

# **St Mary's, Barton-upon-Humber: Readings, prayers and notices for the week May 10-17**

## **Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Almighty God,  
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death  
and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:  
grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires,  
so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect;  
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

or

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.

**Readings:** Acts 7.55-60; Psalm 31.1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2.2-10; John 14.1-14

## **Meditation**

I suspect most of us know at least some of the Gospel reading, not from Easter 5 but from the Service for the Burial of the Dead – and this year of all years it's a shame that the reading doesn't continue as far as the line '*Peace I give you,*' particularly since I'd come up with a neat little homily about the words for 'peace' and for 'handing over/betrayal' being almost identical in Jesus' own language. However, that one will have to wait for another year....

Instead we have a speech by Jesus which for a long time I've shied away from at funerals, since there's a faint flavour of exclusion about it: '*No one comes to the Father except through me,*' said in the setting of a funeral for someone whose attachment to the Christian faith was fairly loose *almost* sounds like a threat, all but undermining the reassuring '*In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places.*' earlier in the lesson. To a grieving family, the words '*No one comes to the Father except through me*' sound more like a particularly aggressive bouncer at a venue – '*f you want to get in, you'll have to get past me first, pal*' than the Lord of Life

It's passage full of hostages to fortune, as it happens. '*If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it*' is a good one to ponder as well. Does it mean, 'Dear Jesus, please send me a new car' (or indeed a new vaccine)? And if it doesn't, what does it mean? Even the (by comparison) straightforward '*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*' is a fairly mind-boggling quote to handle. John is a Gospel we either love (even if we don't get it) or dread.

I remember a lecturer of mine 40 years ago warning us off taking John's Gospel in the wrong way. By the time the fourth Gospel appears there's no shortage of reliable accounts of Jesus' life, plus some bits and pieces from Paul to add a bit of extra ballast on the earliest Christian years. No, this isn't (if you like) yet another Jesus Tribute Band performing the same numbers, it's doing something rather different. It seems to assume people will know the bare facts of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection and doesn't feel the need to tread that ground again. Instead John wants to equip his readers with a sense of what it all means. Reading John has more in common than reading (difficult) poetry or understanding art or music than it does with reading a railway timetable. 'Who is Jesus?' asks John.

Perhaps if we get the idea that John is trying to get us to respond, to ask ourselves who Jesus is and why he matters we'll get on with him better. Perhaps John is more mirror than road-map. And once we get that into our heads, things start to add up more easily.

It's this teasing, almost playful quality about John which can make him opaque, frustrating and (if we're honest) rather irritating. He doesn't seem to come out with straightforward answers but (in the good old Jewish style) tends to answer our questions with other questions. '*Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?*'

What happens if we take that lighter approach to 'I am the Way...'? He invites his hearers to see him differently, not as the Galilean preacher, but as what the philosophers are seeking for, that is Truth; what the Jews, with their awareness that there is one fundamental gift from God, who breathed it into Adam's nostrils, that is, Life; and even picks up on those who describe their search for meaning as a journey, that is, the Way.

Jesus isn't the ultimate Bouncer, then, if we follow this way of reading John; rather it's something like this: 'If you're longing to serve Truth, or find meaning, or tread the way to the heart of the universe, if you desperately want to know what life in all its fullness is — come here, and welcome.'

Immigrants to the United States, often wretched, often fleeing persecution, often unable to speak English, would take comfort in the words on the Statue of Liberty:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

That is the Spirit of 'I am the Way' and it has more in common with '*Come unto me all you that travail and are heavy laden and I will give you rest*' than with the humourless guard checking your papers are in order before grudgingly letting you through the gate he's so jealously protecting.

What is '*If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it*' but an invitation so to enter into the heart of God that what we long for is what he longs for as well. Not a Santa-list, but Christ asking us to join the dance of the Trinity!

And '*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*' is the reassurance that the Christ who has come to seek us and bring us home is of the same mind and heart as the one who will receive us when we finally arrive at journey's end. We are not brought by Christ into the presence of a fearful tyrant, there to beg for mercy – what we see of God in Christ, the one who comes to retrieve the lost and the broken, is what we find in God too, the one who longs to have us back with him.

John isn't an easy read, and there's layer after layer in him. But let's not be intimidated; hear instead the playful, teasing voice asking, 'Come on, what do you think? Don't be frightened – I am good news beyond your imagining; come and play - and find me.'

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## For your prayers

**Church:** Chaplains in the NHS. Christian Aid The Church in Kenya.

**World:** Health workers, all those involved in keeping essential services running. Our own political leaders. Those charged with peace-keeping and peace-making. The governments & peoples of China, Syria and the Middle East, North Africa. All seeking to resolve the issues surrounding protection of the environment, of infection control and of migrancy.

**Our Community:** The MU and the Ladies' Group.

**Those in need:** Those whose lives or livelihoods are endangered by Coronavirus. Those who fear the prospect of isolation. All who live in areas of conflict or tension; the homeless, the poor, the sick, the enslaved, the hungry and the abused. Victims of terrorism.

