



FEAST OF
SAINT STEPHEN
August 2, 2020

St. Stephen's is a Christian community in the making.

At the intersection of what was and what will be, we invite you to gather with us around prayer, food, and the simple conviction that nothing is wasted in God's economy.

All are welcome at St. Stephen's.

Whether you come with great faith or great doubt,
regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation or marital status,
whatever your financial status or housing situation –
we hope you can find a home with us
as we explore together what it means to follow Jesus.

Ministry Team

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ST. STEPHEN'S

ANGLICAN CHURCH, MAPLE

Preparation

*Whether you participate in worship in a small group or alone,
know that you are joined together with the whole St. Stephen's community
and the wider church as we offer our prayers and praise to God.*

*Consider setting a candle or two out in the space you're using for worship,
as a reminder of God's presence. Light the candles, and say:*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

Almighty God,
to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hidden.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Seek the Lord

Seek the Lord while he wills to be found;
call upon him when he draws near.
Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the evil ones their thoughts;
And let them turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion,
and to our God, for he will richly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
For as rain and snow fall from the heavens
and return not again, but water the earth,
Bringing forth life and giving growth,
seed for sowing and bread for eating,
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth;
it will not return to me empty;
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed,
and prosper in that for which I sent it. *(Isaiah 55.6–11)*

Collect of the Day

Grant us grace, O Lord,
that like Stephen we may learn to love even our enemies
and seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt;
through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.

Amen.

First Reading: Jeremiah 26:1-9, 12-15

At the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, this word came from the LORD: Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word. It may be that they will listen, all of them, and will turn from their evil way, that I may change my mind about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings. You shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently—though you have not heeded— then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.

The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, 'You shall die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant"?' And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, 'It is the LORD who sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will change his mind about the disaster that he has pronounced against you. But as for me, here I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.'

Psalm 31:1-7, 16

In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me; make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold;
for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.

Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, for you are my tower of strength.

Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth.

I hate those who cling to worthless idols, and I put my trust in the LORD.

I will rejoice and be glad because of your steadfast love; for you have seen my affliction; you know my distress.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Second Reading: Acts 6:8-7:2a, 51c-60

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.' And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked him, 'Are these things so?' And Stephen replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me. You are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.'

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Gospel: Matthew 23:34-39

Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."'

Reflection – Jeff+

*The following reflection can be watched online [by clicking here](#)
or can be read in full below.*

*Please feel free to engage with either or both options,
and know that whatever you choose
will enable you to fully participate in the worship of our community.*

The feast of St. Stephen, which we celebrate today, is a bit challenging. As far as feasts go, it's a bit depressing – because St. Stephen is admired and celebrated as the very first Christian martyr. The book of Acts tells the story of

his powerful and unrelenting preaching, which leads to him being hauled before the religious authorities and stoned to death.

There is much to admire in St. Stephen. His conviction. His passion. His astonishing faith, for which he gives up his life. His compassion, as he prays for his attackers even as he is stoned to death. His keen awareness of the presence of God even in times of trouble, as he has a vision of Jesus even as he is being persecuted.

One of the things that strikes me most about St. Stephen is his ability to be present to the moment he has been given, and to model integrity even in circumstances that might seem hopeless.

Sometimes we might imagine that health or stability are rewards for a godly life. Or that if we just pray enough or are pious enough, God might intervene to remedy our crises. Heal the illness. Provide a new job. Mend broken relationships.

But it just doesn't work that way. People who do everything right still have things fall apart. Disaster strikes. Frail bodies fail. Relationships flounder. Businesses close. And when we reach the end of the road of conventional wisdom, we meet the limitations of our own understanding. We discover mystery. And, I believe, we discover God. In Hebrew tradition, there has always been room for conventional wisdom – we find this in places like Proverbs – that helps us to navigate the known world in predictable ways. This is good, but it only takes us so far. Because sometimes everything falls apart, and there's no apparent rhyme or reason. And so, alongside this conventional wisdom, there has always been an alternative stream of wisdom found in texts like Ecclesiastes. And it's also all through the teachings of Jesus.

This alternative wisdom points to the existing structures, and says that it's all temporary. Empty. Transitory at best. That when it really comes down to it, all we're given is this moment and the insistence that God is with us in it. This alternative wisdom asks us to be willing to give ourselves over to the moment, to be really and truly present to God and to those around us, because there we find life that survives even death. We find that God can fill even the emptiness, and help us to find meaning in things that are painful and wrong. Not because God has willed these things to happen, but because we come to discover that we haven't been abandoned, and that God continues to desire good for us.

And so Stephen speaks truth even when it costs him his life. He doesn't try to hide, or change the circumstances. Aware of God's presence with him, he sees Jesus in a grand vision and also in the very faces of his accusers and attackers. He manages to take a story that is essentially about senseless violence, and show us something about goodness and love and forgiveness. And the assurance of God's abiding presence through it all.

In a great many ways, I hope we're nothing like St. Stephen. I hope we're not ever put in circumstances where we have to show his courage or faith or passion. I hope we are given kinder, simpler days. But, in other ways, I believe that we are on our way to finding ways to live a little bit like him. To be a community that is willing to give ourselves away.

