

SESSION II – Monday – 22nd May 9.15am

Sacrament of Holy Communion

*(Commissioners are asked to stand for items marked *)*

Call to Worship:

“He brought me to the banqueting house and His banner over me was love.”

(Song of Solomon 2:4)

***Hymn: Psalm 121 (CH4 81) I to the hills will lift mine eyes**
French (Dundee)

Prayer

Let us pray
Almighty God,
In infinite grace and unfathomable love,
You enter and re-enter the story of humanity
Time and again.
Expected and unexpected,
Called and un-called,
There You are, here You are,
In brightness and shade,
In laughter and tears,
In company and in solitude.
A God for every season,
Accompany us through life,
God with us, and God for us,
Sometimes God despite us.
We gather at the Table of Your Son,
Who is with us in word and in silence,
Who speaks and Who listens,
That we, each one of us in this Assembly Hall,

And across our country and world,
May find that we are not alone,
But kneaded into the bread of Kingdom life,
And poured out upon a world of isolation
To bring it joy and friendship.
Through Christ our Saviour,
God with us.
Amen

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25
Revd Dr George Whyte, Associate Principal Clerk

Reflection: Word of Life – With

St Martin-in-the-Fields is a landmark church in the heart of London. It is a hospitable, vibrant and forward thinking community with worship at its heart. The church exists to honour God by being an open and inclusive, enabling people to question and discover for themselves the significance of Jesus Christ. It seeks to be a place of welcome for all.

Sam Wells is Vicar of St Martin's. We'll hear more from him tomorrow afternoon. He has written about the most important word in faith. It is the word '**with**'.ⁱ

So much of our active faith has become based on the tiny word 'for'. When we care about people finding life tough; when we want our friends and family to enjoy being around us; when we feel our relationship with a colleague or a relative is faltering – our instinct is to do something **'for'** them. It seems the word that epitomises being an admirable person is the word, 'for'.

These are good gestures, warm-hearted, and in some cases sacrificial and noble. But they don't go to the heart of the problem. 'For' doesn't dismantle resentment; it doesn't overcome misunderstanding; it doesn't deal with alienation; it doesn't overcome isolation.ⁱⁱ 'For' doesn't deal with the loneliness of knowing that you are a surplus commodity, or the indignity and frustration of being unneeded. Do you remember

Charles Shultz's *Peanuts* cartoons? There was one of Linus afraid to go to the library and Charlie Brown tries to explain that everybody is lonely in some place or another. Linus asked Charlie Brown where that place was for him. Charlie pondered and then replied, "Earth".ⁱⁱⁱ

'For' is not the way God reveals Himself to us. In the different stories in the Bible – Matthew has the angel telling Joseph that the child's name should be 'Emmanuel...God with us'; and John giving his majestic statement of what the heart of God means, "The Word became flesh and lived among (or with) us." That's the most important little word in our Christian faith.

The word is ***with***'.

Could it be that that is the most important word in the Bible – the word of life that describes the heart of God? God's whole

life and action and purpose are shaped to be **with** us. It is the word we find at the beginning of Matthew's gospel in the name given to Jesus – Immanuel – God **with** us. It is the word the Saviour speaks to the disciples on the mountain, in their worship and in their doubt, telling them to go out in the power of the Spirit, to baptise and teach, "...and lo, I am **with** you always, to the close of the age."

'With' is in many ways a lot harder than 'for'. You can do 'for' without a conversation, without a real relationship, without changing your views and your attitudes and prejudices.^{iv} 'With' asks more of us than simply what we donate. Do we prefer to keep charity on the level of 'for', where it can't hurt us, or maybe even change us? Charity giving is a truly wonderful thing, but might it be that beyond generosity with our money,

the C21st deficit has more to do with the gift of our time?
Being **'with'** your family and friends and colleagues and fellow worshippers, including the difficult ones. What the isolated, grieving and impoverished people of our communities and world usually need is not simply our money, but our concerned presence with them. Do we care about them as people, or as a project? It's the **'with'** and not the **'for'** that is needed in our world today.

This remains one of the greatest challenges facing the Church today. Walls that shelter must not cocoon us from the neediness and messiness of the world beyond. We need sanctuaries for safety, not as theological fortresses protecting our notion of spiritual purity, which shuts out rather than welcomes in the world that we are meant to encounter and get

alongside. How can we be *for* the hurt, the frightened, the resentful, the broken, the confused, the dismissive, and the vulnerable unless we are first ***with*** them? Nor do we get to choose who these might be. God has already done that.

