

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Nancy Hands to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

As we gather this morning from our separate places, may we be filled with an awareness of our oneness and common purpose. Together, we lift our eyes to gaze on God, waiting on him, to hear his Word and to receive his peace. With all that we have been, all that we are, and all that we hope to be, we offer ourselves to God now, in worship and in praise.

We acknowledge God's presence with us as we sing

Be still, for the presence of the Lord (Singing the Faith 20)

<https://youtu.be/ZugvUQ4m90U>

Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found -
we stand on holy ground.

Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight -
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him -
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b.1957)

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

(The response to 'So we praise you' is 'We praise and worship you')

God of all power, you made the world out of goodness, creating order out of confusion and beauty out of chaos; you made each one of us in your own image; your fingerprint is on every soul.

So we praise you.

We praise and worship you.

Jesus, Friend and Brother, you are the carpenter who left his tools and trade; the poor man who made others rich; the healer who let himself be wounded; the prisoner on whom soldiers spat; our Saviour who died and rose again.

So we praise you.

We praise and worship you.

Holy Spirit, Transformer, you broke the bonds of race and nation; you made disciples drunk with grace; you converted souls and emptied pockets; you showed how love made all things new and opened the doors to change and freedom.

So we praise you.

We praise and worship you.

God, Three-in-One, you know us each by name. You have put your ear to our heart, when we prayed and when we doubted. You know well what we fear and question, what we long for

and from whom we turn away. And even when we become deaf to you, through disappointment or grief, you never stop listening for us and to us.

In silence, in penitence and in confidence, we open our hearts to you and ask to be made whole.

(Silence)

Lord have mercy on us.

God is good, on all whose lives are open to change - from guilt to grace, from darkness to light - God pronounces his pardon and grants us his peace.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Reading: Isaiah 40:25-31 NRSV

25 To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see:

Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;

because he is great in strength,

mighty in power,

not one is missing.



27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
29 He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
30 Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
31 but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

(A musical setting of this passage can be found at Youtube, sung by Esther Mui ‘Those who wait on the Lord’ <https://youtu.be/Lk870JkX980>)

Reading: Mark 1:29-39 NRSV

Jesus Heals Many

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33 The whole town gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

38 Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

39 So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Reflection

We have two scenes in our New Testament reading this morning. On the Sabbath, Jesus, Simon, Andrew, James and John have returned from the synagogue where Jesus had astounded everyone by publicly casting out an unclean spirit. But when they get back to where they are staying, they find Simon's mother-in-law very ill. We witness a personal encounter: Jesus goes straight to her, takes her hand, helps her up and - suddenly well - she gets straight back to looking after them all.

We will all have had a fever at some time and know how difficult it is to bounce back immediately, in to a normal routine of work afterwards. After this miraculous healing, she is completely restored - able to cook for and serve a household of hungry men - so it is not surprising that the news leaks out into the surrounding households and spreads quickly. The result is that the townspeople gather up all their sick and frail and crowd around the house when the Sabbath is over at sunset, for their turn of healing. And Jesus does not disappoint, ministering to them one after the other, throughout the evening.

It had been an overwhelming day for Jesus, right at the start of his ministry, with people and situations coming at him from all sides. So before dawn the following morning, while it is still dark, Jesus escapes the confines of a full house to find a solitary place, to be alone and pray. This is what gives him perspective and balance and perhaps sanity. But his peace is disturbed. His new friends hunt him down (that is the strength of the verb used) - anxious to get him back to deal with the next lot of needy people who are no doubt already gathering around the door of Simon's house, clamouring for attention.

'Where have you been? Everyone's been looking for you!' I wonder if that has ever been said to you at some time, when you were late for something. Maybe you overslept, forgot the time, got distracted, missed the bus, misjudged the traffic.... You can hear the accusation in the tone, the implied criticism; you sense the disappointment. It can feel overwhelming. And our reaction? Probably guilt, embarrassment, discomfort and irritation with ourselves. We offer an apology, or think of an excuse, work twice as hard to catch up, or resolve not to be late again.

And Jesus? No apology, no working even harder, no bending to the will of the insistent voices. He resists being overwhelmed by the demand. He has stepped apart and been guided to a decision by God. He tells his friends they are moving on.

Perhaps it is somewhat shocking to think of Jesus walking away from people who need him. There was so much more good to be done, for people who appreciated him: more sickness to heal, more lives to be put back together again, more dignity to be restored. How would it have felt to be in that new queue in the half-light at Simon's door, expecting your own miracle, to find that Jesus wasn't coming back?

To the disciples, Jesus was on a roll: why quit now when he was ahead? They were perplexed, disappointed and probably quite angry with him. Possibly we would have been too.

But Jesus hadn't been slacking or forgetting the time; he was prioritising his relationship with his Father: listening in order to be obedient, recharging his batteries and checking the direction in which his ministry was to go. He was making sure his life and work were in balance: his doing and his being.

What if he had stayed? Spent another day healing everyone who queued at the door from dawn to dusk? And the next day? And the next? Would he not have become known as the famous free medical man of Galilee - reduced to an exhausted miracle worker?

Jesus' vision was wider and deeper than anything the disciples could see. His mission was so much more than healing physical ailments in one place at one time. He had greater gifts for humanity to come; these were only glimpses of God's love and

of the coming Kingdom where all would be made whole, in harmony with all creation. Jesus had a message to spread, more people to reach and an urgency of mission.

