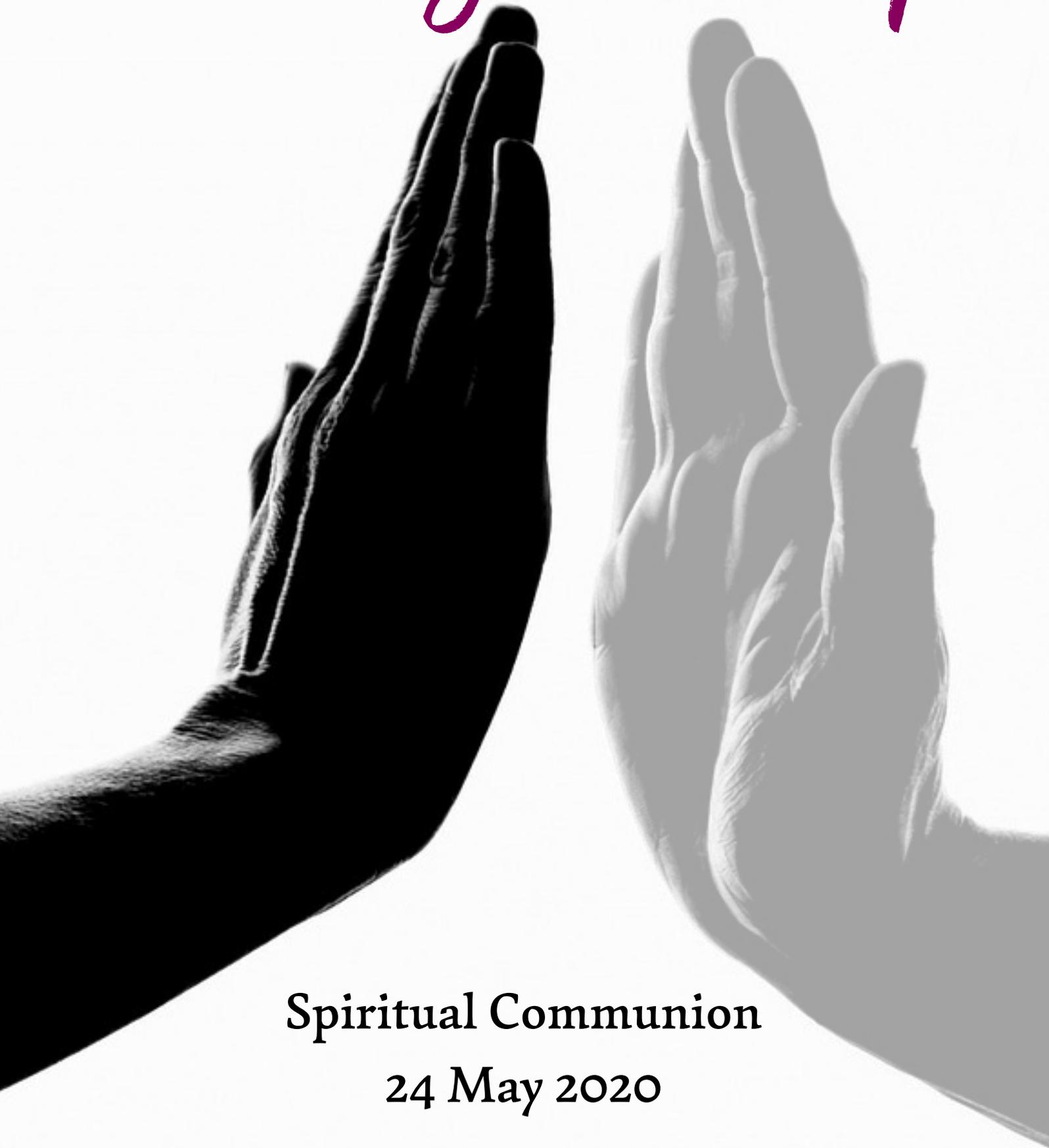


Morning Worship



Spiritual Communion

24 May 2020

WWW.CHWCHURCHES.CO.UK

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Morning Worship here at the Parish churches of Coxley with Godney, Henton, and Wookey. Although we are currently apart due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) it is hoped that following this liturgy knowing that others in the benefice will be doing so at the same time might help provide a spiritual connection between us. This spiritual connection does not only exist between each believer but also with God himself. Normally, we would celebrate that connection in Holy Communion, the sharing of bread and wine, also known as the Eucharist. However, due to being unable to meet with each other to share this meal we have instead a Spiritual Communion - sharing the inward grace of Holy Communion without receiving the outward form where the believer is desirous to partake of it.