Are you with those people who are part of the C21st epidemic of loneliness and isolation in our country, young and old; with the parents in your family or circle of friends who feel overwhelmed by work and family responsibilities; with the people who have poor mental health who come into our public spaces and rarely get a smile of friendship, let alone a word of greeting; with the person who comes to a food bank with more embarrassment than you could ever imagine, needing to find acceptance, and not just charity; with the refugees fleeing war and famine and drought and persecution, and not grudgingly

offering the lowest possible response we can make to their needs. With the cancer sufferer; with the bereaved; with the jobless; with the angry; with the human being whose values and lifestyle and choices may be entirely different to or opposite your own; with the doubting; with the single parent; with the fragile soul whose relationship has just crashed and burned.

As we gather around this flat Communion table, all are equal, everyone has a place; all are welcome, and all means all. With Communion God says unambiguously, 'I am with you.' It is the nature of God to be present, always, with God's children, wherever they gather, in thousands, hundreds or twos and threes.

God is neither controlled nor contained by bread and wine, or churches and theologies; God is never shut out by hard hearts or closed minds; God is never put off by indifferent commitment or broken promises. God persists. Who would want to bother with people like us? God does.

There are those who are depressed or frightened by the state of the Church today. Some things are very good, whilst others are no longer fit for purpose. We feel, “caught in a culture and a religious institution that is deteriorating...yearning for new ways of seeing, a new way of trusting, a new way of coping with problems that seem insurmountable...biblical history reminds us, this is exactly the kind of scenario that God most desires. It is when we are vulnerable and lost and anxious –

and out of control – that God can finally discover a way into our hearts.”^v Which is why the word **‘with’** is a word of life.

Communion is the radical intrusion of God into the fearfulness and emptiness of our human condition. God is with us.

Restoring relationship, reconciling us with the Gospel.

The world’s Jesus; the world’s Immanuel, the world’s Saviour.

God with us. This day. Every day.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Let us stand and make confession of our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

*** THE NICENE CREED**

**We believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible:
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,**

**The only begotten Son of God,
Begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,
Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the
Father,
By Whom all things were made:
Who, for us and for our salvation,
Came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
And was made human,
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried,
And the third day He rose according to the Scriptures,
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father.
And He shall come again with glory to judge
Both the quick and the dead,
Whose Kingdom shall have no end.
And we believe in
The Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped
and glorified;
Who spake by the prophets.
And we believe one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.
And we look for the Resurrection of the dead,
And the life of the world to come.
Amen.**

Invitation:

From east and west, from north and south, people will come and take their places at the banquet in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29

This is the table, not of the Church but of the Lord. It is ready for those who love Him, and who want to love Him more.

So come, you who have much faith, and you who have little, and you who have been here often, and you who have not been for a long time, and you who have never been before, and you who have failed.

Come not because it is I who invite you: it is our Lord. It is His heartfelt desire that those who want Him should meet with Him here.

***HYMN: Psalm 24 vvs 7-10 (CH4 19) Ye Gates**

Prayer

Let us pray.

Loving God,

Through the sacrifice of Your Son You have shown us

A way forward to live and hope through faith.

Out of the fullness of Your gifts,

We make our offerings to You,

And present this bread and this wine,

For all things come from You, and of Your own we give You.

We give thanks that in this bridging of eternity that Christ offers,

So that where You are and where we find ourselves

Are no longer distant but brought near, within the touching of our hands.

You gave us Jesus, to remedy the hurt and brokenness of the world,

And given us a way, through Him, to make amends for the hurts we have caused.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us be silent and in the silence make our own confession to God.

Silence

In the name of Jesus Christ, I declare to you who have confessed your sin to God,
That He of His love freely forgives you, and absolves you from all your sin.

He offers you now the grace and strength of His Holy Spirit.

Amen.

NARRATIVE OF THE INSTITUTION

Hear the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper, according to Paul:

"I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,
That the Lord Jesus, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread,

And when He had given thanks, He broke it,
And said 'This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.'

In the same way also the cup after supper saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in My blood.

Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup,

You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

As the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, together as a family of faith we share the bread and the wine and remember His sacrifice of love for us.

Let us Pray.

