

Worship at Home – 18th May 2025 (5th Sunday of Easter)
A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Karen Frost.

Call to worship

The Lord's name is to be exalted,
his glory is above earth and heaven.
So, let us come before him now,
young and old together, wherever we are,
and praise his name.

Hymn – STF 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord David J Evans (born 1957)

- 1 Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.
- 2 Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.
- 3 Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Opening prayers

Lord God, you know every bone in our body, every ache and pain, every beat of our heart, every emotion. You know us inside out. You know when we are joyful, but also when we struggle. We take a moment now to pause and be aware of you. We breathe out our old life and breathe in the gloriousness of your new life. **Amen**

A prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

Lord, we ask forgiveness for the times when we don't accept your Word because it seems strange to us.

Lord, forgive us for not seeing the big picture.

For the times when we hang on to the old, doing things as we always did.

Lord, forgive us for not seeing the big picture.

For when we think we are the only ones worthy of your love.

Lord, forgive us for not seeing the big picture.

For when we make judgements on things we have no right to judge.

Lord, forgive us for not seeing the big picture.

Open our eyes to new life in you. **Amen.**

The Spirit tells Peter to have no hesitation and to go with the men from Caesarea.

Lord God, sometimes we are afraid to repent, to give ourselves to you. Today we come to you unafraid, knowing your forgiveness in our hearts and grateful beyond measure for the new life you give us. **Amen.**

Hymn – STF 331 – King of kings, majesty Jarrod Cooper (b 1970)

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| 1 King of kings, majesty,
God of heaven living in me,
gentle Saviour, closest friend,
strong deliverer, beginning and end,
all within me falls at your throne.
<i>Your majesty, I can but bow,
 I lay my all before you now.
 In royal robes I don't deserve
 I live to serve your majesty,
 I live to serve your majesty.</i> | 2 Earth and heaven worship you,
love eternal, faithful and true,
who bought the nations, ransomed
souls,
brought this sinner near to your throne;
all within me cries out in praise.
<i>Chorus</i> |
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Bible reading – Acts 11:1-18

Peter Explains His Actions

¹¹ The apostles and the believers all through Judea heard that Gentiles had also received God's word. ² Peter went up to Jerusalem. There the Jewish believers found fault with him. ³ They said, "You went into the house of Gentiles. You ate with them."

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story. ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying," he said. "There I had a vision. I saw something that looked like a large sheet. It was being let down from heaven by its four corners. It came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth. There were also wild animals, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice speaking to me. 'Get up, Peter,' the voice said. 'Kill and eat.'

⁸ "I replied, 'No, Lord! I will not! Nothing that is not pure and "clean" has ever entered my mouth.'

⁹ "A second time the voice spoke from heaven. The voice said, 'Do not say anything is not pure that God has made "clean."' ¹⁰ This happened three times. Then the sheet was pulled up into heaven.

¹¹ "Just then three men stopped at the house where I was staying. They had been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² The Holy Spirit told me not to let anything keep me from going with them. These six brothers here went with me. We entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house. The angel said, 'Send to Joppa for Simon Peter. ¹⁴ He has a message to bring to you. You and your whole family will be saved through it.'

¹⁵ "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them. He came just as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the Lord's words. 'John baptized with water,' he had said. 'But you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ God gave them the same gift he gave those of us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ When they heard this, they didn't object anymore. They praised God. They said, "So then, God has allowed even Gentiles to turn away from their sins. He did this so that they could live."

Hymn – STF 164 – Your words to me are life and health George Currie Martin (1865-1937)

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| 1 Your words to me are life and health;
they fortify my soul,
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal. | 2 Your words to me are light and truth;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
as in their truth I grow. |
| 3 Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace and grace;
from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face. | 4 Your words are perfected in one,
yourself, the living Word;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord. |

Reflection on the reading

I wonder what your favourite food is? Perhaps it's something you loved as a child and continue to do so, or perhaps it's a food you disliked as a child, yet as you've grown older you now really enjoy. Food is central to our lives – without it we would get very ill and die. *What* we eat is important too. Perhaps your favourite food is one from your culture or the place where you live or grew up – it can mark us out can't it? Let me ask you about which order you put the jam and cream on your scone Devonians, you'll put the cream on first then the jam, but if you're from Cornwall then you'll do it the other way around. (If you're from anywhere else you're probably not that bothered!)

