

**Sunday May 1st 2022.**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Rev Alan Hargrave**

Nottingham North East  
Methodist Circuit

WWW.NNEMETHODIST.ORG.UK

Charity number 1134226



You may wish to use the [links](#) to access hymns on **YouTube** or simply sing them yourself from the text written below.

**Welcome** Welcome to our worship this morning. We celebrate Christ's resurrection in this season of Easter, but, like the early church, with trouble at our door. So, before we begin, let us take a moment to still our hearts before God. You may care to say the following, slowly and quietly:

Be still , Be silent, Alone,  
Empty Before your God  
Say nothing.  
Be silent, Be still  
Let your God look on you. Let God love you.

**Easter Greeting** Now, let us proclaim the glory of Easter, which is at the heart of our faith:  
Alleluia, Christ is Risen  
**He is risen indeed. Alleluia**

**Hymn** All heaven declares <https://youtu.be/kPkZAjA610k>

All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord  
Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?  
Forever He will be the Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow my knee and worship Him alone  
  
I will proclaim the glory of the risen Lord  
Who once was slain to reconcile man to God  
Forever You will be the Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow my knee and worship You alone  
  
Forever You will be (Forever You will be)  
The Lamb upon the throne  
I gladly bow my knee (I gladly bow my knee)  
And worship You alone

c. Martin Bell

**Confession**

Lord our God, in these troubled times, with a world in turmoil and an uncertain future, it is hard to hold onto faith in you as the Lord of all Creation.

When we doubt you **Reveal your presence to us**

We wonder where you are, what you are doing, why you allow such atrocities in Ukraine, in Syria, in Afghanistan, in Yemen, in so many situations and places around the world.

When we doubt you **Show us your hands and side**

We find it hard to watch the news. So much of it is just too painful, too alarming. It is easier to switch over, to try and ignore it.

When we cannot face the reality **Speak peace to our hearts**

Hear again the words of Jesus: 'Neither do I condemn you. Go. Sin no more.'

Lord God, thank you for your full and free forgiveness. Grant us the courage, hand in hand with you, our wounded, risen Lord, to face whatever befall. **Amen.**

**Bible reading 1**          Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory.

He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love.

He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.

And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.

At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you;

for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes" says the LORD.

For the Word of the Lord          **Thanks be to God**

**Address Part 1**

Imagine for a moment that you are not in Nottingham, but in Poland. You are a Ukrainian refugee, forced to flee with your two children and your elderly mother and your two dogs. Your husband is still in Ukraine. You are not sure where he is, but you recently had a skype conversation with him. He was in a trench with a bottle of Coca Cola and an AK 47 assault rifle.

Well, that is exactly the situation of a Ukrainian family taken in by my son's partner's family, in a town called Piotrkow, west of Warsaw. We met them, the week before Easter, when we visited my son, who lives in Poland with his Polish partner. If you were that family, how would you feel if you read this passage from Zephaniah chapter 3? Take a minute or two to re-read it, imagining yourself to be a Ukrainian refugee, with loved ones left behind to fight.

////////////////////////////////////

It is far too easy for us, here in the West, to think of faith and religion as a very personal thing. But most of the Bible is not so much about individuals but about peoples. It is about the fortunes of nations, especially the fortune, or lack of it, of Israel. God is concerned not just about me and my faith, nor even about us as a church. His concern is for the **whole** of creation, for **all** of the nations, for **all** the peoples of the earth. So, as we think about our faith and about our church community, let us hold it in the context of the God who is deeply involved in everything that happens around us, both in our personal lives, but also in Ukraine, in Russia, in Yemen, among the Uyghurs in China, the Rohingya in Myanmar, with women in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, as well as with patients in QMC and City Hospitals. He is **God of all** and, in ways we cannot understand, ultimately, as the prophet Zephaniah proclaims, weeping **will** give way to dancing, mourning to shouts of joy.

