

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

May 2026

Weekly Worship Resources

03 May – There’s a place for you

Peter encourages Christian communities facing persecution that they are specially called by God and given a new identity as ‘living stones’, built together like a new temple, supported by Jesus the cornerstone. The believers should keep on trusting and praising God who has shown them light and mercy.

Like the church in 1 Peter, we might question our place in the world and how we navigate life and all its complexities. This week, we learn that even amid our doubts and fears, God has a place for us.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 5 Year A: **1 Peter 2.2-10**; Psalm 31.1-5,15-16; Acts 7.55-60; John 14.1-14

1 Peter 2.2-10 [NIV]

²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The living Stone and a chosen people

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.’

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’

⁸ and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Thought for the week

If you’ve ever seen the musical *West Side Story* you might recall the wonderful song, ‘Somewhere’, which repeats the line ‘There’s a place for us’. The musical is based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, a story about two young people from warring social groups who fall in love. Both feel out of place with where they’ve come from and face further alienation and rejection because of their desire to be together. The words of that song are a wonderful summary of the Christian call to live differently. It says, ‘We’ll find a new way of living, we’ll find a way of forgiving ... Somewhere’.

In one of today’s lectionary passages, 1 Peter 2, Peter is speaking of the Church being a special people, set apart for God. But Peter starts this passage by reminding us that the one we are built upon – our cornerstone, Jesus – was rejected by humans. From his birth, through his ministry and to his death, Jesus wasn’t given a ‘place’ to be. He was rejected by the religious authorities, by the Roman rulers, and he was even rejected by those closest to him.

Peter reminds us that Jesus overcame that rejection to become the cornerstone on which the Church is built, and that it is built with living stones – that means us! Because of Jesus’ rejection, death and

resurrection, we can now be God's special people, set apart, together. There's a place for us!

This also means that anyone who faces rejection or loneliness from the world can find a place to belong in God's church. That might feel like a challenge to us. As with the gangs in *West Side Story*, we can prefer to be with people who we know or seem most like us, or we can assume that those from other social groups won't want to be around us.

God's church is made up of all of us, misfits who follow the way of this countercultural messiah. We are 'God's own people'. We are called to proclaim God's works and demonstrate his grace, mercy and love. Perhaps as we think about the call to be this chosen people, we might remember the words of 'Somewhere' and consider how we might create a place where there is space for all of us, and all who hunger for belonging.

Some questions to consider:

- Where do you know there's a place for you? Draw a picture or talk to someone.
- Who do you know who often feels rejected? How might you encourage and include them?
- What can we learn from Jesus in how he faced rejection?



A prayer of praise

Thank you, precious Lord, that we are called to be living stones. Confident knowing our place, and generous enough to go out and live our lives serving others, helping them to find their place in you. Amen

10 May – Sharing your hope

Peter encourages persecuted Christians to keep doing good, even when faced with evil. They should replace any fear with readiness to gently explain the reason for their hope in Jesus, who also suffered to bring salvation.

This week we'll explore how, with the Holy Spirit as our advocate, comforter and encourager, we are strengthened to be faithful witnesses, sharing our hope in Jesus with others.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 6 Year A: **1 Peter 3.13-22**; Psalm 66.8-20; Acts 17.22-31; John 14.15-21

1 Peter 3:13-22 [NIV]

¹³Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It

saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Thought for the week: What are you hoping for?

'What are you hoping for?' is a question often asked at the beginning of a new year, season of life, or a new experience. We might look ahead and ponder what we are hoping is going to happen. This is often about our expectations for external situations – I'm hoping my team win the league; I'm hoping this job will be good for my career; I'm hoping for sunshine on my holiday.

But Peter is talking to the Early Church about an internal hope: something already deposited in them, which will give them the strength to keep going. There is no promise that external circumstances will change in the immediate future, but there is a promise that God's eternal hope – available through the saving work of Jesus – is already with them and can help them in this difficult time. In the Channel 4 TV series *Alone*, contestants are dropped miles apart from each other into the Canadian wilderness to see who can survive the longest. Some drop out due to physical circumstances, such as injury or ill health but, for most, the will to survive is about their mental perseverance. After several weeks living off wild berries and fish, sleeping in shelters made from branches and listening to bears stalk around them in the middle of the night, most of the contestants hit a low point. At this juncture, many of them choose to quit the competition, often because they miss people they love and struggle to know how to continue, completely alone. However, a few who keep going often do so because they are spurred on by the thought of their family and friends back home. They want to make them proud; they want to show them that they can persevere and overcome the challenge; they want to be a stronger person when they return to those relationships. The harsh reality of the external environment they are in doesn't change, but their internal focus is strengthened.

