



The Benefice of
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme
Sunday 3 May 2026
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Our liturgy today is prepared by Alison

THE GATHERING

Call to Worship

Let us offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God,
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

Alleluia! Thanks be to God!

Silence is kept

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us.

Prayers of Penitence

CALL TO CONFESSION

Whoever believes in Christ will not be put to shame.
Confident in this promise,
let us confess our sin before God and one another.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Almighty God,
your word offers freedom from sin,
but we confess that we have not obeyed your word.
We have harbored malice toward our enemies;
we have been deceitful in our relationships;
we have been insincere in our commitments;
through gossip we have slandered our friends.
Forgive us our sins and lead us to genuine repentance.
Help your children long for your pure, spiritual milk
that we may grow into the joy of salvation
through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Sisters and brothers,
once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.
In the name of Jesus Christ we are forgiven. **Amen.**

The Collect

Risen Christ
Your wounds declare your love for the world
And the wonder of your risen life:
Give us compassion and courage
To risk ourselves for those we serve,
To the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Testament Reading: Acts 7:55-end

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his word.

The Gospel Reading: John 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his Holy Word.

Reflection by Liz

One of the joys of seeing any of the children in the services or at Messy Church is seeing how they react with one another or with anyone else around them.

Sometimes it can be quite amusing to see them copying their parents or other adults around them as they try to fathom the ways in which people behave in church – like trying to catch someone’s attention when they are concentrating on the sermon or when they go to shake hands with people as the peace is shared. Hopefully they always feel welcome, knowing that church is a welcoming place for all people of any age and that everyone is valued.

As I was pondering on this, I was reminded of a poem written by Dorothy Law Nolte in 1955. It is entitled “Children learn what they live” and is a reminder that how children are treated can have far-reaching effects on their lives. Some of the lines include these observations:

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and others.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

It is certainly a reminder that how we treat people can have a lasting effect, either in a positive or a negative way. But that is not just something which applies to children. We all live in a world where we live alongside others and how we interact with others can make our part of the world a better or worse place. I think that that is why I found today's reading so striking. Two people are mentioned in the reading from Acts, and we can gather that they both had a distinct effect on the people around them. Those people are Stephen and Saul. Stephen is the first person who is mentioned. In chapter 6 of Acts of the Apostles tells us that he was a Hellenist (a foreign-born Jew who spoke Greek). He lived in Jerusalem and had become a Christian. The Hellenist converts, who probably formed a minority in the early Christian community, complained that the care of their elderly widows was neglected by the Hebrew-speaking majority. The Apostles presented the matter to the congregation and, because they felt that they could not devote the necessary time to such pastoral matters whilst they were intent on sharing the ministry of the word of God, the congregation were instructed to select seven deacons who would take on this pastoral responsibility. Stephen who was seen as a man full of the Spirit and wisdom was chosen for this role and was duly anointed by the Apostles for the task. Stephen was encouraged to serve God and the community in this way – and from today's reading we see that he embraced his calling with total commitment, even to the point of dying for his faith. The gifts which were such an integral part of his character were recognised and used in God's service. The second person who is mentioned is Saul. He was known at that time for persecuting Christians and in this reading, he is an onlooker as Stephen is brutally stoned to death.

He seems to be a total contrast to Stephen, and we can only imagine the cruelty which he showed as he persecuted others for their faith. And yet, if we follow Saul's story in the book of Acts we can see the miraculous transformation of Saul – his conversion on the road to Damascus, his encounter with Jesus and the way in which his life is totally turned around. This is reflected in the change of his name from Saul to Paul. The one-time persecutor became an enthusiastic, totally committed follower of Christ who witnessed to his faith in numerous places around the Mediterranean and who has left a legacy of writings which have helped so many others through the years as they have explored their faith. Who would have believed it? Well, probably not those who were with him as Stephen was martyred, but certainly there were many others who listened to him preaching and encountered him on his missionary journeys who witnessed his transformation. What a wonderful thing to read about – and to recognise. God can see the best, the good in everyone. And if we are open to him in our lives, he can use that good for the benefit of others – for the communities we live in and for the good of his Kingdom. We may have given up on Saul, but God saw something in him which could be used for good, not just for him as an individual, but for the good of those around him and for the good of his Kingdom. What an amazing thing to happen, just because God looked for the good in the man. We are called to be like Christ, who in turn is God made man. God who looks for the best in his creation. I wonder, do we look for the best in people? Do we try to see the good in them? Let us pray that we will always try to see the best in others – and hope that they will be encouraged to see the best in us. And if we give our best in our communities, just think of what a gift that could bring to the world around us.

