

# Service of the Word 2 August 2020

## Pentecost 9 Church Re-opening

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### Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our service. Today is a special day as a few of us gather in St Paul's for a service of worship. We are using the same service as this Podcast to keep our two communities, one actual and one virtual, to keep our two communities linked as we go forward into a new way of being church during a worldwide pandemic. As we move forward together today seemed like a good time to reflect back on all that has happened over these last traumatic months. For many of us the trauma continues and for those venturing out into the real world there are new traumas to navigate. One of these for those of us gathered in St Paul's on Sunday morning is a changed church surrounded by the new normal of hand sanitiser, masks and reminders of keeping out physical distancing. So while it is a joy to be back it is also a sorrow, a reminder of the easy, casual intimacy of church that we have lost along the way. I know for many of you even stepping out of your front door to anywhere that there may be other people is no longer a casual experience. This morning we unite our voices near and far together in the worship of God our creator and our redeemer.

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### Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God  
to offer praise and thanksgiving  
to ask forgiveness of our sins  
to hear and receive God's holy Word  
to pray for the needs of the world  
and to seek God's grace  
that through Jesus Christ our Lord  
and in the power of the Holy Spirit  
we may give ourselves to God's service.

### Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.  
Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.  
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.  
Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, all we long for is before you;  
and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.  
But we acknowledge our wickedness;  
we are filled with sorrow at our sin.  
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;  
O Lord, make haste to help us.  
May the Lord forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are  
and direct what we shall be,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Praise

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God's people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,  
and God the Holy Spirit,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world;  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

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### Collect of the Day

Loving God,  
you comfort the sad,  
and strengthen those who suffer:  
hear the prayers of your children  
who cry out in tribulation;  
and grant, we pray, to all who are distressed  
mercy, relief, and refreshment;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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First Reading Isaiah 55.1-5

Invitation to the thirsty

1 'Come, all you who are thirsty,  
come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread,  
and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me;  
listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
my faithful love promised to David.

4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,  
a ruler and commander of the peoples.

5 Surely you will summon nations you know not,  
and nations you do not know will come running to you,  
because of the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has endowed you with splendour.'

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Second Reading

Matthew 14:13-21 MSG

Supper for Five Thousand

13-14 When Jesus got the news, he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself. But unsuccessfully—someone saw him and the word got around. Soon a lot of people from the nearby villages walked around the lake to where he was. When he saw them coming, he was overcome with pity and healed their sick.

15 Toward evening the disciples approached him. “We’re out in the country and it’s getting late. Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.”

16 But Jesus said, “There is no need to dismiss them. You give them supper.”

17 “All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,” they said.

18-21 Jesus said, “Bring them here.” Then he had the people sit on the grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation. They all ate their fill. They gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. About five thousand were fed.

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## Reflection

*“we have travelled so far, so fast, that now it is time to sit and let our souls catch up with us” (repeat)*

Back in March when lockdown began and this lovely church building of St Paul’s was closed I made a statement which I now know was very foolish. I said then that when we were able to be back in church again there would be a great celebration. I think I had in mind something like this morning’s gospel story - five thousand for supper! Instead what I am feeling this morning is more like Isaiah’s solitary cry of longing. There is great joy here today but there is also deep sorrow. During the cleaning earlier this week I left the Paschal candle, the one we should have lit on Easter Sunday - I left this special candle out because I had planned to light it with great ceremony at the beginning of this morning’s service in church. But here it stands unlit because I realised that *you cannot preach Easter Sunday from the landscape of Good Friday. (repeat)* When the trauma of this pandemic started to really hit home a few months ago I assumed, wrongly as it happens, that this was our somewhat prolonged Good Friday and that by now as we gather again in church we would be coming out the other side of Holy Saturday, coming through the period of waiting into the glory of Easter Sunday. But the truth, so hard to hear and to accept is that we are just stepping into Holy Saturday the period of grieving and the time of mourning. And the trauma is still with us; there is more Good Friday to come in the uncertainty of the future before us. We are only just beginning, as the sheer trauma of what is happening sinks in - we are only just beginning to appreciate the scale of what we have lost, might still lose and probably never recover.

*“we have travelled so far, so fast, that now it is time to sit and let our souls catch up with us” (repeat)*

We are bereaved and grieving loss of all shapes, sizes and kinds. We are used to thinking of grief - the loss of something of value to us as connected with the death of someone we love. But grief comes with all kinds of different loss: home, health, business, job, lively hood, meaningful connection with family and friends. Grief, the loss of something of value to us, leads us into bereavement, the process of acknowledging that loss; mourning that loss, lamenting that loss and eventually learning to live again with the pain of that loss still very much a part of who we are after the loss. Books on grief often advise the reader to learn how to live in a new normal. Well the Covid-19 pandemic world is our new normal and we have loss es to acknowledge, mourn, and lament before we can even begin to live hopefully in this new way of life.

Lament, longing for that which is gone, is very much a part of our Christian heritage. Both the old and new Testaments are filled with songs, prayers and stories of lament. And God’s boundless, loving, kindness - God’s *hesed*, to use the Hebrew word - God’s boundless, loving kindness is the source of healing for our loss. God’s boundless, loving kindness is the answer for our cries of longing for that which we can no longer have. Isaiah tell us of God’s longing to refresh and restore us:

*Come, all you who are thirsty,  
come to the waters;  
Pay attention, come close now,  
listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.*

Jesus in our Gospel looks on the crowds with pity not just healing the sick but feeding everyone who comes to him. He tells his disciples that the people who have travelled so far to hear his teaching, the people who are weary and hungry need to be fed. They need simply to sit down, to rest awhile and to eat so that their very selves are restored. This is not a time for theology this is a time for practical action, for feeding the five thousand.

*“we have travelled so far, so fast, that now it is time to sit and let our souls catch up with us” (repeat)*

Before we can even start to process our losses; before we can think about moving forward in this new world we need to simply rest awhile in God's healing presence - to let our souls catch up with us. We need to breathe deeply and let the Holy Spirit in to calm our troubled minds, bodies and souls.

*“we have travelled so far, so fast, that now it is time to sit and let our souls catch up with us” (repeat)*

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## Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in our lives*

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## Intercessions

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## Blessing

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 this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen

### Act of Dedication

Almighty God,  
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:  
may it be a lantern to our feet,  
a light upon our paths,  
and a strength to our lives.

Take us and use us to love and serve all people  
in the power of the Holy Spirit  
and in the name of your Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Praise

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.

You renew the face of the earth.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \* you renew the face of the earth.

### Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and evermore. Amen