

# **North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)**

## **Service Sheets For the Month of April 2024**

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## Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Easter 2 (World Health Day)

*This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap*

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.  
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

### **Call to Worship:**

Come, all who are in need, all who are lonely.  
Come, young and old, and everyone in between.  
Come, if you are hurting or healthy, weary or happy.  
Come, whether you are joyful or sad.  
Come, to the 'grace giver', the One who welcomes us home.  
Come, and worship our God.     **Amen.**

### **Hymn: He Has Risen (StF302)**

*Refrain:*            *He has risen*  
                          *He has risen*  
                          *Jesus is alive*

When the life flowed from His body,  
Seemed like Jesus' mission failed.  
But His sacrifice accomplished,  
Vict'ry over sin and hell.

*Refrain:*

In the grave God did not leave Him,  
For His body to decay;  
Raised to life - the Great Awakening,  
Satan's pow'r He overcame.

*Refrain:*

If there were no resurrection,  
We ourselves could not be raised;  
But the Son of God is living,  
So our hope is not in vain.

*Refrain:*

When the Lord rides out of heaven,  
Mighty angels at His side,

They will sound the final trumpet,  
From the grave we shall arise.

*Refrain:*

He has given life immortal,  
We shall see Him face to face;  
Through eternity we'll praise Him,  
Christ, the champion of our faith.

*Refrain:*

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### **Prayers of Praise:**

Risen Lord, with hearts ablaze, filled with praise and wonder, we celebrate the truth that death is not the end;

That You rose from the grave, opening the way of life for all.

With a song on our lips, heartfelt hymns of joy and thanksgiving,

We celebrate the fact that love is stronger than hatred, good greater than evil, and light mightier than darkness.

With laughter in our eyes, sparkling with faith and hope, we celebrate the proof that sorrow will turn to joy,

Hurt to wholeness and defeat to victory.

With gratitude deep within, filling body, mind and spirit,

We celebrate the assurance that Your kingdom will never end,

Your purpose never fail, Your love never fade and Your mercy never be exhausted.

Gladly we worship You.     **Amen.**

### **Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

*Response after each line: Lord, forgive us.*

For our greed and self-centeredness:

For our failure to see the needs of those around us:

For our failure to be generous with our time:

For our failure to share when we have more than enough:

For our failure to see that often our lifestyle choices harm and disenfranchise others:

For our failure to love as You have loved us:

For these and all our failings: **Lord, forgive us.**

The Lord, our God, is merciful and kind to all, and says to each one of us who has confessed their sins, failings and shortcomings:  
'My child, I love you, I live with you; your sins are forgiven.'

**You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.**

**Hymn: This Joyful Eastertide (StF 314)**

This joyful Eastertide,  
What need is there for grieving?  
Cast all your cares aside  
And be not unbelieving:

*Come share our Easter joy  
That death could not imprison,  
Nor any power destroy,  
Our Christ who is arisen, arisen, arisen!*

No work for Him is vain,  
No faith in Him mistaken,  
For Easter makes it plain  
His Kingdom is not shaken.

*Come share our Easter joy  
That death could not imprison,  
Nor any power destroy,  
Our Christ who is arisen, arisen, arisen!*

Then put your trust in Christ,  
In waking and in sleeping.  
His grace on earth suffice,  
He'll never quit His keeping:

*Come share our Easter joy  
That death could not imprison,  
Nor any power destroy,  
Our Christ who is arisen, arisen, arisen!*

Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

**Introduction:**

It was only when he was able to see for himself that the crucified Jesus was the risen Christ that Thomas proclaimed his faith unequivocally, 'My Lord

and my God!’ But we who, like the first readers of the Gospel, ‘have not seen’ can know Jesus’ blessing of peace by putting the testimony of the Gospel to the test of living it out in the world so ‘that through believing you may have life in his name’ (v.31).

### **Gospel Reading: John chapter 20:19-31 (NIV)**

#### **JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES**

‘On the evening on that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” after He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you.” And with that, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive someone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

#### **JESUS APPEARS TO THOMAS**

Now Thomas [called Didymus], one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came in and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God.”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed.”

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

#### **Meditation: THOMAS**

Did He condemn me for doubting?

Not a bit of it –

He understood, and answered.  
Perhaps I should have believed earlier –  
After all, I had my fellow disciples' word that Jesus was alive –  
But can you appreciate I wanted to be sure?  
Don't forget, we were grief-stricken when He died,  
Numb with despair,  
None of us listening when Mary and the others rushed back from the tomb  
Declaring it was empty and the Lord raised –  
No, not one.  
We feared it was wishful thinking, a beautiful but sad delusion,  
For though Jesus had spoken of rising again,  
We never imagined it could really happen.  
It was just my luck not to be there when He appeared again,  
And though I longed to accept He was truly alive,  
I didn't dare to trust lest it were all to prove a ghastly mistake.  
I couldn't have lived with more disappointment,  
Not after what we'd been through already,  
So I closed my mind to the idea until Jesus stood before me,  
Inviting me to touch, and feel, and know.  
Seeing is believing, isn't that what they say,  
And so it was for me.  
So how, may you ask, can anyone possibly believe without seeing?  
Well actually they *can*,  
For even though He's gone from us now,  
Returned to the Father,  
I know He's with me still,  
Every moment of the day –  
Here through His Spirit in His risen power.  
I can't see Him, but I can feel His presence,  
For ever by my side.  
Not that you have to take my word for it –  
I wouldn't expect that.  
Respond, and discover the truth for yourself.  
Do not doubt, but believe!