This is the encouragement that Peter offers to the Church: although circumstances are incredibly tough, focusing on Christ's authority

allows them to have hope, and also to practise respect for those who persecute them. A reminder of who God is and what God has put within them brings a change in how they can deal with the world around them.

As we look at our own circumstances and ask, 'What are we hoping for?' can we invite God to reveal the hope that is in us, through Christ, and ask God to transform our perspectives so that we can keep going? Knowing the hope we already have will help us to share it with others.



A prayer of confession

Lord God, sometimes we hold faith and hope to ourselves. We act as if faith is something private, to be held close, frightened to share it with others. Forgive us, Lord, and may hope replace fear.

We fail to notice the people suffering around us, desperate for your love in their lives. We ignored their pain, too busy with our own concerns. Forgive us, Lord, and may hope replace fear.

We forget that a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. We ignore those who are ready to support us, scared to let them help us in our difficulties. Forgive us, Lord, and may hope replace fear.

Assurance of forgiveness

Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

Today, as we are truly penitent before him, he brings us to God the Father who forgives us.

He renews us in his all-encompassing love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

17 May – Support through suffering

Peter reassures the Early Church communities that Christ is with them and cares for them in their suffering. Believers should be humble, resist evil and give their anxieties to God. Those who are steadfast in their faith will ultimately be rewarded.

Today's passages remind us that whatever we face, we can withstand testing times with support from God and those around us.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Easter 7 Year A: **1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11**; Psalm 68.1-10,32-35; Acts 1.6-14; John 17.1-11

1 Peter 4:12-14 [NIV]

Suffering for Being a Christian

¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1 Peter 5:6-11 [NIV]

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you

and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.



Thought for the week

Several weeks ago, thousands of runners undertook the London Marathon. Many raised money for good causes, some ran in costume and the elite runners, who set off at the front of the field, competed for a prize and a potential course record. For everyone involved it will have been the culmination of a lengthy process of planning, training and monitoring their nutrition, water and rest levels.

A common theme in the stories posted after these events is the pain and difficulty of the run itself balanced against those things that have helped individuals to push through and keep going to the end of the race. Some share of a hardship they have overcome personally, which has led them to pursue the goal of running a marathon. Others

talk of the charitable cause that they are raising money for and how the importance of making a difference for those in need helps them to push on and keep going to the end.

Most often, however, runners mention how important it has been to have their family or friends waiting to cheer at specific points on the route and how general members of the crowd offering their support are what spurs the runners on. Often those who line the race route will call out the names or some type of identifier of those running past to encourage them.

This is similar to what we see in many sports where records are usually broken in the context of a race or competition environment. Athletes attest to the ambience of the event – often the crowd cheering and the energy that creates – as the reason why they could push themselves to achieve more than they might have managed in training.

In Peter's letter, he makes clear that he is unsurprised at the struggles his readers are going through and he is not suggesting that they can expect God to end these troubles. Instead, he encourages them to stand firm in their faith and to endure knowing that God is in control and will ultimately prevail and save them. As runners in the race of faith, perhaps we should also consider whether we are looking for encouragement to keep going or for ways to make the difficulties end? And are we aware of the struggles of those running alongside us? We might want to consider how we might be more like the crowd on marathon day, cheering and supporting others to keep going as they face struggles. What might that look like for us in our church and in caring for those in everyday life?

A gathering prayer

Almighty God, thank you that you see us and know us.

Thank you that, when we struggle, we are following in Jesus' footsteps.

Help us to give our burdens to you this day and to give you the glory.
Amen

A prayer of approach

Lord God, this day, we acknowledge we each have our own troubles, and know you didn't promise us a life without trials.
We come before you, acknowledging your presence.
We cast our cares on you because you care for us. Amen

24 May – God's gift

Paul writes to the church in Corinth who were in danger of thinking they were 'God's gift' to the Church – believing their spiritual gifts made them special. Paul explains that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts to God's people, but they are to be used to serve the common good. The believers should be united as one body in Christ, no matter their background or status.

This week we consider how we can honour all the gifts God gives and use them for the benefit of others.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Pentecost Year A: Acts 2.1-21;
Psalm 104.24-34,35b; Numbers 11.24-30; **1 Corinthians 12.3b-13**;
John 20.19-23

1 Corinthians 12:3-13 [NIV]

³... no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another

speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Unity and Diversity in the Body

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – x and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.



Thought for the week

Every summer hundreds of thousands of people prepare for a new season of Fantasy Football League – a game that allows them to pretend that they are a football manager with their own team for a season. With a pretend budget of £100 million, Fantasy Football participants are invited to select 15 footballers (valued by the makers of the game) from any team in the Premier League. Throughout the season, as Premier League football matches are played in real life, Fantasy Football managers earn points for their chosen players who have scored goals, assisted a goal or kept a clean sheet. They lose points for yellow and red cards and goals conceded.