How we eat our food can also mark us out as being different – do we eat with knives, forks and spoons or use our hands or chopsticks? Do we sit down at a table, on the floor, or on a sofa in front of the TV? Do we eat on our own or with other people? Sometimes it can seem as if there are lots of unwritten rules as to how we eat. Getting them wrong can make us feel very uncomfortable, or perhaps mean we're not invited back. Perhaps you remember the scene in the TV series *Downton Abbey* where the chauffeur is invited in to dine with the family but must be taught how to use the cutlery properly and it turns into a bit of a disaster.

In the Old Testament, many rules were given to the Israelites as to what they could and couldn't eat and how they needed to prepare certain foods. Obeying these rules marked them out as God's chosen people and they were central to Jewish culture. It is likely that Jesus, as a Jew, would have abided by these rules with his disciples. Yet through Jesus' death and resurrection we have been given a new identity. As with any identity, it takes time to work out what that means. The disciples and Early Church had to wrestle with how their identity as followers of Jesus interplayed with their Jewish heritage. Their God had not changed, yet they knew things were different and, as the Gentiles began to also become followers of Jesus, the Church had a cultural dilemma on its hands. Should all followers of Jesus follow Jewish laws and customs, and, if so, did that mean that Gentiles had to become Jewish in order to follow Jesus?

Through this passage, God takes Peter and the Early Church, step by step, through a process of making all things new. Through a vision, which Peter then explains to others, and the Holy Spirit falling upon some Gentiles, God reveals the way for the Church to be. Through Jesus, the old ways have been made new, and salvation is opened up freely to anyone who wants to receive. This was a total cultural change and so there would understandably be many opponents to the idea. Imagine what your reaction would be if everyone in the UK was told to stop using any form of cutlery and that from now on you were only able to eat food with your hands. You'd likely be outraged and have a multitude of questions. I imagine there were many in the Early Church who felt the same about uncircumcised Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus and their eating of what was previously considered unclean food.

It is perhaps understandable then that God in his compassion and wisdom takes the Jewish Christians on this journey to the new, step by step. In Peter's vision, he sees everything three times and the message was unmistakable. Then there were six witnesses to the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles. This was double the number of witnesses normally needed to verify something as true. God was making all things new, freeing people from what were now unnecessary rules, and revealing more of who he is. How can we as a Christian community distinguish between rules that have been put in place to protect us and rules that we need to be liberated from? What is God wanting to make new in your life and my life, today?

Prayers for the world, others and ourselves

God who makes all things new, we pray for new life.
For your creation, that you made and declared to be good,
that it may be restored and renewed,
and that we may care for it as you intended,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,
Restore and renew us.

For your peoples across the world,
that conflicts may end, and relationships be restored,
and that a true, just and lasting peace may be sought,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,
Restore and renew us.

For your church, here in this place and around the world,
that divisions may be healed, strangers welcomed,
and that we may have boldness and courage to follow wherever you lead,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,
Restore and renew us.

For those suffering, in body, mind or spirit,
that those who fear the future may find hope,
those who long for the future may find joy in the present,
and those who recall the past with pain may find healing,
Creator, Re-creator God, we pray.

Silence

God of new life,
Restore and renew us. Amen

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Hymn – STF 350 – I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship William Young Fullerton (1857-1932)

- 1 I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
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.
- 2 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 broken-hearted,
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.
- 3 I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of 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 splendour,
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.
- 4 I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is 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!'

Blessing

Life-giving God, Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, journey with us in our lives, in our communities. As we look forward to the time when you will make all things new, enable us, by your Spirit, to bring your kingdom here on earth.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with you and all those you love, this day and forever more. **Amen**

Bible readings from [New International Reader's Version \(NIRV\)](#)

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