'A Most Amazing Man' – Nick Fawcett

**Hymn: When Easter To The Dark World Came (StF 316)**

When Easter to the dark world came,  
Fair flowers glowed like scarlet flame:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When Mary in the garden walked,  
And with her risen Master talked:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When John and Peter in their gloom  
Met angels at the empty tomb:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When ten disciples met in fear,  
Then “Peace” said Jesus, “I am here”:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

When Thomas’ heart was hurt and grieved,  
Then Jesus’ wounds his doubt relieved:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

And friend to friend in wonder said,  
“The Lord is risen from thee dead”:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

This Eastertide with joyful voice  
We’ll sing: “The Lord is King! Rejoice!:

*At Eastertide, at Eastertide,  
O glad was the world at Eastertide.*

W. H. Hamilton (1886–1958)

**Reflection:**

Author Leslie Flynn tells the story of small boy being brought up by his grandmother. One night, the house caught fire. Trying to rescue her grandson, she was overcome by smoke and died in the fire. Unfortunately,

the city only had a part time fire department. A crowd gathered as they heard the small boy crying out for help. Suddenly, a man pushed through the crowd and began climbing an iron drainpipe which ran to the roof. The pipe was hot from the fire, but he made it to the second floor window. He crawled through and found the boy. With the crowd cheering encouragement the man climbed back down the hot iron pipe with the boy on his back and his arms around his neck.

A few weeks later, a meeting was held to determine in whose care the boy would be placed. Each volunteer willing to give the boy a home made a brief statement. The first said: "I have a farm and would give the boy a good home. He will grow up on the farm and learn a trade." The second speaker was a local school teacher. She promised the boy would have a good education. The third speaker was a bank manager who promised he would give the boy a good home and fine education. The Presiding Officer looked around and asked if anyone else would like to say anything. From the back of the room a man rose and said: "These people are able to offer some things I can't. All I can offer is my love." Then, he slowly removed his hands from his coat pockets. A gasp went up in the room because his hands were scarred terribly from climbing up and down the hot pipe. The young man was recognised because of his hands. The boy whose life he saved ran into his waiting arms. The farmer, teacher and bank manager simply sat down. Everyone knew what the decision would be. The scarred hands proved that this man had given everything he could.

John tells us that on Easter Sunday evening, the disciples were together, in a house somewhere in Jerusalem, hiding behind locked doors for fear of reprisals from the Jewish authorities. Despite the good news brought by Mary Magdalene that she had seen the Risen Jesus, the disciples were still sceptical and afraid. As they talked together, they were suddenly conscious that someone else was present – Jesus. He greeted them with the traditional Jewish greeting 'Shalom' – Peace be with you. Then He showed them his hands. **They recognised Him by His hands.** They were overjoyed at seeing Him again. He repeated His message of peace and His purpose in coming to them – to bless them with the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. But someone was missing from the group – Thomas. When he joined the other disciples, they were eager to share their news – they had met with their Risen Lord. But Thomas wasn't convinced. He wanted proof. He wanted to see Jesus' hands.



A week later, the disciples were together again in the same house in a locked room. Thomas was with them. Again they became conscious that Jesus was with them. He greeted them in peace. Jesus pre-empted Thomas' questioning with an invitation to touch His hands and challenged him to stop doubting and believe. Was this aimed at just Thomas – or to all the disciples? Was this the point where all their doubts and uncertainties that they had expressed over the previous three years were finally satisfied? Had Thomas spoken for all of them in his declaration: “My Lord and my God”? **The scarred hands proved that Jesus had given everything.**

Jesus' self-disclosure to the disciples on Easter Sunday evening and the following Sunday is most appropriately understood as the fulfilment of virtually everything Jesus had promised them in His farewell discourses:

## **THE PROMISE**

**The Fulfilment:** “I will come to you” [chapter 14 v. 28]

“My Father and I will come to him [ch. 14 v. 23]

**Jesus came and stood among them:** [ch. 20 vs. 19, 21 & 26]

“Peace I leave with you; my Peace I give to you.” [ch. 14 v. 27]

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.” [ch. 16 v. 33]

**“Peace be with you.”** [ch. 20 vs. 19, 21 and 26]

“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while, you will see me.” [ch. 16 v.16]

“I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy” [ch. 16 v. 22]

**The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.** [ch. 20 v.20]

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor, the Spirit of truth.” [ch. 14 vs. 16-17]

The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.” [ch. 16 vs. 7-15]

**With that He breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”**  
[ch. 20 v. 22]

Could there now be any doubt? What about our doubting and uncertainties?

If the empty tomb signified to the beloved disciple Jesus' departure to the Father. His appearance to the disciples signified His return. He has not come back to pay them a brief visit, but to stay. His return is the beginning of a new relationship. Three times, the risen Jesus reveals Himself to the

disciples with the greeting: **“PEACE BE WITH YOU.”** The scarred hands proved that Jesus had kept His promise.

