

**Collect and readings for
The Fifth Sunday of Easter**

COLLECT

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of
everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us you put
into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help we may bring them to good
effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS

1st reading, Acts of the Apostles (New Testament,
after the 4 Gospels): chapter 7, verses 55-60

Psalms 31 (Old Testament) verses 1-5 and 15-16

2nd reading, first letter of St Peter (towards the end
of the New Testament) chapter 2, verses 2-10

Gospel, St John chapter 14, verses 1-14

From Revd. Maureen



Our first reading requires a little explanation. Who is the "he" referred to in the first verse? As so often happens in our Sunday lectionary, chunks of verses are taken out of context to fit the theme of the day. If you look back to the beginning of the chapter, it becomes clear that the "he" is Stephen, the first martyr of the Church and whose feast day is the day after Christmas and referred to in the Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas". Stephen was one of seven people who, it is thought, were made Deacons in the young Church and he is remembered and revered as the first to be martyred for his faith. As some of you are aware, I am passionate about diaconal ministry, having been a Distinctive Deacon myself for 7 years, and so Stephen is almost as important to me as St Lawrence! It is fitting, I think, that his feast day should come immediately after Christmas Day. So why was he martyred, you may ask? Well, if you read from verse 6 of chapter 6, you will see how Stephen was selected, and what happened to him – which is uncannily similar to what happened to Jesus during the last week of his life. Stephen was confronted,

Continued...

seized and brought before the council. False witnesses were brought forward, but Stephen withstands that by reminding them of their Jewish history right through to what he considered was their responsibility for the death of Jesus. It is a long speech carrying over into chapter 7 and in verses 51-53 he doesn't pull any punches.

Not surprisingly, then, "they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen" but Stephen, seeing a vision of heaven, stood his ground until – again similar to Jesus' treatment – he was taken outside the city and there they threw stones at him until he died. But before dying, he said words similar to Jesus' words to his Father – 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit', and also – 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (compare with Luke chapter 23 verses 34 and verse 46.) So there we are, out of just five verses in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we can learn so much by a little investigation about the small word "he"!



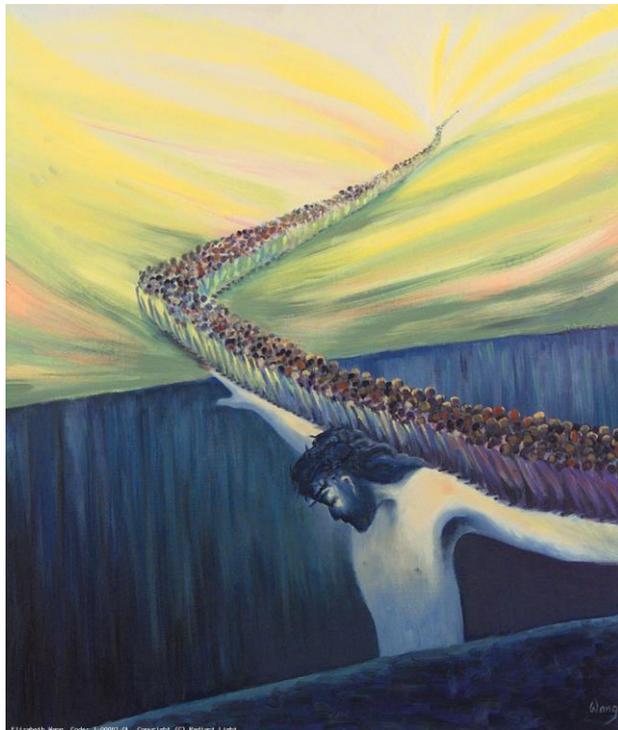
Martyrdom of St. Stephen by Bernardo Daddi. c. 1290 – c. 1348

Our Psalm this week, again, is useful for us in these times in which we find ourselves. It is something like a prayer. It begins with a statement that the psalmist has taken refuge in God, but goes straight into petition. Deliver me; incline your ear to me – make haste! Be my strong rock; lead me; guide me. Take me out of the net – for you are my tower of strength. And then, in the first part of verse 5, again those words uttered by Jesus on the cross and Stephen when stoned 'Into your hands I commend my spirit' and the assertion of redemption. Verses 15 and 16 which, this week, have been added on to the first five verses are an assertion that God is in control, and still praying for rescue, redemption and also a blessing.

Continued...

St Peter's first letter is a great invitation to us to remain steadfast, and reminding us – by quoting scripture - of what has been done for us by Jesus' death and resurrection. Here we have a strong reminder and also encouragement to hold on.

I mentioned last week about our gospel reading for today, that it is often chosen to be read at funerals. Again, we need to understand that – although it isn't clear – this is Jesus speaking to his disciples – 'Do not let your hearts be troubled' For those who are mourning, this is a very reassuring reading that there is a place prepared for each of us in heaven, that God knows us by name (this relates too to last week's Gospel of the Good Shepherd knowing each of his sheep by name); we are reminded that there is space for everyone in heaven; there are no "No Vacancy" signs there. We are expected and welcomed, and all we have to do is to follow Christ.



