

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Kathleen Richardson. 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.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

**Psalm 46** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear.

Today, on Remembrance Sunday, we call to mind all whose lives have been lost or damaged by war and conflict; we remember with thankfulness those who gave their lives in the service of others; and we reflect on our faith in a loving God.

### HYMN Beauty for Brokenness (Singing the Faith 693)

This hymn by Graham Kendrick recognises the broken world in which we live, and in which God is present.

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqDOXfj9W0w>

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,  
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,  
sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,  
work for all people, trade for their skills:  
land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,  
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,  
give us compassion we pray:  
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;  
come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,  
cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.  
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams  
plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;  
make us content with the things that we need.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion  
we pray:*

*melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;  
come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame  
until your justice burns brightly again;  
until the nations learn of your ways,  
seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion  
we pray:*

*melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;  
come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

## **PRAYER**

### **Affirmation**

Gracious God, we live today in a world you created out of dark chaos. You called us your children and invited us to be the

stewards of your creation and to share the responsibilities for the future of this world and all life within it.

In your Son, Jesus, you made your mercy known and called into being your church, so that we may proclaim your purposes for the world and live confidently in the light of your eternal love.

Through your Holy Spirit you empower us to reach through the immediate pains and suffering into a kingdom where your glory is fully known and where light overcomes darkness.

We worship you.

### **Confession**

Lord our God, we are creatures of confusion, capable of courage and self-sacrifice, goodness and truth, justice and peace; but also, of anger and bitterness, hurt pride and wounding tongues, arrogance, greed, selfishness and stupidity.

Our conflicts within ourselves have been the making of much sorrow and hardship in our communities and for this we ask your forgiveness.

We have been complicit in allowing racism, nationalism, and greed to infect decisions that affect public life and we have neglected the disadvantaged.

Forgive us, and when we allow ourselves to be crushed by the troubles of this world as though you were absent from it, help us to perceive you in the opportunities you place before us. Enable us to accept your gift of light in darkness, joy in sorrow and peace in suffering.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **FIRST READING**

#### **Isaiah 52: 7-10**

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns”. Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

### **REFLECTION**

I love this passage. In a few words Isaiah reflects on a momentous event in Jewish history; but it helps when we know the background to it.

Jerusalem had been captured after a great siege by the army of Babylon. They had held out for a long time and were punished for this by having the city ruined, the walls broken down, the Temple destroyed and all the important people – its leaders, artists, poets, musicians, priests – driven into exile. All that was left in the city was the memories of a great past and the despairing poor.

Many years passed, then the might of the Babylonians waned and a new conqueror, Cyrus, the ruler of the Persians, came on the scene. He issued an edict that allowed exiles to return to their homelands, build up their ruined cities and reinstate their places of worship. With no quicker way of sending news, messengers were sent to tell the people of Jerusalem that they were free. As the messengers reached the city, they shouted their good news ‘God reigns!’

And Isaiah pictures the moment when the good news is heard by the remnants of the dispirited and despairing people of Jerusalem. There are still faithful sentinels on the broken

walls, hoping against all hope for signs of relief from their sense of abandonment, and they hear and relay the good news – God reigns and they are free.

In one sense nothing had changed – it would be years before the exiles returned and even longer before the Temple was rebuilt to God’s glory. But they were once more people of hope and faith, God had not abandoned them, they were still God’s people and God reigned.

And perhaps we need to think what victory is – is it winning a battle or creating an opportunity to find a new way of peace.

Much good had come out of the seeming disaster – for in exile the people had learned to ‘sing the Lord’s song in a strange land’, had begun the practice of meeting together in synagogue to study and pray, and compiled the law books and written their history.

And there are times when victory looks much like defeat. In the Royal Gallery at the House of Lords there are two great paintings of the battle of Trafalgar and of Waterloo – they were British victories, but the paintings show at what cost. The loss of life was tremendous.

