

This short act of worship has been produced by Nancy Hands for you to use at home or wherever you are and if you are unable to worship in a church building. 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

From Psalm 15 - the Psalm for today: 'O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart.'

Today, in this service, may we bring to God not only the words on our lips, but the praise of our hearts. May we bring our honesty and bravery, our anxieties and fears, all that we carry within. May we meet with Jesus, who accepts us and all our shortcomings, with forgiveness and grace.

Hymn All my hope on God is founded (Singing the Faith 455)

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DohxO6ytsaU>

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,

he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought;
splendour, light and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844-1930) *Tune Michael*

Prayer of Adoration

God of all power and might, ruler of the universe, you are worthy of all praise. You created the galaxies, the planets and this earth; you designed the snowflakes, the insect world, the ecosystem. You made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. You have given us wills with which to obey you and voices to sing your praise. May we find the purpose of our lives in *doing* your will and in giving voice to the praise which all creation declares. We ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Confession

Almighty God, we offer you praise, but we fail to do your will. With our lips we have professed to follow Christ, but you see what is in our hearts. You know that we have not shown his humble, self-emptying love; we have judged rather than tried

to understand; we have put protocol before justice, and tradition before transformation. We have alienated rather than welcomed; we have not had the mind of Christ. We acknowledge in this moment, our words and actions which did not spring from love.....

Help us to live as a community bound together in forgiving love, kindness and grace.

Thank you, merciful God, that we are a forgiven people, cleansed and restored by you, made pure in your image. Today we are free because of the Cross. **Amen.**

Reading: James 1:17-27

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Hearing and Doing the Word

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save

your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Reading: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Tradition of the Elders

⁷ Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of

cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” ⁶ He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’

⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Verse two of Singing the Faith 501

Help us, O Lord, to live
the faith which we proclaim,
that all our thoughts and words and deeds
may glorify your name.

Reflection

In another life, I would have loved to be a psychologist: understanding what makes people tick; how the mind dictates and influences choices and behaviour; how memory, thought and emotion impact on our communication, interactions and relationships. I would have loved to enable people to look safely into their own mirror, to learn to see and understand themselves as they really are and see the possibilities for change.

Jesus offers us that mirror, to see ourselves as *we* really are, and he does it with love and acceptance, but it is for us to want to look and take the time to really see. All of us have the hypocrite in us; all of us have anger in us; all of us have a propensity for criticising in others, a fault that is in ourselves - often unacknowledged and disguised. It is tempting to feel complacent when we see a biblical list of overt vices as we have just heard: fornication, theft, murder, adultery etc etc, and overlook verse 21: “for it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come”.

The Church throughout history and up to the present day has been guilty of imposing rules of behaviour, practice and conformity, in order to control and contain, at the expense of allowing individuals to be themselves, who might be a catalyst for joy and transformation. If the Church had a reputation for

being a non-judgmental safe haven for all, where the love of God changes lives, we might have more of a problem of crowd control!

The book ‘Chocolat’ by Joanne Harris, was made into a major film in 2001.

The story is set in a small French town which is kept ‘clean’ by the strict rules of one man, Francis Reynaud, who controls what is allowed and what is not. In the book he is the priest and, in the film, he is the mayor who controls the priest, but the effect is the same, as church attendance and obedience are central to community life. Reynaud is rooted in the past and meticulously devout (especially in observing Lent), and he demands the same of the people. He turns a blind eye to domestic violence, infidelity and dishonesty in the town, as long as his parishioners go regularly to confession, do their penance, are respectable in public and attend Mass. He has a suspicion of anything enjoyable or attractive, which he views as the work of the devil. A vivacious, unconventional, single mother Vianne and her little daughter arrive in the village on Shrove Tuesday and open a chocolate shop/cafe opposite the church. To tempt the parishioners with chocolate in the season of self-denial is seen as an outrage and a sin.

The shop becomes a sanctuary of warmth, laughter, confidences and the pleasure of all things chocolate, through the genuine kindness and compassion of Vianne for the

residents who dare to come in to her shop, in spite of thunderous disapproval and a campaign to isolate and eject her. Vianne is not a church goer, having witnessed only judgement, hypocrisy and harsh condemnation of her Traveller mother by the church, when she was a child. She is not ashamed of herself, her daughter or her free spirit and refuses to pretend to be what she is not. It saddens her to see so much unhappiness and bitterness, which she does everything in her power to relieve by her kindness, generosity and joy. She has a belief that people can change, learn to laugh again and truly live. Vianne is not the only one vilified as 'unclean' and a danger to the morality of the town. It applies too to a hated and feared group of houseboat dwellers referred to as 'river rats', who Vianne and her daughter befriend - in spite of the warning that making friends with them will make enemies of others. Anyone unconventional is not tolerated. But Vianne doesn't judge anyone and keeps making her chocolate and giving treats. Slowly the town is transformed, Reynaud loses his authority, falling into temptation himself, and the young priest, having seen guilty joy return to the small town, breaks free. In defiance of all he has been made to preach he decides on an Easter Day sermon about Christ's humanity, his kindness and tolerance. He says, "We must measure our goodness, not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist or who we exclude. Instead, we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create and who we include.'