As these Fantasy Football managers pick their players, they realise that you can't just fill your team with all the international megastars – these players are priced accordingly and you will run out of budget pretty quickly. The key to the game seems to be finding value where others don't see it – to appreciate which players from a lower-ranked teams might still earn big points.

As we look at the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians, we might be tempted to rank or prioritise them, thinking that some are more important and others less important. However, Paul's focus is that we are one body with gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit and that all these gifts are important. Just like a sports team, we need players who can bring different skills and techniques for where they are positioned in order for the whole team to play well.

Perhaps for us as individuals the question isn't whether we have any of the gifts ourselves but whether we are using the ones that we do have for the good of the whole church? It doesn't matter whether we feel like we are a million-pound player; the body of Christ is blessed when every person plays their part.

A prayer of adoration

Lord, on this day of Pentecost, you gave your people miraculous gifts. We thank you that the same Spirit is here with us now. We gaze on you with adoration, hardly daring to believe that you can give us these same gifts today. And yet, deep within, we feel that glow reflecting you. We bless you, Lord, for we are indeed blessed. Amen

A sending our prayer

Jesus, grow your gifts in us so that we might work for the good of those around us. Please give us the courage to share our gifts with others, knowing that all good things have come from you. Amen

31 May – Sent: With you always

Jesus has summoned his disciples to a mountain in Galilee. He tells them that all authority is his and that they should make disciples all over the world, baptizing them and teaching them to obey his commandments. He promises to be with them always.

This week we explore what it means to be sent by Jesus and how we can know him with us as we embark on his mission to all.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Trinity Sunday Year A: Genesis 1.1–2.4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13.11-13; **Matthew 28.16-20**

Matthew 28:16-20 [NIV]

The Great Commission

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”



Thought for the week

Have you ever had to send someone you care about off on a new adventure? Maybe a child who is starting a new school, going to university or taking a trip by themselves for the first time, or it could be seeing a spouse or close friend feel nervous as they start a new job.

We often feel emotions of empathy for what they are going through – excitement, nervousness or anxiety. We might feel like we want to go with them (even if we'd just get in the way!) and, of course, we want to hear regular updates about how it's going.

In Matthew 28, Jesus is sending his disciples out – he loves them and has spent three years teaching and guiding them so they will be ready for this mission. He can do this with confidence because he's spent three years training them to imitate him and follow in his ways. His parting instructions to 'go', 'make disciples' and 'baptise and teach' aren't stand-alone items on a checklist for the disciples. There is so much more to each of these actions, and the disciples understand what is required of them because they have been shown what to do – they have participated in Jesus' work and have been given opportunities to try it out and learn for themselves during the past three years of Jesus' ministry.

This is a bit like how we don't wave off our children as they go to university and say 'remember to cook dinner for yourself', expecting them to teach themselves how to cook for the first time when they arrive. Hopefully, we have given them opportunities to learn some cooking skills at home, where they will have had some practice before they are fully responsible for this aspect of their lives.

Jesus is commissioning his disciples at the point they have been apprenticed to do all of the things he is asking of them. It might feel like a big next step to be without him by their side, but he knows they are ready and can do it.

However, Jesus also has an advantage over parents or friends sending off loved ones. He can assure them, 'I am with you always', knowing that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit and able to know his presence with them wherever they go. Jesus sends them out – and sends us out – but is also able to promise to be with them through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to the end of the age.

Prayers of intercession

Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank you that you are a 'can do' God of positivity and power, and entrust to you all the concerns on our hearts today.

We pray for the people in all places in the world where there is conflict and tension; and for the people of our own nation living with division, hardship, climatic challenges and suffering.

Empower the peace makers, resource the aid workers, and unite us all with the courage to believe that together we can make a difference.

We pray for young people throughout the world whose life-choices are impacted by circumstances and situations beyond their control. We pray for young people in our country sitting exams, and making choices for their future, that they might feel positive about their abilities and about themselves, and share their aspirations, creativity and beauty with their little corner of the world.

Empower their teachers and mentors, resource their schools and places of learning, and unite us all with the courage to believe that together we can make a difference.

We pray for our families, our friends, our church, and our community, as we live out the adventure you have called each of us to, with the challenges, the opportunities, the privileges and the responsibilities.

We remember especially those who are ill, those who are grieving, those who have lost their homes, those who are struggling to fit in.

Empower those who are in positions of influence, resource those who are carers, encouragers and providers, and unite us all with the courage to believe that together we can make a difference. Amen

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