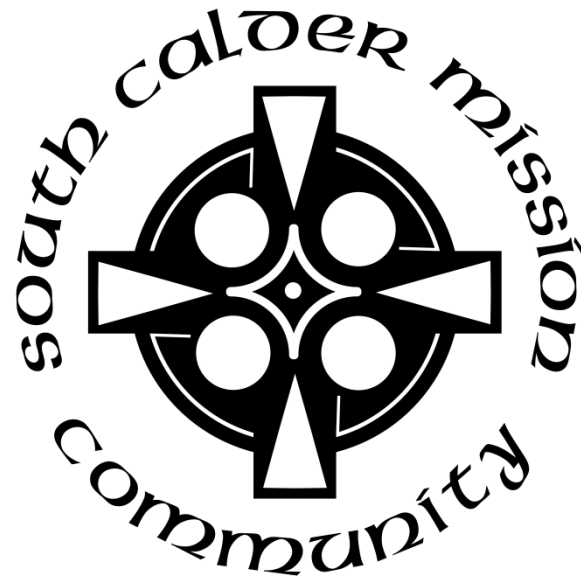


Into his Courts with Praise...



A Service of the Word
for
Sunday 3 May 2026
Fifth of Easter.

A Service of the Word for Sunday morning

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INTRODUCTION

*“Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people.”*

1 Peter 2:10.



THE CONFESSION

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all.
Though we have grieved him, yet he will heal us if we confess our
sins in penitence and faith.

**Almighty God,
I confess that I have sinned against you
in thought, word and deed;
I have not loved you with all my heart;
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.
Have mercy upon me,
cleansing me from my sins,
and help me to overcome my faults,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Receive God's forgiveness

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.**

PRAISE

O Lord, open my lips...
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Give me the joy of your saving help...
and sustain me with your life-giving Spirit.

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.

Suggested hymn to sing or read ***How sweet the name of Jesus sounds.***

THE WORD OF GOD.

Acts 7:55-end.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

Psalm 31.

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame; ♦
deliver me in your righteousness.
Incline your ear to me; ♦
make haste to deliver me.
Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold; ♦
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.
Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me, ♦
for you are my strength.
Into your hands I commend my spirit, ♦
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.
'My times are in your hand; ♦
deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.
'Make your face to shine upon your servant, ♦
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

1 Peter 2:12-10.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner',

and

'A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

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.

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Forgive our sins as we forgive.***

GOSPEL **John 14:1-14.**

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

REFLECTION – I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The gospel reading from John chapter 14 is a part of Jesus' 'Farewell discourse' to the disciples. The last supper has taken place, Judas has been sent on his way to betray Jesus. Very soon will come the trial and crucifixion. Jesus will die, and go to be with the Father in heaven, and by his death will open the way for humankind to be restored to a new relationship with our Father God.

Jesus tells them, 'And you know the way to the place I am going.' Thomas says, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'

Jesus replies, '**I am the way, the truth and the life.**

This reminds me of a song on an LP that my mum had in the early seventies. It was about finding the way to world peace and an end to war. The words that stuck with me were, 'There is no way to peace – peace is the way.' In the same sort of way of thinking, there is no way to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – **He is** the way.

Trying to work out how to make peace happen, making a map of how to get there, will never work. We have to make a conscious decision to **live** peace – in a peaceful way, in a way that will bring peace about. To talk to others and show by our lives that peace can be brought about if we want it and will live in the right way. To spread peace wider and wider.

So it is with faith in Jesus, and in the three-in-one God. We can't work it out – we only have the perspective of human beings, in our limited world, in our time on this planet. There's no formula for working our way to God. We need faith. We believe in him, we make a decision to put our trust in him. 'Come into our lives Lord – we accept what you did for us. We open up our lives to you and ask you to walk with us, and use us as you will.'

For me, it came as a result of listening to a minor celebrity's story on a tape recording. They had decided to live for a year as if the story of Jesus in the New Testament was true. No harm done if it didn't work.

'What a good idea,' I thought. 'Road test it. Live it. Review it after a year. I think I'll try that.' So I did, but I never bothered with the review. I can't tell you, really, just from that year, how or why I found that it was true. Nothing dramatic happened – no visions or words came to me. I just knew it was right. I found a kind of peace and purpose in those turbulent teenage years – then I fell head over heels in love, and later faced repeated storms of depression – but that's another story.