Today beside many cenotaphs across the country and in Whitehall people will reflect on the cost of war, and all the stories of personal loss. I love the story of the woman in a care

home who was being interviewed. She said ‘I lost my fiancé in the war’. She was asked, ‘what was his name?’ and replied, ‘Oh I never met him – but if he hadn’t died, I might have, and then I would have been married and have had a family life’.

Today, at the cenotaph in Whitehall there will be no veterans marching past to remember fallen colleagues, because of the Covid19 restrictions, but instead we are invited to enter into a nationwide private but communal moment of remembrance of all who suffered and suffer loss of life or health, liberty or livelihood, through war or violence or pestilence or lack of hope.

When we as Christians proclaim that God reigns, it is not because enemies have been defeated. It is because Jesus died and rose again to show how much God loves.

**SECOND READING** - we continue our readings in St Matthew’s gospel

**Matthew 25: 1-13**

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him'. Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out". But the wise replied, "No! There will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves."

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

Later the other bridesmaids came also saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you; I do not know you".

Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

## REFLECTION

The early church was expecting God to step into the world at any moment, to announce the reign of God, to glorify Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom, to put an end to suffering and to destroy God's enemies.

Matthew is writing to a church that was having to come to terms with a delay.

So, Matthew records another story Jesus told about a wedding feast – this time we are not dealing with reluctant invitees, but important participants in the wedding, who are there at the appointed time waiting for the bridegroom to appear. Had the bridegroom come when he was expected all would have been well. But he didn't.

Only in the darkness at midnight did he come, and only those who had prepared themselves for this were able to enter the feast.

And Matthew is encouraging the churches to ready themselves for the coming of the Kingdom - however long it is delayed - by building up their resources – including enough oil for their lamps!

I wonder – have we stopped thinking that the end of the world will be when Jesus comes in his glory? We watch the programmes about the slow destruction of the created earth and maybe think it will end in a whimper rather than a glorious festival.

Or do we believe that God already reigns, Christ is risen and the Kingdom is already present, wherever God is worshipped

and where God's people live out their lives in obedience and hope?

We continue to look for the signs of God's presence in the darkness and we give thanks that God is with us.

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

As today we remember those who have died in past wars, so we pray for those who are suffering and dying today, and for those who grieve:

We remember before God those living in countries where civil war is destroying communities and making enemies of neighbours; where violence dominates every aspect of daily living.

We remember before God those who have been injured and traumatised by the brutality of war; especially those robbed of their childhood by what they have seen or been forced to do; those who flee from the conflict and become refugees and seekers of asylum and peace.

We remember before God those who are deeply affected by the fight against the current pandemic – those who suffer and die, the families who are forced to stand aside, those needing to be isolated, those living in fear and mental torment, the

bereaved; and we remember before God, with thankfulness, those who enter the battle – the scientists and politicians, medical staff and teachers, the care homes and food banks, the volunteers, befrienders and faith leaders.

We remember before God those who bring light into darkness using resources of art and music, gentleness and humour, strength and passion.

Gracious God, be with us in the trials and testing places of our daily lives, that we may be worthy of the trust you place in us to be disciples of Jesus and to live to your glory.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

We say together the prayer that Jesus prayed with his disciples:

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.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen

**HYMN God is Working His Purpose Out (Hymns and Psalms 769)**

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8EcuV1SOFU>

God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year;  
God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near;  
nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall  
surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the  
waters cover the sea.

What can we do to work God's work; to prosper and increase  
the harmony of all the world, the reign of the Prince of Peace?  
What can we do to hasten the time, the time that shall  
surely be  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the  
waters cover the sea?

March we forth in the strength of God, with the banner of  
Christ unfurled,  
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth, may shine  
throughout the world;  
fight we the fight with sorrow and sin, to set their  
captives free,

that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters  
cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth, unless God blesses the deed;  
vainly we hope for the harvest-tide till God gives life to the  
seed:

Yet nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall  
surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the  
waters cover the sea.

Arthur Campbell Ainger (1841-1919)

**BLESSING** (*we end where we started*)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear.  
Go forward, then, in faith.