

**Dorset South & West.... Written Service**  
**Sunday July 2nd 2023**  
**The Church Then and Now.**  
**Prepared by Revd Jean Quick'**



**Call to Worship**

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 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. Revelation 1:5b-6

**STF 55**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might -  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;  
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;  
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;  
all praise we would render: O help us to see  
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

**Prayers of adoration and confession.**

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your amazing grace and perfect peace which You supply in such abundance to all those who are called by Your name. Thank You that You are the eternal God, from everlasting to everlasting. Help us to take to heart all the truths that are contained in Your Word and apply them in our lives, to Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name, **AMEN**.

We ask your forgiveness for those times in the past few days when we have not been mindful of the peace you offer and ask us to embrace. Forgive us for the times when our lives have not been a reflection of your calling. We thank you that you know our weaknesses and our strengths. When we turn to you and confess our sins you forgive us and renew us by your Spirit. We bring you our praise and thanksgiving. **Amen**

**Scripture reading : Revelation 1:9-20.**

**John's Vision of Christ**

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven

golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

### STF 691

What shall our greeting be:  
sign of our unity?  
Jesus is Lord!  
May we no more defend  
barriers he died to end:  
give me your hand, my friend -  
one Church, one Lord!

What is our mission here?  
He makes his purpose clear:  
one world, one Lord!  
Spirit of truth, descend;  
all our confusions end:  
give me your hand, my friend -  
Jesus is Lord!

He comes to save us now:  
to serve him is to know  
life's true reward.  
May he our lives amend,  
all our betrayals end:  
give me your hand, my friend -  
Jesus is Lord!

### Reflection: The church then and now.

What is your best memory of Church?

In one of our gatherings as Preacher's and leaders of worship to prepare for this Bible Month. I was reminded of my time working in North Wales and how Sunday school teachers and worship leaders met every Thursday evening to prepare for the coming Sunday. The church, of over 600 members was too large for the building and so we held two separate services on Sunday morning's. The Sunday school had over a hundred children. However the very title Sunday school gives you an idea that this all happened a long time ago. Way back in the eighties. I certainly have good memories from those days and many more from the churches I have been privileged to serve or to worship with.

Thinking back to my memory shared it's not the numbers that count but what we all contribute as 'Church'. The middle letters of the word CHur CH fully describe it for us. We individually and collectively, are the heart of the church. So how do you describe the 'church' both then and now?

The Book of Revelation is a letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor. JB Phillips's translation of who they were also offers a helpful description.

The Church in Ephesus	The Loveless church.
The Church in Smyrna	The persecuted church
The Church in Pergamum	The over-tolerant Church.
The Church in Thyatira	The compromising Church
The Church in Sardis	The sleeping church
The Church in Philadelphia.	The church with opportunity
The Church in Laodicea	The complacent church.



Before we get to caught up with assigning similarities to churches we have known, it's helpful to look at the structure of the letter's to the churches. Each time to each church, the words "I know..." are said with a kind of affirmation and then the Ah...but! A kind of 'then and now' appraisal.

I guess it's something we have all tried to do when trying to appraise something or someone. We find the good and mention that first, then we move on to what needs working at.

We are 'The Church', so how do we describe ourselves both then and now? Do any of the descriptions given to the churches of Asia - Minor fit? Loveless, persecuted, over-tolerant, compromising, sleeping, complacent or full of opportunity? I guess each image has been present in our faith journey at some point in our lives. Though it is easy to dismiss some.


Have I ever been persecuted for my faith? Perhaps not like the Christians John represented. The Roman Empire had been working to limit and even eradicate the influence of Christians within the empire. Roman citizens and all who lived within the empire were required to offer incense to the emperor and declare that he was lord. Christians couldn't do this, as they knew that Jesus was Lord. This was viewed as rebellion within the empire, and exposed the Christians to persecution. Even the writer was exiled to Patmos because of his faith. However we probably have had times when we have felt it was difficult to say we go to church and have felt excluded from our peers.