It is suggested that alongside this liturgy you have a means to listen to the suggested hymns which have links to videos with lyrics within this document. There is a mixture of traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs. If you do not know the tune then why not listen to the hymn/song and worship through reading the words alone.

The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either one can lead with others joining in with the responses in **bold** OR everyone present may join in with all the words.

The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.

Materials in this booklet are drawn from *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* which is copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2006; *New Patterns for Worship* copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2002. All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version. The liturgy for the Spiritual Communion was compiled by Revd Paul Roberts.

MORNING WORSHIP

GREETING

Praise God! For even though we are apart the Lord is in our midst!

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Though we find ourselves isolated
in homes, apartments, and residential places,

**we look out our windows and remember,
the heavens declare the glory of God,
all creation rejoices in our creator.**

Psalm 19:1

Though we cannot reach out and touch
our friends and neighbours,

**we rejoice that Christ is in our midst,
he is with us always, until the end of the age!**

Matthew 28:20

Though we have to stand at a safe distance from others,
giving space to those who pass us by,

**we recall we are all made in the image of God,
connected to one another,
connected to God.**

Genesis 1:27

HYMN: I THE LORD OF SEA AND SKY

[Listen here](#)

CONFESSION AND WORDS OF COMFORT

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world
and knows our every word and deed.
Let us then open ourselves to the Lord
and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you.
We are not worthy to be called your children.
We turn to you again.
Have mercy on us,
bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A period of silent reflection follows

Hear the words of comfort, our Saviour Christ says to all who truly
turn to him:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

COLLECT

Let us pray.

A period of silent prayer is kept.

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.

HYMN: O PRAISE THE NAME (ANÁSTASIS)

[Listen here.](#)

THE WORD OF GOD

Hear what God is saying to his people according to Ezra.

3 When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. ² Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. ³ They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. ⁴ And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, ⁵ and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the appointed feasts of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the Lord. ⁶ From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. ⁷ So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

THE SERMON

By Revd Guy

INTRODUCTION

This is our fourth Sunday looking at the book of Ezra and I am sure you were pleased to see that after last weeks long list of names we had a much more typical passage from the Bible this week! The passage you have just read speaks about the start of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, destroyed some

seventy years ago. This project was undertaken by some fifty-thousand Jews who had returned from their exile in Babylon. As we have seen over the past few weeks God was in control of the entire situation, faithful to his promises and caring about the fate of his people. The rebuilding of the temple was an opportunity for the Jews to return to worshipping this God whom they had neglected, repair their relation with God, and restore their identity as God's chosen people just as our return to our church buildings after lock-down presents us with similar opportunities. But what does this passage, the start of rebuilding the temple and in particular the altar, have to say to us as we consider the future of our churches? It will show us that we need to be united, working together, and focused on the cross.

UNITED WE STAND

The rebuilding of the temple was a significant thing for the returned exiles. It represented the place where God dwelt and because of that it was the only place that they could properly worship God and offer sacrifices to him. It is an event of such significance that 'the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem' to see it begin (Ez. 3:1). It was an event that unified the Jewish people; no one was left behind, no one had something more pressing to attend to, and they all travelled to Jerusalem from their homes in the surrounding areas (Ez. 2:70) for this new beginning which was occurring in the first few weeks of the Jewish year. A new year, a new start, a new temple.

There could have been a variety of reasons why the all the Jews returned to Jerusalem to worship. It could have been to give thanks for their safe return acknowledging God's protection during their long and dangerous journey from Babylon; it could have been because they were afraid and wanted God's help (Ez. 3:3); or for some of them, who could remember the worship before the exile, it simply could have been nostalgia and wanting to return to the worship they used to have. Whatever their motivation, there was one thing that unified them all. The Jews

returned because they acknowledged that God was worthy of worship and for them, this could only happen at the temple in Jerusalem.