When doubts and questioning cloud our vision, when troubles and difficulties close our eyes to the goodness of God, we need to draw closer to Jesus through worship, Scripture, prayer, reaching out to our brothers and sisters in faith. As the verse of the hymn reminds us: (Singing the Faith 28 v. 3)

Join the hand of friend and stranger;  
Join the hands of age and youth;  
Join the faithful and the doubter  
In their common search for truth.

### **JESUS HOLDS OUT HIS HANDS TO US IN WELCOME**

#### **Prayers of Love and Concern on this day which remembers World Health:**

Almighty God, You are eternally patient with us, and no matter what we do, You persevere with us. Help each of us to show patience and perseverance with others; and with this prayer in our hearts and on our lips, we pray for those we know and love and hear of this day.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

For those struggling to accept the Easter message of resurrection; for those who long to have faith but miss the final step; who long to see Jesus but doubt what they see; who long to hear Your word, but grasp only a murmur; who yearn to feel Your presence but shy away from contact; for those who need convincing of the truth in an age of fake news.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them**

For those whose health and well-being balance on the edge of uncertainty, pain, disability or anguish; for those whose treatment is delayed and who are ground down by mental and physical pain that cannot yet be treated; for those who live with darkness and dread overwhelming their waking moments.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

For those without meaning and purpose in life, for those who feel there is no hope; for those without a stable home life, without meaningful work and prospects.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

For those without the shelter of a home, who are constantly forced to move on, change direction through war or violence, political unrest, prejudice, religious hatred and so much more; for those who seek refuge in new places and new lands.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

For those who are victims of modern slavery, abused, undervalued, who are frightened and bewildered and a long way from home, family and support.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

For those areas in our country where unrest or religious divides bring people out onto the streets in protest. For those who want to peacefully make their stand; for those who perpetrate the unrest that they may be helped to see that violence is not the answer and will often only fuel more problems; for those who make plans and laws and those who police society – may they and we seek unity, purpose and love.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

The disciples gathered behind closed doors not only for fear of the Jewish authorities but to grieve the loss of their friend, their leader, their Lord. We pray for those who mourn the loss of family or friends.

God, in whom we believe: **Bless them.**

And for ourselves we pray, that we might banish shadows that hold us back and keep us fixed to what we are familiar with, when we can be afraid to step out, step forward, step up – we pray that we might know the wisdom of the grace of God, the blessing of the Spirit, the love and companionship of each other and the glory of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands (StF 712)**

Put peace into each other's hands  
And like a treasure hold it,  
Protect it like a candle flame,  
With tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands  
With loving expectation,  
Be gentle in your words and ways.  
In touch with God's creation.  
Put peace into each other's hands  
Like bread we break for sharing;  
Look people warmly in the eye:  
Our life is meant for caring.

As at Communion, shape your hands  
Into a waiting cradle,  
The gift of Christ receive, revere,  
United round the table.

Put Christ into each other's hands,  
He is love's deepest measure;  
In love make peace, give peace a chance,  
And share it like a treasure.

Fred Kaan (1929 – 2009)

### **Blessing:**

Lord, Your generous love is showered on us in Jesus.  
Help us to be generous to those among whom we live or meet.  
Guide us in building and becoming a generous community, as we seek to  
put our faith into action.  
We ask this in Jesus' name and for the coming of the Kingdom. **Amen.**

*©Some material is adapted from Roots For Churches*

## Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Easter 3

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge*

### **Call to Worship:**

Come, all who have made mistakes.

Come, all who have said or done things they regret.

Come, all who have failed to do what was right.

Come, all who want to start afresh.

Come to the God who offers hope, healing, and forgiveness.

### **Hymn: Amazing Grace (StF 440)**

Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me;

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,

And grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear,

The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares

I have already come;

'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,

His word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be

As long as life endures.

When we've been there a thousand years

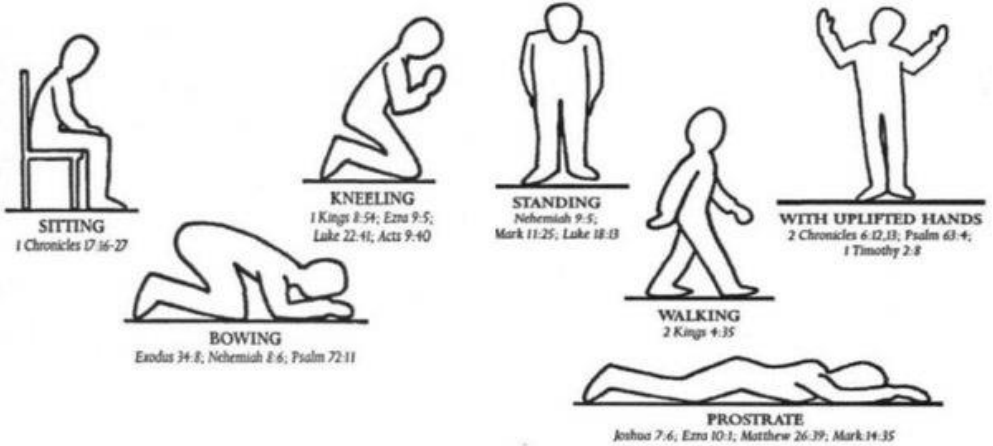
Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we first begun.

