**Morning Praise @ Home 21st May 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Acts 1: 6 – 14 John 17: 1 – 11

**Reflection from Amanda**

**The Comforter**

The distance that information travels via the internet is thousands of miles in seconds. In fact, for the non-scientific of us, the time it takes to transfer information can pretty much be considered immediate.  Our technological age means that significant events are communicated worldwide instantaneously. Just 2 weeks ago it is estimated that 277 million people watched across the world in real time as King Charles was crowned.

I wonder how quickly the news of such a public, supernatural spectacle as Jesus entering Glory would take to spread when word of mouth was the means of communication. At the beginning of Acts we hear that Jesus appeared to the disciples repeatedly for 40 days after his resurrection. It was then that he rose heavenward to be with the Father, to prepare a place for us. An event that was so striking that angels in the form of two men dressed in white attended and observed. The presence of the angels affirms the significance with angelic attendance at the birth of Jesus, at his resurrection as they waited at the tomb, and here at the ascension. They gazed heavenward along with the disciples as they watched Jesus disappearing into cloud which we believe to be a manifestation of glory. Jesus was gone for good and he wanted it known that this time he wasn’t coming back (not for some time at least). He came for our salvation, next time it will be for our glorification. As they all continued to look heavenward the angels scolded the disciples, there was work to be done. They were reminded of the second coming but in the meantime, they were to put into practice all that Jesus had taught them. And we too are called to the same practice. Between the first and second coming we the church are to be witnesses for Christ Jesus.

Obviously, the apostles could never conceive of such instant speeds of communication as the internet when they were “sent out” as witnesses for Christ to spread the gospel. The term Apostle quite literally means “one sent forth by another with a specific task or commission”. The commission for our apostles here in the book of Acts as well as in Matthew (along with other references) is the telling of the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom and this telling has become known throughout the church as the “Great Commission”.

It is interesting however that despite the importance of their task, Jesus was clear that they were not to set out straight away. In the verses preceding our reading Jesus specifically commands them to stay put and to wait. He actually says “Do not leave Jerusalem but **wait** for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”. We of course are all familiar with how powerful and spectacular that baptism in the Holy Spirit was and we will celebrate Pentecost in the week to come.

So why wait? Why not just get on with the job that was to be done and catch up with the Holy Spirit later? Could this gift of the Holy Spirit not be given to them while they travelled? To wait builds anticipation. Good things are always worth waiting for, aren’t they? This gift was to be a shared experience. One they could reflect back on and make sense of together. In its peculiarity, and to those observing, it was an experience that certainly appeared non-sensible. The Apostles would be more effective in representing God’s Kingdom once powered and affirmed in the Holy Spirit. But for me, most significantly, if they had tried to work without that outpouring of the Spirit they would have been acting in their own strength. They would not have endured the task ahead, quickly becoming depleted. They would not have had the supernatural wisdom and understanding needed. Their message was too important to not be heard successfully. Jesus gave them the commission, but the commission was to be anointed by God himself by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Truthfully, it wasn’t a command Jesus gave them to be witnesses. It was more a statement of fact. “You **will** receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you **will** be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. This for me implies that when you receive the Holy Spirit you will witness for Jesus.

This starts to form the model of behaviour we are expected to follow. The Great Commission is for the church across time. Guzik describes how there is a real sense that the book of Acts continues to unfold in current times, it being the ongoing work of God in the world by His Spirit through His church. That’s us. You, me, us. As the Apostles were sent out to spread the good news so are we. In Jesus’ command there is no wriggle room, there is no “If you feel ok about it” or “If it crops up in conversation”, just a straight forward “When the Holy Spirit has come upon you… you shall be witnesses of Me”.

We can imagine that it was easy for the apostles to talk of Jesus. He was their friend. They knew him. They had experiences, saw miracles, the dead rise, the blind see. Their own lives changed beyond recognition. I am sure they couldn’t help but talk about him. But it was not easy. Jesus specifically told them to witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, Jerusalem being where Jesus was brutally executed, Judea where Jesus’ ministry was forcibly rejected, Samaria - well we know how the Samaritans were viewed, and then to the ends of the earth. That’s the non-Jews so Gentiles who were viewed by some as worthy of nothing other than hell itself. It is clear that this was going to be a hard and uncomfortable experience for the apostles. No wonder then that Jesus first wanted them to encounter the Holy Spirit - The Comforter.

Since John stepped into his role with us we have all felt the renewed urgency to grow our church community: the requests to invite friends and family to services, to communicate our church activity through social media, to have a greater presence at community events. The urgency is real. This isn’t a need or wish to simply have a larger church community, to ensure the church’s future or to keep bank balances black. Although of course those things are relevant. This is about souls and eternity. I cannot allow my fear or uncomfortableness to prevent anyone having opportunity to access eternity in heaven. As with the Apostles, we too might be nervous to tell family and friends about our encounters with Jesus, shy to talk to our neighbours about how our lives have been transformed by spending time with Him. But we can also take comfort in the Holy Spirit. His is our strength. He is the gift that has been promised to us. He is there to comfort so take the plunge and let’s get uncomfortable. Amen

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord, grant to your Church the unity that your son prayed for on our behalf. Bathe the Church in the fire and light of your glory, and burn away the dross of our lives as we strive to be made one with you, and one with each other. Kindle in us the fire of your love, so that our lives may reflect your glory to the world and your light and life may be revealed to all people.

Lord, set our hearts on fire with love for you; **in your mercy, hear our prayer**.

Lord, we pray for the leaders of the nations, that they may serve with integrity and justice. May our leaders recognise that you are the ultimate source of their gifts, their positions and their power. And may they strive to prove worthy of the trust and confidence which has been placed in them. We praise you for the glories of nature, and the world that you have made which still holds so many wonders for those who take the time to look around them.

Lord, set our hearts on fire with love for you; **in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord, who has made us one community in Christ, may the glory of your presence transform our lives. When we feel discouraged or dispirited by events in our neighbourhood, may we all be suffused by your Holy Spirit and transformed by your grace. Help us to find the green shoots of regeneration, and then to water and weed them so they may come to fruition in your service.

Lord, set our hearts on fire with love for you; **in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for all those who are weak or discouraged, ill or simply weary. We have confidence that You will support them and us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen, the evening comes, and our work in this busy world is done.

We remember in particular the family and friends of Josie Isaacs and anyone known to us and hold them all in our prayers. May they be wrapped in Your love and feel Your Spirit’s lifting presence.

Lord, set our hearts on fire with love for you; **in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for all those in positions of leadership and power, for Prime Ministers and Government, for CEOs and Bishops. We pray for the Burton AGM today that it will be encouraging, focused and forward looking. May all in leadership be guided by your Spirit of truth.

We give thanks for all who serve your Church here in Burton, Puddington and Shotwick and ask that Your blessings are poured upon them.

Lord, set our hearts on fire with love for you; **in your mercy, hear our prayer**.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**