

This short act of worship has been produced by Revd Dan Haylett for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. I trust that you are enjoying summer with all its colour and beauty and God's creation. I pray that you will find the service uplifting and that God will meet you in your need, whatever that might be. Amen.

### **Opening Prayer**

God speaks: and worlds spring into existence.

God speaks words of love and truth in Jesus Christ: and our world is filled with grace and peace.

God speaks today: God's word inspires and fires our hearts. With words, and in silence, we offer our praise and prayer today.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

### **Hymn: Speak O Lord (Singing the Faith 161)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://youtu.be/OzAIHjyPgU>

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

*Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963) ©2005 Thankyou Music. Administered by worshiptogether.com*

### Let us pray together

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you:  
Speak your word of truth to us and over us, showing us who we truly are by the light of your grace and love.

Speak through all that you reveal to us of the way you come in Christ Jesus, as the Bread of life, as the source of our living and hope for all the world.

Speak your truth as we catch glimpses of your glory in the everyday corners of our lives. Tell of your majesty and awe in what we see of you in all that is around us and all that is being made new in Christ.

Speak in ways that make us listen, not out of dry duty, but in response to your love and grace that wins us afresh.

Speak to reassure us, to bring your comfort and strength. Speak to inspire us to turn again to you, to find in you the words of life.

As you speak your words of truth and grace, may you be honoured by all we are. May your words come to sing in us and shine from us, as we learn to trust more fully in Jesus Christ.

God of grace, as you speak your truth to us, let the reality of our lives and the possibility of your love and mercy meet. We pray for forgiveness for the times we have turned from you. We seek healing for all that does not make for wholeness within us. We pray for a heart to receive your word anew.

In the quiet of our hearts, may we hear the word of grace. Jesus Christ speaks: *'Your sins are forgiven'*. Thanks be to God.  
**Amen**

### Today's Gospel Reading: John 6 vv. 56-69

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you

are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, ‘For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.’

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’

### **Time to Reflect**

“Lord, to whom can we go”?

Peter’s dawning realisation comes as the disciples (yet again) find themselves almost at their wit’s end. By this stage, others have turned away as Jesus’ teaching got too demanding, too pointed, too close to home.

Faced with the starkness of what Jesus has to say about eating flesh and drinking blood, the sensitivities of the crowds are raised. It’s too much to take, too much to live with.

But the disciples struggle on as they try and keep up with what Jesus is asking of them, and showing them of God and they realise there is no-one else to turn to. So far, they have to find ways to live with their perplexity, confusion, and uncertainties

in this struggle. They have come to realise that in all of this faith is being found and nurtured – this is the journey with Jesus. Unlike for the crowds who hear and turn away, there is to be no going away for them.

Of course, the language of going away is a preoccupation with us at present. Understandably enough we think about what it would mean to get away and to escape the challenges of work or home, or even the wider concerns we live with.

Some of that preoccupation however stand a bit of consideration. We’ve become aware of the reinvention of the odd word “staycation”; not to speak about staying at home any more, but used rather to mean staying in this country, as opposed to taking a holiday in sunnier climates.

We have probably all heard someone say, or have said ourselves, “I just want a break from all the covid news, I want to get away from it all”. The problem with a pandemic is that it is global; we are faced with the reality that there is nowhere else to go to “get away from it all”. Just like the disciples found in a different context, there was no viable alternative for them, despite the difficulties.

That language of wanting to go away reflects on the different expectations of holidays, retreats, respite and staying that are going on in the passage from John 6.

The desire of the disciples to even consider going away echoes the stories of many from the Bible too. We find there, records not of holidays but more of escape attempts. Think of the story

of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden; one of the strands of the Genesis story has them trying to hide from God out of shame. The thought of getting away can stem out of all sorts of motives.

Or think of Moses and Pharaoh. It's not a personal retreat that Moses longs for, certainly not "just me time". But the cry of "let my people go" breaks the chains of slavery and forges new life for the whole community.

Or think of Ruth in her complete devotion and dedication to Naomi, ready to go away from all she knew to show this love in action.

Think of Jonah, who tries to escape God's call and ends up in some of the worst living conditions this side of Nineveh.

Think of John the Baptist calling others to come away from the city to the wilderness to turn towards God. Think of Jesus who calls people like you and me away from where we once were to a new relating, in new patterns of life and service.

Inherent in scripture and within our own stories and thinking about God is the idea of getting away. Christian maturity is realising that we cannot escape God, and that in fact this is where we are most truly free. What do we mean when we sing, "I once was lost, but now I'm found"? Or what about when we sing from the dungeon conjured up in Charles Wesley imagination, "My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee".

