

# *Sunday worship Survival kit*



*The Bible, Jesus  
and you.*

EASTER TO PENTECOST 2021

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Hello everyone,

Welcome to your service book that will take us from Easter to Pentecost. This service book marks the end of my first year as your vicar, and an entire year of lockdown, loss and disruption to our lives. There is much about this season for us to grieve and mourn. Hopefully however, we can now look forward to our churches reopening and being able to worship together fully.

This booklet is intended to take us up to the end of May when we should have our annual meetings and allow us to have a discussion about our mission to share the good news of Jesus with our communities. This season is intended to look towards Pentecost as a time of rebirth for our churches and a renewed understanding of our relationship with Jesus. If we can grasp this message, and the opportunities we now have, then this could truly be a time of new life for our congregations.

God bless you and look forward to seeing you soon.

Rev. Adam Pitt

# Sunday 11 April 2021

2nd Sunday of Easter

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen Christ,

for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred:  
open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others  
and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Exodus 14.10-end; Exodus 15.20, 21, Acts 4.32-35, Psalm 133, John 20.19-end

## Thoughts for today:

This Easter season, as we look forward to Pentecost with hope for the re-birth of our churches and the hopeful return of our lost communities. This is an opportunity for new life in many different ways, but is only possible if we make conscious choices to think and live differently, rather than falling back into patterns that may have been destructive. There is a particular kind of self understanding that is unique to Christianity. It is not self improvement or self actualisation, but a knowledge of yourself in relation to Jesus.

The first and most important step in understanding yourself therefore is understanding Jesus. Who was He, what did He do, and why does it matter. These are the thoughts that were forming in the minds of the disciples after the miracle of Jesus resurrection.

The readings this week begin to thread together the mighty acts of God. The description of the God leading His people out of slavery in Egypt, pursued by the forces of pharaoh is a perfect beginning to understand our relationship to Jesus.

We can see the connection between the great sweep of history, the life of Jesus, and our own lives. As I have said before, it is like a fractal image where you can see the same shapes and patterns repeating again in large and small scales. The redemption from slavery and the rescue from the powers of evil and oppression that were controlling the lives of the people of God is a fundamental part of the history of Israel. This defines the journey of the Jewish people through the Old Testament, and is a foreshadow of Jesus' act of redemption for all people that then adopts all of us into this great story.

This narrative of slavery, redemption and adoption then becomes the framework, the lens through which we can understand our own Christian identity. It expresses our internal struggles, our changing relationships and our hopes for the world.

Our understanding of Jesus' life, His death, and His resurrection then becomes the centre point of all history and life, the moment that shapes both the whole of history and the whole of our lives. This is the self-understanding that we seek to move deeper into, one that is defined, filtered, focused and refined by the life of Jesus. From here we can think about how we can then express this in the world.

### **Communion Prayer:**

Lord God our Father,  
through our Saviour Jesus Christ  
you have assured your children of eternal life  
and in baptism have made us one with him:  
deliver us from the death of sin  
and raise us to new life in your love,  
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# Sunday 18 April 2021

3rd Sunday of Easter

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen Christ,

you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:

strengthen us to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Zephaniah 3.14-end, Acts 3.12-19, Psalm 4, Luke 24.36b-48

## Thoughts for today:

This week we will focus on the words of Peter in Acts, as he speaks to the gathered church leaders and proclaims 'you killed the author of life'. What can we understand about Jesus, about life and about ourselves from this damning statement?

What we need to recall first is this threefold fractal relationship between Jesus, the Bible and our lives. That we can see the great story of redemption and adoption played out in the pages of the Old Testament, lived out and fulfilled through Jesus, and then experienced individually in our own hearts. This reflection and re-telling of the story of redemption works from multiple angles, as we can see our life's journey reflected not just in the hope, joy and enthusiasm of the disciples, but also in the brokenness and disobedience of those who rejected Jesus and called for His death.

It is vital to our understanding of Jesus, and to our relationship with Him to know our own brokenness. Understanding our relationship to Jesus death in particular, knowing that He died for our sins. Why was this extraordinary and extreme step necessary? Why did the author of life have to die?

The problem is this, That whilst we may be 'good' or act 'good', or even do 'good', there is a side to everyone's heart that is held in the darkness. That whilst we may spend our time repenting and turning towards God, there is always a part of us that is forever turning away.

Whilst we may count ourselves hopefully amongst Jesus disciples, we must be convicted and gripped to the core as we realise that the accusation 'you killed the author of life' is justly leveled at us.

