

Transcript for Service on May 10th 2020 led by Ruth Dillon & Karen Smith

Introductory music: Blessed city, heavenly Salem

Opening words

Good morning: you are most welcome to this time of worship. In this moment in time, when we pause and immerse ourselves in prayer, music and reflection, we can celebrate that we are able to join together as God's church. We have the opportunity to give thanks for all that has been good this past week and contemplate those events and interactions that have been less so. On this day, we step boldly, humbly into the presence of our God.

Call to Worship

Together we come to this time of worship ready to hear God's great story,
The story of God's new purposes for the church, for our lives and for the world
Let us listen, let us worship.

Opening Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession

Living and loving God,
Once more we bring you our praise and worship.
We acknowledge you as our God.
We marvel at your love and compassion.
Living and loving God,
Draw near to us and help us to draw near to you.
Come to us through your Holy Spirit & help us to open our hearts to the risen Christ.
Speak to us through the worship we offer this day, & through it all deepen our faith.

Living God, we praise you that there is so much that speaks to us of your love and purpose –
So much in our lives, in our daily experience, in the world around us,
In the fellowship we share with one another. & in the relationship we enjoy with you,
Through which you teach and guide and challenge us.
Forgive us that sometimes we don't hear your voice, that often we do not want to hear.
Forgive us that sometimes we refuse to listen, that often we are close to anything but our own words.
Help us to see everything that points to your activity in our lives, in our fellowship, in your Church,
And in the world.
And speak through us as we work and witness for you, that others may come to know you for themselves.

Each day, we are walking the stepping stones of our faith journey, so we may live that faith. Be assured:

Assurance of Pardon

God abides in you! God is breathing, living, forgiving, restoring you in this moment, and in the days to come. This is the good news for us!

As God is in us, so we can live, work, care for others, so that love, hope and joy might touch all people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ gave us the pattern for all prayer, and so we gladly say:

The Lord's Prayer.

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, for ever and ever. Amen

1st Reading :

read by Tom Dean

Psalm 31: 1 -5 & 15,16

¹In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

The hymn we will sing together today is

Hymn: In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease

My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the pow'r of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand

No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand

Songwriters: Keith Getty, Stuart Townend

2nd reading:

read by Christine Allen

1 Peter 2: 2 -10

²Like new born infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—
³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and
⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer
spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in scripture: "See, I am
laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be
put to shame." ⁷To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The
stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," ⁸and "A stone that makes
them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as
they were destined to do. ⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own

people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

A time to reflect

Rev'd Ruth Dillon

This morning I would like to focus on each one of us being Living Stones.

The writer of 1 Peter piles on many images to encourage us to think about the firmness and strength of God's love, but the one image that stands out from them all is the image of Stones.

Peter is speaking to new Christians and likens them to new babies who need to grow, and to feed on God's love to grow as Christians. To do this we need to build our faith around the cornerstone, which is Jesus. We gather and move around Jesus, who hold us all together, and when we do this God builds a strong faith within us.

The image of stones dominates all the verses in 1 Peter. In 1 Peter the image of stones alludes to the fact that we should not be fixed to the ground and crumbling, but be living stones, working together to transform ourselves from the familiar, to living life within the light of Christ so that a change takes place within us.

This passage ends with new metaphors which enable Jesus' disciples to hear afresh the resurrection and be participants in becoming living stones within our community. Living stones become useful, purposeful, determined, compassionate, and are full of Love for God's people.

There is no doubt about it, the coronavirus has indeed taken us into hibernation, where our homes have been our fortress, where hopefully we have taken stock and reflected on many issues: what is important to us, and what is not, and where is God?

Change has happened; our place of refuge of strength, our church building has been replaced by our home. And we need to consider certain questions at this time: for example, what will the new normal be like? You will all be receiving a letter in the coming days from Clare Downing, our Moderator, that will help us, as a group of faithful disciples and part of the body of Christ, to consider some questions.

- *What have we missed about gathering at church, and what have we not missed this time?*
- *When we come out of lockdown, we will be changed people. Is this something you are pleased about, or fearful?*
- *What do you hope and dream would change within the church?*
- *What will you be sad to lose?*

Living stones means precisely to live - not to be fossilized and hard, but movable and adaptable.

We are encouraged to entertain the possibility that resurrection life is so profound that aspects of it are captured in the images of the mundane—from rocks, milk, darkness, light, and growth—as well as in the images of the magnificent—from majesty scenery, precious stones, and new born babies. We need only to have the courage and imagination to play with interpretations, exploring the vast possibilities of resurrection in this season.

Music: 'Grace and Peace' by Fernando Ortega

A prayer for others

There will also be times of silence during these prayers for you to bring your concerns before God. There is a response – when I say “we pray that they may all know your strength and peace,” I invite you to respond by saying “**loving God be for them a rock and a stronghold.**”

Let us pray together:

You call us to speak to you in prayer– even when the places we would usually go to are not available.

Help us to know your Spirit’s presence wherever we pray.

Today we especially pray for those who are living in fear – give them your strength.

For those who have not yet realised the urgency of the situation – protect them, and all of us from harm.

we pray that they may all know your strength and peace, **loving God be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

Silence

In the world at this time there is so much fear,

many have had their lives and livelihoods destroyed;

many grieve for loved ones who have died; many are still sick - or fear becoming so:

we pray that they may all know your strength and peace, **loving God be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

Silence

In a world where industries and infrastructures have failed,

where means of transport and delivery struggle to survive,

where many do not have adequate food, water or power:

we pray that they may know your strength and peace, **loving God be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

Silence

In a world where many people are or feel alone;

where many do not know where to look for comfort;

where many see no purpose or future:

we name those for whom our church members have a particular concern.....

we pray that they may know your strength and peace, **loving God be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

Silence

In our world, where we are living day by day,

where we have made new routines, rediscovered forgotten interests;

where we wait, wonder and look out at a different world to our normal;

we pray that we may each know your strength and peace, **loving God be for us a rock and a stronghold.**

Silence

In the name of the living Lord Jesus. Amen.

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Final Prayer & Blessing Ruth

May the God who made the earth, the heavens, and all of creation, bless us with courage to be living stones, **and clothe ourselves in the humility of Christ.**

May Christ, who is our cornerstone, bless us, strengthen us and guide our hearts and minds **to be fed by the Love of God found in Jesus Christ.**

May the Spirit, who lives with the Creator and within us, bless us and stir us into action, to move and adapt and place our living stones in areas of need

that will touch the untouchable, nurture the lonely and bring hope to the fearful.

Amen