



Good morning and welcome

Today we reopened our church building at Oakley for worship. I very much hope that, in time, you will feel able to join in the resounding praise of our God as we gather in our building once again. In the meantime, we will continue to post a Sunday Message for our Church WhatsApp Group, and on our website.

Let's begin with a few verses from Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Amen.

## Mission Praise 30

Alleluia, alleluia,  
Give thanks to the risen Lord;  
Alleluia, alleluia,  
give praise to his name.

He is the Lord of all the earth,  
He is the King of creation.

Alleluia, alleluia...

Spread the good news o'er all the earth,  
Jesus has died and risen.

Alleluia, alleluia...

We have been crucified with Christ;  
now we will live for ever.

Alleluia, alleluia...

God has proclaimed his just reward,  
life for all men, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia...

Come let us praise the living God,  
Joyfully sing to our Saviour:

Alleluia, alleluia...

Let's pray

Dear Lord, as we come away from a second season of Easter with our church buildings closed because of Covid-19, we wonder when you might raise us up that we might live before you again. We read that you are enthroned on the praises of your people, yet we have not been able to gather for praise as we would like, and are still not able. We long for the day when our church family life might be resurrected, not just from the ravages of a virus but from years of decline; when will we see sons and daughters born again into your kingdom? How long will you keep silent while men say, 'He has gone let us forget him'. But we acknowledge sovereign Lord that we are the ones who have kept silence; we have not spoken up for your righteousness, or messaged others about your kingdom. And so we pray: Our Father...



On Friday the death of Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh was announced, and the news has been reporting little else since. The man 'who had an insult for every occasion' passed away just a few months before his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday; seems a bit rotten really; I'm sure he would have liked to make a century. Thinking about 'a time to die' It seems appropriate, for a number of reasons, to consider a reading from John's gospel.

'Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honor anyone who serves me.' John 12: 20-26

Jesus' mission was to the lost sheep of the children of Israel, not the gentiles. The mission to the Greeks (and all other gentiles), would need to be undertaken by others, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew that his death and resurrection would enable that to happen, because only after his ascension would the Holy Spirit be given, but it got off to a rather shaky start...

Reading: John 20: 19-29

It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

## Mission Praise 381

Jesus, stand among us  
at the meeting of our lives,  
be our sweet agreement  
at the meeting of our eyes;  
O Jesus, we love You,  
so we gather here,  
join our hearts in unity  
and take away our fear.

So to you we're gathering  
out of each and every land,  
Christ the love between us  
at the joining of our hands;  
O Jesus, we love You,  
so we gather here,  
join our hearts in unity  
and take away our fear.



It is not really surprising that the disciples were 'locked in' for fear of the Jews. After all, their leader had just been betrayed and crucified. They didn't want the same treatment from a paranoid religious elite.

We have been in lockdown since the first week in January, and many of us have been 'locked in' for over a year now. Some of us have been afraid of catching the virus and some of us have been afraid of being caught where we shouldn't be by the authorities. But even now, as lockdown is gradually being eased many folk are still afraid of being out and about, despite having had the first, and even the second vaccination. Fear can paralyze us.

But there are many branches of the local church that have been in lockdown for many years; happy to worship behind close doors but fearful about taking the message onto the street. Fearful of causing offense perhaps.

We all know that Prince Philip was a man who didn't let the fear of causing offense stop him from saying what he wanted to say. The Church would do well to take a leaf out of his book. Our national church now deems it a disciplinary offense to cause offense to someone with regard to protected characteristics, i.e. gender, sexuality, race and religion. But no one has the right not to be offended. If we are fearful of causing offense we will never be able to share the gospel; the gospel is a great cause of offense to many people. Jesus certainly didn't shy away from causing offense, and he give us his spirit so that we might venture out from behind our closed doors and share the life transforming message that Jesus is risen from the dead and he is Lord.

Mission Praise 664

The Spirit lives to set us free,  
walk, walk in the light;  
He binds us all in unity,  
walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light,  
walk in the light,  
walk in the light,  
walk in the light of the Lord.*

Jesus promised life to all,  
walk, walk in the light;  
the dead were wakened by his call,  
walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light...*

He died in pain on calvary,  
walk, walk in the light;  
to save the lost like you and me,  
walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light...*

We know his death was not the end,  
walk, walk in the light;  
He gave his Spirit to be our friend,  
walk, walk in the light.  
*Walk in the light...*

By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,  
walk, walk in the light;  
the Father's kindness is revealed,  
walk, walk in the light.

*Walk in the light...*

The Spirit lives in you and me,  
walk, walk in the light;  
His light will shine for all to see,  
walk, walk in the light.

*Walk in the light...*



And now go in the peace of the Lord and the liberating power of the Holy Spirit, to love and serve the Lord, and may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you.

Amen