*John Newton (1725 – 1807)*

# DIFFERENT WAYS TO PRAY



Prayer:

We sit,

We bow

we kneel,

we stand,

We walk,

We lift our hands

We lay before we,

we come

with adoration, love and amazement

at the sights you give us

of your being,

at the love you enfold us with,

at the voices that speak your words,

of the visions that reveal your presence,

at the way you gently teach us

and guide us.

O Lord our God, in awe and wonder we adore you this day. **Amen.**

## **Psalm 4**

Answer me when I call to you,  
my righteous God.

Give me relief from my distress;  
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

<sup>2</sup> How long will you people turn my glory into shame?  
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods<sup>[b]</sup>?<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself;  
the LORD hears when I call to him.

<sup>4</sup> Tremble and do not sin;  
when you are on your beds,  
search your hearts and be silent.

<sup>5</sup> Offer the sacrifices of the righteous  
and trust in the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> Many, LORD, are asking, “Who will bring us prosperity?”  
Let the light of your face shine on us.

<sup>7</sup> Fill my heart with joy  
when their grain and new wine abound.

<sup>8</sup> In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for you alone, LORD,  
make me dwell in safety.

### **Prayer of Confession:**

Almighty God, we read the stories of old, of psalmists and prophets, of disciples and apostles, of followers and onlookers, and ask ourselves ‘Why did they do that, why did they make so many mistakes, why did they do bad things, wrong things?’ Help us to see that we too do things that are wrong, that are not good or right. Help us to see that we make mistakes, take wrong decisions because they somehow seemed the easiest things to do at the time. As you have forgiven those of old, so too, when we confess our failings, when we look at what we have really done and seen what we could have done better, you forgive us, you cleanse us and set us free. **Amen.**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Almighty God, we have confessed to you and faced our failings, let us now in penitence hear your forgiving words that assure us of your love, your forgiveness and your patience with us. Take the burden from us and help us to face the future with a lighter load and clearer vision. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: Father Hear The Prayer We Offer (StF 518)**

Father, hear the prayer we offer:  
not for ease that prayer shall be,  
but for strength that we may ever  
live our lives courageously

Not for ever in green pastures  
do we ask our way to be;  
but the steep and rugged pathway  
may we tread rejoicingly

Not for ever by still waters  
would we idly rest and stay;  
but would smite the living fountains  
from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,  
in our wanderings be our guide;  
through endeavour, failure, danger,  
Father, be thou at our side.

## **Reading: Acts 3:12-19**

<sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup> By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

<sup>17</sup> “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,



## **Hymn: Jesus – The Name High Over All (StF 357)**

Jesus, the name high over all,  
In hell, or earth, or sky:  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly.

Jesus, the name to sinners dear,  
The name to sinners giv'n;  
It scatters all their guilty fear,  
It brings them peace of heav'n.

Jesus the prisoner's fetters breaks,  
And bruises Satan's head;  
Pow'r into strengthless souls He speaks,  
And life into the dead.

Oh, that the world might taste and see,  
The riches of His grace!  
The arms of love that compass me,  
Would all mankind embrace.

His only righteousness I show,  
His saving grace proclaim:  
'Tis all my business here below,  
To cry, Behold the Lamb!

Happy, if with my latest breath  
I may but gasp His name:  
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,  
"Behold, behold the Lamb!"

### **Reflection:**

In 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy, (*it's a gorgeous book and quickly read with wonderful illustrations – do try to get hold of a copy – and Enjoy! with tears*) the mole remarks that the greatest illusion is that life should be perfect. By way of illustration, Charlie Mackesy includes the page from his manuscript 'marred' by a paw print from his dog. We are far from perfect. All of us make mistakes. Some of them are minor.

Take a moment ....

to think about any mistakes

you have made

recently ....

Apart from asking for God's forgiveness is there anything else you now feel prompted to do?

It is important that we understand that not all mistakes are sins, nor should we feel guilty after them. Some are necessary and even positive in order to learn or gain experience. The inventor Thomas Edison describes how he found thousands of ways a light bulb wouldn't work (i.e. *mistakes?*) before he came up with a working light bulb. Few of us learn how to ride a bike or drive a car safely the first time; we have to have a number of goes, sometimes a lot!

In her insightful book *Failure*, Emma Ineson records a story that exposes a common misunderstanding of the nature of the failure that the Bible calls sin. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the speaker at a church gathering where he declared he was a sinner. 'Well,' responded an outraged woman in the audience, 'if I had known that you were a sinner I wouldn't have bothered to come today!' and stalked off in high dudgeon. She made the error of imagining that because someone had attained importance in the Christian church, he or she could not possibly be a sinner.