Affirmation of Faith

**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.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Alan

Lord, we bring before you the Parish of St John, Rev Alison and all the part time clergy who work to make our parish a happy worshipping community. We eagerly await the arrival of our Team Rector Rev Daniel Furlong. Our prayer goes out for all the churches of our benefice and the wider Christian faith. Christians of all the differing beliefs in how best to serve you. May we work with them across different countries in a multitude of places and situations. May we working with and through the Holy Spirit learn from them, their examples of vision, commitment, mission, service, fellowship and worship. Unite us in love and equip us for your service, through the insights of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Unite us in love.

Equip us for service.

We pray for the leaders of the world, mindful especially of the rapidly changing geo-political landscape in which we live, and which impacts us every day, both in this country and abroad. We are aware of the many changes, tensions and questions that this can bring, and the challenge it can seemingly pose to the stability and wellbeing of all. Lord of nations, whose Kingdom rules over all; have mercy on our broken and divided world. Give wisdom to all in authority, guide and direct their decisions, that all may be led into the ways of justice, freedom and peace to the honour of your name. May all that they do and say be rooted and grounded in you. Lord, we pray for peace in places torn by conflict across our volatile world. Give comfort to those suffering from the effects of war, from poverty, homelessness, displacement and hunger. Guide world leaders to act with justice, integrity, and wisdom. We pray, also, for those involved in the industrial and commercial life of our nation. Remove barriers of mistrust, bitterness and prejudice which sometimes exist. Give to all a spirit of tolerance and understanding, and an earnest desire to seek you.

Unite us in love.

Equip us for service.

Lord, thank you for all people in our church communities. Church Wardens, members of the PCC, the people who provide tea, coffee and biscuits after our services, voluntary cleaners and those that do the minutia of jobs that keep our churches working. Lord be with all teachers, administrators, and staff in our local schools.

Fill their hearts with your strength, so they may rise to every challenge and not grow weary. Grant them an abundance of wisdom, patience, and grace to guide every student with compassion. Protect their mental health and refresh their spirits. As the exam season unfolds, we lift all students facing this time of pressure and hard work. We pray they will bring all their anxieties to you. Help them to remain calm and stay focused so that they will have a clear mind to cope with the exams.

We pray for the emergency services, both paid and unpaid. Keep them safe as they work to protect and often rescue people in our community and country.

Unite us in love.

Equip us for service.

We pray for carers in our community, providing strength, patience, and compassion to the ill, elderly and vulnerable.

Lord, in a moment of silence we pray for those people known and unknown to us who are ill, afflicted, suffering in body mind or spirit. May they know your power and be restored to fullness of health, that in your mercy those who suffer in body mind or spirit may know your power and be restored to fullness of health,. Place them under your loving care.....

We pray, also, for those who have died and may be known only to you. Help those who mourn their loved ones to experience the comfort of your Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light no darkness can quench, which eternally shines and brings hope.

Unite us in love.

Equip us for service.

Gracious Lord, open doors of opportunity for us this week, and let our actions reflect your love. May we rise and shine in all we do.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Risen Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us,
lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, in Christ you have shown us the way,
revealed to us your truth,
and offered to us everlasting life.
Keep our eyes upon him,
that we may see your path more clearly,
know your truth more fully,
and receive your life more abundantly;
through Christ who dwells with you and the Holy Spirit
in eternal glory. **Amen**

The Blessing

God grant to the living grace,
to the departed rest,
to the Church unity, peace and concord,
and to us and all God's servants, life everlasting;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Sending Out

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia! Alleluia!
In the name of Christ. Alleluia! Alleluia!