

ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, RASTRICK

# Welcome to Morning Praise

9<sup>th</sup> August 2020

*Click on the underlined links to take you to safe content on the internet.  
If you are able light a candle as you start the service and if others are in the house  
encourage them to reading some of the service with you.*

## *Introduction*

This is the day that the Lord has made.  
**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

We have come together in the name of Christ  
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,  
to hear and receive God's holy word,  
to pray for the needs of the world,  
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,  
that by the power of the Holy Spirit  
we may give ourselves to the service of God.



## *Prayer of Penitence*

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' So, let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

## *Together we pray:*

**Lord God, we have sinned against you.  
we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent.  
Have mercy on us according to your love.  
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.  
Renew a right spirit within us  
and restore to us the joy of your salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Hymn:**      [I heard the voice of Jesus say](#)

**The Word of God - [Click Here](#)**

Reading:      1 Kings 19: 9-18 read by Shirley Stow  
Gospel:        Matthew 14: 22-33 read by Derek Davis

*Reflection prepared by Glenn Tatton - [Click Here](#)*

Imagine you are watching a cartoon on TV, probably an American one. You've probably seen something like the following scene: Coyote is chasing Roadrunner. Coyote runs along a path and then goes off the edge of a sheer drop. Coyote is still running hard, his legs rotating like Catherine Wheels, but is no longer moving forwards. However, Coyote does not plunge downwards straight away. His confidence only fails when he realises that he is no longer standing on terra firma. He turns to look at us, and then plummets down into the abyss.

Some people seem to have more self-confidence than others. In part this just seems to be the way we were made: some people just seem to have been blessed with a higher degree of self-confidence. However, our self-confidence can also be affected by the things that happen to us. A series of bad experiences can knock people's self-confidence.

Here is a little example from my own life, exhibit A if you like. My kitchen knives are all about 25 years old and rather blunt, and earlier this year I decided that I needed a new vegetable knife, one that cuts properly. So I went out and bought exhibit A. A nice sharp knife, one with the kind of curved blade that TV chefs use with a quick and confident rocking motion, dicing vegetables rapidly. Now all my old, blunt knives have serrated blades and I'm not used to using a very sharp straight-edged blade, still less one which is curved. The first thing I tried to cut with it was an onion I had just peeled. Hey presto, the blade slid off the curved surface of the onion and made a nice deep cut into my finger. I have been cut many times, and deeper than that, and need stitches on a fair few occasions, but I have before never *seen* so far inside my own flesh. The wound was so deep it took a couple of weeks to heal using steri-strips. The wound has now been healed for several months, but there is another kind of wound that has not healed. I have tried only once since that accident to use exhibit A, and I put it down again feeling rather queasy. I'm guessing now that I may not use it again.

Even the most self-confident of people can suffer a failure of confidence sometimes, but the lower someone's natural self-confidence and self-esteem, the more plagued they are with self-doubt, the more likely they are to be affected by a negative experience, and the less likely they are to take a risk in future.

Elijah lived during the reign of Ahab of Israel, who was married to the wicked Jezebel. Elijah is fighting what must seem to him to be a lone battle to preserve worship of the God of Abraham and Moses against pagan gods. He has fled fearing retribution and is feeling utterly alone. His mood must have been the same as it was forty days ago, when he sat under a tree in the wilderness and asked that he might die. On that occasion God, through an angel, gave him food and told him to go on a journey to Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai. His journey completed, and presumably feeling exhausted and alone, he spends the night in a cave. God comes and finds Elijah in his cave and asks what he's doing. His answer is that he is alone. Jezebel has her army and God stands at the head of the heavenly hosts, but Elijah is alone. So, God promises to pass by his cave.

Elijah had obviously been brooding on his situation because he used the same words twice when speaking to God, once when God asks him what he is doing in the cave, and then again when he is standing at the entrance to the cave. Many of us when we are alone can spend a lot of time running through the same thoughts again and again, and that is what Elijah has done here. When we are finally asked what is wrong we can blurt it all out. The words are already formed in our minds because we've been through them again and again. And that is just what Elijah does, twice. As Elijah sees it, he has been zealous for God, and he has been left alone and in fear of his life in consequence.

Wind, earthquake and fire ensue but God is not in any of these. Then sheer silence. In his state of exhaustion, loneliness and fear we can easily imagine what Elijah must have felt like as he experienced the wind, earthquake and fire from inside his cave. His senses must have been numb, and his flesh must have wanted to retire to the furthest place from where he was. Yet he did go to the entrance of the cave, and heard, in that sheer silence, the still, calm voice of God.

Today's Gospel passage is one of many where Jesus seeks quietness and solitude to spend time with his Father. A Trappist monk named Thomas Keating once said 'Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation'. How often do we seek silence in order to come closer to God?

Moses was only allowed a glimpse of God's back in Exodus 33. Elijah was not allowed even that. God comes to him as 'a sound of sheer silence' on the mountain, but this was enough to strengthen his faithfulness. It would be nice to read in the passage that God gave Elijah words of comfort, but he doesn't really. He just issues instructions to Elijah telling him to go about his business, although he does reassure him, finally, that he's not alone – seven thousand people are waiting for his lead.

I'm reminded of a small scene in Tolkien's book *Fellowship of the Ring*. The Hobbit Frodo Baggins is feeling that the burden he has to bear is far too great for him:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo.

"So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Do we ever feel our senses numb? Do we ever feel that our flesh wants to retire to a place a long way away from where we are?

