

twelvebaskets



EASTER 6C

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year C
25th May 2025



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR

125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

389 STF – Like the murmur of the dove's song

Readings: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29

Hymn:

377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

560 STF – My eyes be open to your presence OR

567 STF – You are the centre, you are my life

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR

313 STF Thine be the glory

Blessing

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Call to worship

We are here, holy God,
And you are in our midst.
Come amongst us, as we worship,
Show us how to follow in your way,
And to become more and more like you each day.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR
125 STF – Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer

Opening Prayers

Holy Spirit, come to us, inspire us
Teach us how to stay close to Jesus
Believing that love can overwhelm hatred
That grace will not be trampled by negativity
That small things can change the world.

And when we feel despondent, uphold us
And when we feel helpless, empower us
And when we feel belittled or lost
Raise us up.

Because at the very beginning you breathed creation into being
Brooding over the waters and giving life
Because you bring the gift of wind and fire
When the embers of hope burn low
Because you baptise us into a community of the faithful
And call each one of us heavenward
When we speak in strange languages or seem strangers to each other
You help us to understand
Because you can stop us in our tracks and turn us on our heels
To follow the creator of all love.

Holy Spirit, come to us, inspire us
Teach us how to stay close to Jesus
Believing that love can overwhelm hatred
That grace will not be trampled by negativity
That small things can change the world.

Amen.²

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Barbara Glasson

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

I wonder how many of you know the story of Aldersgate Sunday? Does anybody know what that means, or why we mark it in our Methodist calendar?

[Take any suggestions].

Today is important, because of John Wesley – what do we know about him?

[Take any suggestions – you may need to adapt the next paragraph based on what you have discussed with the congregation].

John Wesley was an Anglican priest, who was already devoting much of his life and energy to the Church and to God, when he had his life-changing experience. On the 24th May 1738, he went to a church gathering on Aldersgate Street in London – and nearly didn't go at all. In his diary he describes being unwilling to attend. I wonder how many of us have felt like that about church at various points in our lives... Maybe today you are feeling a bit 'unwilling'?

Yet he went, and whilst there felt his 'heart strangely warmed'. This little phrase has become a much-used expression to describe how Wesley came to have a real encounter with the Holy Spirit, and perhaps it is a phrase you can associate with. Or perhaps God reveals something of the divine nature to you in totally different ways. For Wesley, this was the moment when God became present to him in his heart, as well as just an idea in his head. As this is the Sunday nearest to the 24th May, this is the Sunday we mark as Aldersgate Sunday in the Methodist tradition.

As we worship today, and as you go about your life in the days and weeks ahead – let us make spaces where that can happen to us. How can we be transformed by the encounter with the divine?

God is all around us, in us, working through us and in the faces of the people we meet. Are we looking out for God in those spaces? Are we touched by the Spirit of Aldersgate Sunday, who warms hearts and changes minds?

Wesley went on to do amazing things in his life – he was a prolific writer, preacher and encourager of others. His hard work and commitment to following God's call on his life led to the Methodist Church existing, because he challenged the norms of the church he was in. All through that hard work, it was the encounter with the Spirit of God that gave him energy and strength.

May we be a people who encounter God, who make space in our hearts, who are transformed, by the grace of God.

Amen.³

Hymn:

657 STF – You give rest to the weary OR

389 STF – Like the murmur of the dove's song

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Baker

Readings: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29

Hymn:

377 STF – Down the mountain the river flows OR

397 STF – The Spirit lives to set us free

Reflections on the readings

One of the most poignant moments in the Lord of the Rings is a conversation between Frodo the hobbit, and Gandalf the wise wizard.

Frodo: I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.

Gandalf: So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.

More about that in a moment, but first, let's look at our Bible passage for today:

'Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "but Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not the world?"

John immediately identifies the poser of the question, making sure that his readers understand which Judas he is talking about. Or rather, which Judas he is not talking about. Elsewhere in his Gospel, John is very clear about his feelings towards Judas Iscariot and his suspicion of his every intention. We might assume then, that by distancing Judas from the asking of this question, John wants to avoid his reader attaching any negativity to the question asker or the question itself. It seems that John feels this a perfectly valid inquiry. Perhaps it's a question that he himself has been pondering and, as I'm sure we've all experienced in a meeting at some point, is relieved someone else has been brave enough to ask. I certainly share that sense of relief as it's a question that I have often pondered.

So what is the question? It's important to remember that we are dealing with Greek words which can have a variety of translations, meanings and nuances. For instance the phrase 'show yourself' is based on the translation of *emphanizein*: manifest *seauton*: of yourself. This makes it clear that the question is about much more than Jesus simply being physically present amongst his disciples. Judas is asking why Jesus is willing to reveal his divine nature to them and not to what John calls the *Kosmos*. Again *Kosmos* is a word which can be used in a variety of ways including to denote a decoration or adornment, the inhabitants of the earth or a harmonious arrangement. It depends on the context of the use of the word. However, of all the authors who put this word to use, John is by far the most prolific. In his Gospel John uses the word *Kosmos* 57 times making it his favoured term for the world or the 'whole created order.' The way John repeatedly uses this term allows us a sense of timelessness. This question, and indeed John's Gospel as a whole, can then be framed not as something important only to the earth as it stands at the time of his writing but as indispensable to all the created order that has gone before and will come after.