I still have Jesus in my life, abiding in me, and he in the Father, who sends the Holy Spirit. I am still a little human being living through the ups and downs of life. He touches my life in so many ways: through other Christians, family and friends. He leads me through all sorts of contacts with others, or seemingly co-incidental events, to things which I can see later he has been calling me to. It might be befriending someone, or helping with a specific task. It could be to listen to someone's problems, or to pray for them, or to encourage them. It could be practical support. It may be within the church, or the wider community, or crossing national or even international boundaries by supporting the work of Fair Trade or Christian Aid or Mind.

I can't prove God is there or show you – it can be argued about from many perspectives. All I can tell you is that I **experience God in my life**, that my faith in him is a very grounding and positive thing. I have been given so much love through it. I see that God uses everything that happens to me in a good way. God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – he **is** the way, the truth and the life.

And so I come to the passage from the First Letter of Peter. That rings true with my faith experience – a living faith.

The passage talks about coming to God as living stones: giving ourselves to him, and letting him build us into a spiritual house – the new temple, the new people of God: the Church.

As his people of the new covenant, given new life and forgiveness through Jesus, we are a chosen race – chosen by God, a royal priesthood – as his children, a holy nation, set apart and used by him.

Our task as his priests? To proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Not necessarily by accosting people in the street, but by the way we live, and pray. By being ready to answer questions about the hope we have in us, or why we go to church. By opening our lives to Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, and letting his new life and love flow through us, and on to others. Sometimes to let others help and minister to us.

We need theology and theologians and doctrine and ethics, and all the other sides to learning about faith, helping us to go deeper and understand more, and to keep us going in the right direction. But we must balance that with faith and trust and putting that faith into practice, or we'll have a beautiful but hollow shell.

Come to Jesus and ask him to show you himself and the Father; to send you the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to lead you and prompt you. Abide in him, and he will abide in you.

For he is the **WAY**, the **TRUTH**, and the **LIFE**.

Sheila Falkner

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **Hail to the Lord's anointed.***

THE CREED

**All I believe in God the Father,
whose loving care is the pattern for family life.**

**I believe in Jesus, the Son of God,
who lives in my heart through faith,
and fills me with his love.**

**I believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens me with power from on high.**

**I believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

THE PRAYERS

A time of quiet prayer for

- *The universal Church - Bishops, synods and all leaders church*
- *The leaders of the nations*
- *The natural world and the resources of the earth*

Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace.

**Look upon our divided world
to be with those who are victims of violence.**

**We pray for the people of Ukraine
and all who have been subjected to the cruelty of others.**

Help us to know the gift of your peace

in the power of your Spirit and

we ask you to soften the hearts

of those who can stop the fighting.

**Creator God, we ask for your aid as your children of light
living in the darkness of our world.**

Amen.

Cumbria Ecumenical Spirituality Group.

Finishing with the South Calder Mission Community prayer...

**Heavenly Father we thank you for the life of your Church
in this place, and in all the villages of the South Calder
Mission Community;**

**for all who have served and worshipped you in years gone by,
for all who make up your family in our churches today,
for the faith we have in common, and for the people and
traditions which make each church unique.**

**By your Spirit, guide and equip us,
that together we might find new ways
to reach out to our local community,
to show your love to our neighbours,
and to encourage them
to follow the Lord Jesus in their lives.**

**Father, we offer ourselves to your service,
In the unity of the Holy Spirit,
And in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

and 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.**

THE CONCLUSION

*Suggested hymn to sing or read **The King of love my shepherd is.***

The following prayer is said

**Be with me, Lord, as I finish my prayer today.
May my lips always speak the truth;
may my eyes which have read your word
see only what is good;
and may my life as well as my worship
be always pleasing in your sight,
for the glory of your name. Amen.**

And now may the Lord who brought us to birth by his Spirit,
strengthen us for the Christian life.

May the Lord who provides for all our needs
sustain us day by day.

May the Lord whose steadfast love is constant as a mother's care,
send us out to live and work for others.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with us and remain with us always.

Amen.

So now may I go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

Links for the hymns

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds.

<https://youtu.be/JXyHMMMy4YyY>

Forgive our sins as we forgive.

<https://youtu.be/HixCQUirJxg>

Hail to the Lord's anointed.

<https://youtu.be/EkrepBvrLI4>

The King of love my shepherd is.

<https://youtu.be/nWfZ-8s71-k>