

## Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit

### SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024

Prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

Welcome to this week's service at home sheet, where we will be reflecting on what it means to be God's people. What does it mean to be church – especially when for some of us it may be difficult to access public worship? Our opening hymn reminds us that God's house is a place where all are welcome – that God's love is offered to everyone.

#### **Listen, read, pray or sing along to STF 409 Let us build a house [All Are Welcome](#)**

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
And all can safely live,  
A place where saints and children tell  
How hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
Rock of faith and vault of grace;  
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions;  
*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
And words are strong and true,  
Where all God's children dare to seek  
To dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
And a symbol of God's grace;  
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:  
*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where love is found  
In water, wine and wheat:  
A banquet hall on holy ground,  
Where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
Is revealed in time and space;  
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:  
*All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

*Marty Haugen (b. 1950)*

## Prayer of Approach

Take a moment of silence to open yourself to God. Give God the joys, anxieties and sorrows of this past week. Entrust these to God, and this time of worship, trusting that God will meet with you and hears your praise and your prayers.

We pray:

Gracious God, whose love surrounds and enfolds us, wherever we may be, may our words, thoughts and prayers be pleasing to you today. Meet with us as we worship. May we know your presence and hear your voice. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

### **Read Ephesians 2.11-22**

### **Read Mark 6.30-34, 53-56**

## Reflection



[Model of Herods Temple – The Herald](#)

The temple Jesus and his disciples would visit in Jerusalem was the second temple, restored by Herod the Great in around 20 BC. Known as Herod's temple, it was destroyed during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD70. The above picture is a model of the temple. On the same elevated platform as the temple building itself, it was surrounded by three courts – the court of the Priests, the court of Israel (for the men) and the women's court. The spacious lower court was the court of the Gentiles, running right round the temple and its inner courts. On a much lower level than the main complex, Gentiles (non-Jews) could look up and view the temple, but they could not approach it.

The surrounding wall formed a 1.5m stone barricade. The famous Jewish historian Josephus describes this temple in both his books, writing in his *Antiquities* that it was ‘encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death.’ In effect it read ‘trespassers will be executed’! In Acts 21.27-31, Paul himself was almost lynched by an angry Jewish mob who thought he had taken a Gentile with him into the temple.

So what does this history lesson have to do with the bible readings we have read today? In Ephesians, Paul is writing particularly to Gentile believers. In chapter 2, he reminds them that they were formerly alienated from God and from one another, ‘*being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*’ (v. 12) But that changed when they put their faith in Christ Jesus. ‘*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*’ (v. 13) Gentile nations were considered to be far from God, but by the blood of Christ, that is – his sacrificial death for us – those who were far off had been brought near to God. Through faith in Christ, Paul writes, ‘*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,*’ (Ephesians 1.7) our sins no longer separate us from God because of his forgiveness and grace.

Paul continues, ‘*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has **broken down the dividing wall**, that is, the hostility between us.*’ (v. 14). No longer were the Jews the people of God and the Gentiles excluded – together both Jews and Gentiles were united as God’s people through Jesus and through faith in him.

When Paul wrote his letter, the temple was still standing. Imagine looking up at the huge wall, a literal division between Jew and Gentile, and symbolising the alienation of the Gentile people

not only from their Jewish neighbours but also from God. The temple symbolised the place where God’s presence dwelt among his people, and the Gentiles could not approach. Now imagine that wall being torn down.

Many of us can remember seeing the Berlin wall being torn down in 1989, a barrier which had separated East and West Germany for over 28 years. There was great jubilation when the dividing wall was broken down. Families and friends, separated for so long, were finally reunited. One remaining segment of the wall reads: ‘*Forget not the tyranny of this wall, horrid place. Nor the love of freedom that made it fall – laid waste.*’ And next to it the words, ‘*a time for peace.*’



Paul says, this is what Jesus has done - the old divisions have been broken down through him, so that one new humanity would be created in place of the two, thus making peace (v. 15).

And remember, not only have divisions between the two groups been broken down. Paul reminds his readers again that both Jews and Gentiles, together, are reconciled to God *in one body* through the cross (v. 16). Through Jesus’ life given for us and the redemption we have in him, both Jews and Gentiles have *access in one Spirit to the Father* (v. 18). This is really amazing news!

We do not have to long for God from afar – through Christ Jesus and his death for us, we can draw near to God – we have **access** to the Almighty God. The dividing wall has been broken down – we do not have to keep our distance, we are not excluded.