The truth is, however, that all of us are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). It is what we do when we own this truth that is the crucial thing. Peter makes this point in this week's passage from Acts. His audience had committed a very serious mistake in not recognising who Jesus really was; it took him to the cross. However, by coming clean about this, through confessing that they had done wrong opens the way to forgiveness. They had acted in ignorance along with their rulers. That's the bad news. And it is bad news for us too. Our failure takes God to the cross. But, here's the good news: by recognising our failure to live as God desires and turning to him brings us forgiveness and the restoration of that relationship brings new life. Then we can experience 'the incredible forgetfulness of God' to use a striking phrase by Emma Ineson. God does not remember or hold against us the sins that we have truly confessed. He offers us a fresh start, a new beginning that will bring joy.

## **Prayers for Others**

*Response after each line: We pray to you, O Lord.*

Let us bring before God  
those who have never known the transformative power of love:  
those who live in fear of what others may do to them:  
those who have the strength to stand up to that which is wrong:  
those who have the courage and the opportunity to speak out against  
injustice:  
those who give of themselves to help those in need:  
those who work to make this world a better place:  
those known to us who need our prayers at this time: **Amen.**

Say the Lord's Prayer: Our Father ....

## **Hymn: Lift High The Cross, The Love Of Christ Proclaim (StF 276)**

*Lift high the Cross, the love of Christ proclaim*

*Till all the world adore his sacred name.*

Follow the path on which our Captain trod,  
Our King victorious, Christ the Son of God: *Lift high....*

Each new-born soldier of the Crucified  
Bears on their brow the seal of him who died: *Lift high....*

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,  
The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine: *Lift high....*

From farthest regions let them homage bring,  
And on his cross adore their Saviour King: *Lift high....*

O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,  
As thou has promised, draw the world to thee: *Lift high....*

Set up thy throne, that earth's despair may cease  
Beneath the shadow of its healing peace: *Lift high....*

## **Blessing**

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you now and with all those whom you love and cherish,  
in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**

## Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – Easter 4

*This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap*

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.  
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

### **Call to Worship:**

God of grace, You know our weaknesses,  
and how we let You, ourselves and others down  
by the things we say and do, or fail to do.  
In this time of worship, open our hearts and minds,  
to learn from our mistakes, to know more of Your ways,  
and live and love as Christ, the Good Shepherd, loves us. **Amen.**

### **Hymn: I Will Sing The Wondrous Story (StF 323)**

I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me,  
How He left the realms of glory  
For the Cross on Calvary:

*Refrain: Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me,  
Sing it with the saints in glory,  
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

I was lost; but Jesus found me,  
Found the sheep that went astray,  
Raised me up, and gently led me  
Back into the narrow way:

*Refrain:*

Faint was I, and fears possessed me,  
Bruised was I from many a fall;  
Hope was gone, and shame distressed me;  
But His love has pardoned all:

*Refrain:*

Days of darkness still come o'er me;  
Sorrow's paths I often tread;  
But the Saviour still is with me,

By His hand, I'm safely led:

*Refrain:*

He will keep me till the river  
Rolls its waters at my feet;  
Then He'll bear me safely over,  
Where the loved ones I shall meet:

*Refrain:*

Francis Harold Rowley (1854–1952)

**Prayer of Praise:**

For the vastness of Your purpose, the immensity of Your creation,  
And the awesome wonder of Your grace.

**Lord, we thank You.**

For knowing us better than we know ourselves,  
For calling us by name and loving us more than we can begin to imagine,

**Lord, we praise You.**

For joys past, joys present, and joys to come.

**Lord, we worship You, now and evermore. Amen.**

**Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Lord Jesus Christ, You paid the price that we could never begin to pay.

You gave Your all to cancel the debt we owe,

Securing our freedom through Your suffering and death.

We celebrate again the wonder of that sacrifice and the generosity of that gift,

And we praise You that You make no demands in return for forgiveness,

Nor lay down conditions before You are ready to grant it.

You ask us simply to acknowledge our need and to accept Your mercy,  
trusting in what You have done on our behalf.

Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, we struggle to understand Your  
grace, but we respond to it with joyfelt praise and heartfelt worship,

Offering You our love and service as a token of our glad thanksgiving.

To You be honour and glory, blessing and adoration, now and for  
evermore.

Thank You, Lord, that when we go stray, You seek us out like a Good  
Shepherd, searching until You find;

And no matter how often we fail, You still come looking for us; each of us precious in Your eyes.

Thank You, that through Your forgiveness, we can start again restored, redeemed, renewed. **Amen.**

**You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.**

### **Psalm: PSALM 23 taken from 'Psalms Now'**

#### **Introduction:**

Ezekiel denounces Israel's rulers as shepherds who had devoured rather than fed their sheep. So, God will be their shepherd, seeking the lost, strengthening the weak, and providing splendid vegetation (Ezekiel 34). The image of the Lord as shepherd and the people as the flock is developed in this Psalm. It recalls the ways in which the 'Shepherd of Israel' (Psalm 80:1) guided the people from exile to homecoming, from fear to trust, along the 'right paths' through the 'darkest valley' to the 'house of the Lord'. On their journey through the wilderness, God's rod fends off wild animals, the staff keeps the sheep from wandering, and a table of manna and quails was spread (Psalm 78:19).