One of the most reassuring aspects of the gospels is that Jesus' twelve disciples, despite their close proximity and access to Jesus for three years, still struggled with failures of confidence and doubts in their faith. This should encourage the rest of us, who do not have that close proximity to strengthen us. In today's gospel reading Peter undergoes a small but intense crisis of faith. Peter voluntarily puts himself into this position. He has witnessed Jesus walking on the water towards the disciples boat, and invites Jesus to ask him to step onto the water. Peter starts out walking with confidence but then doubts creep in. He becomes a bit like Coyote in the cartoon. His confidence deserts

him, and he begins to sink, and so cries out for rescue. Once Jesus has caught hold of Peter he chides him, saying “you of little faith, why did you doubt?”. This gospel passage seems to have two focusses. The first focus is that Jesus has done another miracle; he can walk on water. That might be for many the main focus of the story, the main lesson to be drawn from it. But there is a second focus, and I think that this might be the main lesson to be drawn. This is the focus that Peter too began to walk on the water, and only began to fail when his faith and confidence deserted him. “Why did you doubt?”, Jesus asks Peter. But who was Peter doubting. Was he doubting Jesus? I don’t think so. Peter has just seen Jesus conjure up a meal for five thousand out of minimal resources. I think Peter was a bit like a weak swimmer, swimming with confidence until they realise that they are out of their depth. I think that Peter’s confidence collapsed when he started doubting himself. And I don’t think that Jesus was trying to be very critical of Peter when he said to him, “you of little faith, why did you doubt?”. I think that Jesus is recognising the vulnerabilities of the people he has to work with, and the fragility of their self-confidence and faith.

Peter and Elijah both struggled to maintain their faith in God, and in themselves, despite the amazing deeds that God has performed in front of them.

I *could* tell you that I have overcome my doubts about using my new knife, but that would be untrue, and it would also be a trite example even if I had. Yet there are greater fears and doubts we have that take a lot more than that to overcome. We are all of us open to doubts and failures of self-confidence, but we shouldn’t allow these to convince us that we are not able to do Jesus’ work. There is no place within us that is beyond the reach of God.

Unless something unforeseen occurs in the next few days, the churches of our two parishes will be open once more for Sunday worship next weekend. For most of us that will be good news, but for some, particularly those who’ve been “shielding” at home the last few months because of age or medical condition, it might be a cause of anxiety. They might not feel ready to attend worship in person. Getting back to being a Body of Christ, all of whose members are able to worship together in our church, might be a process rather than a single event. It will be harder for some of us than others and take longer.

Jesus himself chose to work with disciples whose own faith and confidence was frail. Jesus, the light of the world, did not come in might to work with the powerful, the rich, the strong, and the self-confident. He came in the form of a poor and humble person to work with the weak, the poor, the marginalised, and those plagued with problems and doubts. What matters is not what we are or what we have, but what we bring to Jesus.

We should not be critical of Peter for panicking after getting out of the boat. When he left the boat he left security behind. Can we always stay in a secure place in our lives? If we are always careful to stay within our comfort zone, will we, in doing so, avoid stepping out in faith?

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, sometimes life following you can be difficult.

We face so many problems and struggle so much.

We wish it could be easier.

We so want to trust you and see your plan for us.

Help us today and throughout this week to relax into your presence,

to clearly hear your word and be prepared to act on it.

In Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

**Hymn:**        [Here I am to worship](#)

**The Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

**he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again.**

**he ascended into heaven,**

**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**

**the holy catholic Church,**

**the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,**

**and the life everlasting.        Amen.**

***Prayers of intercession prepared by Soo Sykes***

Heavenly Father we pray for the Church throughout the world, for all Christians everywhere and for those who minister to them.

We pray for our Church here at St John's, we pray that our efforts to secure a new vicar will meet with the approval of someone who wants to aid us on our Christian journey.

**Lord hear our prayer and let our cry come unto you**

We pray for the people's of Lebanon and particularly the residents of Beirut who have been so badly affected by the explosion earlier this week. Give solace to those

who have lost relatives and friends and strength to those who have gone to support them.

**Lord hear our prayer and let our cry come unto you**

We continue to pray for those who are affected by the pandemic. Help us to do what is right to protect others around us. We need your love and support to see us through this difficult time. We pray for those whose are struggling mentally at this time, give them courage to reach out for support, and for the rest of us to acknowledge their struggle.

We pray for those on our prayer list and for those known only to us. Lord give them your love and support as we keep them in our hearts.

**Lord hear our prayer and let our cry come unto you**

At this time, we pray for our congregation who are separated by events. We look forward to being able to worship in Church again. Things will seem strange and the way we have always done things is not the way we will be doing things for the foreseeable future. Let our faith lead us and our personal thoughts be put aside.

**Lord hear our prayer and let our cry come unto you.**

Lord, at this time we bring before you our own problems.

We pray for our families who we are not seeing again.

We pray for those whose jobs may be in doubt.

We pray for the children who are having a hard time because they do not understand why things cannot be like they were before.

Lord hear our prayers, give us strength to do your will here on earth and to make you pleased with us.

**Heavenly Father**

**Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ Amen**

*A Prayer for Church Growth*

**God of Mission**

**Who along brings growth to your church,**

**Send your Holy Spirit to give**

**Vision to our planning**

**Wisdom to our actions**

**And power to our witness.**

**Help our church to grow in numbers,**

**In spiritual commitment to you,**

**And in service to our local community,**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**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.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

### *The Collect for today*

Almighty God,  
who sent your Holy Spirit  
to be the life and light of your Church:  
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,  
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit  
in love and joy and peace;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen

### **Hymn:** [Dear Lord and Father of mankind](#)

### **Final Prayer**

God of our pilgrimage,  
you have led us to the living water:  
refresh and sustain us  
as we go forward on our journey,  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Our service ends with the Grace,*  
**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.**

J G Walther: Chorale Prelude - Werde munter mein Gemüte  
Played on the Conacher organ, St John the Divine, Rastrick  
by Gordon Balmforth  
For the congregation during lockdown [Click Here](#)