Such a united approach by the Jewish people should be an example for us today as we work out what worship looks like during lock-down and contemplate what it might be like when we return to our church buildings. There may be an expectation that things just 'return to normal' but as we have been hearing for the last few weeks, what we have now is the new normal and something like it will be shaping society for months to come. To think that Sunday mornings will return to what they were before lock-down anytime soon is at best naive and at worst ignorant of the situation we are in. Our Sunday worship is different now and will be different again, in fact, it may have multiple different incarnations between now and next year as lock-down continues to ease. But the God we worship is the same and so, just as the Jews acknowledged that God was worthy of worship at the time of Ezra, we need to hold onto that same truth as we experience all the changes to our worship that are on the horizon and that we are experiencing now.

This period of isolation has the potential to divide our church communities, for us each to worship in our own way, to forget about those we worship alongside, and for us all to have different ideas about what the future might hold for us as a Church. But instead of such division, I implore you to be united. Now, don't get me wrong, I am not saying that we all need to be the same, the Bible famously tells us that we all have different gifts and roles to play in the service of God (see 1 Cor. 12), and so we will all have different perspectives. What I am saying though is this: in this uncertain time, let the worship of God be what unites us - however it may look. We read in Ezra 3:4 that the Jews came together to celebrate the Festival of Booths using their shared history of God's provision for them as they travelled to the promised land. Let us do likewise, for we share the same history of redemption and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ let that be what unites us in our worship and let us

talk with one another about what the future might look like so we can approach it together. We need to be united.

FOLLOWING THE LEADER?

The Jews were united in their need for the rebuilding of the temple which would mean a huge amount of work and a good plan. However the rebuilding of the temple was unlike any building project I have ever seen or read about. Usually with these projects you start by laying the foundations, then you build the structural parts of the house, the exterior, any supporting walls etc. and the last thing that you do is everything inside. Well, the Jews didn't do that, they started with the altar, at the instruction of two people: Jeshua, a priest, and Zerubbabel, a leader of the Jewish people.

These two people decided on the priority of rebuilding the altar over every other aspect of the temple in fact it was of such importance to them that it was decided upon before materials were even ordered for the restoration of the rest of the temple (Ez. 3:7). I will talk about why they made such a decision to prioritise the altar in a moment, but first I want to just take a moment to pause and reflect on what these two people, Jeshua and Zerubbabel represent and how it is relevant to us today.

In Jeshua and Zerubbabel we have the sacred and the secular coming together, the priest and the political leader. Yes, they shared the same faith but they had different roles. Jeshua would have led the people in worship and offered sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people; Zerubbabel would have dealt with things of a more political and practical nature. They were both leaders in their respective fields who came together to make this decision.

Often, as a Church, we fall into the trap of thinking that everything needs to be led by the vicar, or the ministry team, or the worship band. But that is not the case. Yes, the vicar has a role, a calling, a vocation, which has leading a church as a pretty large feature within it but it is not a role to be done in isolation. If

we isolate leadership of our churches to just the clergy then you end up with what has happened to so many ministers over the years of them being overworked, over-stressed, and ultimately burnt out. But removing all leadership from the minister has just as serious a set of consequences. Time for God and his church is hard to find when you have a family, a job, and all sorts of other commitments vying for your attention. In a vicar you have someone whose time is devoted to God and his people so to restrict them to leading the service on a Sunday morning is to waste that wisdom, insight, and prayer that the vicar has done. A church cannot be led by the vicar alone, nor can it be done without them and the same goes for the people of the church too! In the people of Jeshua and Zerubbabel we have an example of the ordained and the laity working together to lead God's people and take them forward, let us do likewise. Some of us will have gifts and talents that we use in our jobs or our hobbies that can be used in the service of God; one of those gifts may be leadership or collaborative working or vision. Offer your gift in service to the church, speak to your vicar or church warden, join the PCC which is where vision is curated and decisions made. Each of us has something to offer the church and when that gift is used together with the minister then it has the power to change the entire church.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

With the joint decision of the setting of the altar decided upon by Jeshua and Zerubbabel we know get to the question of why this was prioritised over everything else in the temple. Surely some walls, a door, and a roof would have been a better place to start? Well, it may surprise you to hear that this is not the first time an altar has been prioritised over everything else. If we look back to the book of Genesis and the story of Abraham we see that when Abraham first set foot in the land that God had promised him he set up an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12:7). So why are altars so significant?