#### **'The Lord is my constant companion.**

There is no need that He cannot fulfil.

Whether His course for me points  
To the mountaintops of glorious joy  
Or to the valleys of human suffering.

He is by my side,

He is ever present with me,

He is close beside me

When I tread the dark streets of danger,  
And even when I flirt with death itself,  
He will not leave me.

When the pain is severe,

He is near to comfort.

When the burden is heavy,

He is there to lean upon.

When depression darkens my soul,  
    He touches me with eternal joy.  
When I feel empty and alone.  
    He fills the aching vacuum with His power.  
My security is in His promise  
    To be near me always  
    And in the knowledge  
    That He will never let me go.'

**Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd (StF 481)**

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me lie in pastures green,  
He leads me by the still, still waters,  
His goodness restores my soul.  
    *And I will trust in Him alone,*  
    *And I will trust in Him alone,*  
    *For Your endless mercy follows me,*  
    *Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,  
And He anoints my head with oil;  
And my cup – it overflows with joy.  
I feast on His pure delight.  
    *And I will trust in Him alone,*  
    *And I will trust in Him alone,*  
    *For Your endless mercy follows me,*  
    *Your goodness will lead me home.*

And though I walk the darkest path –  
I will not fear the evil one,  
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know.  
    *And I will trust in You alone,*  
    *And I will trust in You alone,*  
    *For your endless mercy follows me,*  
    *Your goodness will lead me home.*

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

## **Gospel Reading: John 10:11-18 THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

### **Introduction:**

In Matthew (18:12-13) and Luke (15:4-6), the parable of the lost sheep evokes God as ‘Shepherd of Israel’ (Psalm 80:1). In Matthew (26:31-2) and Mark (14:27- 28), Jesus uses Zechariah 13:7 to understand his death, as well as his disciples’ desertion, as integral to His call as Shepherd: ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’. This is close to what Jesus tells us here, ‘The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep’.

**“I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father.”

### **THE SHEPHERD**

To what lengths would I go in looking after my sheep?

That’s a good question.

I’d watch over them night and day if I had to,

For it’s dangerous country out there,

And there are wild animals aplenty that would make a meal of them given the chance.

I’d search for them, too, should they be lost,

And yes, defend them if necessary, provided I was suitably armed.

But knowingly surrender my life for them?

No, I’d draw the line at that,

After all, it’s sheep we’re talking about, nothing more,

A way of earning a living –

Keeping a roof over one’s head

And money in one’s pocket.

There’s no room for sentimental attachment,



Would any go further?  
Certainly, none I know of.  
A hired hand wouldn't, that's for sure;  
They'd run a mile at the first whiff of danger;  
And even the most dedicated among us would save their own skin first  
If push came to shove.  
No, I've heard of some good shepherds in my time,  
But to lay down your life for your sheep would be something else.  
Would any flock be worth it?

### **Reflection: 'THE GOOD SHEPHERD'**

Two men were called into a classroom to recite Psalm 23. One was a great public speaker – trained in speech technique and drama. He recited the Psalm in a powerful way. When he finished, the audience cheered and asked for an encore so that they could hear the wonderful voice again. The other man repeated the same words – “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.....”. But when he finished, the audience sat in silence, instead, people sat in a deep mood of devotion and prayer.

Then the first speaker stood to speak. “I have a confession to make;” he said, “the difference between what you have heard from my friend and what you heard from me is this. I know the Psalm, my friend knows the Shepherd.”

Shepherds and shepherding have always played a significant role in the way God works through His chosen servants. Abraham, the father of the nations, was a shepherd to a considerable number of flocks; Moses was shepherd to the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro when God called him to a special service; David was a shepherd boy destined to be the King of Israel and the writer of many of the Psalms, including Psalm 23. When Isaiah spoke of the coming of the Messiah, he spoke of one who would “feed His flock like a shepherd! He will gather His lambs into His arms.”

The tradition of a shepherd was very much a part of the heritage of Christ. So how did Jesus perceive His role as our Good Shepherd? How did He understand the nature of the power given to Him by the Father?

### **AN UNDERSTANDING SHEPHERD**

The first thing Jesus reveals about His understanding of His role and His authority is that He is highly sensitive to our problems. Other shepherds are

hired men who think first of self-preservation. They see the wolf coming and run in the other direction. Jesus sees that the wolves are coming also. He is conscious of the problems directed at our lives. He is aware of the problems we have to face. He is alert to our difficulties.

What Jesus makes clear about His claim to power is that He so completely identifies with our problems that He is willing to lay down His life for us. Jesus faced the same problems and the same enemies. It was not that Jesus was just aware of how intense life can be for us. For Him, there were always new and first temptations. They did not come from within His own being. We are offered comfort from that when we feel alone and overwhelmed by our own difficulties.

### **IN INTIMATE SHEPHERD**

Not only does Jesus know our problems, He knows us. This isn't an acquaintanceship or casual relationship; He does not happen to know us by sight. When He talks about knowing us, He is talking about a unique, intimate relationship. When you were young do you remember that a parent could figure out what you were doing? It was always a puzzle to me! It was equally a surprise if they knew when I'd done something wrong – even though they weren't there! "I've got eyes in the back of my head". Have you ever said that? They were also expert at reading body language; a blush, a nervous twitch, a quiet movement. All were giveaways by which we were rumbled. They knew us "inside and out". That's the intimate kind of 'knowing' Jesus speaks us.

