

**‘With Glad and Generous Hearts . . .’**

**Opening Prayer:-**

Living God, we come, as your people across the years have come, seeking your guidance, hungry to know your will and understand your purpose. You have called us to be your people; **Help us to hear your voice.**

We come bringing the life of our fellowship before you, our practical and spiritual needs, our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, successes and failures. You have called us to be your people; **Help us to hear your voice.**

Loving Father, we ask for your forgiveness, for so often being more concerned with the outside than the inside. For taking pride in external appearances, whilst neglecting our inner selves.

For putting on a good show, with nothing behind it.

For seeming virtuous on the surface, whilst being full of ugliness underneath, Father God, **hear our prayer.**

Living God, open our hearts to you, to one another, and all around us, so that we may truly meet in heart, and mind and soul. You have called us to be your people, help us to hear your voice, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Hymn: - STF 57 – Let all the world in Every Corner Sing**

1 Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!

2 Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The Church with psalms must shout,  
no door can keep them out;  
but above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King.

George Herbert (1593–1633)

**Acts 2: 37 – 47: -**

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**Message: -** I remember back in 2007/8, my dad and brother and I, went to watch England play Rugby in the World Cup that was taking place in France. We had got tickets to go and see England play the USA. In amongst the raucous rendition of “*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*”, by the choir of thousands of English fans, it was a spine-tingling moment of finding ourselves harmonizing with complete strangers, as if they were all new friends.

England thrashed the USA, as the tries rolled in, that joy turned very quickly to a gladness and a generosity of heart. Especially near the end of the game, the Americans scored a try – the whole crowd erupted. Yes, it was a little patronizing – but there was real gladness that England had played so well, and a real honourable joy, that the opponents hadn't ended up getting zero on the board. Why am I telling you about an old Rugby Trip – well, that sense of Gladness and that joyful generosity is very clearly part of our reading from Act's 2.

Let's focus today, on that wonderful phrase from Acts 2, verse 46 –

*“Day by Day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...”*

Just for a moment cast your mind's eye to the day of Pentecost. The air was filled with the outpouring of the spirit, and disciples were energised – they simply couldn't contain themselves. Those that had only really experienced the words of Jesus, and the drive of the still small voice of God, suddenly were drawn into a magnificent encounter with God and God's spirit – noise, and colour and drama.

*“Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the **rush of a violent wind**, and it filled the entire house...all of them filled with the holy spirit, began to speak in other languages, as the spirit gave them ability”*

The church was born in Gladness, a joy, a community full to overflowing of Gladness.

It was a gladness for what God had done through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was a gladness for the outpouring of the spirit, as promised of old, and fulfilled on Pentecost.

There was a gladness at Home, at the Temple, and parties of gladness on the streets. And why – because through Christ, through the Holy Spirit, **Day by Day** – people came to know the transformative, miraculous, amazing love, of God in their lives. *And he added to their number Daily.*

That tells me that Today – we need to be listening deeply, in our hearts, in our services, in our conversations for that same “rush as if a violent wind”. We need to see God at work all around us, in the big things and in the small – and we need to Rejoice and be Glad in it. **Because** – God will bless us richly when we live, dwell, and revel in his glorious, and bountiful blessings for each one of us, and for all the world.

### **They Spent much time together. . .**

A preacher who shall remain nameless, was once visiting a church. When he arrived he was greeted by one of those grim-faced stewards I am sure we have at one time or another all encountered – but not here in Dorset South & West! And he was told in no uncertain terms – “wipe off that smile lad – we don't do ‘enthusiastic happiness’ here”. Ours he went onto to tell the preacher was a deep joy – rooted deep within. Having endured about an hour of their ‘deep joy’ the preacher encouraged the gathering to send a message from the depths of their joy to their faces, as a smile or two wouldn't go amiss. And then he promptly left . . .

When we spend time together in community. We become familiar with what we like and don't like. We do what becomes traditional in our community, our context. We become **comfortable**.

On the day of Pentecost, the joy that dwelt deeply within – simply popped **out, out out out and again out**, all over the community – it couldn't be contained. Through that outpouring, attitudes were changed, lives were transformed. And the community spent even more time together, in fellowship, prayer, discipleship, and importantly joyful, glad, praise of God, for all his blessings for us. We don't have to be singing and dancing in the aisles, clapping our hands, banging a drum, or tingling a tambourine to show our joy and gladness.