Christ is our Bridge to Heaven, by Elisabeth Wang (1942-2016)

Thomas then questions something which Jesus says. He shows his human and vulnerable side, something which comes very much to the fore at times of bereavement. He reminds Jesus that they don't even understand where he's going, so how can they know the way. We then hear those well-known, and well-loved words: I am the way, and the truth and the life..... So Jesus is saying: continue to believe in me because I will show you the way, I am telling you the truth and I will give you life. Those words "I am" are very important. They are the words which God used when he spoke to Moses in the desert as the Israelites were led out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses met God on the mountain and asked God what he should tell the Israelites about who had spoken to him and given him a message.

Continued...

God tells him to say ' "I AM" has sent me' and Jesus uses this 'I am' title in several of his sayings: 'Before Abraham Was, I AM'; 'I AM the bread of life; I AM the Light of the World; I AM the Door of the Sheepfold (last week's Gospel); I AM the Good Shepherd; I AM the Resurrection and the life; I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life (today's Gospel); I AM the Vine. All these sayings can be found in St John's Gospel between chapters 6 and 15.

I hope, then, that by looking a little more closely at our readings chosen for this Fifth Sunday of Easter, you can see the links between them all and how they relate – even in our own day – to our circumstances right now. Let us pray that we may draw comfort, confidence and reassurance from our readings as we await news of a possible easing of restrictions at some point soon. However, even if an easing of restrictions doesn't change things very much for us, we can hold on to what is offered to us this Sunday in the knowledge that – even if we are not aware – God loves each and every one of us, he knows us by name as we heard last week, and we are precious in his sight. He is not far off, but walks with us, laughs with us, weeps with us, suffers with us. What more could we possibly need?

Maureen

A note from Georgie Slater

We seem to find plenty to fill our days. Howard is busy researching as he's become fascinated by physics over the past couple of years - each to his own!



More mundanely, I've never been so far ahead with the spring-cleaning (kitchen at the moment), the garden looks as though somebody actually lives here, and I've had time to brush up some more of my stories.

Our granddaughter has also instigated a weekly baking competition. This week it's a wide remit, anything chocolate, so I'm going retro and making a Swiss roll. Entrants to the competition range between 2 and 72 in age and more of the family are gradually joining in, so our daughter Lizzie has to tread a very fine line as judge. Last week somebody recreated the Beatles Abbey Road album cover using gingerbread men.



Love to all.

Georgie

**Dogs, cows, books and a blessing...
from Maureen**

Well, here we are – beginning another week and awaiting the Prime Minister’s speech to the nation this Sunday evening. Will it be another three weeks of the same, or are the restrictions going to be tweaked? We must wait and see. Our Bishops – Peter and Ruth – are also in consultation with the Archbishops and the Bishops of all the other Dioceses in England and we have been told that there may be another letter coming from them this week with an update. In the meantime, the rota of services and those who will lead has been put together for the months of May through to August – obviously this is provisional in the circumstances and also because we don’t yet know when our new Rector will be able to join us and move into the Rectory. Also, the rota for readers, intercessors, chalice assistants, refreshment providers has also been prepared in readiness for when it is needed. We are ahead of the game – ready, willing and able!

Otherwise the week has been fairly normal – thank goodness for the sunshine, though I understand that colder weather is forecast for Sunday. We may be shivering again, so not yet quite time to put away those jumpers! Don’t forget the saying – ‘cast not a clout till May be out’, but is that the month of May or the plant May. My theory is that if it refers to the plant, then the saying would be ‘cast not a clout till the May be out’, but who knows?



Our dogs have been going out three times a day during this time of lock-down – lucky them! I’m sure they’re benefitting from us being around all the

time, and not leaving them to doze or chew on a bone while we’re out. Our only problem is that one of our local farmers has turned his cows and calves out into the field at the back of the Rectory, and I’m not too keen on cows following an incident here a couple of summers ago when someone was trampled by a cow because they had inadvertently walked too close to a newly-born calf hidden in long grass. I am now very wary, so I have to time my walk with the dogs carefully, while the cows are well away from our usual route.

One thing I love to do when I’m eating chocolate and drinking a mug of tea, is to read. I was very fortunate, back in 2017, to look through some books which had belonged to our dear Sister in Christ Josie Harrison. I was somewhat greedy, I’m afraid, and came away with quite an armful – one of which I’ve just finished reading. I can heartily recommend it. It’s called ‘Six New Gospels: New Testament Women Tell Their Stories.’ It’s written by Margaret Hebblethwaite and was published back in 1994.

Continued...