**Hymn**            And so, let us sing again of the one who is no stranger to pain and death

<https://youtu.be/uN1DwvHYBWA>

Come and see, come and see, Come and see the King of love  
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears  
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer, As he lifts the cruel cross  
Lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill

*We worship at your feet, Where wrath and mercy meet  
And a guilty world is washed, By love's pure stream  
For us he was made sin, Oh, help me take it in  
Deep wounds of love cry out 'Father, forgive'  
I worship, I worship, The Lamb who was slain.*

Come and weep, come and mourn, For your sin that pierced him there  
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail  
All our pride, all our greed, All our fallenness and shame  
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him

Man of heaven, born to earth, To restore us to your heaven  
Here we bow in awe beneath Your searching eyes  
From your tears comes our joy, From your death our life shall spring  
By your resurrection power we shall rise

*We worship at your feet, Where wrath and mercy meet  
And a guilty world is washed, By love's pure stream  
For us he was made sin, Oh, help me take it in  
Deep wounds of love cry out 'Father, forgive'  
I worship, I worship, The Lamb who was slain.*

C. Graham Kendrick Music

**Bible Reading 2**        John 21: 1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them: "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them. Though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him: "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and

gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time: "Do you love me?" And he said to him: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him: "Follow me."

For the Word of the Lord      **Thanks be to God**

**Hymn**                      O the deep, deep Love of Jesus      <https://youtu.be/cuDHqIClpAg>

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free  
Rolling as a mighty ocean, In its fullness over me  
Underneath me, all around me, Is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward, To Thy glorious rest above

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Deeper than the deepest sea  
The love that led my Christ to die, Is the love that set me free  
Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Spread His praise from shore to shore  
How He's loving, ever loving, Changing never, nevermore

How He watches over His loved ones, Died to call them all His own  
How for them He's interceding, Watching o'er them from the throne  
Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Deeper than the deepest sea  
The love that led my Christ to die, Is the love that set me free

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, Love of every love the best  
It's an ocean vast of blessing, It's a haven sweet of rest  
Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus, It's a heaven of heavens to me  
And it lifts me up to glory, For it lifts me up to Thee

Samuel Francis

## **Address Part 2**

Well, having spoken about our faith being not just a personal matter, but of global significance, we now turn inward, to a personal encounter. Today's gospel reading gets right to the heart of the matter. Jesus' searching question to Peter: 'Simon, Son of John, do you love me?' And it's a question we might imagine Jesus asking any one of us.

We all know the background, of course. Brash, confident Peter. A real man's man. Tough, wholehearted, uncompromising, ready for anything, outspoken, always engaging heart and mouth before brain. 'You are the Christ' declares Peter in a moment of sheer inspiration. Yet in the same conversation Peter is remonstrating with Jesus, telling him how wrong he is about suffering and dying, to which Jesus replies: 'Get behind me Satan, you are a stumbling block to me!'

And, as Jesus' arrest and trial & death approach, it is Peter who stands up to be counted. *'I'll never leave you! I'll never deny you! They might all run away – but not me! I am ready to lay down my life for you!'* 'Truly I tell you' replies Jesus 'before the cock crows, you **will** deny me, three times.'

And, sure enough, when Jesus is arrested, Peter runs away, just like the other disciples. And later, sitting in the courtyard watching Jesus' trial at a distance, Peter is recognised as being one of the disciples. 'No' he says 'I do not know what you are talking about.' Then he's challenged a second time, but he swears blind he doesn't know Jesus. And, when confronted for a third time, he begins to curse and exclaims with an oath: 'Look, I do **not** even know the man.' Then the cock crows. And Jesus looks at Peter. And Peter goes out, and weeps, bitterly. Brash, confident Peter, put to the test and found badly wanting.

Well, all that has passed now. Jesus is **risen**. Tears have turned to joy. But it hasn't yet made much of a difference to the disciples. John 21 finds Peter and some of the others right back where they started – back in Galilee, fishing. And that is a big challenge to all of us. Ask yourself the question, honestly: What difference has it made to me being a Christian? What would your friends and family and neighbours say? Do they think you're a better person for it? Or is it just 'as you were'? Well, it is certainly 'as you were' for the disciples. They've drifted back into their old way of life. There they are, out all night in the boat, fishing, with nothing to show for it. Then, at daybreak, a voice from the shore invites them to try again. And suddenly, there are so many fish in the net, it is now at breaking point. John leans over to Peter, as they sweat and strain to pull in the net, and says: 'It is the **Lord**'. And Peter, rash as ever, jumps into the lake and swims ashore.

But there remains some unfinished business. The not insignificant matter of how Peter might be reconciled to the one he has failed - failed so very, very badly. What can he say? What **can** you say, when you've hurt someone, failed someone, that badly? When you have let down, abandoned, disowned, betrayed a person you said you loved, in such an appalling way?

