

This short act of worship has been produced for you by
Revd Valentin Dedji.

If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few
moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would
normally be sharing with others in church and pray for
them as they pray for you.

Welcome and Invocation

Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness (Singing the Faith 51)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGNrtJsuEM8>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)

Opening prayers:

Almighty God, as we gather in this virtual community of
friends, brothers and sisters, we thank you for the
precious gift of a new day and of a new opportunity to
start afresh with you. Therefore, wherever we may be
right now, in our kitchen or in our living room, fill us with
your divine presence. We are grateful that, of your own
free goodness and mercy you are continually recreating

and transforming us. Therefore, may you give us a new hope and a new passion to live according to your kingdom's values. Guard us by your love and, in your wisdom, keep us in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen!**

Confession of Sins:

Lord Jesus Christ: We confess that in an age of twisted values, we have lost the truth we need. In sophisticated language, we have justified our greed. By our struggle for possessions we have robbed the poor and the weak – Hear our cry Lord and heal our nations:

For communities divided by the walls of class and race, hear our cry and heal our nations. Above all, Lord Jesus Christ, may the Power of your love and your forgiveness bring us back to you as your friends and partners in your Mission wherever you have placed us. Thank you for your amazing Grace. Alleluiah. Amen!

Amen. Thanks be to God

Today's reading: Matthew 6: 25-34

Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[e]?”

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Time to Reflect

I still remember that in 2003, I had the privilege of being invited to give a talk at the Headquarters of the AACC, the

'**All Africa Conference of Churches**' in Nairobi, Kenya. It was at the occasion of a symposium organised to reflect on the topic: '**Understanding the meaning of human life today in the Third millennium**'. One of the main objectives of the said symposium was to lay down the theoretical and the ethical foundation for what was then a big vision for an **African Renaissance**. The audience was made off Church Leaders, young entrepreneurs, millionaire business men and women competing to invest in Africa. There were also many ambassadors from Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Soul-Searching questions

The key questions then were and still are: As a Christian, what's the meaning of my life in this complex and multi-faceted world? Why are we so worried and confused? How can we finally find a solution to our frantic pursuit of happiness? What is the purpose of my life?

The challenge of dealing with such soul-searching questions was that, there was a temptation to apply some complex socio-political and theological theories that could easily make people more confused.

Instead, I chose to deal with the said topic from a practical and spiritual angle.

The changing Scenes of Life...

So I started by telling them the following story. We may call it a parable. It goes like this:

There was a rich man who had a huge art gallery. And he had a terrific son. The Son would go in the streets to interact with people who were from all sorts of social backgrounds. And one day the Son befriended a beggar. He started to see this beggar regularly, helping him to transform his life. He would describe His father's big house, and the paintings and all what his father did in his extended family. The beggar was really impressed by the humility of this young man. But one day, the young man stopped coming. Few days later, the beggar found out that the young man died suddenly. So he went and got himself some paper and a crayon. And he drew a portrait of that young man and he went to the home of the rich man. He gave the portrait to the watchman outside and said: 'Would you please give it to your boss because his son was very good to me, and I have drawn this portrait because I heard that he has an art gallery in the house.' The watchman looked at it and was rather bemused by it.

He sent the beggar away. But in fact, the watchman thought that, that was quite a nice gesture from the beggar. So he waited the right moment when one day the rich man was going out, and he told him how a beggar came with the said portrait of his son. The rich man took it. Nothing happened. Some years went by and the beggar found out that the rich man had passed away. An auction was going to take place in the deceased rich man's art gallery. He decided to get some nice clothing in order to squeeze in. He did! He walked around to see if his portrait of the young man was part of the items that were exhibited. The auctioneer came and bang the hammer to signal the beginning of the auction. The room was full of experts in art with their special lenses to examine which art work was genuine and which one was fake. There was a lot of excitement in the room. The auctioneer said that there was a condition left in the will of the deceased owner of the art gallery. The condition was that the portrait of the son should be the first one to be sold. There was a moment of groaning. Nobody bids on it. The beggar put his hands in his pocket and put a bid on it with the few coins he got. No counter offer, the hammer was bang, sold! He went to pick it up. As he was walking away, the gabble was bang again and the auctioneer said that there was a second condition. In the will, it was said that, whoever bid on the portrait of the Son, should get the whole art gallery!

Sunday, 9th August 2020

In the concluding remarks of my talk, I said to the audience: 'Ladies and gentlemen, when you get the Son, you get all the components of meanings in life!

It was wonderful to see the reaction of the audience. At the end of the talk, there was one ambassador from the Middle East who came and grabbed my hand and said to me: 'Dr Dedji, when I get to heaven, I am going to ask the Lord Jesus, if you and I could be roommates?' My wife did not like that suggestion. I said to the ambassador: 'Sir, when you get to heaven and you see the Lord Jesus Christ, you would not want anyone else as your roommate.' He kissed the back of my hand and said that I was right. And he walked away.

