**Morning Praise @ Home**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Bible Reading** ACTS 8:26-40

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**Reflection**

The followers of Jesus had lived through tumultuous times.

First, Jesus is crucified and they are devastated.

Then he is raised from the dead and they are mind-blown

Then comes Pentecost and there is a mighty outpouring of God’s Spirit birthing, forming and energising the Church.

Then comes persecution, Stephen is martyred and the church is dispersed not simply out of fear but out of conviction to share the Gospel more widely.

The Church then is like a pebble thrown into a pond spreading outwards with concentric ripples.

In Samaria - a place which was beyond the pale to Jews the local people responded warmly to the Good News of Jesus. Surely Philip would hang around to share in the exciting growth of the Church. Instead, Philip is drawn away from a hugely successful ministry – prompted by God to go into an out of the way desert leading to Gaza. Here he meets an Ethiopian - a man who may be almost as far “out there” as their meeting place. A man with black skin. A person from an exotic land the edge of the world, timbuktu, someone whose dark skin makes him an object of wonder and admiration among Jews and Romans.

He was also a castrated male banned from entering the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem employed in the service of the Queen of Ethiopia. Her Chancellor of the Exchequer if you like. He was spiritually hungry - a gentile enquirer with an interest in Judaism. What a mix!

The Ethiopians spiritual curiosity drew him to Isaiah 53’s well-known but haunting words about a suffering servant whom people unjustly torture and slaughter. While most Christians have come to see this as a prophecy about Jesus the Christ, the Ethiopian hasn’t. He recognizes that he needs help if he’s to understand what he’s reading. This member of the queen’s cabinet asks a member of King Jesus’ court if Isaiah is talking about himself or someone else.

It's so exciting to talk with people who are spiritually curious about Jesus. Who might say they are not religious. searching but unconnected. They are everywhere.

I want you to note that all this is going on for Philip in a desert. An out of the way place. It’s a reminder that the greatest of missionaries have gone to out of the way places for God. James Hudson Taylor wen to China and was seen as a pioneer who sought to be culturally sensitive, adopting local dress etc and so provide a strong platform to engage people with the Gospel without hesitation.

This scripture today is a dramatic reminder that the Church is always to go out of its way to reach others with the Good news of Jesus Christ. No church buildings to hide in. NO Church as we want it. No comfortable group of supporters to depend on - we are to be accessible to those who are strangers to God’s love and as required go to places which others may see as inhospitable or barren.

It's never enough for a church to welcome people into our services. We need to also go onto their turf.

We need to help them grow as followers of Jesus never thinking that attendance at church alone will cut the mustard – it won’t. People need to come here and meet with Jesus and we have to make sure we don’t get in the way.

Like Philip we need to introduce curious people to Jesus - not lock him up in private sanctuaries.

And what good news Philip had to share! He was able to take that passage (ISAIAH 53) about a silent, passive Saviour and point the man to his sins and need for God to rescue him. He was able to tell how Jesus perfectly filled that role for him, died and rose from the dead to conquer his sins and bring him to eternal life. That singular passage and question about it was the gateway for Philip to expand on everything that God had promised and done. Through Philip, God met this man where he was and brought him to where he needed to be.

So once Philip had introduced the Ethiopian to Jesus this man was converted and baptised. Both Philip and the Ethiopian went their different ways. That said the Ethiopian would be the first person to then go home and share the good news of Jesus in Africa.

Here is a pattern for healthy Church life; we intentionally grow as followers of the Lord Jesus who in turn introduce others to become followers of Jesus and they in turn play their part in introducing others to Jesus. Only a Church which is a reproducing church will be a growing Church. All other approaches may be attractive for some but often prove to be spiritually sterile in their outcomes.

God may not tell you and me to go hang out by a parked chariot or a taxi rank and eavesdrop waiting for an opportunity to speak. That was how it was for Philip. But he sends people into our lives with spiritual needs that must be met. He sends people in our families, in our jobs, in our neighbourhoods who need to have someone explain to them what God has done. He often meets people where they are through you and me. You get to share God’s love and truth with those around you. That’s exactly what Church is about from the days of Philip to our homeland in 2024.

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord of our lives, we come before you with thanks – that you have protected and guided us through this past week. Receive our prayers we pray, guiding our hearts into your ways and thoughts.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Sustaining Father, thank you for America’s decision to help our neighbours in Ukraine resist the aggressive forces they face, which we prayed for back in February.

- Please give wisdom to those utilising military resources, that they may be effective in ending the aggression, and please help those distributing humanitarian aid to be efficient and effective.

- We pray this too as aid reaches the desperate in Gaza – that it will do the greatest good and that people will share rather than seize what’s available.

- Please strengthen those in the medical and caring professions who seek to alleviate suffering, both physical and mental in these war-torn areas, as well as in Sudan – alongside and through them may you draw close to the broken-hearted and the fearful, mending lives and minds in the peace of your embrace.

- We lift up to you families whose livelihoods and homes have been devastated by flooding in Burundi, just one example to the impact climate change is having. Please strengthen the resolve of politicians and business leaders to actively meet the emissions targets they have agreed on, rather than slide away from that responsibility. This is your world Father – please open hearts across the nations to heed how it should best be stewarded.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Saviour Jesus, we bring to you our neighbours and friends who are not yet in relationship with you.

- Please lead and guide us to be brave in stepping out for you, in our conversations, in our hospitality, in going beyond our personal comfort zone so that others come to understand what you are like and ultimately receive your saving love in their hearts.

- Help us discover ways of reaching those who don’t feel comfortable in church, help us establish connections as we venture onto other people’s ‘turf’, rather than staying with the familiar.

- We thank you for the success and safety of Messy Church yesterday and pray that you help the relationships established with young families to deepen. Please give fresh vision to the Messy Church Team about how best to develop this ministry.

- Please, Lord, give wisdom to those who are involved in the selection procedure for the Children and Families worker we long for

- We also pray for the staff and pupils of Bishop Wilson School, that they may may grow in their knowledge of you and be seen as a beacon of good care and education in our community.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Sanctifying Spirit, may we be grow together as a worshipping community which is alert to Your leading and guidance.

- Help us support one another in love, and help the pastoral team to work effectively so that no-one in our community is left without practical and spiritual care.

- We lift up to you those in the FOLLOW group as, with candidates exploring confirmation, they deepen their understanding of the

good news and commit their lives more fully to you through the Alpha course. Give wisdom to John and others as they address the many genuine questions which are provoked by spiritual hunger. We pray that more in our congregations may hunger to know you better.

- We pray that you comfort those who are struggling with caring responsibilities, and those we know facing repeated challenges to their physical and mental health, mentioning in our hearts those known personally to us. …

- We lift up to you those facing the ending of earthly life and families coping with bereavement. May they discover in this time of loss that you are the God of compassion. Help us to draw alongside them with practical care, and we also ask that you help us to plant and nurture seeds of eternal life.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY: HEAR OUR PRAYER.

Surrounded as we are by buds bursting into leaf and vivid new flowers, we pray that our lives may more fully reflect that vibrancy, the breath, water and life of Father, Son and Spirit, to Your praise and glory.

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

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**