May we know the value and depth of every moment, no matter the challenges it brings. May we speak the truth we've been given, in a way that shows love and compassion for those around us. May we so love God that we hold fast to our faith, even in times when that faith is inconvenient or unpopular.

And when we come to the end of conventional wisdom, when we're at the end of our rope and it all falls apart, may we know the love and peace of God which pass all understanding.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again
to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of the People

*As a community of people made one in Christ, we offer our prayers to God for ourselves,
our community, and the world. Feel free to adapt these prayers as you like,
and to make use of the spaces indicated to add your own prayers and petitions.*

Let us pray together to the Lord, saying, "Lord, hear our prayer."

Lord, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we thank you for your many gifts to us,
for the love which brings us together,
for the earth which provides for our needs,
for the new life you have given us in Jesus Christ, (for . . .).

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray to you for our Christian family (especially for . . .)
and for grace to grow in your love.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray to you for our world, for all its cares and needs,
and for all who lead us and care for us, (especially . . .)

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray to you for those in need, for the sick and the lonely,
for the hurt and the frightened, and for those who live without hope (especially . . .).

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those we love who have died, that you will surround them with your care and love
(especially . . .)

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for one another, asking you to bless us, our friends, and relatives.
Bless the places where we work, and bless our home and our life together.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us now name before God those for whom we offer our personal prayers.

*A period of silence is kept as we offer silent prayer
and listen for the leading of the Spirit.*

Let us remember before God our selfish ways, the things we have done wrong,
the sorrows we have caused, the love we have not shown.

Most merciful God, forgive us our sins against you and against each other.

**Strengthen us to overcome our weaknesses,
that we may live in love as you would have us live,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

Lord, you have called us to serve you.

**Grant that we may walk in your presence
and experience the present truth of resurrection:
your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds,
your strength in our wills, until, at the end of our journey,
we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

And now, as our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

**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 this day our daily bread.

**And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

May joy and nothing less find us on our way.

May we be blessed and be a blessing.

And may light guide us, and countless others, all the way home.

Amen.

May we go in peace, have courage, hold on to what is good,
return no one evil for evil, strengthen the faint-hearted,
support the weak, help the suffering, honor everyone, love and serve God,
rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

MUSIC

Following are several hymns that you may want to sing and/or listen to.
Music and texts, as well as sample links, are provided.

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service



1 Lord, whose love in hum-ble ser - vice bore the weight of hu-man need,
2 Still your chil - dren wan-der home-less; still the hun - gry cry for bread;
3 As we wor - ship, grant us vi - sion, till your love's re - veal-ing light
4 Called by wor - ship to your ser - vice, forth in your dear name we go,



who up - on the cross, for - sak - en, worked your mer-cy's per - fect deed:
still the cap - tives long for free - dom; still in grief we mourn our dead.
in its height and depth and great-ness dawns up - on our quick-ened sight,
to the child, the youth, the a - ged, love in liv - ing deeds to show;



we, your ser - vants, bring the wor - ship not of voice a - lone, but heart;
As you, Lord, in deep com-pas - sion healed the sick and freed the soul,
mak - ing known the needs and bur - dens your com-pas - sion bids us bear,
hope and health, good-will and com - fort, coun - sel, aid, and peace we give,



con - se - crat - ing to your pur - pose ev - 'ry gift which you im - part.
by your Spir - it send your pow - er to our world to make it whole.
stir - ring us to ar - dent ser - vice, your a - bun - dant life to share.
that your ser - vants, Lord, in free - dom may your mer - cy know and live.

Text: Albert F. Bayly, 1901–1984
Music: BEACH SPRING, *The Sacred Harp*, Philadelphia, 1844
Text © Oxford University Press

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqpeGrFud8M&t=35s>

Seek Ye First



1 Seek ye___ first the___ king - dom of God
2 We do not live by___ bread___ a - lone,
3 Ask and it shall be___ giv - en un - to you,



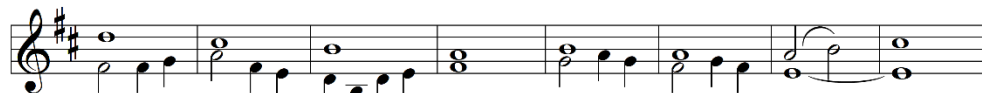
and God's___ right - eous - ness,_____
but by___ ev - 'ry___ word_____
seek and___ you shall___ find;_____



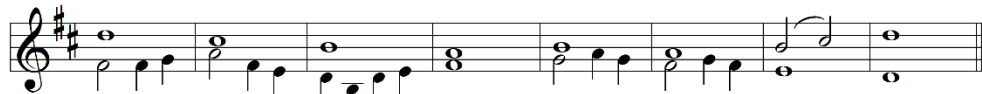
and all these things shall be add - ed un - to you.
that pro - ceeds from the mouth of___ God.
knock and the door shall be o - pened un - to you.



Al - le - lu, al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LMQfOp9w8k>

For other hymns, check out:

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



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