What does this say to us? Are we driven sometimes to go it alone, bite off more than we can chew, meet every need that presents itself? Do we become overwhelmed by demands and feel that life is just happening to us? The Protestant work ethic that I and many others were brought up on, is sometimes deeply ingrained, and it can drive us. It is admirable to work tirelessly for others, to repeatedly go the extra mile, to expend ourselves in the service of those who need help - after all, that is living out the Gospel message isn't it? Denying ourselves? But maybe sometimes the balance goes: a little vanity can creep in; we can feel indispensable and need to be constantly giving out for our own self-esteem and sense of worth, or we forget that it is God's work and not our own private crusade. Maybe we just get too exhausted to pray, or care so much about the hurting people we see, that we drown, and overlook the need to take care of ourselves too; we run dry.

But Jesus is our model here: he IS the Gospel - the Good News - and what he shows us in this passage is that what is most important is to be God-centred and God-directed: to take that step away and press the pause button - regularly. We see him pour himself out for those who need him, but then he intentionally removes himself to a quiet place to pray and reset

his spiritual compass. How much more must we guard our time listening to him; to shield ourselves against the lure of human admiration and our love of 'success', and the compelling drive of our own agendas. We will head for burnout, if we don't balance our 'being' with our 'doing'; we need to learn to rely on God's direction for our lives, and that means time.

On 25th January, the bible reading in my IBRA notes 'Fresh from the Word' was from Mark chapter 3, which records Jesus appointing the twelve. The writer points out that Jesus' reason for calling them was 'that they might be with him' - which comes before sending them out to preach and drive out demons. Spending time with Jesus enabled and empowered them to then go and do his work. We must not be so busy doing Christ's work, that we stop spending time with him.

Our Isaiah reading is helpful here.

'Even youths will faint and be weary.
And the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.'

'Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength'. The NIV has '*those who **hope** in the Lord will renew their strength*'. It is the same Hebrew verb for both wait and hope. Our waiting

is in hope and expectation, when we wait on God. Perhaps that is a verse to accompany us throughout this year.

Waiting is never easy and has been particularly trying in periods of lockdown. We have waited out quarantine and isolation, waited for tiers to change, for test results, for our turn for the vaccine, for our churches to open, for lockdown to end, for recovery, for normality, for peace.

But God can take care of the *weight* that we carry - the weight of worry and fear, of caring and coping - if we *wait* on him, with him and for him, in hope and expectation.

The eagle, when he senses a storm is coming, knows he can't escape it. He flies high above it and waits. When the storm strikes, he lets the wind catch his wings so that he rides on top of the storm, rather than being battered in its vortex.

It is easy for us to get sucked in to the anxieties and disappointments of our circumstances and the demands and needs of others; to be battered by illness and grief, worry and fear, as in the eye of a storm. Just as the eagle tunes in to the thermals in the atmosphere, waits and then responds, so we are invited to tune in to a loving God and wait, trusting that his timing is better than ours and that his direction is the best way to go. If we let him, he will carry us with him, empowering, strengthening and confirming us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

(The response to 'Lord in your mercy' is 'Hear our prayer')

Mighty God, your power is known in strength and in gentleness.

We ask for your power in the world today; to pull down the mighty who abuse their privilege, and to help the frail and powerless to lose their fear.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, you planned the secrets of the universe and know the limits of human capability.

We ask for your wisdom in the world today; to enable the knowledge and technology of the few, to be accessible to the many; to ensure the world's rulers and planners perceive the gifts and plight of the poor.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, in the dawn of Creation and in the presence of your Son, your light shattered the force and lure of darkness. We ask your help today for those who in public and personal life, are in the grip of that which is harmful: for those who are slaves to a vice they fear to name; for those who have traded openness for secrecy, morality for money, love for lust.

We ask for a light, not to blind them, but to show them the way out of their darkness.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, your ways are justice, equality, dignity and righteousness. We ask your help today to crush the systems and break down the barriers of discrimination, prejudice and domination which demean, damage and destroy, that all your children may know they are valued, loved and needed.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Restoring God, through Jesus you healed and saved: gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansing to the lepers and soundness of mind to the possessed.

We ask your help today for those suffering from Covid and Long-Covid, for those sick from exhaustion and mental anguish, for those waiting for a hospital bed, and for those who grieve. May your love surround them and your healing hand be upon them.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord God, teach us today to rely on your strength, learn from your wisdom, walk in your light, and live out your compassion. In the name of Christ, Amen.

We pray the Lord's Prayer together.

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.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind (Singing the Faith 495)

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOnjmr9Ah0>

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways:
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord

let us, like them, without a word:
rise up and follow thee,
rise up and follow thee!

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down,
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace,
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;

let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

Blessing

For our blessing, I have chosen Paul's closing words of 2 Corinthians, from The Message Bible.

'And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure. Greet one another with a holy embrace. All the brothers and sisters here say hello.

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.'

Amen.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession adapted from A Wee Worship Book 1989 Wild Goose Worship Group p4.

For private worship: 'Be still' Hillsong worship from 'There is more'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7pJb49vVQY