God of faith and love,
We give You our thanks that in the shaping of the world,
You laid the earth's foundation and set its corner stone in place,
The morning stars sang in chorus,
And the angels of God all shouted for joy.
By the might of Your Word You made us a universe and gave us life.
Hear our prayers for our world, our nation.
Hear our prayers for those outwith the comfort of our fellowship,
But not beyond the reach of Your gracious love.
For those with burdens, grief or pain today we pray.
For those with anger, envy or confusion we pray.
For those with hurt hearts and splintered souls we pray.
For those who feel that love has passed them by we pray.
For the business that we will discuss, debate and decide in this week, we pray.
For the things that we will say and not say in this week, we pray.
For the searching of heart and mind and soul, as we work towards a Church that honours and accommodates diversity,
And that we may model grace at all times, and good disagreement when we must, we pray.
God bless the Queen.
God bless Her Grace and all her household.
God bless our Church, and the communities of faith

From which we come across this land and across this world,
That here at this table, we might be one in Your Name.
And now, gracious God, we bless You for Your Son, our
Saviour.

That He is Your Word made flesh and living with us,
For His life on earth, His suffering for us, and His triumph over
death;

For His ascension to Your right hand and His gift of the Holy
Spirit;

And for the promise of His coming again.

Send down Your Holy Spirit to bless us that through our faith
We may take the bread and wine and be reminded of His
sacrifice of love

And our need of faith, and so grow in grace.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Who taught us when we pray together to say:

All:

**Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in
heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

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

For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,

For ever.

Amen.

TAKING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

As the Lord Jesus,

The same night in which He was betrayed took bread,

I take these elements of bread and wine,

To be set apart from all common uses

To this holy use and mystery;

And as He gave thanks and blessed,
Let us draw near to God
And offer Him our prayers and thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING

Lift up your hearts.

Let us lift them up unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

It is meet and right so to do.

Lord, You are always close to us,
Be with us now as we give thanks
For the gift of Your Son, our Saviour, God with us.
When we were nothing, You made us something.
When we had no name and no faith and no future,
You called us Your children.
When we lost our way, or turned away,
You did not abandon us.
When we came back to You, Your arms opened wide in
welcome.
And look, You prepare a table for us because You loved us,
So that we might be forgiven, filled, healed, blessed and made
new.
For us You were born,
For us You healed, taught and showed us how to live;
For us You were crucified,
And for us, after death, You rose again.

Therefore, with Your people of all places and times, and with
the whole company of heaven, we proclaim Your greatness
and sing Your praise in the angels' song:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord,

**God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes
In the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.
Amen.**

BREAKING OF BREAD

Come to this table, not because you must but because you may;
Come, not because you are strong but because you are weak.
Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you the right to come,
But because you need mercy and help.
Come because you love the Lord a little and would like to love Him more.
Come, because He loved you and gave Himself for you.

According to the holy institution, example, and command of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And as a memorial of Him, we do this:

Who, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread

(Take the bread),

And when He had given thanks He broke it,

(Break the bread),

And said, 'This is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'

In the same way He took the cup

(Raise the cup)

Saying, 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.'

The Moderator says:

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,

Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,

Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,

Grant us Your peace.

Silence may be kept for a time.

COMMUNION

Take, eat, this is like the body of Christ, which was broken for you. Do this and remember Him. This cup is the new covenant sealed by Christ's blood, which was shed that the sins of many might be forgiven.

Let us all drink from it.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Serve the Clerks and Chaplains at the Lord's Table, who then serve the elders.

The elements are taken to the people in their seats.

When all have received, the vessels are returned to the Communion Table, and the Moderator is served last by the Principal Clerk

Then the elements are covered.

THE PEACE

Not an easy peace,
Not an insignificant peace,
Not a half-hearted peace,
But the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Let us pray
Lord Jesus Christ,
Saviour,
God with us,
In all that lies ahead, be by our side,
Encouraging, not condemning,
Blessing, not berating,
Sharing, not withholding.
We put our lives into Your hands;
Take us, renew us and remake us.
What we have been is past;
What we shall be awaits us.
Lead us on,
Walk with us.

Amen

*** Hymn (CH4 130) Ye servants of God** *Laudate Dominum*

The Blessing

Entrust your life to the ever-present God,
Who is with you in the darkness and the light.
Entrust your life to the ever-present God,
Who is with you in the sorrow and the joy.
Entrust your life to the ever-present God,
Who enfolds you and includes You in love and mercy.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you, always.

Amen.

ⁱ Samuel Wells, A Nazareth Manifesto, p1ff

ⁱⁱ ibid p2

ⁱⁱⁱ William P Barker, A Saviour for All Seasons, p27

^{iv} Wells, p4

^v Susan R Andrews, Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew Vol 1, pps 8-10