

DSW Circuit Written Service 11th May 2025 4th Sunday of Easter

This service was written in April 2024 by Rev Ruth Lownsborough

Welcome to this act of worship, shared with siblings in Christ, across the Circuit and as the Easter season extends before us, let us proclaim the truth of resurrection life in Jesus.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Hymn **StF 297** Christ is alive! Let Christians sing. Brian Wren

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
His cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
To distant years in Palestine,
He comes to claim the here and now
And conquer every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,
Untouched, unmoved by human pains,

But daily, in the midst of life,
Our Saviour with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift and war,
Where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
He suffers still, yet loves the more,
And lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His Spirit burns
Through this and every future age,
Till all creation lives and learns
His joy, his justice, love and praise.

Prayers

Thanksgiving - I invite you to spend some time now, in the presence of the risen Lord, in praise and gratitude, thanking God for all that God has done, is doing and promises to do for and with you, as you continue on your journey of discipleship.

Confession - Lord, you know everything. You know all about me.

You know when I have been half-hearted in following you.

You know when I have let myself and others down.

You know when I have criticised too soon, and understood too late.

You died and rose again, conquering the power of sin and death so I can know your unbounded forgiveness and new life. You know all those things in my life that do not show the love and forgiveness that you pour out on me. You know, and you forgive – again and again and again.

And so, I bring my heart, my whole being to you to be cleansed, renewed and strengthened.

Assurance of forgiveness – Know that your sins are forgiven and new life in Christ is yours. Amen

You are invited to pray the **Lord's Prayer** in whichever version you prefer.

Readings

Peter has been travelling amongst different groups of believers and his journey has taken him to Lydda, where he healed Aeneas. The next event takes him to Joppa, the port for Jerusalem.

Acts 9: 36-43 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

The gospel reading comes just after Jesus’ teaching – ‘I am the good shepherd’. Jesus is confronted by some Jews as he walks in the Temple. They want a straight answer to the question of Jesus’ identity. Is he really the Messiah, the King of God’s people?

John 10: 22-30 Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered round him, saying, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’

Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’

Reflection

In woodland, sometimes trees fall over but continue to live, sending new shoots upwards from trunk and branches, determined to seek out light and life. Plant seedlings too will grow upwards whichever way the pot is lying; they always grow that way. Both trees and plants are made to seek out light and life. Their outside action shows the inner make up.

Of course, we are different from seeds and fallen trees but our outside actions do shed light on who we are and what our inner attitudes are like.

Our readings today are about how what is on the inside of people, shows on the outside, evident in attitudes and actions.

In the reading from Acts, Peter is called to Joppa because a woman has died. This is a small story about someone we might consider quite ordinary, not very important, but who uses her skills in needlework to help others. We might identify ourselves with this woman, using what skills we have to help and support others.

Luke goes to great trouble in naming the woman, Tabitha in Hebrew and Dorcas in Greek, pointing her out as a person of significance, someone who was a true disciple of Jesus.

There was great mourning and upset at Tabitha’s death because she was known in Joppa for her good works and helping the poor. We can imagine how they were lost without Tabitha, weeping in grief, showing Peter the clothes she had made, telling him what a stalwart of the community Tabitha had been. We can probably all think of people we’ve known, or still know, like Tabitha, ordinary individuals who simply work hard at doing what they can to help other people, motivated by their faith in Jesus.

What Luke is saying is that although Tabitha was just an ordinary member of the community in Joppa, her life and work was just as worthwhile as that of anyone who had a prominent profile, someone like Peter or Paul.

Maybe sometimes we overlook the people who quietly, selflessly get on with serving others in some ordinary kind of way, without trying to attract attention, their lives reflecting their motivation to serve. The church is full of such faithful people.

Tabitha’s life was a real reflection of Jesus’ life. Because she believed in Jesus, in his death and resurrection, and was a disciple, her gratitude for life showed it. Tabitha used her skill as needlewoman to bring poor widows new life, purpose, community, belonging and security. No wonder they were distraught when Tabitha died.

Peter of course is also a disciple of Jesus and his life showed it by the things he did. Remember when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter? He prayed and then told her to get up. So Peter followed Jesus' example. He knelt in prayer and then called Tabitha to get up and Tabitha was raised to life too. Luke places this story straight after one of Peter healing a paralysed man, Aeneas, in a very similar way to when Jesus healed the paralysed man and told him to take up his bed and walk.

In both situations, Peter followed Jesus' example, and called on Jesus' resurrection power. Luke wants to show his readers that the power of the resurrection life which was in Jesus, now flowed through his disciples, through their faith in and witness to Jesus. What Jesus had been doing in his earthly life, the disciples were now able to do through the name and power of Jesus.

Because of what Peter did in Joppa, many people came to believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Imagine the conversations that Peter and Tabitha were able to have with others. What a great opportunity to share what they knew about Jesus with others, to pray with others, to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to speak to people's hearts. We must be prepared to do the same.

Both Tabitha and Peter, in different ways, reflected the life of Jesus. Their faith was expressed in the way they lived their lives.

We too have the gifts of life and faith offered to us in Jesus. What will we do with them? Where is our spiritual life and daily action really anchored? Jesus' life was firmly anchored in God, his Father.

In John's gospel there is beautiful scripture which describes how Jesus was at one with his father, how they live in and through each other. The whole of Jesus' life pointed to the truth that he was God's Son, the Messiah, the one the Jews were waiting for.

And yet in John's gospel, we hear from some Jews who were not satisfied with Jesus' miracles and teaching as evidence of Messiahship. They were looking for a straight out admission by Jesus – 'Yes I am the Messiah! The king you are waiting for!'

But Jesus knew that for some, their motives were not right, that they had laid a trap to charge Jesus with blasphemy.

Jesus had just been talking at length about himself as the Good Shepherd, being a gate for the sheep and his sheep knowing his voice. These Jews obviously did not know the Shepherd's voice and were not prepared to contemplate Jesus in this role of the king who would finally bring in God's kingdom.

To do so would have meant accepting a huge shift in their world, a shift which would call into question their role as shepherds to the people. They were unable to relinquish their lives to Jesus in love and obedience, to become Jesus' sheep and receive the gift of eternal life.

Later in John's gospel Jesus says 'If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. My command is love each other as I have loved you'. This is the source of eternal life....love. Love for God and love for each other. Jesus says that this eternal life cannot be snatched away from us. It does not matter what happens in life or death, eternal life is secure when we follow Christ.

We are followers of Jesus, called to express our love for God and others. Both Peter and Tabitha were Jesus' disciples too and the way they lived gave evidence to the truth of Jesus' resurrection and God's kingdom being established on earth. What they knew in their hearts was expressed in how they lived their lives.

May that truth continue to be revealed and made known through our relationship with Jesus, and may the Holy Spirit at work in us continue to grow God's kingdom by our actions.

Prayers for others

You are invited to linger on each line of the following prayer, imagining the flow of God's love in each situation:

Lord, in our world:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our government:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our friendships:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our families:

let your love flow.

Lord, among the suffering:

let your love flow.

Lord, among the bereaved:

let your love flow.

Lord, in this Circuit:

let your love flow.

Lord of all love, help us to know and to receive your love and to share this love wherever we may be. Amen

Hymn StF 566 Take my life and let it be

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Blessing and sending

We belong with God's family, but we also belong in God's world.

Thank you Lord that you send us out, to live out our beliefs in our actions.

You are with us, behind us and in front, above and beneath us. Help us not to be afraid to do your will.

In the name of Jesus Christ, in his love and with his blessing. Amen