Jesus reassures us that He knows His own. He lived and died to make that happen. It is by His great sacrifice that *we* know what *He* is like. He showed us the full extent of His love by the price He paid. He literally lived out the Word by suffering and dying for us. And because we know this, we know the Father – as Jesus knows Him – and as He knows Jesus. Because we can know the Good Shepherd, we can know that God is love.

### **THE LOVING SHEPHERD**

What can help make us certain of this is that it is universal. If we feel lonely, down hearted, when we question our self-worth, we need to remember that there are many other people feeling exactly the same – even if that seems of little help to us at the time. What can be a major source of comfort and hope is that Jesus tells us He loves us all unconditionally. We can't escape it; it is universal. There absolutely cannot be any doubt that He loves us. If His sacrifice was for all – then His love must be too.

## **THE LEADING SHEPHERD**

This may be difficult to appreciate if we are not familiar with biblical shepherding. My knowledge is limited to television's 'One Man And His Dog' – which is very different to Jesus' experience of shepherding. What Jesus saw was a more intimate scene of a town shepherd in a small rural area who lived with the sheep out in the plain and drove them into the sheepfold at night and lay down at the entrance of the sheepfold to serve as the very door to the sheepfold itself. The sheep were safe. Nothing could get in.

We all have our own images of shepherds and sheep – just as we all have our own images of Jesus. What we can be certain of is the picture He gives of Himself – tender hearted, full of compassion, love and forgiveness and He wants us to experience that. He was able to lay down His life and three days later take it up again. That is power and the greatest love ever shown throughout history. It is out of that love that He cares for us. The shepherd for whom nothing is beyond our imagining. That is the Good Shepherd and the Good News. I wonder if there is someone you know who you know that needs to know that too?

### **Hymn: Lord, I Come To You (StF 471)**

Lord, I come to You,  
Let my heart be changed, renewed,  
Flowing from the grace  
That I found in You.  
And Lord, I've come to know  
The weaknesses I see in me  
Will be stripped away  
By the power of Your love.

*Hold me close,  
Let Your love surround me;  
Bring me near, draw me by Your side.  
And as I wait,  
I'll rise up like the eagle,  
And I will soar with You,  
Your Spirit leads me on  
In the power of Your love.*

Lord, unveil my eyes,  
Let me see You face to face,  
The knowledge of Your love  
As You live in me.  
Lord, renew my mind,  
As Your will unfolds in my life  
In living every day  
By the power of Your love.

*Hold me close,  
Let Your love surround me;  
Bring me near, draw me by Your side.  
And as I wait,  
I'll rise up like the eagle,  
And I will soar with You,  
Your Spirit leads me on  
In the power of Your love.*

Geoff Bullock (b. 1956)

### **Prayers of Love and Concern**

Good Shepherd, we pray for the world, in turmoil,  
for those living in fear of violence, terrorism and war.

We pray for those in countries plagued by natural disasters, flooding and  
famine,

Drought and inadequate sanitation.

We pray for all those engaged with agencies dedicated to bringing relief,  
ending poverty, working towards climate change or helping to meet the  
needs of others.

**May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done.**

Good Shepherd, we pray for those whose lives are damaged because they  
are perceived as different through colour, race, gender, spirituality or faith.

We pray for a spirit of understanding, recognising that all are equal and  
valued in Your sight. Help us to be more tolerant and understanding, ready  
to listen to other's ideals and points of view – even when that challenges  
our own attitudes and beliefs.

**May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done.**

Good Shepherd, we remember those whose lives are traumatised by  
disabilities, illness, bereavement, every kind of loss – employment,  
relationships, family support, financial stability. We pray that they will find

the help they need from those who are dedicated to bringing healing – in all its forms – to answer their deepest needs.

**May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done.**

Good Shepherd – we pray for the Church around the world. For the many ways in which people are able to express their faith and live it out in their daily lives. We pray that Your Good News may permeate communities, spread and more people become enlightened to the changes that living in Your truth brings. We pray for all those who work to share the Gospel, that lives may be changed and Your Kingdom may grow.

**May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done.**

Good Shepherd, we pray for ourselves, that our faith may be strengthened, our commitment to You challenged and our desire to serve You reignited.

**May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done. Amen.**

**Hymn: When Circumstances Make My Life (StF 641) [Alternative tune Beatitudo 73 ‘Fill thou my life’]**

When circumstances make my life  
Too hard to understand,  
No doubt or fear, no pain or strife,  
Can snatch me from God’s hand.

In valley’s where the path is steep,  
With shadows deep and long,  
I know the Shepherd leads His sheep –  
His grace will keep me strong.

Though sorrow and perplexity  
Are often what I feel,  
Gethsemane and Calvary  
Affirm God’s love is real.

It is enough for me to know  
God’s promise and God’s care  
Wherever on life’s path I go  
My Saviour will be there.

