

Call to worship

Blessed are those who doubt, **For faith is a journey, not a destination.**

Blessed are those who question, **For easy answers are dismissed, but truth takes time to discern.**

Blessed are those who have not seen, **Blessed are those who have come to believe.**

Blessed are those who struggle in their faith, **For God has called us in the struggle together.**

Come, worship God, and follow Jesus, who calls us into this life of faith together. Amen.

Hymn: STF 152 – this is the day

1 This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made,
that the Lord has made.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day that the Lord has made.

2 This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again,
when he rose again.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.

This is the day when he rose again;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when he rose again.

3 This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came,
when the Spirit came.
We will rejoice,
we will rejoice and be glad in it,
and be glad in it.
This is the day when the Spirit came;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
this is the day when the Spirit came.

Anonymous

Prayer of Thanks

We give you all thanks and praise, O God, for you meet us in our doubts and fill us with life and peace.

You are the one who was and is, and is to come — the beginning and the end — who breathed life into the earth and its creatures. Our ancestors put their trust in you and celebrated your mighty acts of salvation.

You sent your child, Jesus, as a faithful witness to your goodness and love.

He was killed by the powerful, but you raised him, as the firstborn from the dead.

Appearing behind the locked doors of our fear he breathed Holy Spirit into us and commissioned us to carry his words of peace and mercy to the world.

Seated at your right hand as Leader and Saviour, he frees us from sin and makes us a kingdom of priests to serve you forever.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high, we offer you thanks and praise at all times through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of Hope and Healing, we confess to You that we have hidden wounds, scars that run deep. We confess that we do not know the pain of those around us. We have become good at telling others we are fine when we are not. We have accepted the false witness from others that everything is okay when it is not. Help us in our own journey of healing to recognize our pain and trauma, to seek help when needed, to know that though we may be broken, we can experience healing and wholeness.

We pause for a few moments to bring confessions of heart and of mind to god

We believe in the risen Christ, who comes to us with scars. We believe in the risen Christ, who was beaten and killed by the world. We believe in the risen Christ, who comes to all and says, "Peace be with you." We believe in the risen Christ, who embodies healing and hope.

There is life. There is hope. Love is eternal. Know that you are beloved of God, and no matter what you have been through, Christ loves you, accepts you, and in Christ there is the hope of healing, and the promise of eternal life. Amen.

Readings:

Acts 5: 27 – 32:

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Revelation 1: 4 – 8:

4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits[a] before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. 7 "Look, he is coming with the clouds,"[b] and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." [c] So shall it be! Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Sermon

In 1980 Ozzy Osbourne released a song called "Crazy Train." The chorus of the song is ridiculously simple, but very evocative: "I'm going off the rails on a crazy train." What the apostles were doing must have seemed like this to much of the surrounding world. The Pharisees and leaders certainly seem to think so. Drawing attention to the public proclamation of Jesus as Lord was indeed crazy.

What to the authorities of the time seemed like going off the rails, was the disciples acting upon the command of Jesus to Go and make disciples, to love the lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul. I think that probably sounds a lot like going crazy and off the rails to many people out there in the world today. Does it to you? **We are witnesses of these things, my soul, my life, my all**

Miraculously delivered from imprisonment, the Apostles chose the bold path of obedience. While preaching in the temple courts they were detained once again by the captain of the temple guard. The Apostles went with the officers, providing no resistance, and soon find themselves facing the religious court once again.

At issue for the Sanhedrin: The Apostles had disobeyed a direct order to cease and desist. Of even greater concern was their fear that they (the Jewish leaders) were being blamed for the death of Christ. **Perhaps**, what they failed to understand was that in the new Kingdom they had become irrelevant?

At issue for the Apostles: Obedience to the call of God. Not only were they not intimidated by the Sanhedrin, they were seemingly dismissive of their concerns. It no longer mattered to them who was to blame for the death of Jesus. Why, because, **Jesus was alive!** And their living Savior held the keys of life and had commissioned them to be ambassadors of his new Kingdom.

But you see, to proclaim that 'Jesus is Lord' was to declare that the Roman Emperor was not. So not only were the disciples' ruffling feathers with the Religious elite in the Sanhedrin, they were also poking at the very fabric of Roman life. **Where** do we have Christian voice to share and shout about, what's going on in our world, in our country, in our communities? What is at stake for those disciples is the truth, that Jesus brings a new world order, one centred and focused on God's authority overall.

What is at stake for us is the truth that we, like the religious elite of Jesus' time have become irrelevant, maybe without knowing, its only when we hold those in power to account, with God's wisdom and love, that Jesus' voice and teaching is heard in our world today.

This episode at Acts 5:27–32 marks the second time that some religious leaders and Sadducees arrested, detained, and interrogated the apostles for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. Previously, Peter and John were imprisoned because the same religious authorities were "much annoyed" at their preaching Jesus' resurrection (4:1-4). This second time they are motivated by "jealousy" (v.17). The first time, the council eventually released the apostles. However, this time "an angel of the Lord" discharges them (v.19). And when brought before the Council, they again declare their resolve to follow the voice of God over human authority.

These events were not something they read about but that they experienced. New experiences/events that we witness should impact what is already written down and can alter in some way our prior knowledge. We search the scriptures to support what we think we already know about God and to affirm, too often, our oppressive ways toward others — others who think, teach, live, and look differently from ourselves.

As a result of the disgrace and the exaltation that the apostles experienced as witnesses to Jesus' death and resurrection, they could approach life, vocation, and humanity through a different lens or perspective. **I wonder what different perspective does our reading this evening give you, on your journey of Faith?**

From a Roman perspective, Augustus Caesar was the sole savior of the world and the healer. The authorities who were deeply invested in depicting the emperor as the only savior likely saw Peter's words as a challenge to, and a mockery of, royal titles. Jesus, from their perspective, was an imposter whose name should not be associated with the titles the emperor had rightfully earned. Whereas the Roman emperor would have exercised absolute power in order to maintain his status, Jesus sacrificed his power and status in the process of bringing salvation to everyone.

Unlike the Roman emperor's abuse of power and violence that allowed him to claim the title of savior, it was Jesus' crucifixion, an act of solidarity with the marginalized, that made him the savior. The emperor might have undeservedly claimed the title of savior for himself but, in truth, it was Jesus who lived up to that title. This makes the emperor, not Jesus, an imposter.

Within the literary context of this story, it was also their healing ministry and the practice of sharing possessions among members that enhanced the apostles' popularity and landed them in trouble. Whereas the empire turned a blind eye to the needs of the disadvantaged, the apostles brought them healing.

Whereas the Roman empire fostered an ethos of hoarding and acquiring wealth at the expense of the poorest, the Jesus movement was promoting an alternative worldview—an ethos of sharing possessions. As I read this passage this evening, I amazed that all these years later the power dynamics haven't really changed that much in our world. **Are** we prepared to land ourselves in trouble, that we might come alongside the marginalised, the sick, the outcast of our society here in Dorset South and West?

Peter's short message concludes proclaiming "repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Public proclamation of Jesus in obedience to God rather than humans, intends not to cut off those who oppose; it intends to serve and even to suffer for doing it, pressing on to witness to God's renewal of all things. **That** is to say, that through Jesus' life – death – and resurrection, God breaks the chains and power of human authority, that all might know his new creation, centred on LOVE, that conquers all things, even death on the cross. If that is not something for us to shout from the rooftops about, I don't know what is, because: **We are witnesses of these things, my soul, my life, my all. Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Holy Spirit of Christ Jesus, Holy Spirit of God, we pray for a world where blaming one another will give way to trying to understanding, and a determination to put right old wrongs. **Breathe on us breath of God:** We pray for our imperfect system of justice in this land. Let magistrates, jurors and judges begin by seeing themselves standing there in the dock, but for the grace of God. **Breathe on us breath of God:** That in spite of their limitations, our prisons may be geared towards character change and restoration, and that communities may give ex-prisoners a fair go to make good. **Breathe on us breath of God:** Let compassion and encouragement flourish in our family life, that biting criticism for obvious faults, and nit picking over minor ones, and the habits of pay-back may not set the dominate mood. **Breathe on us breath of God:** We pray for church congregations around the globe. Let us become extravagant with the ointment of compassion towards the lost and those who hate themselves, yet steel-sharp in confronting both injustice and social evils. **Breathe on us breath of God:** Loving God, please continue to save us. Where our true need is the loosing of sins, deal gently with us. But where we need discomforting, binding and rebuking, give us no rest until we come to our senses and open up to receive your mercy. **Breathe on us breath of God:** Spirit of Christ Jesus, come with your breath of pure sanity and grace. Amen!

The Lord's prayer

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our father in heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive 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.

Blessing

Go now to love and forgive, for as God sent Christ, so now Christ is sending you.
Obey God above any other authority and bear witness to Christ's resurrection life.
And may God continue the work of salvation in you;
May Christ Jesus meet you in your doubts and fears;
And may the Holy Spirit fill you with peace
and speak through you with mercy. **Amen**