So now that we have established and re-enforced the importance of the question (read it carefully!) let's turn our focus to the answer.

Such an important question deserves a full and considered answer.

Jesus understands well the context within which this question is being asked. He has spoken to disciples several times now about his coming death. The disciples are understandably scared and some of the motivation for this question is surely born out of their fear of what is yet to come. After all, for all of us, would it not be a great deal more simple for Jesus to unquestionably reveal his nature to the whole world? How often have

you wished or prayed for the clouds to part and booming voice to declare to everyone that all you have believed is true? Maybe God could throw in a big sign and some flashing lights too! Jesus doesn't immediately address that fear but rather reminds his disciples of the requirements of faith and love, and of the covenant nature of the disciples' response. Jesus is also clear to remind the disciples that his message is endorsed by God the father, re-enforcing his place as Immanuel, God incarnate.

After this challenge, Jesus does offer incredible words of comfort to those who are fearful. He begins with a reminder that he doesn't expect all who follow him to remember or understand all that he is asking them to do. Indeed, he doesn't expect anyone to do anything for him, relying only on their own strength. He says that to those who have journeyed with him, who have seen his miracles and shared daily in his teaching. If they weren't expected to know or remember everything, perhaps we can feel a little better about our own perceived failings (which is a good job for me because I was never very good at revising either!) We might also hear the foreshadowing of the risen Jesus's encounter with 'doubting' Thomas. 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Not only does Jesus talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit he also gives his disciples the gift of peace. It's not an invitation to peace, it is forcefully and abundantly given. 'Peace I give to you' a definitive statement of fact. It is because of this peace that the disciples can truly be released of their fear. It's not a peace that finds its place in anything of this world, that word *Kosmos* again, but is to be found only in the God who is beyond any definition of the created order.

This part of Jesus's answer is often used at funerals. It is used not because those of us charged with leading those services are looking for a simple, flippant phrase to appease or comfort those who are in mourning. Rather, these words allow us to occupy a dual position of understanding and facing the pain this world can cause, while simultaneously saying that there is one who can offer a peace that lies beyond even the worst that this world can employ against us.

Jesus knows, all too well, the pain that separation through death will cause. He knows it must be faced by his disciples at his leaving to join the father and he knows that he too will experience that pain in his moment of sacrifice. And yet he knows, and we have, the joy of experiencing the power of the resurrection. Ultimately, we can have peace through the love of God for the world he has created.

The last phrase used by Jesus speaks straight to the heart of his answer. 'I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.' Believing is the beginning of faith. Without faith we cannot hope to claim the gifts offered by God. Faith then leads on into the transformation of our actions, our taking of our place in the covenant relationship of God and his people, sealed by the sacrifice of Christ.

The great German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, in his book 'The Cost Of Discipleship', of the differences he saw between what he termed 'Cheap Grace' and 'Costly Grace.' 'Cheap Grace', he said, 'is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.' That would be the simple answer, that I feel we all as Christ's disciples, are sometimes guilty of seeking. It is, I believe the kind of grace Judas's question is trying to find. In contrast, Bonhoeffer said of Costly Grace 'it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "Ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us... Costly Grace is the Incarnation of God.' This is the grace of which Jesus's answer speaks. An answer which is far from simple, is full of compassion and calls us deeper into discipleship.

This is where we come to Frodo's conversation with Gandalf in 'The Lord of the Rings'. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.

The disciples who first hear Jesus answer Judas's question are left then with a choice in their response, as are we. We can either decide that the burden of faith and the fear of separation is too difficult, that we don't want to engage the help of the Holy Spirit, nor embrace the Peace given to us. Or we can lean into the promises that Jesus has made to us, love him and follow his commands.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

560 STF – My eyes be open to your presence OR

567 STF – You are the centre, you are my life

Prayers of intercession

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to embrace your love and grace for all your creation
May we keep peace within us
Push out hatred, discrimination and spitefulness

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to shelter with you in the wildest of storms
May we keep your strength within us
Push out indecision, crisis of faith and doubt

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to rest in your careful embrace
May we find health in you
Push out sickness of body, mind or spirit

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to protect those in need and trouble
May we always seek to give, more than we receive
Push out greed, selfishness and boastfulness

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to build your church on the earth you have made
May we extend your welcome in every place
Push out exceptionalism and break down barriers

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord
Help us to speak of your light and share your love
May we keep fires of faith within us
Push out all that would douse our flame

Circle us with your promises, oh Lord.
Amen.⁵

⁴ Reflection written by Graeme Dutton

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Graeme Dutton

We will now take up the offering.

Lord, you have blessed us with this day, this week, this month, this lifetime.
Show us how to use the time you have given to us,
And the gifts we have given,
For your glory and your Kingdom, here on earth
Amen.⁶

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR
313 STF Thine be the glory

Blessing

We shall go out with joy and set forth with peace,
Heading out into our communities and our world,
To seek to play our part in building a Kingdom of justice and joy,
By the power of your Spirit, O God.
Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker