



Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021

Deacon Sally Wheadon, “...to whom can we go ...” (20<sup>th</sup> in Ordinary)

*This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use as a supplement for the On-Line services that others may join with you..*

**Singing the Faith 440**

- 1 **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.
- 2 God's grace has taught my heart to fear,  
his grace my fears relieved;  
how precious did that grace appear  
the hour I first believed!
- 3 Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.
- 5 And, when this heart and flesh shall fail  
and mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil  
a life of joy and peace.
- 6 When we've been there ten 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)

**Call to worship:**

Eternal God, source of all life,  
today we choose to follow you.  
Be present in all we think, say and  
do. Powerful redeemer, you have  
the word of eternal life, Speak to our  
hearts and draw us close to you.

**Amen**

**Singing the Faith 343**

1. All my days I will sing this song of gladness,  
give my praise to the fountain of delights;  
for in my helplessness You heard my cry,  
and waves of mercy poured down on my life.
2. I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,  
I will sing of the blood that never fails,  
of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,  
of death defeated and life without end.
3. I long to be where the praise is never-ending,  
yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,  
where countless worshippers will share one song,  
and cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,  
clothed in majesty, Lord of history,  
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.  
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,  
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion,  
and You reign, You reign over all!*

*Stuart Townend.*

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### Prayer of Adoration:

We are blessed indeed,  
who have put our trust in you,  
who live to serve and walk in faith,  
where you lead us.  
We are blessed indeed,  
who have found our strength in you,  
who seek your face and hear your  
word as you encourage us.  
We are blessed indeed, who bow  
down to worship you,  
then go out in faith to do  
the tasks you have prepared for us.

### Confession

#### ***Forgive us, Lord,***

when we rely on our own strength  
and not yours.

#### ***Forgive us, Lord***

when we forget your provision  
and your love.

#### ***Forgive us, Lord***

when we listen to the insistent  
voices of this world and then  
struggle to know what's right.

#### ***Draw us close, Lord***

equip us with all that we need:  
empower us and strengthen our  
faith so we can engage with the  
world under the banner of your light.

**Amen.**



### Thanksgiving

We thank you Lord that we can trust  
in your word when we are struggling  
to cope and faith is weak.  
We thank you Lord that we can trust  
in your word and that we can turn to  
you when the world closes in  
and sin drags us down.  
We thank you Lord that in your word  
we find wholeness and peace;  
mercy and grace and hope for  
tomorrow. **Amen.**

### **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. **Amen**

### Singing the Faith 362

#### **1. Meekness and majesty,**

Manhood and Deity,  
in perfect harmony,  
The Man who is God.  
Lord of eternity  
Dwells in humanity,  
Kneels in humility  
And washes our feet.

We pray for people who suffer for their  
faith. For ministers and evangelists who  
seek to spread your word.  
For us all as we share the gospel of our  
Lord Jesus Christ.

May they, and may we, be built up in  
your love and strength.

**Lord, we pray in your Spirit.**

We pray for people who feel bound  
by chains of unemployment and  
poverty, chains of disability or illness,  
chains of sorrow.

**Lord, we pray in your Spirit.**

We pray for ourselves when we feel  
vulnerable. May they, and may we, be  
built up in your love and strength.

**Lord, we pray in your Spirit. Amen.**

### Singing the Faith 287

**1 When I survey the wondrous cross**  
on which the prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

**2** Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
save in the cross of Christ my God;  
the very things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

**3** See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

**4** His dying crimson, like a robe,  
spreads o'er his body on the tree;  
then am I dead to all the globe,  
and all the globe is dead to me.

**5** Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were an offering far too small;  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.

*Isaac Watts (1674-1748)*

### A sending out prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life,  
and we have come  
to believe and know  
that you are the Holy One of God.  
Go with us into your world.

**Amen.**

### Mission Praise 272

1. I have decided to follow Jesus;  
I have decided to follow Jesus;  
I have decided to follow Jesus;  
No turning back, no turning back.
2. Tho' none go with me,  
I still will follow,  
Tho' none go with me  
I still will follow,  
Tho' none go with me,  
I still will follow;  
No turning back, no turning back.
3. My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;  
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus,  
My cross I'll carry till I see Jesus;  
No turning back, No turning back.
4. The world behind me,  
the cross before me,  
The world behind me,  
the cross before me;  
The world behind me,  
the cross before me;  
No turning back, no turning back.

*Source: LyricFind  
Songwriters: Traditional / Leslie B. Tucker  
"I Have Decided" lyrics © Songtrust Ave.*

only a right relationship with God can satisfy, a relationship made possible through the blood of Jesus. It may be that we feel challenged by Jesus' sacrifice because although God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ is a free gift which cannot be earned or bought, in reality, deep down our own heart and conscience tell us that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross demands a response from us, it calls us to repent and believe.

In our gospel passage today Jesus is teaching the difficult truth that we must rely on him for our very life, and about our need to feast on who he is in order that we may have life in all its fullness. When Jesus says "you must drink my blood" he is saying "my life is the life which belongs to God which you must take into the very centre of your heart and being." But people find this difficult, they choose to be offended because the alternative is to believe and to take up their cross to follow Jesus. Jesus' shedding his blood on the cross demands a change of direction from us.

It demands the laying down of worldly ideas and attitudes. It demands that we, like Jesus, seek to serve instead of being served. It demands that we put the needs of others before our own and that we offer our lives as a living sacrifice, that we live lives that are holy and pleasing to God. And although to some all this might sound like foolishness causing them to be offended and turn away, the truth is that it is only when we offer our lives to Jesus and follow his way that we will experience life in all its fullness.

So today in response to Jesus' words "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them," and in response to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, my question to you is - do you choose to be offended and turn away or do you choose to believe that Jesus has the words of eternal life? Amen.

#### **Songs of Fellowship 398**

1. My Lord, what love is this  
that pays so dearly,  
that I, the guilty one,  
may go free!  
*Amazing love, O what sacrifice,  
the Son of God given for me.  
My debt He pays, and my death He dies,  
that I might live, that I might live.*
2. And so, they watched Him die  
despised, rejected:  
but Oh, the blood He shed  
flowed for me!
3. And now this love of Christ  
shall flow like rivers;  
come wash your guilt away,  
live again!

*Graham Kendrick (born 1950)  
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#### **INTERCESSIONS**

O God, who answers prayer,  
we hear the words of Paul the apostle.  
He exhorts us to pray on all occasions  
and with all kinds of prayers and  
requests. We pray for communities that  
have seen tragedy. For vulnerable  
people who struggle to face what life  
throws at them. May they be built up in  
your love and strength.

***Lord, we pray in your Spirit.***

*O what a mystery,  
Meekness and majesty.  
Bow down and worship  
For this is your God,  
This is your God.*

2. Father's pure radiance,  
Perfect in innocence,  
Yet learns obedience  
To death on a cross.  
Suffering to give us life,  
Conquering through sacrifice,  
And as they crucify  
Prays: 'Father forgive.'
3. Wisdom unsearchable,  
God the invisible,  
Love indestructible  
In frailty appears.  
Lord of infinity,  
Stooping so tenderly,  
Lifts our humanity  
To the heights of His throne.

*Graham Kendrick (born 1950)*

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#### **Gospel Reading: John 6:56-69**

<sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." <sup>59</sup>He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

#### **The Words of Eternal Life**

<sup>60</sup>When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?" <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

<sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup>And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

<sup>66</sup>Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

#### **Songs of Fellowship 200**

1. I am the Bread of Life;  
He who comes to me shall not  
hunger; - He who believes in me  
shall not thirst;  
No one can come to me  
unless the Father draw him:  
*And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up,  
And I will raise him up  
on the last day.*

2. The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world; And he who eats of this bread, he shall live forever, he shall live forever:
3. Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink of his blood, and drink of his blood, you shall not have life within you:
4. I am the resurrection, I am the life; He who believes in me, even if he die, he shall live forever:
5. Lord, we believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world:

*Suzanne S. Toolan (born 1927)  
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### **Reflection/Sermon**

At the end of John's gospel the gospel writer tells us that the things that he has written are so that we may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that through believing we may have life in his name.

And John's gospel is full of examples of people who come to believe and people who don't and here we see in our gospel passage this morning a stark contrast between those disciples who stopped following Jesus and those who made a decision to stick with him.

So what is the difference between those who turned back and those who decided to stay? It is, as Simon Peter says, that those who chose to stay had come to believe and know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. They had come to know that Jesus has the words of eternal life.

But what about those who turn away? Well, there is no doubt that Jesus' words are difficult. He starts by saying "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them." From a 21st century perspective, if understood literally, this smacks of cannibalism and sounds, at best, weird, at worst, repulsive. I have heard people who are unfamiliar with the sacrament of Holy Communion where we share bread and wine say that they felt uncomfortable with some of the language that was used in the sacrament. A Christian friend of mine who did some work in Russia a few years back in Russian schools was questioned by some school children there. And one of the first questions they asked was "Is it true that Christians eat people?"

But Jesus' words would have perhaps been even harder for the people who were present at the time that he spoke them. To this day, no orthodox Jew will eat meat which has not been completely drained of blood. In Jewish thought blood stands for life and blood belongs to God alone. In Genesis chapter 9 verse 4, it says "you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." And in Leviticus it says clearly "If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among

them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people."

So what is Jesus talking about here when he says "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them." Well Leviticus 17:11 continues "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement."

In talking about his flesh and his blood Jesus is connecting himself to Leviticus 17 and the blood that saves. Jesus is telling the disciples that he will be the sacrifice that leads to eternal life. Later in John's gospel we hear an account of Jesus' crucifixion and it tells us that after Jesus received the wine, he said "It is finished" and then bowed his head and gave us his spirit signalling to the Jewish world that there was no more need for sacrifices or temples because the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross was a once and for all sacrifice, obtaining eternal redemption for us with his blood.

And today there are many people who find that difficult and distasteful to hear. We don't like talk of sacrifice do we? We think of it as a barbaric ritual that belongs to another era and civilization. But sacrifice can also mean willingly giving something up for somebody else or for the greater good. John's gospel makes clear that Jesus willingly gave up his life for us. When they came to arrest

him in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

But Jesus didn't appeal to his Father and yes God allowed Jesus' crucifixion to happen as part of his plan to rescue humanity but it wasn't God who killed Jesus, it was sinful human beings. In humility during his ministry Jesus healed the sick and comforted the broken and the lost and yet the religious leaders of the day, human beings like you and me, had Jesus killed because he posed a challenge to their 'religion' and their understanding of the way things should be.

And yet on the cross, what does Jesus say? He says "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." This is God's outrageous love for us. Even when we do our worst, God still loves us and God offers us a fresh start; he offers us new life in the life of Jesus who God raised from the dead.

When confronted with the risen Jesus and the scandal of God's amazing and self-giving love, we face a profound tension that will lead either to offence or belief. Many people find it hard to accept that someone would willingly lay down their life for them and endure such suffering and brutality, why would they? No-one loves anyone else that much surely? Or it may be that we are offended because we don't believe that we are in need of a Saviour. We don't want to admit that somewhere deep down within us there is a longing that