Well, throughout the Hebrew bible we have numerous altars set

up to God, all in slightly different circumstances and in different places. However, they do all have three things in common. Firstly, they were a place of worship where God was glorified for who he is and what he had done. Secondly they were a place of communion between God and the worshipper (e.g. Ex. 29:43). And finally, they were a place of testimony to the one true God and therefore a reminder against idolatry. In the circumstances facing the Jews of being in a hostile area with nothing but a ruined city for shelter and protection and the teachings of an alien culture still lingering in the minds of some of their citizens can you blame them for prioritising the altar over everything else?! If the altar represents a place to glorify God for what he has done, then it would bring hope to the Jews for a better future. If the altar represents a place where God is present with his people then that would give them courage in the face of their enemies (Ez. 3:3). If the altar was a place of testimony to the one true God then it would serve as a reminder of what the returned exiles had come back for - to turn away from other gods and the lifestyles of alien cultures and return to the one true God who had chosen them as his people. The altar met religious, social and even some political needs for the Jews and this is before we even get to the role of sacrifices as a means of the Jews making themselves right with God. Now it makes sense for the altar to be prioritised, but what on earth does that mean for us today? What is God trying to tell us through this passage?

Simply put, it is telling us to return to the foot of the cross and make that our priority for the cross is our altar. At the cross God was glorified for his grace and his love for us poured out as his Son took on the punishment that we deserved. At the cross, communion with God was made possible as sin was defeated and the barrier between ourselves and God was removed. At the cross we have the greatest testimony for our creator, one who 'so loved the world, that he gave his only Son', and through the resurrection the confidence that 'whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (Jn 3:16). When we make the cross

a priority, when we reflect on what happened and what it means to us to can offer us the same things that it did for the Jews: hope, courage, and a reminder that we have different priorities to the rest of the world.

The cross is a fountain of truth that can speak into our lives and so it needs to be prioritised. This is what unites us and this is what helps us to work together because when we remember the death of Jesus Christ on the cross during communion, (be that spiritual or otherwise), we not only have communion with God but with each and every person who is sharing that moment with us. If I could have it my way, we would celebrate communion before every PCC meeting so that those who represent the leadership of these churches were not only focused on who we do the business of church for and why we do it, but also to unite each person there with one another; that it might lay a foundation for a united vision and purpose, for a civil discussion, and an evening that glorifies God.

As we work out where we are going as a church, both in vacancy, and in lock-down, let us take a leaf out of the book of Ezra, let us be united, work together, and be focused on the cross.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

INTERCESSIONS

Use the silence between each prayer to bring before God your own concerns around that topic.

Jesus, our exalted Lord, has been given all authority.
Let us seek his intercession that our prayers may be perfected
by his prayer.

Jesus Christ, great high priest,
living for ever to intercede for us,
pray for the Church and its leaders, your broken body in the world...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, King of righteousness,
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high,
pray for the world and its leaders, and make it subject to your gentle rule...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,
drawing humanity into the life of God,
pray for your sisters and brothers in need, distress, or sorrow...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus, pioneer of our salvation,
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection,
surround with your saints and angels
those who have died trusting your promises...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe,
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in your service...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ,
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

HYMN: WILL YOU COME AND FOLLOW ME

[Listen here.](#)

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast

.Psalm 139.7-10

Jesus says,
Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you and eat with you,
and you with me.

Revelation 3.20

Lord our God
you prepare a table before us
and, although we cannot be present at your Holy Eucharist,
by your grace, open our hearts to receive
the gift of your Son, the Word made flesh:

who, on the night that he was betrayed
took bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying
take, eat, this is my body which is given for you,
do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way after supper, he took the cup
he gave it to them saying,
drink this all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins,
do this in remembrance of me.

Send your Holy Spirit upon us
that, though separated by distance,
we may still, through faith, be partakers in the benefits
of Christ's offering of his body and his blood.

This we ask, through the same Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

A time of silence follows, as each person present makes their own spiritual communion with God concluding by saying:

Father of all,
we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love,
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

HYMN: 'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS

[Listen here.](#)

DISMISSAL

*'Remember, I am with you
to the end of the age,' says the Lord.*

Matthew 28.20

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

With the risen life of Christ within us,
we go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!