Martin Lechebusch (b. 1962)

**Blessing:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit live within you and radiate from you this day and every day. **Amen.**

## Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Easter 5

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom*

### **Call to Worship:**

We gather together to meet with our Lord,  
to refresh our faith,  
to learn new things,  
and to be encouraged on our journey.  
So, come, let us worship.

### **Hymn: Holy Spirit, We Welcome You (StF 385)**

Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Move amongst us with holy fire,  
as we lay aside all earthly desire,  
hands reach out and hearts aspire.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you.

Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Let the breeze of your presence blow,  
that your children here might truly know,  
how to move in the spirit's flow.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you.

Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Holy Spirit, we welcome you.  
Please accomplish in me today,  
some new work of loving grace I pray,  
unreservedly have your way,  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome you.

### **Prayers:**

Your love, O God, is for all people no matter where they are from or where they live. Your love accompanies us on our journey through life, through the good and the bad, happy and sad times and all the times between them. Your love is with us on the mountaintop and in the valley, on roads rough and smooth. You are our sustenance, our guide, our teacher and our friend. For all of this and so much more, we adore you.

We come in penitence for journeys not shared with those who needed companionship. We come in sorrow for not walking with and talking with those who needed us most. We come in sadness that we have let ourselves and others down, and let you down when we have not accompanied those who have been searching for you. There are times when we could have done more. We confess our failings and seek forgiveness, as we seek also to forgive those who have not walked with us because the burden was too heavy for them as well. In penitence we seek forgiveness. Lord, hear our prayer.

The Lord forgives those who repent of their sins, of their failings and faults, and the Lord travels with us on our journey in life.

**Amen.**

**Hymn: Will Your Anchor Hold In The Storms Of Life (StF 645)**

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,  
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?  
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,  
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;  
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,  
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?  
While the surges rage, and the wild winds blow,  
shall the angry waves then your bark overflow?

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,  
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?  
On the rising tide you can never fail,  
while your anchor holds within the veil.

Will your eyes behold through the morning light  
the city of gold and the harbour bright?  
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,  
when life's storms are past for evermore?



## **Bible Reading – Acts 8:26-40 (NIV)**

### **Philip and the Ethiopian**

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” <sup>27</sup> So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian<sup>[a]</sup> eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

<sup>30</sup> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup> “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

<sup>32</sup> This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

<sup>36</sup> As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” <sup>[37]</sup> <sup>[c]</sup> <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

### **Thought From The Day:**

A schoolboy was very upset when his father, for economic reasons, stopped him travelling by train to school because he could get a free bus pass. Little did he know that one of the schoolgirls he befriended on those bus journeys would later become his wife! Sometimes something quite ordinary can change our lives completely. At the time it didn't appear to be a nudge by

the Spirit as happened to Philip in our Acts reading. However, in retrospect, both saw the hand of God at work. We do not know what a journey can bring us or who we will meet that will profoundly affect our life and purpose. Perhaps this will encourage us to pray before we set out on a journey – not simply for safety in our travels, but for those whom we might meet on the way.

Perhaps one of the most famous stories is of an invitation to Billy, a young farm boy, to drive a vegetable truck packed with youth to a tent crusade. He joined the others inside and the evangelist made such an impression that Billy felt called to become an evangelist, even though he had had very little formal education. Little did he know that he – Billy Graham – would preach to millions, including presidents and world leaders, and many churches would be reinvigorated by those who responded to his call to get out of their seats and come up front.

Probably our own encounters will not be so dramatic as that, but you never know what the God of surprises has in store for you. However, if the journey we take this week will forge a new friendship, give you fresh insight through a chance conversation, or simply bring solace or hope to a lonely person, that journey will have been worthwhile.

### **Hymn: Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (StF 465)**

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but you are mighty;  
hold me with your powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore,  
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
where the healing waters flow.  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
ever be my strength and shield,  
ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside.  
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,

land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever sing to you,  
I will ever sing to you.

**Intercessions:**

To all those in need of love:

**let the love of God be known.**

To a world in need of love:

**let the love of God be shown.**

To those in need of food:

**let the love of God be shared.**

By those in need of healing:

**let the love of God be experienced.**

By those in need of peace:

**let the love of God be felt.**

By those in need of hope:

**let the love of God be seen.**

To those in need of joy:

**let the love of God be sung.**

By those in need of justice:

**let the love of God be heard.**

By all those in need of love:

**let the love of God be known.**

**Amen.**

**Hymn: One More Step Along The World I Go (StF 476)**

One more step along the world I go,

One more step along the world I go;

From the old things to the new,

Keep me travelling along with you:

*And it's from the old I travel to the new;*

*Keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn,

More and more about the world I learn;

All the new things that I see

You'll be looking at along with me.

As I travel through the bad and good,  
Keep me travelling the way I should.  
Where I see no way to go,  
You'll be telling me the way, I know.

Give me courage when the world is rough,  
Keep me loving though the world is tough;  
Leap and sing in all I do,  
Keep me travelling along with you:

You are older than the world can be,  
You are younger than the life in me;  
Ever old and ever new,  
Keep me travelling along with you:

**Blessing:**

Lord, be with us on our journeys with others and open our eyes to you.  
Amen.

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