When we get the Son, and we sincerely let him take control of our life, we get the way, the truth and the light. We get all we need to understand the realities within and without. St Paul said: '**For me, to live is Christ...**' (Philippians 1:22).

Strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness

In our Gospel reading in Matthew 6: 25-34, Jesus was speaking to an anxiety-driven audience. They were worried about minute details of their daily life. How were they going to survive in the changing and challenging scenes of their daily life? Questions about their daily

bread, their clothing, their human dignity, their health issues and anxieties about what the future may hold for them; all these were driving them mad. Jesus' key strategy was to reassure his listeners. ***'Do not worry about anything'***!

To be honest, on a personal level, in the unpredictable and confusing situation that the whole world is currently going through, I confess that I cannot help but panic a little bit whenever a church' member or a member from our local community calls me on the phone to ask questions like: 'Do you think, it would be safe for me to allow my grand-children to come to visit me?', 'would it be safe for us to get the trial vaccine against the Corona Virus?', 'When are we going back to our church' building?' However, I learnt recently that in the Bible, the phrase, 'Do not worry' has been used 365 times! That would mean that God has reserved for us a word of reassurance and hope for each day throughout a whole year! The reality is that, I may not know what the future holds for me; but I do know who holds the future! That's why, instead of wasting our energy, worrying for a future that we cannot control, Jesus invites us to ***'strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to [us]'***. (Matthew 6: 33).

And that's why in a world where we search and long for something, someone who would provide answers to

many questions and guide us towards solutions to many problems, the Lord Jesus stands tall and says to me and to you,' 'Come to me, all who labour and I will give you peace'. He also says: ***'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God His righteousness, and everything else will be given to you'*** (Matthew 6: 33).

Practical Implications

As a matter of fact, when we start giving priority to 'seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness', there emerge many practical implications. In the hymn entitled ***'In an age of twisted values'*** (StF 703), the hymn writer Martin Leckbusch gives us a long list of challenges to deal with, in order to contribute (from a divine perspective) to the transformation of the community around us: He puts it like this:

In an age of twisted values
we have lost the truth we need;
in sophisticated language we have
justified our greed;
by our struggle for possessions
we have robbed the poor and weak -

We have built discrimination
on our prejudice and fear;
hatred swiftly turns to cruelty

if we hold resentments dear.
For communities are divided
by the walls of class and race

When our families are broken;
when our homes are full of strife;
when our children are bewildered,
when they lose their way in life;
when we fail to give the aged
all the care we know we should -

We who hear your word so often
choose so rarely to obey;
turn us from our wilful blindness,
give us truth to light our way.
In the power of your Spirit
come to cleanse us, make us new:

And the hymn writer concludes by pleading God to 'hear our cry and heal our nations till our nations honour his Holy name'.

I pray that today, in this city of London, among the clatter of voices around us, Jesus may help us to redirect our energies from self-centered worries to a more purpose driven life. Above all, may we have the clear assurance that: ***'Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because He***

lives, all fear is gone and life is worth living because He lives. Amen!

A time of prayer (trusting that others pray with us)

God of peace, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of all: We pray particularly so that through your grace and mercy, you may intervene in the major health and economic turmoil the whole world is going through now, due to the Corona virus.

We pray for all the key workers and the amazing NHS staff members who are constantly putting their lives at risk by caring daily for thousands of patients across the UK. We pray specifically for Nurses, Medical Doctors, Consultants, Para-Medics, Care Assistants, Social Service Officers, so that, in their tiredness and personal anxiety, they may here hear your voice saying to them: Do not be afraid: I am with you!

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

We pray Lord, for all who strive for justice and for our welfare: Teachers, Fire Brigade Officers, Children and Youth Workers, Civil Servants, Street Pastors, cleaners and rubbish collectors... May you Lord grant them your divine strength to carry out their duties with integrity and wisdom.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray that you may govern the hearts and minds of those in authority at the levels of Central and Local governments: We also pray for MPs and their special advisers. May you grant them your divine wisdom in these times where, even the best experts are themselves confused.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

Lord Jesus, we pray for all vulnerable women, young girls, men, children who are in abusive relationship. May you Lord intervene in order to bring release to those victims of human exploitation. We pray for the families in many nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of human cruelty and needless wars. May they also taste at last your Peace. For you have come to bring Good news to the poor and release to the captives...

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for Church members, for our friends, family members or colleagues who are struggling to cope with the current lockdown situation. We pray for thousands of families who have been bereaved or unwell due to the Corona virus or other diseases.... May you Lord comfort them and heal their inner wounds.

Finally, we pray for all those who are reliving some past painful experiences of racism and discrimination in any form. We pray that through the power of your love, you may heal their inner wounds. Above all, we pray that through the insights of the Holy Spirit, you may open the minds of us all, that we may understand that you have created all your people in your image and that, in your Kingdom there is place for only one race: the human race!

The Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God (Singing the Faith 254)

Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9MTRPA0z-E>

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you:
Allelu-, alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, Allelu-, alleluia!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto to you;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, Allelu-, alleluia!

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, Allelu-, alleluia!

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)

Blessing

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