I don't know about you, but there have been times when I've needed to say sorry, to try and make things right. And I'd lay awake at night, thinking about what to say. And I'd work out a speech, or several alternative speeches, in my mind. But, by the morning it doesn't sound any better than it did when I went to bed, 8 hrs ago! So too for Peter, uncharacteristically, sitting there, eating breakfast, **silent**, feeling bad, not knowing what to say. There are other people present, but they may as well not be there. This is between Peter and Jesus. This is all about the two of them. So, for once in his life, Peter lets Jesus do the talking. But just note what Jesus **doesn't** say. He **doesn't** say:

'Well Peter, so much for **your** promises, eh! You're such a disappointment, such a failure.'

'Peter – I just hope you've learned your lesson!'

'Peter - you and your big mouth. I told you so!'

'Peter - are you truly sorry?'

'Peter - do you promise **never** to do it again?'

'Peter - will you commit yourself to following me **seriously** from now on?'

But Jesus **doesn't** say any of that. Instead, he addresses Peter face to face, not as Peter, the Rock, but by his old name, Simon, perhaps hoping he will listen this time (which is what Simon means – 'listen'). And Jesus asks Peter one simple question: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' It's as though Jesus is saying. 'Look. Forget all that other stuff. Yes, I know how you've failed. And I know how bad you feel. But that's history'. 'Just one thing is important now. Nothing else matters. This one, vital thing. Just this: **'Do you love me?'**

By implication, Jesus is saying: 'Peter, you have seen how much *I* love **you**. You have even seen me lay down my life, for **you** – even when you cursed and swore you'd never even met me! Even when you ran off and left me, alone. You **know** Peter, how much *I* love **you**. So, answer me this. This one thing. Do **you** love **me**?

And it is the same question to each one of us. For the truth is, we **too** have all failed. We've all blown it. None of us have even lived up to our **own** standards, our **own** expectations of ourselves – much less our partner's, or our parent's, or our kid's, or our neighbours. And we certainly haven't lived up to **God's** standards. Maybe we've failed in small, selfish ways. Maybe in our attitudes or how we treat others. Or maybe we've failed in big ways, where we have **really hurt** people, really hurt **ourselves**, really hurt **God**. There are all sort of ways in which we can blow it. And, to be honest, the **people I worry about most** are those who **don't** think they have blown it! We have **all** blown it, all of us, and we will blow it again, despite our best efforts.

But, in the end, that's **not** what it's about. Because, at the heart of it, it isn't about **trying our best** to serve God and live a decent life - important though that is. It is primarily about a **relationship**. A relationship with the God who loves us, each of us, with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength. A relationship with the God who loves us enough to lay down his life, for **each one** of us. A relationship with the God who offers mercy, instead of judgement. Who pours out costly grace, which we don't deserve. The God who forgives us, and welcomes us back, again, and again, and again, and **again**, no matter what we've done - or failed to do.

Well, I doubt if **any** of us have failed him as badly as Peter, his right-hand man. But, even if we have, God is always there, like the prodigal son's father, to welcome us home. But that welcome sometimes involves, as with Peter, a painful encounter. '**Do you love me?**' says Jesus to Peter. Because, in the end that's all that really matters. If you do, **then** you can tend my lambs and feed my sheep. If you love me, **then** you can serve me. But that comes second. First and foremost is this: '**Do you love me?**'

It's a bit like getting married. Most people **don't** get married because they hope for breakfast in bed every day, or the free services of a cleaner, a gardener, a DIY expert, a cook or a mechanic. (And those who do generally end up disappointed.) No! People generally get married because they **love** one another – and everything else, how they live their lives together, how they cope with each other's failings and foibles - it all flows from that: their **love** for one another. A love which is not just about feelings, but about being **committed to one another**, through thick and thin. About wanting the best for the other person, instead of for myself.

**But**. And it is a **big but**. **How** can we love **God**? What a difficult question! It's hard enough to love someone you can touch and feel and see. But how, can we love **God**? It is clearly a big issue for Peter. And there is a **play on words** in this conversation between Jesus and Peter which doesn't come out at all in **English**. This passage uses two different Greek words for love. And I do **not** think they are used by accident. To begin with Jesus uses the word '**agapeo**', which is generally used to describe the **highest form of love**: the way **God** loves us - and the way **we**, as Christians, **should** love God and one another. The other word used here is **Phileo** – generally translated as 'affection' or 'fondness' or 'liking' or 'friendship'.