It’s about six women who knew Jesus, but it’s told from their point of view: Elizabeth (cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus); Mary herself; the woman who met Jesus at the well, known as Photina; Martha of Bethany (sister of Lazarus); Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) and Mary Magdalene. The really lovely thing is that Josie has made various notes in the margins or marked particular passages – the only trouble is, I can’t read her writing but obviously those paragraphs were meaningful to her.

Talking about books, you may recall that I mentioned ‘The Small Woman’ last week, the story of Gladys Aylward and her missionary work in China. Adrian included a note that although the book is out of print it is available on Amazon. It’s also available on www.Abebooks.co.uk so, if you would like a copy, you should be able to get it from there as well. I’ve just ordered one for a friend, who wished to have a copy for themselves.

Another book which I can really recommend is one by my favourite poet, Malcolm Guite. The book is called ‘Parable and Paradox: Sonnets on the sayings of Jesus and other poems’. Included in this are sonnets for 4 saints: Valentine, Patrick, St John of the Cross and Nicholas Ferrar; 50 Sonnets on the Sayings of Jesus; 7 Sonnets on the Lord’s Prayer; and at the end of the book 7 Sonnets called Seven

MALCOLM GUITE
**PARABLE
and
PARADOX**
Sonnets on the sayings of Jesus and other poems



“His work is both beautiful and timeless... deeply thoughtful and humane, unashamedly robust, inclusive and beautiful.”
—*Thomas Merton*

Whole Days based on the words of George Herbert’s hymn King of glory, king of peace. This book was written in 2016, but I’ve only just got round to ordering a copy! And, if you would like to hear Malcolm speaking again from a service of Evensong from Girton College this Sunday about the next stanza of the Lord’s Prayer – it’s the same website reference as last week, and you can hear the lovely Girton College choir singing too! I cannot recommend Malcolm highly enough. He is an absolute treasure, and so down to earth, human and accessible (and funny!).

Well, I think I’ve given you more than enough for this coming week! Every blessing as we journey on in these strange and different times. Happy reading, and enjoy whatever else you are involving yourselves in. Who knows whether this time next week we might have a clearer idea of what is happening and when. Until then, the blessing I’m offering this week is an Irish one, which you may know already:

May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
the rains fall soft upon your fields
and, until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Amen.

Maureen

From Kath Halkyard

Hello everyone.

Lovely to read the latest InTouch.

I usually participate in various May time shenanigans to celebrate creation and the Creator, but this year all are cancelled of course. Luckily, my garden (unaided by me), has yielded a beautiful bed of lily of the valley, so I am pleased that I could share them round and about on Mayday.



A friend sent me a card last week. The wording made me laugh out loud!



**BLESSED ARE THE
CRACKED**

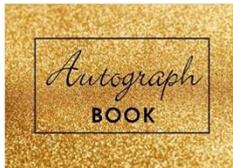
**FOR THEY LET IN
THE LIGHT**

On that happy note... the very best to all of you, hoping you stay safe and well, thoughts and prayers ongoing.

Kath

A note from Julie Woodward

I was sitting thinking the other day, remembering the things we used to do when we were young. What came to my mind was that my sisters and I and most of my friends had Autograph books.



So then I started to remember the things that were written in them:

Granny: "Love many, trust a few, always paddle your own canoe".

Mum: "Be a good girl, live a good life, choose a good husband and be a good wife".

Dad: (*man of few words*) "Love Dad".

Friends: "By hook or by crook I'll be first (or last) in this book"

"When in this book you look, and on this page you frown, remember me who spoilt it by writing upside down".

"Two in a hammock attempted to kiss, all of a sudden they landed like this" (*drawing of 2 bodies on the ground!*)

Those are all I can remember at the moment, but my sister Rita thinks she still has her book somewhere, so she is racking her brain try to think where it could be. Oh yes, "The wall of friendship", a page filled with bricks!

Anyone else out there who can fill in some more?

I have plenty of thinking time and feel blessed that everyone I know is safe.

Julie Woodward

From Katherine Lyddon



Katherine warmly invites you to daily prayers using the Zoom meeting facility, starting at 2.00pm daily, Monday to Saturday.

Please note that there are new details for joining the meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/94873333863?pwd=NXhybG5MbKlNcUJteGdNL3J4SUNVdz09>

Meeting ID: 948 7333 3863

Password: welcome

Dial in 0208 080 6591

Meeting ID: 948 7333 3863

Password: 712229



Please contact Katherine if you have any questions on 07974 528880 or email katherinelyddon35@gmail.com

From Katharine Smith



Hello everyone

I have just come across two prayers by Revd Dr Sam Wells who is the vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields and thought it might be good to include these in InTouch.