Life is strange people accept those who want to talk about all manner of seemingly trivia but mention religion and an awkward silence descends in certain circumstances. In the spirit of the letter to the seven churches, in whatever way we might feel we are missing the mark. Christ says to us, "I know..." Provided we want to be Christ like and to strive to be the best we can. That "I know" is surely a comfort. Remember how we began this service with the opening words of Revelation, 'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins'. We are loved and freed from our sins.

I wonder how your image of Christ has developed over the years? There is so much richness in the description of Christ in these early three chapters. Something like thirty wonderful descriptions of Christ in these opening three chapters of Revelation. There's a challenge for you, to see if you can find them all. I wonder which description might have drawn you to Christ and your own early days of faith and which would be more important for you today?

These first few chapters have such rich imagery and there isn't space to look at it all here. However we can't pass on the lampstands. Which we are told are the churches. How many different forms of light can you think of? There are bicycle lamps, street lights, room lights, torches, bedside lamps and I will leave you to think of many more.

Think about how these sources of light have changed in your lifetime. Some for the good others? Well we won't even think about the Laser green lights that replaced Weymouth's fairy lights! Both are gone and no doubt some people saw the good in each, that others didn't. We are all different and that's good.

 The seven lights remind me of the Jewish menorah. I wonder how many Jewish menorah's have suffered from some candles burning down quicker than others. Or finding it difficult to get all seven lit. The closest we can get to this is the Advent candles and trying to make sure we have them all burning brightly for Christmas Eve or Day. I used to make candles and the worries I had over the wick being central and the candles being firmly fixed in a draft free space. Or if one of the four red candles might meet with an accident and so I could go on. But what was important was that the candles were there to Glorify Christ.

In conclusion if we were to write a letter to The Church and don't forget you are an important member too. What would we write? What way would we describe our vision of Christ and what lights would we use to describe the churches. I think I would want a variety of lights not so much to represent the church but perhaps to represent my faith journey and sometimes even my day.

However all the lamps offer some promise of illumination and if in our journey of faith we can hear Christ saying to us, no matter how dim we might feel our light is.. "I know". How wonderful that we are known and loved and forgiven both then and now and it doesn't end there.

Thanks be to the One who says "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!

## **Prayers of intercession based on STF 183**

Praise to the God who clears the way preparing room and space; for power and pride will lose their sway as peace comes in their place.

Heavenly Father we know you know our needs and we pray earnestly for Peace. We think of the peoples of the Ukraine and need for the war to end. We pray for countries and so many places where peace and respect for all humanity needs to be restored.

Praise to the God who comes to judge the truth of word and deed, who calls our minds and wills to change, rebuking wealth and greed.

In these difficult economic times we pray for those who have been reduced to having so little. For those who struggle with rising costs and managing their finances. We thank God for the work of the food banks and all agencies trying to bring respite to those in need. Help us to be mindful of those in need. Help us to let go of the fear of missing out that can drive the sense of greed and increase others needs.

Praise to the God who waits with us for hope and joy to reign, who shares our suffering and our loss, embodied in our pain.

We think of those who we know are in pain and as we remember their suffering we ask that you will be very near to them and bring peace and healing to them.

Praise to the God who comes to bring comfort to all who mourn. You are the one who said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!

We pray for those who are bereaved and pray that they might know the comfort you alone bring. **Amen.**

### **Let us say the Lord's Prayer.**

#### **STF 410**

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking  
your renewal from above;  
teach us all the art of speaking  
with the accent of your love.

We would heed your great commission:  
sending us to every place -  
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,  
serve with love and share my grace.

Freedom give to those in bondage,  
lift the burdens caused by sin.  
Give new hope, new strength and courage,  
grant release from fears within:

light for darkness; joy for sorrow;  
love for hatred; peace for strife.  
These and countless blessings follow  
as the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city  
where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
let us show the Saviour's pity,  
let us of his mercy tell.

In all lands and with all races  
let us serve, and seek to bring  
all the world to render praises,  
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

### **The Blessing.**

May God's Blessing abide with us today and in this Bible Month As we join together with our brothers and sisters across the churches and around the world, in our times of reflection, on this book of Revelation.

May we know God's blessings as we discover the treasures in these wonderful words. We pray for God's blessings to us as we seek to apply them to our lives in the coming days and weeks.

Bless us and strengthen our wills to live as this book calls us to live. **Amen.**