

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Kathleen Richardson. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to Worship

(Words from Psalm 46)

God is our refuge and our strength,
a very present help in trouble.
The Lord of hosts is with us,
the God of Jacob is our stronghold;
therefore we will not fear.

Hymn Sing for God's glory (Singing the Faith 116)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LEi0UpfjGns>

Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
sun of delight
succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would
bind us,

searing the darkness of fear and despair that would bind
us,
touching our shame
with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion:
lifeblood of right,
resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey
before us,
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;
in them we see
the new creation to be,
spirit of love made flesh for us.

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Prayer of Adoration

Eternal God, whose glory is displayed in all the world,
we praise and honour you for bringing order out of chaos,
for your continual activity in the renewal of your earth
and the daily miracles in the processes of human life.

Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, we praise and honour you,
for revealing the extent to which love will go,
for assuring us that you hear the cries of the poor, the
needy and the oppressed,
and for the promise of fullness of life for all who trust in
you.

Holy Spirit, we praise and honour you,
for you liberate our minds to know your truth,
you release in us the power to perceive you at work in the
world,
and you enable us to use the gifts you give,
in your praise and your service, binding us into
communities of love.

Gracious God, in your kingdom of compassion,
we thank you that all our anguish and grief and pain,
is calmed by the remembrance of your steadfastness
and your power at work through your Church.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we offer you our grateful
praise.

Prayer of Confession

Author of life,
we humbly confess that too often we fall short of your
intention for us
and of our expectations of ourselves.
We would touch the world with goodness,
but often withdraw in anxiety and self-concern.
We would live with integrity and stand for truth,
but we are torn with uncertainties.
We would warm the lives of others with our love,
but we hesitate, wondering if they will love us in return.
We would go about our daily tasks with confidence and
joy,
but find ourselves struggling with self-doubt.
We need your presence, O God, if we are to be what we
could be and want to be.
Let our worship heal us, renew us and strengthen us,
that we may go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

Assurance of forgiveness

The good news is that God is more willing to forgive our
sins than we are to acknowledge them. Let us open our
minds and hearts to the assurance of God's grace. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading

Mark 4: 35-41

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go across to the other side". And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Reflection

If I say some of the lyrics for a song that hit the charts more than fifty years ago – I wonder how many could identify it? It was sung often in the churches, many called it a white gospel song and it was popular at weddings, I even remember it at funerals. It went:

'When you're weary, feeling small, when tears are in your eyes,

I'll dry them all, I'm on your side.

When you're down and out, when you're on the streets,
when evening falls so hard,

I will comfort you, I'll take your part'

Recognise it? You would if I sang the tune – it was 'Like a bridge over troubled waters' (Simon and Garfunkel)

It became popular again when it was sung by artists for Grenfell over the dreadful fire four years ago last week. People identified with it as like God reaching down to their pain, acting like a bridge over troubled waters.

Lovely tune – it has been invading my head since I thought of it.

But it is almost the exact opposite of the experience in our gospel reading for today. God is not reaching down from highest heaven to provide a bridge over troubled waters – he is in the boat with us while the storm is raging around us.

Jesus and the disciples had had a very heavy day – lots of teaching to big crowds on the lakeside in Galilee, with thought-provoking parables for his disciples. Then when evening came Jesus announced they would go to the other side. No explanation was given – it was the gentile side of the lake, inhospitable, and it seems Jesus only stayed long enough to cure a troubled man and inadvertently drown a herd of pigs before crossing back again. But that healed man became a strong advocate for Jesus and we know a Christian presence grew up there after his testimony.

But Mark recognised the significance of this story and chose to include it in his gospel – followed by both Matthew and Luke. The storm on the lake is terrifying, even to seasoned fishermen who knew the lake so well. They feared for their lives and in the inner turmoil of their fear they wake up Jesus – “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus stilled the storm completely and queried their faith. Mark recognises that the ability to still the

storm is a characteristic of the eternal God – this is what the disciples have yet to learn. Mark sees it as a time they begin to question who Jesus really is. Can it be that God is with them, not presiding over the troubled water but with them in it.

And Mark is writing this for the early church – deep in the storms that were raging through the world as they knew it. Both the powerful Roman empire was persecuting the church from without, and the Jewish authorities threatening from within the culture. The Christian Church is experiencing that God is with them in dangerous waters.

