***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***

**August 2nd: Our Informal Worship Together**

**for the Eighth 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 Eighth Sunday after Trinity.*

*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***

*Psalm 85 is a psalm of reorientation; listening to God’s word and guidance will bring us out of troubled times:*

1 Lord, you were gracious to your land; ♦ you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the offence of your people ♦ and covered all their sins.

3 You laid aside all your fury ♦ and turned from your wrathful indignation.

4 Restore us again, O God our Saviour, ♦ and let your anger cease from us.

5 Will you be displeased with us for ever? ♦ Will you stretch out your wrath from one generation to another?

6 Will you not give us life again, ♦ that your people may rejoice in you?

7 Show us your mercy, O Lord, ♦ and grant us your salvation.

8 I will listen to what the Lord God will say, ♦ for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful, that they turn not again to folly.

9 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear him, ♦ that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth are met together, ♦ righteousness and peace have kissed each other;

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth ♦ and righteousness look down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed give all that is good, ♦ and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him ♦ and direct his steps in the way

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 Old Testament reading is another section from the love story that is the Song of Solomon. This is the girl in the story speaking to he friends:*

I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! my beloved is knocking.
‘Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one;
for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’
**3**I had put off my garment; how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?
**4**My beloved thrust his hand into the opening, and my inmost being yearned for him.
**5**I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt.
**6**I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but did not find him;
    I called him, but he gave no answer.
**7**Making their rounds in the city the sentinels found me; they beat me, they wounded me, they took away my mantle, those sentinels of the walls.
**8**I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him this:
    I am faint with love.

***9****What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women?
What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?*

**10**My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.
**11**His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.
**12**His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=song+of+solomon+5&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-17611a)]
**13**His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance.
His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.
**14**His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels.
His body is ivory work,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=song+of+solomon+5&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-17613b)]  encrusted with sapphires.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=song+of+solomon+5&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-17613c)]
**15**His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.
**16**His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable.
This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

*The New Testament reading comes from the beginning of Peter’s second letter:*

Simeon[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30463a)] Peter, a servant[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30463b)] and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ:[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30463c)]

**2**May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

**3**His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30465d)] his own glory and goodness. **4**Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature. **5**For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, **6**and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, **7**and godliness with mutual[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30469e)] affection, and mutual[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30469f)] affection with love. **8**For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9**For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. **10**Therefore, brothers and sisters,[[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30472g)] be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. **11**For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

**12**Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already and are established in the truth that has come to you. **13**I think it right, as long as I am in this body,[[h](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-30475h)] to refresh your memory, **14**since I know that my death[[i](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=II+Peter+1%3A1-15&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-30476i" \o "See footnote i)] will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. **15**And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

*Reflection, from Alex:*

Letter-writing seems sadly to be becoming a dying art. I had a very dear aunt, who wrote very long letters commenting extensively on all the things I was doing as I grew up – at the time they made no sense as I ***knew*** what I was doing, but now they act as wonderful historical documents. Clearing various family homes, we have discovered all sort of letters - from a great-grandfather in France from November 1918; letters from relations I never knew; even my own letters written when I was a child. A letter in someone’s own handwriting is intensely personal, and often hard to read in faded ink or stylised writing.

Letters are written in the idiom of the times. They speak of the world as it is on that day, and they give us glimpses into past lives and people’s daily realities. They are deeply, deeply personal. And because they speak of other times, the language carries its own coded messages – for example, today’s letters may speak of “social distancing”, facemasks, sanitising – things that would have made no sense even six months ago, but which will help to date today’s letters in years to come. Letters begin by addressing the person being written to, and end with some sort of signing off – and both those give us clues about the relationship between the people.

Peter’s letter we’ve read from today is thought to be the latest book of the whole New Testament – written, probably, at the end of the first century – nearly two thousand years ago. Today we read it in a book – in printed form – but the oldest existing, 3rd century copy of this letter now lives in the Vatican Library, was written on papyrus in Greek, and by going on-line you can see both digital microfilm of the whole letter, and the papyrus itself – ancient paper made from the pith of the papyrus plant. For me, looking at that ancient papyrus returned this letter to what it was – not a familiar printed bible passage, but a living document.

And, of course, what we read today is not in Greek. The letter would have passed through many changes – copies made by hand with the possibility of mistakes and tiny changes, translation into Latin, into English – and once in English into myriad versions of English, all seeking to discern the message at the heart of this passionate, ancient human document. If you explore a wonderful website called Bible Gateway you can read the text in many versions, and this is often helpful in trying to work out what the writer is saying.

The letter begins by introducing who is writing - the traditional form for a letter in those days. The writer calls himself *Simeon Peter* – and whether this is really Peter has sparked speculation for hundreds of years – doubt from Origen, one of the earliest Church Fathers back in the second century, to widely differing views among bible scholars today. Today’s scholars maintain that this is not Peter, but someone writing in Peter’s name – what is called *pseudepigraphy*, when someone writes under an assumed name. It’s a common feature of much biblical writing, and there are clues in many texts that give away the fact that what was written could not have been written by that person. In this case, there are possible clues that suggest a date of writing later than Peter’s death in Rome in about 65 AD. But no one’s sure, and the search for truth will keep academic theologians busy for a while yet.

Was this letter written by Peter - that most fallible of humans, the fisherman who left his nets to follow Jesus? Peter, who made mistake after mistake, and who became the rock on which the church was built? Many believe it was. But even if written after his death, the likely timing was so close to Peter’s lifetime as to be awesome in its close links to the time of Jesus and the days when Peter followed his Master across the hills and valleys of his ministry.

The writer of this letter sees the Roman world about him as corrupt and writes both for his contemporaries and for posterity, to remind others who have knowledge of God to follow the way of Christ. Across nearly two thousand years his voice speaks to us now – reminds us to strive for goodness, to love, to seek to become Christ-like in all that we do. The letter is almost a testament – last words before death, a setting out of beliefs for all who share his faith. And we who share that faith and profess ourselves today’s Christians, in a world that doesn’t seem to have changed in many ways, must make sure that Peter’s letter does not lie hidden in our time, but is read anew by us, kept safe and handed on to those who will follow us.

Amen.

*Now we share our faith in the words of 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.

*Let us join together through the Spirit as the body of Christ to make our prayers, using these words or your own:*

Heavenly Father, we pray that when we read your word in the Bible, we see through the eyes of your apostles and hear the voice of your Son Jesus with their ears; may we learn to love and serve him as did Peter and his friends, that we may be a witness, like them, of the joy of your kingdom. Amen.

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

Lord Jesus Christ,

You taught us to love our neighbour,

And to care for those in need

As if we were caring for you.

In this time of anxiety, give us strength

To comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,

And to assure the isolated

Of our love, and your love,

For your name’s sake. Amen.

*In a few moments of quiet, let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we have worries and concerns, to God’s loving care, knowing that his love for us all is infinite and unending.*

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity:*

Almighty Lord and everlasting God, we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments; that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. 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.

*Here are two hymn suggestions to go with this service. The first is by the hymn-writer of the Methodist Church, Charles Wesley:*

O thou who camest from above
the fire celestial to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire
and still stir up the gift in me.

Still let me prove thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

*The second is a favourite classic, thinking about God as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was written by James Edmeston, grandson of an independent pastor; he was an architect and surveyor and one of his pupils was Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, famous for church restorations.*

1. Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our guide shall be.

2. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us,
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary
through the desert thou didst go.

3. Spirit of our God descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided
nothing can our peace destroy.