You killed the author of life...

There is only one path out of this desperate conviction, and that is to realise, as Jesus opens up the scriptures, that we were always headed this way. The journey of the Old Testament is the path of Humanity towards the killing of God's only Son. But the revelation is that Jesus knew that it was only through this act of substitution, dieing at our hand, that we could be saved.

Here, in this darkest moment, we find our source of hope and rejoicing in God. For friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

Praise be to God, I was lost and now I am found. I was blind and now I see.

### **Communion Prayer:**

Living God, your Son made himself known to his disciples  
in the breaking of bread: open the eyes of our faith,  
that we may see him in all his redeeming work;  
who is alive and reigns, now and forever.

# Sunday 25 April 2021

4th Sunday of Easter

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen Christ,  
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep:  
teach us to hear your voice and to follow your command,  
that all your people may be gathered into one flock,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Genesis 7.1-5, 11-18; Genesis 8.6-18; Genesis 9.8-13, Acts 4.5-12 , Psalm 23, John 10.11-18

## Thoughts for today:

We continue this week with our theme of knowing and understanding our relationship with Jesus. This time not through the multiple lenses that scripture provides, but through Jesus speaking directly into our lives.

Our relationship to Jesus is described as one of sheep and shepherd, of servant and lord, or one who commands and one who obeys. If we have this relationship with Jesus then we will respond when we hear his voice.

I have heard this described as a game of Simon says. Jesus says love, so we love, Jesus says give, so we give, 'Jesus says' is probably the best way of describing the game of being a Christian.

And this is what John is writing about, when he looks at how faith is manifested.

17How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

We are often good with words, but John compels us to action, to hear Jesus' voice and to respond not with slippery words, but with 'truth and action'. As though anyone can say that they believe, but their actions show the truth.

The foundation of our faith is on the corner stone of Jesus laying down his life for us. The operation of our faith is in recognising and not rejecting this relationship. The realisation of our faith is in our laying down our lives for others.

**Communion Prayer:**

Merciful Father, you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd, and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:  
keep us always under his protection, and give us grace to follow in his steps;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Sunday 2 May 2021

5th Sunday of Easter

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen Christ, your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage to risk ourselves for those we serve, to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Genesis 22.1-18, Acts 8.26-end, Psalm 22.25-end, John 15.1-8

## Thoughts for today:

As we continue on this journey of understanding Jesus, we reflect this week on how it is that this message actually applies to us. Initially, this may be something that we take for granted, in a Christendom sense, that it is just our religion. But it is important not to short circuit this process. You were not born a Christian, you were not born as a child of Abraham.

When we encounter Abraham in our old testament reading this week he has been asked by God to undertake the most difficult and troubling task. God has asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as an offering. This is totally out of character for God, who always condemned human sacrifice, but is in fact a test of faith that points forward to Jesus. Abraham is stopped by God at the last moment, as God says that He himself will provide the sacrifice.

This sacrificial moment that Abraham has before God is a foundation to the whole system of offerings and sacrifices that are performed by the Jewish priests. This is the system where by the Jewish people atone for their sins and are united with God again. Into this system Jesus comes as both priest and sacrifice, make atonement once and for all. God here is mirroring and completing the sacrifice of

Abraham, but this time God lays down the life of His only son so that all sins are forgiven.

This can still all make sense only if you are born Jewish. If you are born into the people of God and recognise Jesus as the Messiah. But few, if any of us are Jewish. We are born outside of this blood line, outside of this family, outside of this inheritance.

How is it that we can say that this is our story, how can Jesus be our saviour, how can we say that this is now our life?

It is because we have been grafted in. These are not our roots, but amazingly, through Jesus, we have been made part of this story. We have been adopted in as God's children and now all of the inheritance comes to us

To be a Christian is to have inherited a fortune and you never deserved, to be the recipient of unconditional, unearned love. A love that was never yours to claim but is lavished upon you nonetheless.

And from this place of love, we are called to love. Knowing this sacrifice that was made for us, we then are free to lay down our comfort to make it known to others. Having been grafted into these deep roots of love and compassion, we can then go and bear this fruit in the world.