So, the conversation, if we translate the words as I have suggested, goes something like this:

'Simon, Son of John, do you love me?' (*Agapeo*)

'Yes Lord,' Peter replies 'you know that I **like** you.' (*Phileo*)

'But Simon, do you actually **love** me?' (*Agapeo*)

'Yes Lord' says Peter 'you **know** that I'm **fond** of you.' (*Phileo*)

'OK Simon' says Jesus, finally, changing the word from 'agapeo' to 'phileo' 'if you can't manage to love me, will you at least **be my friend.**'

And Peter, upset because Jesus questions him, not once but three times, reminding him, painfully, of his three-fold denial, says; 'Lord you know everything. You know that **I'm your friend.**' (*Phileo*)

The point is this. Jesus **allows** Peter to respond **as best he can**, to this searching question. Peter cannot yet bring himself to say that he **loves** Jesus, in that rich, demanding, all consuming '**agape**' way. So, Jesus, instead, accepts his lesser offer of 'affection', 'friendship'. I suspect many of us, too, may feel unable to respond in kind to God's, incomparable, immense **love for us**. But God is content for us to offer what we can, providing, like Peter, we are open to acknowledge the poverty of our response, and are wanting, seriously, to love him more.

I love the Iona invitation to Communion which, for me, captures this perfectly. It says: 'This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord. It is made ready for those who love him & those who want to love him more. So, come you who have much faith & you who have little. Come you who have been here often & you who have not been for a long time. Come you who have tried to follow & you who have failed. Come, not because I invite you: it is the Lord who invites you. It is his will that those who want him should come and meet him here.'

God accepts us as we are, with all the imperfection of our response.

I mentioned earlier, people getting married **because** they love one another. But that is not universal practice. Some years ago, on an interfaith week in Luton, I stayed with a Hindu couple, whose 20-year marriage had been arranged. I asked the wife, a woman in her 40's, if she was in love with her husband when they got married. 'Oh no' she said. 'I did not know my husband when we got married. I did not get married **because** I loved him. I got married **in order** to love him' - which she very clearly did.

I would say a similar thing about my relationship with God. I didn't become a Christian because I loved God – but rather **in order to try and love God** in response to **God's great love for me**. I became a Christian, **in order to learn** how to love God. And after 50+ years, I'm still trying, and not doing particularly well at it. I dare a lot of you are doing a lot better at it. And maybe some of you aren't. But God knows that. And God accepts our rather feeble response to his **immeasurable love** for us. And God never stops hoping that you and I will indeed, learn to love him more. Hoping that, one day, we will truly be able to say, not just: 'Yes Lord, I am fond of you.' Or even: 'Lord, I'm your friend.' But 'Lord, **I love you**, with all my heart, just as **you love me**, with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.' Because, as St Paul so rightly observes, without love, I am nothing. And, it is from that relationship of love, that all our Christian service, all our work for others, all our praise & worship, must surely spring.

'Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me.' We sing that great Charles Wesley Hymn.

## Hymn

And can it be?

<https://youtu.be/-t66l03XmQI?t=22>

And can it be that I should gain, An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain, For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace  
Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race:  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me!

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th' eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

'Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies: Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries, To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, Let angel minds inquire no more.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Charles Wesley

## Intercessions

Let us pray

Father God, thank you that **you** love **us**, with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength. Take, we pray, our feeble attempts to love you back, and blow that tiny spark into a flame, that we might love you as you deserve, and loving you, might serve you, all our days. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

We bring before you our failure to love you and to love one another. Both our own individual failures and the sum total of human failures which has resulted in war, persecution, abuse, oppression and unspeakable cruelty. We hold in our minds and our hearts the people of Ukraine, of Moldova, of Afghanistan, of Yemen, of so many other places of suffering, war, violence and oppression.....

Have mercy on the people you yourself created, we pray. Lead us from darkness to light. From despair to hope. From death to life, through our wounded, risen Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

We bring before you the people close to our own hearts who are going through painful or troubled times right now. Let us hold their needs before God.....

Lord God, be alongside those who suffer, give them courage to face whatever befall and fill them with hope of resurrection and new life, we pray. **Amen.**

So, let us conclude our prayers with the prayer Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name**

**Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven**

**Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins**

**As we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.**

**For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

Let us remind ourselves, despite all that is going on in the world, that Jesus is risen and **He will** have the last word.

**Hymn**                      Thine be the Glory      <https://youtu.be/bPjTfw4a2ZE>

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;  
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

### **Blessing**

**May the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead,  
strengthen us, in the power of the Spirit, to live his risen life of love and service.  
And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son & Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us, now and always. Amen.**

So, let us go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**