**Those for whom our prayers are asked:** Melissa Milbourn, Julie Newton, Penny Archer, Vicky Page-Chestney, Kate Eaton, Mike Page-Chestney, Brenda Skinner, Henry Farrow, Stephen Wilkinson, Joyce Gibson, Janet Petch, David Witter, Sally, Abby, Jan, Nell.

**Departed:** David Redrobe, Kathleen Windle, Rosalind Ellerby, Lillian Bratton. Those who have died as a result of COVID-19 infection, especially those who work in the caring and medical communities.

## Next Sunday – the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17.22-31; Psalm 66.7-18; 1 Peter 3.13-22; John 14.15-21

## Updates

### Daily Hope phone line

A Church of England initiative, Daily Hope offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line. The line – which is available 24 hours a day **on 0800 804 8044** – has been set up particularly with those unable to join online church services during the period of restrictions in mind. It's an 0800 number, so landline calls will usually not cost you anything.

**Christian Aid Week** starts today, and the usual fund-raising like the Humber Bridge Cross can't take place. Like many charities (including the Diocese of Lincoln) the suspension of normal life is financially challenging (ie, there's not enough coming in to sustain the work). If you'd like to make a donation it can be made online, or envelopes marked Christian Aid can be dropped off via David's letter-box.

**Magazines** for May have been printed and a stack of spare magazines will be found in the porch, along with various other bits and pieces, so if you would like a copy, do help yourself and either 'owe' us or drop the money through the Vicarage letterbox.

**As talk of relaxing the lock-down continues,** rest assured that as soon as we can open up, we shall. It's likely that the first development will be to permit us to open for private prayer and perhaps for number-limited funerals. Mercifully, a lot of discretion has now been handed over to diocesan bishops and I have a great deal of confidence in the pastoral sensitivity and straightforward common-sense of our bishops here in Lincoln!

**Foodbank** is still operating, but unable to take donations in the usual manner. We are accepting cash donations to help run things slightly differently during the present situation.

**Do keep in your prayers** Janet Petch, Joyce Gibson and David Witter, who have suffered health reverses in recent days.

**With support from Barton Town Council and others,** the Ropewalk is providing meals to the elderly of Barton. Meals will be provided on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday and delivered to the door/outhouse/shed - wherever they can put it to avoid contact. To book a meal ring the day before on 01652 660380. The service is free although donations will be accepted.

**Those in need.** Please help us keep our intercessions up to date and leave requests for prayer – either by email to david.rowett@lincoln.anglican.org, or the phone, or even a note through my door, and encourage others likewise.

## Coronavirus Provisions

The provisions on the BBC and Barton FM as previously listed continue. If you know anyone who'd like a copy of the weekly bulletin, let David know.

Our websites and FB pages contains details of how to join others online for prayer, worship, study, and community life. The Diocesan Website in particular carries material of all sorts, and our own website carries a number of resources also.

See: [www.lincoln.anglican.org](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org)  
[www.stmarysbarnton.org.uk](http://www.stmarysbarnton.org.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/StMarysChurchBarton](https://www.facebook.com/StMarysChurchBarton)

## Meanwhile:

It was good to see VE Day being commemorated in so many places (and all observing social distancing). It's worth remembering that this marked the end of war in Europe, but another four months lay in store for those in the Far East, and we're all uncomfortably aware of how that was brought to a close. Continue in your prayers for peace, then, and remember especially those who have agonising life-or-death decisions to make as part of their callings.

**Those of a liturgical bent** may be wondering why I left out a local saint last week. I hold my hands up and confess, I'd forgotten St Augustine Webster, Prior of the Charterhouse on the Isle of Axholme, executed on May 4 1535, one of the first to suffer death in the century-long politico-religious wars which convulsed England. In the Church of England's calendar (and Rome's) May 4<sup>th</sup> is set aside for remembering the martyrs of the Reformation period, but the Lincoln calendar specifically recalls Augustine Webster on the anniversary of his martyrdom. May the Church always be fearful of becoming a tool of the powerful.

And on Wednesday of this week, the CofE remembers a favourite of mine of whom most will not have heard, **Gregory Dix**. Dix, who died in 1952, was an Anglican priest, Benedictine monk and scholar who is chiefly remembered for one book, *'The Shape of the Liturgy'* which shaped the way a couple of generations of clergy understood the Eucharist (and, for a 70 year old book, still has important things to say today). The book contains a wonderful passage on the Eucharist beginning 'Was ever another command so obeyed?' (it's on FB from Tuesday, or it's on <https://www.frnsimon.uk/dom-gregory-dix-was-ever-another-command-so-obeyed/> )

**And Matthias the Apostle?** We all know the story of how he was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, which leads me to wonder whether he is the patron saint of raffles, lotteries and lucky tickets.....