### **Communion Prayer:**

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:  
grant us to walk in his way, to rejoice in his truth, and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns, now and forever

# Sunday 9 May 2021

6th Sunday of Easter

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen Christ, by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples: help your Church to obey your command and draw the nations to the fire of your love, to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Isaiah 55.1–11, Acts 10.44–end, John 15.9-17

## Thoughts for today:

This week we come to look at our part in this Christian relationship. We have looked at how our relationship to Jesus is the lens through which we see the strands of the old testament, and the patterns of our lives. That Jesus is both the fulfillment of these ancient prophecies and the real and current saviour of our own human failings. But if we are to call ourselves Christians, what should we do, and why?

To be a Christian is to be a 'little Christ', to be part of Jesus body on Earth with Him as our head, to be a child of God, hopefully with some identifiable family resemblance. This is what it is to be born of God. This is the confusing rebirth of baptism that so confused Nicodemus. As we focused on last week, no matter our origin, our birth or our heritage, we become God's children through our belief in Jesus. Which is no more than the acceptance of a free gift, purchased by God, an inheritance we were given through the death of His Son. This, again, is our adoption.

But what of this family resemblance? Always flawed, always incomplete, but what is it that God has as the hope for this children as He sends us out into the world?

To love one another - this is the commandment that Jesus Gives - this is the summary of the law, love God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself. As Children of God we are called to love the parent and love the child.

Our adoption and inheritance, or right to be called children of God and claim all of these promises as our own, comes through Jesus' love for us, His willingness to lay down His life for us. And now, as His friends, invited to share in His mission, we are directed to love as He loved.

It is through love that we bear this family resemblance, that we reflect the image of God into the world. This is the fruit that God hopes for in our lives, that we would love, and thereby make His joy in us complete. We may begin every gathering with a confession of the times that we have failed to love in this way. But as we are reminded of the reality and extent of God's love for us, we are ready to be sent out again to love and serve the Lord and to bring a bit of joy in the world.

### **Communion Prayer:**

God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:  
may we thirst for you, the spring of life and source of goodness,  
through him who is alive and reigns, now and forever.

# Sunday 16 May 2021

7th Sunday of Easter

Sunday after Ascension Day

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Risen, ascended Lord, as we rejoice at your triumph,  
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,  
that all who are estranged by sin may find forgiveness and know your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Ezekiel 36.24-28, Acts 1.15-17, 21-end, Psalm 1, John 17.6-19

## Thoughts for today:

We have been building a picture, over these weeks from Easter to Pentecost, of our relationship between Jesus, the Bible, the world and our own lives. We must understand that threads that God weaves into the old testament. Of promises and sacrifice and inheritance, of adoption, faithfulness and forgiveness, of prophets, priests and kings, of atonement and redemption.

We must understand the way that these strands are all drawn together in Jesus. That His life is a retelling, a summary and fulfillment of all the old testament threads, all the law and the prophets. His death is the atonement paid by God to bring us back into His presence, to defeat death, to bring us life. And His resurrection is the proof of this triumph.

Through Jesus this message of unconditional love and forgiveness explodes out into the world. And as it comes into contact with people's hearts, they are transformed. Forgiveness and compassion from God bring forgiveness and compassion in humans. Love breeds love and defeats evil. Light drives out darkness.

And this is where we come in. We are sent into the world as people who know love and forgiveness, and can therefore share this with others. We are sent as God's ambassadors, as His image bearers, as Jesus' body moving in the world. Our role is not to judge, not to condemn, but to live in love and peace with everyone.

Our role is to love other people the way that Jesus loved us. It is through doing this that we begin to really know how we are loved, and it is through this that others will see the reality of Christ in the world.

**Communion Prayer:**

Eternal God, giver of love and power,  
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world  
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:  
confirm us in this mission,  
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Sunday 23 May 2021

Sunday 23 May 2021

Pentecost / Ordinary Time

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire;  
strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love,  
and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Ezekiel 37.1-14, Acts 2.1-21, Psalm 104.26-36, 37b, John 15.26-27; John 16.4b-15

## Thoughts for today:

And so we come again to Pentecost and the birth of the church. We arrive at this point having been on a journey for the past year of closed churches, lost lives, missed traditions and distance from the things we love. This is a journey from which the church needs to be reborn.

We also arrive at this point after a journey of understanding our relationship to Jesus. A re-birth of our knowledge of Jesus as God's word, as the summation of the Old testament story of salvation. As the one who stands in our place and makes a way for us to again be God's children. His sacrifice allowed for us to be born again.

