***The Churches of St Mary, Cleeton St Mary; St Giles, Farlow; St John the Baptist, Middleton Scriven; Holy Trinity, Sidbury, St Michael, Silvington; and St Mary, Stottesdon***

**July 19th: Our Worship Together**

**for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity**

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Welcome to our worship together for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity. There are no services in our churches this Sunday, so this is the principal and only service for the day!*

*Let us begin by calling to mind those times when we have not been obedient to God’s will for us, and make our confession:*

We have not always worshipped God, our creator.

Lord, have mercy.

We have not always followed Christ, our Saviour.

Christ, have mercy.

We have not always trusted in the Spirit, our guide.

Lord, have mercy.

*A Prayer for absolution:*

May the Father forgive us by the death of his Son and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit all our days. **Amen.**

***The Word of God***

*Today’s psalm speaks of how God our creator knows us through and through; it comes from Psalm139:*

1 O Lord, you have searched me out and known me; ♦ you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

2 You mark out my journeys and my resting place ♦ and are acquainted with all my ways.

3 For there is not a word on my tongue, ♦ but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

4 You encompass me behind and before ♦ and lay your hand upon me.

5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, ♦ so high that I cannot attain it.

6 Where can I go then from your spirit? ♦ Or where can I ﬂee from your presence?

7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; ♦ if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.

8 If I take the wings of the morning ♦ and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

9 Even there your hand shall lead me, ♦ your right hand hold me fast.

10 If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will cover me ♦ and the light around me turn to night,’

11 Even darkness is no darkness with you; the night is as clear as the day; ♦ darkness and light to you are both alike.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit ♦ as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forever. Amen.

*The Bible reading, from chapter 13 of Matthew’s gospel, is another farming parable:*

**24**He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; **25**but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. **26**So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. **27**And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” **28**He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” **29**But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. **30**Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’

**36**Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ **37**He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; **38**the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, **39**and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. **40**Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. **41**The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, **42**and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **43**Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A24-43&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-23583d)] listen!

*Reflection*

*‘Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.’*

Much of what needs to be said about this week’s reading from Matthew was said last week in the context of that parable. So this is a splendid opportunity to think about the Psalm. This is one of my favourites: it speaks of God’s loving presence with us, and his knowledge of us as our creator. Wherever we are, he is near and holding us safely. That’s a comforting thought when we are surrounded by this pandemic, and largely in exile from our churches.

You may recall the story of Jonah from the Old Testament. God called him to go and preach to the people of Nineveh; Jonah was most unwilling to do so, and tried to run away. He took ship across the Mediterranean to try and find a place where God would not be. But the storm arose, Jonah ended up being thrown into the sea so the storm would stop, and then for three days in the belly of the great fish to bring him safely to land. After all of which, he reluctantly went to call Nineveh to repentance, as he’d been told in the first place.

The moral of this part of the story is that you can’t escape God: there is no place where he is not. Wherever we are, he is already there. And if this sounds a bit sinister and forbidding, then remember that verse from our psalm: ‘Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.’ It’s not God waiting to pounce on us when we go wrong, it’s God who’s leading us lovingly through all our lifetime paths, God who is keeping us protectively safe in his strong right hand – if we let him.

This has been very relevant for us through this time of lockdown. We may have felt, while the churches have been closed, that we’ve been cut off from God. But actually it’s been an opportunity to experience God in a much broader and fuller way. In the Gospel stories, we hear of Jesus worshipping and teaching in the synagogue: but much more we hear him teaching in the open – as in this section of parables in Matthew’s gospel. He is by the Sea of Galilee, the crowds come round him, and he needs no dedicated building to take the opportunity to speak of God’s love and his kingdom. In the same way, when Jesus wants time of quiet prayer, we don’t hear that he goes to the synagogue or the temple, but to a quiet place on his own.

So as we begin, gently and carefully, to go back into our churches for prayer and worship, we remember all the places where we’ve prayed and worshipped in the time of exile. And as we do that, we might ask this: have we been exiled from our churches, or have we come out of exile into the rest of God’s creation? For we have still been in God’s very presence all this time.

*‘If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*

*Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.’* Amen.

*Now we share our faith in the apostles’ 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.

*Wherever we are today, we come together in the Spirit as the body of Christ to join together in our prayers, using these words or your own:*

Creating God, you know us all who are your works of love, and we give you thanks for your presence with us in all places and at all times, and especially for your loving care when the journey is long and wearisome: may we be aware of you in all we do, that we seek ever to do your will and walk in your way, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As lockdown is gradually eased, we pray for all we know who are lonely, bereaved, or ill. Let us pray for good sense on the part of all people enjoying returning freedoms. Let us give thanks for those who have a care of the needy. In a few moments of quiet, let us hold before God all those on our hearts in any kind of need.

Lord of all, you see those who suffer with your compassionate eye: hold them in your care, and bring them wholeness and healing, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

*We share the Covid-19 Prayer for all those suffering in any way from the virus:*

Keep us, good Lord,

under the shadow of your mercy.

Sustain and support the anxious,

be with those who care for the sick,

and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may find comfort

knowing that nothing can separate us from your love

in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*The Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity:*

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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 forever. Amen.

*We finish with the daily prayer that Jesus taught his friends as we say The Lord’s Prayer:*

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.

*We share the peace across our churches, our communities, our world:*

‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name,’ says the Lord, ‘there am I in the midst of them.’ May the peace of the Lord be with us all.

*We finish our worship by blessing each other in the words of 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.

*Since there is no recorded service this week, here are two hymn suggestions!*

*The first was written by John Keble, one of the leaders of the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement, and after whom Keble College, Oxford is named. We commemorate him on Tuesday 14th July.*

New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.

The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask:
room to deny ourselves; a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in thy dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

*The second is a song of God’s presence and power, set to the lovely ‘Londonderry Air’:*

I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship,Should set His love upon the sons of men,Or why, as Shepherd,He should seek the wanderers,To bring them back, they know not how or when.But this I know, that He was born of Mary,When Bethlehem’s manger was His only home,And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how silently He suffered,As with His peace He graced this place of tears,Or how His heart upon the cross was broken,The crown of pain to three and thirty years.But this I know, He heals the brokenhearted,And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,And lifts the burden from the heavy laden,For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how He will win the nations,How He will claim His earthly heritage,How satisfy the needs and aspirationsOf east and west, of sinner and of sage.But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory,And He shall reap the harvest He has sown,And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendourWhen He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worshipWhen, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,Or who can say how great the jubilationWhen all the hearts of men with love are filled.But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,And myriad, myriad human voices sing,And Earth to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth, will answer:“At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!”