Gladness is shown, in taking the time to chat to someone you haven't spoken to for a while before or after the service. Gladness is shown when we help someone do their weekly shopping or help them cross the road. Gladness is shown in the simplicity of sharing a smile, a conversation a joke, or just time together, sharing space

with other people, who also are Glad because of the Blessings that God has bestowed on each of us. And there are other times when gladness goes deep, very deep. And this is when Gladness strengthens and sustains us and when it brings tranquillity and transformation in the darkest of places.

A few months ago I met with a widow to plan her husband's funeral. She told me the story of the night he died following a long illness. Knowing this would probably be their final evening together, the lady did her makeup and hair, and her nails. They poured a glass of champagne and got out their photo albums. Cuddling together they looked back with gladness over the life they had shared together, whilst looking forward to the fullness of heaven that would soon be the husband's experience. The gladness of that moment is one the lady will always treasure. A gladness that was her strength in the darkness of her grief.

In an age when many are anxious – for a whole variety of reasons – about the future, gladness can change the landscape. We are challenged to live in the moment, day by day, by former vice-president of conference Richard Vautrey, who says that churches should live life to the max with whatever time we have left as Church Communities, we should think about giving away as much as can, not just in money, but in time, in our gifts and skills.

The irony of which, is that any church marked with this kind of extravagant generosity, which knows how to live together, to break bread together, who engages with the community, and gives as generously as it can in all kinds of ways, is in fact less likely to die at all, and in many cases are the churches around the connexion that are growing and growing significantly.

The encounters we have each week, each day, open the door of opportunity for God to draw his people back to the kingdom, in this place, and God continues to bless us – because we are reaching outward to the community, and we are ready to welcome them with Joy and Thanksgiving in our hearts.

Finally, lets talk about **with Glad and generous hearts . . .**

I want our circuit to be marked amongst those communities here in this District , as a circuit that is full of Joy and Gladness, a church community that has a house full of Generous Hearts, Minds and souls. The gospel writer of Luke and Acts notes that those who were the first adventurers of the church: *“had the good will of all the people”*.

The habits of holiness that the early church exhibited were infectious, were attractive and were transformational, for individuals and for the whole community. Is it any wonder that those early disciples of the church were full of Gladness and Generous Hearts? Sacrificially and gladly giving of our time, showing Gods love on the streets, caring for young and old who find themselves with fragile lives, those are the markers of Christ, and the markers of community that Christ calls us too today.

Gladness, generosity and goodwill – it's a godly way of life, that we must all aspire to. Now and forever.  
AMEN

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Gracious God, whose Spirit helps us in our weakness and guides us in our prayers, we pray for the Church and for the world, **in the name of Jesus Christ.**

Renew the life and faith of the Church; strengthen our witness; and make us one in Christ . . .

Grant that we and all who confess that Christ is Lord may be faithful in your service and filled with the Spirit, that the world may be turned to you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guide the nations in the ways of justice, liberty and peace; and help them to seek the unity and welfare of all people . . . Give to all in authority wisdom to know and strength to do what is right. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comfort those in sorrow; heal the sick in body or in mind and deliver the oppressed . . . Grant us compassion for all who suffer, and help us so to carry one another's burdens that we may fulfil the law of Christ. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

May we and all your people share the life and joy of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer: -**

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

**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 and ever. Amen.**

### **Hymn – STF 21 – Born in Song**

1 Born in song!  
God's people have always been singing.  
Born in song!  
Hearts and voices raised.  
So today we worship together;  
God alone is worthy to be praised.

4 Sing the song!  
God's Spirit is poured out among us.  
Sing the song!  
He has made us anew.  
Ev'ry member part of the Body;  
given his power, his will to seek and do.

5 Tell the world! All power to Jesus is given.  
Tell the world!  
He is with us always.  
Spread the word, that all may receive him;  
every tongue confess and sing his praise.

6 Then the end!  
Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.  
Then the end  
of all earthly days.  
Yet above the song will continue;  
all his people still shall sing his praise.

Brian Hoare (b. 1935)  
Words and Music: © Brian Hoare / Jubilate Hymns

### **Blessing**

Gracious God, take this moment, take our lives, and use them for the kingdom.

May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all. With those you love, and those you are called to love, now in the name of Christ. **Amen.**