In all these accounts from the Bible, from hymns, in our own

stories and in the disciples' experience in John 6 there is a moment of transformation around which this realisation happens. Others hear Jesus and try and go away, even prophets and disciples think of trying to escape but the realisation comes in the question "to whom can we go?". Jesus has the words of eternal life and there is nowhere to run to, nowhere better for us to be.

What the disciples learn is that sometimes you have to stop running, stop going away from God to find God coming close to you.

In John Chapter 6, the desire of others to go away from Jesus has been caused by his teaching. He's offended the crowds as he has been talking about himself as the bread of life. It's part of a long discourse of teaching that has the effect of a motif in a piece of classical music recurring in various ways. Here the theme of bread and life are woven together in complex ways throughout this chapter.

Jesus has offended those who from their Jewish context cannot accept the strangeness of the language of eating flesh and drinking blood, which sounded and can sound even today like the embracing of a gruesome taboo. The eucharistic overtones are obvious to us, as the author of the gospel is writing for a church that was beginning to think and talk theologically about this connection of Jesus' body and blood being for us the way to feed on Christ and find sustenance. But in the passage we read, that alone isn't the end of the

offense. What Jesus compares in v56-69 is almost exactly the same comparison that he makes back in John 3: where Jesus then speaks with Nicodemus.

There and here, it is the contrast between flesh and spirit that is the real issue. It's not just about how we think about communion. It is Jesus talking about how he has been given from God, and how God is revealed in him that is causing the issue. The crowds struggle with the imagery of eating flesh and drinking blood, but the real point is that we find it hard to accept that Jesus' reveals God's way for us.

So, they turn away. They try to get away. This is a real split when many turn from Jesus. There's this moment of high drama in v 67-69: *"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.*

*Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."*

This is in many ways a copy of Peter's declaration made at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus also asks what the crowds think, who they say he is, then in turning to Peter challenges him for a personal response.

And what a response! In his "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Peter realises that there is nowhere to turn to, nowhere where he can get outside of God's reach. He recognises that Jesus has the words of eternal life, that the Word of God is before him. And then he says that he has "come to believe and to

know that you are the Holy One of God".

That is such a precious reflection. Peter doesn't say "we knew it from the start" or it was apparent as a "blinding flash, and everything was perfectly straightforward". No, Peter says that he has come to believe and to know who Jesus is, implying a process of the lived experience of placing trust and living with struggle of the journey of faith.

Peter's awareness that Jesus holds the words of eternal life shapes his response in the light of the offense, the questions and the doubt. Nothing else compares to that which Jesus holds out to us, as we find our wholeness, our living now and forever held in God. The words of eternal life are the promise of a tomorrow after the struggle and pain of today. It's that which should provoke a spirit of thanksgiving in us, as it did the disciples:

To whom shall we go? Where else can we turn to? What else could we need?

Truth is, we have no need to go anywhere else. No need to try and escape God's presence or call, God's drawing power. But rather as disciples we continue to come to believe and to know that the Holy One of God is present to us, and today we give thanks that are found in love.

### **A time of prayer**

Take time in silence today to pray for the needs of the world and for those around us.

Pray today for a world facing catastrophic climate changes. Pray for those who do not have the things that we take for granted, food, shelter, or healthcare.

Pray today for a world where destructive conflict and greed is rife. Pray for places where war is a daily reality, and for places and people who live with the threat of violence every day.

Pray today for the Church in every land, for all who are coming to believe and to know that Jesus is the Holy One of God. Pray for those on your hearts and for all who have asked for prayer. Pray for those who want to turn away from Jesus and for all who have been hurt.

Pray today for yourself and for your ongoing commitment to Christ. Give thanks for the word of life held out to you.

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus, the Holy One of God. 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.**

### ***Hymn: O Jesus, I have promised (Singing the Faith 563)***

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r50HvufAf1g>

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve you to the end;  
Lord, be for ever near me,  
my Master and my friend:  
I shall not fear the battle  
if you are by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me;  
the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me and within;  
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking,  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
to hasten or control;  
Lord, speak, and make me listen,  
O guardian of my soul.

O Jesus you have promised  
to all who follow you,  
that where you are in glory  
your servant shall be too;  
and, Jesus, I have promised  
to serve you to the end;  
O give me grace to follow  
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)

**A prayer of blessing**

God speaks words of love over you, and calls you by name in Jesus Christ. God sends you in the power of the Spirit to live to God's praise and Glory.

May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

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