We arrive at this point as the latest generation to stuard and preserve this message through the Anglican church. We serve as the body of Christ Through Preserving and passing on not just Jesus words, but also the ancient traditions that bring balance to our worship and experience our salvation intellectually, physically and artistically through all our senses.

What we are called to reflect on at this time is actually the closeness of death. This is not to be morbid or discouraging, but again to understand the true nature of things. The past year has shown us the fragility of our lives and our way of life. It served to magnify and bring to the fore all that was fragile, unequal and broken in our society. And also, hopefully, the fragility of the church that we love. Knowing the reality of what closed doors can look like and what it would mean if we were the last generation to see the Anglican church alive.

Pentecost is the birth of the church because it is when the Holy spirit comes to the disciples and enables them to speak to the world. The church's birth is in this moment of sharing the good news, in the working out of the commission to teach and baptise. This is the work that the coming of the spirit enables.

The difference between life and death is the presence of the Holy spirit. We know that the church is alive when the Lord is here. We know that the church is alive when His Spirit is with us. We know that the church is alive when everything we say, and do and have is compelled to speak the good news.

That we are sinners, saved through grace.

### **Communion Prayer:**

Faithful God,  
who fulfilled the promises of Easter  
by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation  
the way of life eternal:  
open our lips by your Spirit,  
that every tongue may tell of your glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# Sunday 30 May 2021

Trinity Sunday

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Holy God, faithful and unchanging:  
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,  
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,  
that we may truly worship you,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Isaiah 6.1-8, Psalm 29, Romans 8.12-17, John 3.1-17

## Thoughts for today:

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday, and as we begin to open our churches and look towards the hoped for, full lifting of restrictions in the summer, we must take this opportunity to look to the future of our trinity of churches.

I have spoken many times over this past year about this notion from Paul of the 'spirit of adoption'. That our Christian life can be best summed up as our being adopted as God's children. The good news of Christianity is that, through Jesus' sacrifice we have been given this magnificent inheritance of grace and love.

I also feel that one of the positive outcomes of this unusual start to my ministry has been for us to be able to think and act as a benefice. Worshiping and learning together as we figured out how to deal with our changing circumstances. We found that we were able to achieve so much more than we thought possible. To use technology and media that may otherwise have taken an entire generation to bring in. We were able to reach out, to impact our communities and connect with our schools through creativity, enthusiasm and generosity. It was

possible for our churches to act and speak and impact, when we could not even unlock our front doors!

So what are we to do now that we are allowed to open? What do we take away from this experience?

The first thing we must recognise is our collective and individual grief. Nothing about the past year is what any of us had wanted or planned for. We all had hopes and expectations that were dashed by the impact of the virus. Many of us have lost loved ones, as well as jobs and relationships.

We must take time to allow ourselves to grieve for all that has been lost.

And we must also celebrate all that has been achieved. Like the hard work of NHS and care home staff, essential retail and delivery workers, and incredible scientific and technical developments that have allowed us to begin to recover.

And finally we must take away the lessons for us, for Paulton Benefice, our little trinity of churches.

I am sure that people have spoken to you before about the crisis facing the Church of England, but warnings can sometimes be hard to perceive. There is a phrase in business management called the 'burning platform', which is a crisis that necessitates change and where remaining in the same place is not an option. Our crisis up to this point has been a bit more like the climate change, or lobsters in a pot. The danger is real, but the change is slow enough that we don't notice until it is too late.

As I said last week, the pandemic has provided us with a glimpse of what it would be like if our buildings were locked. We are fortunate in being able to reopen now. I fear that for many small churches, a year of closure could be more than they can survive. We have also had a glimpse of what we are capable of when we are compelled to act.

We must now take this knowledge forward with us. We Have enjoyed this inheritance that has been given to us, now we must ensure that we invest in the next generation to be sure that we can pass this treasure on to them.

As I have said before. To pass this treasure on will require sacrifice on our part. Our role will be to love and serve the lord by gearing our worship, our resources, our gifts and our buildings towards passing on this inheritance.

This certainly does not mean sacrificing what is precious and that we mean to pass on. Our liturgy, our teaching, our community and our message of hope. But It will mean making sure that we think and act in a way that will clearly express the importance of these things to a new generation of Christians.

**Communion Prayer:**

Almighty and eternal God,  
you have revealed yourself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
and live and reign in the perfect unity of love:  
hold us firm in this faith,  
that we may know you in all your ways  
and evermore rejoice in your eternal glory,  
who are three Persons yet one God,  
now and forever.