When the Berlin wall fell, many in East Berlin nevertheless found it difficult to cross the border into West Berlin. Their way of life and thinking was set and to cross the border was to challenge it - the wall in their heads remained. Paul's words bring a challenge to us today. Christ Jesus has torn down the dividing wall, between us and other believers and between us and God – but does that wall in our head remain? Do we live as if that distance between us and God remained? We have access to the Father – but it is our choice whether we draw near to God or remain at a distance. What is keeping you at a distance from God today? Is there a sin you need to confess or a reluctance to come closer to God?

And do we as a church build walls ourselves between different groups of people, discriminating and excluding those who are different from ourselves? Paul's words bring hope but also challenge us about how to live faithfully as God's people. Who do we exclude from the church? In our gospel reading today, we saw Jesus having compassion on the crowds, teaching and healing all who came to him. Jesus was mocked by some of the religious people, for spending time with those who were considered religiously unclean, with 'tax collectors and sinners.' Has it always been easier to build walls, to spend time with people who are similar to us, where we feel safe and comfortable, than to tear them down and make room for people whose needs, experiences and even outlook may be different from our own?

When Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, there stood in Ephesus the marble temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In the inner shrine was a statue of the goddess. In Jerusalem, Herod's temple was still

standing, with its barricade keeping the Gentiles out. But Paul finally reminds his readers and reminds us today that God does not live in a temple built by human hands. We do not need to visit a temple, in Ephesus, in Jerusalem, or even a church building in Eastleigh, Winchester or Cadnam, to meet with God. The church, the 'household of God', with Christ Jesus as the Cornerstone, is the people of God, a holy temple where God dwells. If you use this service at home because you cannot get to church, this does not make you any less part of God's church.

For our reading ends: *'So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom **you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.**'* (Ephesians 1.19-22)

May God continue to build his church and may we be faithful in following and open in welcoming others and sharing the good news with all. Amen.

#### **Prayer of confession** (Roots on the web 2018)

Lord, I confess to you that it doesn't take much to put me out of kilter – with myself, with those around me, and with you.

I ask forgiveness for any wrongs in my life that need righting; any times I have wrongly put myself first; any barriers I have put up; any times I have not been welcoming.

I ask you to bring to my mind: anyone I have offended; anyone I need to forgive. I seek your pardon, Lord.

Make me whole, Lord, and able to share in the healing of those around me. **Amen.**

## Prayers for others

Lord, hear our prayers today for your church – bring unity to your people and help us to be places of welcome and inclusion. Show us where we have excluded people and help us to work against discrimination. Unite us with those from different fellowships in our love for you and in our desire to spread the good news of the gospel. *In the silence, bring your prayers for your local church.*

Lord, hear our prayers today for your world – especially places where there is division and conflict. We pray for the US following the assassination attempt this week – for a peaceful process as the election approaches and for healing of the deep divisions in that society. We pray for countries where there is no freedom of speech and where people live in fear of their government. *In the silence, bring your prayers for our world.*

Lord, hear our prayers today for our country – for our new government and all who have recently been elected as MPs. May they have wisdom in their decision making, respect in their disagreements and a willingness to listen to the needs of the people they represent. We pray for the healing of divisions in our society. *In the silence, bring your prayers for our country.*

Lord, hear our prayers today for the communities in which we live and work. We pray for the work of charities and other agencies who support the homeless, those living as refugees and asylum seekers, those in financial need, those suffering from physical or mental ill health and those who are sad or lonely. *In the silence, bring your prayers for the community where you live.*

Lord, hear our prayers today for ourselves and those we love, as we bring them to you in the silence.

We bring ourselves and the gifts which we bring, praying that all may be used to spread the good news of the gospel, to the glory of God. Amen.

## Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along to STF 351 [In Christ Alone \(Official Lyric Video\)](#)

- 1 In Christ alone my hope is found,  
he is my light, my strength, my song;  
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
here in the love of Christ I stand.
- 2 In Christ alone! -- who took on flesh,  
fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
scorned by the ones he came to save:  
till on that cross as Jesus died,  
the wrath of God was satisfied  
for every sin on him was laid;  
here in the death of Christ I live.
- 3 There in the ground his body lay,  
light of the world by darkness slain;  
then bursting forth in glorious Day  
up from the grave he rose again!  
And as he stands in victory,  
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
for I am his and he is mine --  
bought with the precious blood of Christ.
- 4 No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
this is the power of Christ in me;  
from life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
can ever pluck me from his hand;  
till he returns or calls me home,  
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)  
Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition 351

## Closing Blessing

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son  
and Holy Spirit, be with us and those who we  
love and pray for, now and always. Amen.

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