A Prayer on Feeling Small

God of small things, in Jesus you gave up always and became now, you renounced everywhere and became here; meet us in this season of fear, bewilderment, and loss. When our efforts seem tiny, show us the thousands who care about what we care about; when our skills seem insufficient, reveal to us the many who seek the same goal. Lift our gaze from what we miserably don't have to what we wonderfully are, that in joy and wonder at your glory we may turn from emptiness and find fullness of life. Through Christ in the power of your Spirit. Amen.

A prayer after 75 years of Peace

God our strength and refuge,
Your son died at 33 alone and in agony.
Visit households where the scars of war run deep.
Fill your people with grateful hearts for those who laid down their lives to make a better future.
Send your Spirit on initiatives great and small that seek to turn former antagonists into lasting friends.
Show us how we may love our enemies.
Inspire us with courage and hope in the face of our present struggles,
knowing that our forebears have known worse and this too will pass.
And show us your face in the face of the stranger.
Through Jesus Christ your son our Lord. Amen.

From Gavin and Maureen Lord

Hello everyone

Another song from our multi-talented retired vicar in Essex (Canon Chris Bishop) who has been writing and performing songs about our current problems in collaboration with his brother in law who was director of music at Brentwood School. We hope you enjoy this further offering from the duo! The link is below. Chris is playing a concert ukulele.

<https://youtu.be/CIP-OmHcLb0>



Best wishes

Gavin & Maureen

**At my Grandmother's knee...
from Penny Gale**



'It's a long lane that has no turning.'

'There is a straight path, around the bend, that will lead you to your journeys' end.'

'Things are never so bad that they can't get better.'

And some **Heartlifters for Oldies.**

'These days, it's easy for Doctors – either it's something I have to live with, or... something I have to live without!'



'Growing old is when you hear the 'snap, crackle and pop', before you get down to breakfast!'

To be continued...

Spike's column



Hello everyone!

How are you all? Thank you for all the lovely feedback on my column. Here is the latest news on my very busy life, with a sprinkling of helpful advice!

Mr Human has continued to work from home. I have been supervising and helping but it is very boring indeed.



I have been maintaining good relationships with the neighbours, whilst of course, maintaining the required 2 metres distance.

Which reminds me – we are having some warm weather at the moment so please don't forget the importance of keeping properly hydrated in order to stay healthy.



Of course a glass of wine is fine too. I have told Mr Human that this must be good as it has a paw mark on it!

When the sun has not been out I have been continuing to check out those cupboards!



Finally, don't forget to maintain your standard of appearance. I have been having a daily Zoom Groom – which also provides an excellent opportunity to bite Mr H!



See you next week!!

Love from Spike xxx

Let Your God Love You

By Edwina Gately

Penny Gale writes: 'we are encouraged regularly in our church services to 'love God and our neighbour as ourselves'. Perhaps we do not stress sufficiently the equal need to allow ourselves to be loved by God and, indeed, our neighbour? This poem was heard by Jenny Greenwood at a Quiet Day.

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.

Let your God—
Love you.



Editor's note: Edwina Gately is a poet, theologian, artist, writer, and lay minister. She is a single mum and has been described as a modern-day mystic and prophet.



Mrs. Jones got a little too used to watching online worship from home.

Our prayers

Risen and reigning Lord, assure our troubled hearts that you have gone to prepare a place for us, so that where you are, we may be also. You alone are the way, the truth, and the life by whom the Father comes to us, so that through you, we have seen him and know him.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Risen and reigning Lord how often are we like Thomas questioning your son Jesus whilst thinking that we're on our own to work things out? Help us to listen to your promises, to receive your assurances, to let you remove troubles from our hearts and may we always remember your constant presence with us. We pray for all who strive to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel especially in these difficult times when we cannot meet together in our church buildings.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Risen and reigning Lord, we pray for those people of the world featured in the news: the victims of the pandemic, accident, war, disease, violence, greed and natural disasters. We pray for hope and we pray for peace.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Risen and reigning Lord, we pray for family and colleagues, for friends, for neighbours and strangers, for those with whom we break bread at home, for those we have missed at work, in the community, and in our church, giving thanks for social media and the internet which allows us to keep in touch with those we love.



Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Risen and reigning Lord, whose touch alone could heal the sick; hear our prayers for your servants who are ill as we ask for your help and mercy to restore them to health. Thank you for the continuing work of our National Health Service risking their lives on a daily basis, coping with the pandemic.

Today we pray especially for: Peter (Cothelstone), John, Gwen, Joan, Bobby, Lucinda, Norma, Marissa, Roger and Wendy and for all others known to us.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Risen and reigning Lord, we pray for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them, for members of our families who have died and whose anniversary we recall. Help us to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit within us, and the fellowship of the church family around us until we are reunited once more in that family house which is your heavenly kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer

Risen and reigning Lord, we thank you for showing us the Way, in human terms that we find easier to understand and which helps us to recognise all the wonderful things in your world for which we should be grateful.

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