And what the New Testament then explores, is that after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, the church is the body of Christ. What can the church offer to calm the fears of those for whom life is hard? If the world says to the Church, ‘Do you not care that we are perishing?’ what can our response be?

Paul made an attempt at a response by telling the Corinthian church that the disciples of Jesus were in the pain and chaos of the world with them, but that the experience gave them hope.

The other reading offered to us today is from Paul's letter to the church. In this passage he sets out what it means for him and other Christians to be involved in the storms that trouble the communities. They are not immune from the hardships, calamities and sleepless nights. The church identifies with all those in trouble, but is able to say: 'and yet'.

Let's hear this passage –

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time, I have listened to you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech

and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute.

We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return - I speak as to children - open wide your hearts also.'

The storms of life are where God's compassion and power is often made manifest. It was in a storm in the Atlantic when John and Charles Wesley were on their way to Georgia, that the faith of the Moravians, as they faced that storm, made a deep impression on them and led to new insights into faith.

The emblem that the World Council of Churches chose to represent their common life was a boat with a cross at the

centre, surrounded by the waves of the sea. I remember seeing a cartoon based on this, the boat precariously balanced on a cresting wave, obviously sinking, and a group of church grandees gathered at the high point saying – ‘We are so pleased we chose to sit at this end of the boat’. The church is not immune from the storms that rock our common life, but nor are we alone to meet the dangers – God is with us.

It was interesting to see last weekend the leaders of much of the whole inhabited earth - the oikumene – considering together the matters that create the tensions in the earth and that affect all of us – the pandemic, energy creation, climate change, and to recognise that we are in it together.

This Sunday is marked by the churches as World Refugee Day. We cannot, and must not, close our minds to the sight of refugees and asylum seekers crossing perilous seas in flimsy boats, many risking their own lives in an attempt to save their families. Do we hear some of their voices – ‘Do you not care that we perish?’ And what should be our response? We do care because we believe profoundly that we are all children of God, and whatever our circumstances – God is with us.

Prayers of Intercession

For refugee Sunday

(Using prayers prepared by Christian aid)

God of all, where are your children?

Let us see God’s children who are far from home, adrift in an open overcrowded boat, with no compass, no crew, no safety.

God of all, why is there crying?

Let us hear the cries of refugees and respond with love to those whose escape from danger leads only into a journey into danger.

God of all, who is praying?

Let us pray for the young lives being lost, for the families who are broken apart, asking for comfort and for justice.

God of all, who is answering?

Let us see that you are in the boat, alongside the members of your family. May we, who bear your name answer with compassion for you.

Merciful God

We pray for all whose desperation leads them to the sea,
to undertake perilous voyages, often following dangerous
land journeys

- Those escaping brutal wars
- those fleeing religious persecution
- those escaping climate disasters and economic ruin
- those looking for hope in a hopeless situation.

May we look beyond our own fears and concerns to the
needs of those who have nothing,
risk everything, and depend on the kindness of strangers.
May our hearts be challenged and our self-interest be
called out,
in Jesus' name.

Amen.

And a prayer for ourselves and for those closest to us:

Lord, when we feel that we are overwhelmed by problems
and fears that are beyond our control;
when our fear is for others we care about;
when we feel that you are far away in a place that our
prayers cannot reach
when the answer to 'have you no faith?' disturbs us;

let us hear again your voice that can command the wind
and the sea 'Peace! Be still!'
and help us to rest in your power and your love.
In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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

Hymn Eternal Father, strong to save (Singing the Faith 517)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dVGZFIfGOs>

Eternal Father, strong to save,
whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
its own appointed limits keep:

*O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.*

O Saviour, whose almighty word
the winds and waves submissive heard,
who walked upon the foaming deep,
and calm amid its rage didst sleep:

*O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.*

O sacred Spirit, who didst brood
upon the chaos dark and rude,
who made its angry tumult cease,
and gavest light and life and peace:

*O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.*

O Trinity of love and power,
shield all who sail in danger's hour;
from rock and tempest, fire and foe,
protect them wheresoe'er they go:
*and ever let there rise to thee
glad hymns of praise from land and sea.*

William Whiting (1825-1878)

Blessing

We are a community of faith created by the love of God,
set free by the word of forgiveness, and empowered by the
gift of the Spirit. We will go with serenity and joy,
strengthened to be the bearers of God's peace. Amen

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