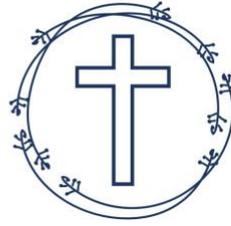


# LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



## ***The Church's prayer for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May***

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.

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> May**

### **Psalm 98**

Oh sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things!

His right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has made known his salvation;  
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody!

<sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who dwell in it!

<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands;  
let the hills sing for joy together

<sup>9</sup> before the LORD, for he comes  
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

### **A Gospel reading from the Gospel of John, Chapter 15 verses 9-17**

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's

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commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants,<sup>[a]</sup> for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

## **A reflection from Ruth Bond, member of the Lordsbridge Team Chapter**

We've all gone through it, and in this past year of pandemic I venture to expect everyone has felt so many emotions, unexpected feelings, the high and lows, quite a few tears and yet laughter too. There's a phrase we'll all have heard, time and time again, not something new, and that is, "Be kind". Accept people right where they are and not where we think they should be, in other words, just love each other and drop all those preconceived ideas.

The two passages from the Bible for today say exactly that - Love each other and in love drop the preconceived ideas. Be kind to each other, don't judge others. The only judge we have is God but so often we act as if we are the best judge of everything. The love of God is for everyone, not just those we feel deserve it because of whom they are, according to wealth, ability, creed, colour or all manner of things. None of that matters to God, He accepts us as we are, no matter whom we are. And it is sobering to recognize that Jesus himself was an outcast, an ordinary and poor Jew with no home to call his own, seen as something akin to crazy. Jesus understood, Jesus understands, Jesus knows.

We learn just that as we read from Acts this morning, for "The Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles". What a statement to a practicing Jew over 2000 years ago. "even on the Gentiles"?! To find out more of what this means I think we should look at the previous verses of this tenth chapter.

This final exclamation, this final blessing, in fact, comes after the requested visit of the Apostle Peter to the house of a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Cornelius is

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stationed with the other troops in the town of Caesarea on the northern coast of Samaria. Prompted by the vision of an angel who has urged him to summon Peter, Cornelius sends two of his servants to fetch the apostle.

Peter was then in Joppa which is about 39 miles from Caesarea, so not just up the road.

At just about the same time, Peter has had the strange vision of a huge sheet let down from heaven, filled with unclean animals, and he has been commanded by the Lord to eat what is unclean. In other words, Peter has learned that the good news of the gospel is not only for ritually pure Jews or for the faithful of Israel, but for all people everywhere. Realizing this, Peter travels, without question, to Cornelius' house where he explains all about Jesus, His death and resurrection and ends with what we heard in the reading with the Spirit coming upon all who heard the message. Cornelius, the first Gentile to be baptised and with that the family of God just grew larger. We know that not everyone was very happy with this, in fact, it was against the law for Jews and Gentiles to interact. And rules were rules. A divisive issue in that early church, no doubt; but God's desire and plan is for us all is to be part of the a whole. I think of the coat of many colours that Joseph wore, referred to as "ketonet passim". The Aramaic meaning of pas is palm of the hand" - "to be broad, a spread"; we are all part of that magnificent coat, a coat to be wrapped around us.

An utter revelation to the Jews at that time, they were thinking that the salvation Jesus wrought was for Jews alone. But no, Salvation, God's love, is for everyone. In the same way we must embrace all people, even when we feel they are different from us – remember we are just as different from them.

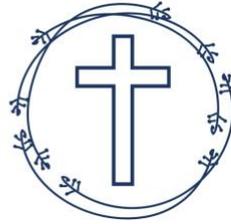
The Holy Spirit can soften the hardest heart the most rigid ideas, God can interrupt our thinking, he can burst apart those preconceived ideas especially as "God does not show favouritism" as Paul wrote to the Romans in his first letter. "but in every nation, anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God (Acts 10 v35)

And even more especially, as reported in this 15th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, his friends, tells us, to love one another. The love he speaks of is not romantic love, it is the love true friends enjoy, almost an act of will.

Jesus himself said to the disciples, "I have called you friends." Verse 15

"I have called you friends." Before anything else. "I have called you friends."

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He is saying these very words to us too. Whether we be Jew or Gentile.

Friends care about each other's wellbeing, want the best for each other, want people to think well of them, want no harm to come to them. you would agree I feel sure that deep friendships can be formed in the middle of desperate situations, in the midst of suffering. I think of the comradeship of soldiers who have gone through terrible battles and hurts and remain as brothers until death, with the motto of looking out for their fellow soldiers and not themselves.

Think of your friends, the best friend you reminisce with about your days in primary school or the first time you met. Friends share, they share all that is good and all that is bad. Friends are kind to each other. Friends love each other.

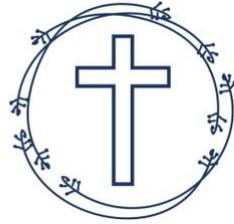
When we love one another, we fulfil the second of Jesus' two Great Commandments. When we love Jesus, he becomes our true best friend. Friends have our best interests in mind, just like Jesus does. Friends will be with us in good times and bad times just like Jesus is. They help us to expand our world, expose us to new and wonderful possibilities, and keep us going when the going gets tough. "A friend is one who overlooks your broken fence and admires the flowers in your garden", they are the words on a fridge magnet given me to by a very dear friend a long time ago. I cherish the object and love the words.

We can say that Jesus is our friend, but can we say that we are his friends? Do we listen to him when he speaks to us, or do we only want him to listen to us? Do we want to know what's on his heart and mind, or do we only want to tell him what's on ours? Being a true friend of Jesus means listening to what he wants to tell us and then using that information to do his work in our world and in our lives.

Be kind to each other, put aside the divisions, the divisive preconceived ideas, there is enough love to go round

Jesus knew there would be problems to say the least in the establishing of his church; he knew his disciples, and the night before he was to die he brought them all together for their last supper as a group of friends and he reminds them of who they are and what they have been called to do. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends."

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Indeed, who are these disciples? They are a community united by Jesus' love for them. No matter what future lies ahead, they are bound together by His love for them. And together they have been given a job to do – to love one another as Jesus loves them.

What holds us together is Jesus' mutual love for us. We are His friends, called to love one another just as Jesus has so loved us.