Back to our Bible passages. The Pharisees and scribes who came from Jerusalem to Galilee in order to find fault with Jesus were not inherently bad men - as Renaud in the story was not. They were devout, clinging to holy ordinances, trying to keep themselves and others pure and undefiled. But they had lost sight of the reason why. The Law of Moses was meant to be a bedrock of guiding ideals to help the people of God live in such a way as to honour and love God and their neighbour. However, Israel, over time, ring-fenced the laws with 613 more elaborate restrictions of man-made ordinances: 'the tradition of the elders', which became burdensome, impractical and for countryfolk, often impossible. Jesus' disciples were accused of not going through the prescribed ritual hand washing before eating. This was not about basic hygiene; they believed the disciples were not keeping themselves pure and holy, and were therefore defiling themselves. Jesus points out what is important. Holiness doesn't come from rituals; it is what comes from inside you - from your heart, and is demonstrated by what you say and do, and how you treat people. The Pharisees had lost sight of who God was: a loving, faithful, constant God who chose Israel to be an example and a light to all nations. Reynaud similarly was trying his best to be pure and holy, by denying himself all pleasures and shutting his eyes to temptation; by demanding austerity and obedience in others and being harsh in discipline. But he had misunderstood what holiness was and had lost sight of who Jesus was: a

compassionate, forgiving and redeeming Saviour of all the world, who came to give life in all its fulness.

What is evil comes out of the human heart. This isn't necessarily a dig at the Pharisees; it is an observation of how things are for all of us. What keeps us close to God has nothing to do with the rituals we perform, the treats we give up for Lent, how often we go to church, or what version of doctrine we believe. What keeps us close to God is believing Christ offered himself in love for us, sinners that we are, and expressing our love and thanks to him through our love and generosity towards others. What separates us from God is what we allow to fester inside us: the jealousy, the grievance, the prejudice, the bitterness, the anger, which will govern our words and actions.

Which leads us to the reading from James.

This letter is thought to have been written to predominantly Jewish Christian communities, scattered far away from Jerusalem. It is a general, moral letter about right behaviour, which is as applicable now in our multicultural and secularised world as it was then. James sees two ways of living: the way of God, who creates all things, and the way of the world, that resists God's claim on creation. He is particularly concerned about two-faced or double-minded people who profess commitment to God, while contradicting it in their words and

actions. He writes that God 'gave us birth by the word of truth' in v 18 and 'welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls' in v 21. The Message interprets that as, 'In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation garden of your life.' I find that really helpful. If we allow God's Spirit to shape us from within, our thinking, speaking and doing will be consistently kind. We are urged to 'be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger'. Listening is so important for keeping and building peace and communication at all levels of society. Words sometimes need to be carefully and thoughtfully chosen. Anger rarely helps a situation, especially when it is over a perceived personal slight; it helps neither our relationships nor our own peace and so often escalates out of control. James neatly contrasts those hasty hurtful words which can cause lasting damage, to God's healing, loving word of truth which gives us life and joy. Persevering through a difficult situation instead of getting angry, can pave the way for the Word of God. Receiving the word of God ourselves means putting it in to practice; it is not enough to savour it and meditate on it. Putting love in to action is the worship God requires, and sometimes that means guarding our tongue and thinking of the other before ourselves. Even righteous anger at inequality, injustice or oppression, wrongly expressed, can be overlaid with our own pride and self-righteousness and make a situation worse.

Life is for living. God has given us that life through the gift of his Son, to bring light and joy, healing and comfort to those around us. He has landscaped a unique salvation- garden within us, for his word to grow and influence others for good, but let us be honest and vigilant about the weeds and thistles that are there. We have to look into that inner garden and pluck them out as they appear, knowing that the Holy Spirit has chosen to be a resident gardener for us, with all the tools we need. He knows all about the imperfections, yet he still wants and needs us, but *we* are responsible for allowing space and the right conditions for his word to take root and fundamentally change all that comes out of that 'garden'. May our actions of kindness, generosity, self-control and gentle speech be witness to the love of God poured freely into our lives. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

The response to 'Father, your kingdom come' is '**your will be done**'

Father God, we thank you for all who help to bring in your kingdom by seeking to do your will. Thank you for your faithful people through all generations, who served others' interests before their own. Guide your Church that it may know your will and strive for justice and freedom for all, serving you with integrity and faith. We pray for the Church working in areas of poverty, war or oppression and for your Church under

persecution, threat and secrecy. We ask your blessing on our Circuit congregations and leadership, as we seek to serve you in purity of heart.

Father, your kingdom come, **your will be done.**

We pray for the people and nations of the world, divided, disparate and in conflict; for the persecuted and the persecutors; the dispossessed poor and the greedy rich; the despised and the applauded. Help us to know the peace we should accept, the peace we should offer and the peace we should forego. We pray for peace-keeping forces and relief agencies throughout the world, that they will have wisdom and compassion, as they encounter the victims of war, disease, disaster and famine. We continue to pray for the situation in Afghanistan and in Haiti.

Father, your kingdom come, **your will be done.**

We pray for all who have lost their way in life: for those who have lost faith in themselves, in others or in their God; those who have felt judged or rejected by religious institutions and individuals; all who are finding life desperate and frightening. May they be met with kindness and acceptance, and the opportunity to discover your love for them through those who care.

Father, your kingdom come, **your will be done.**

We pray for our homes, our families, friends and loved ones. Give us patience and gentleness in our dealings with each other, guarding our words and being quick to forgive. We pray for those in difficult or fractured relationships, those who feel unloved and those who are in danger at home. May we be ready to listen, to support and offer safety where we can.

Father, your kingdom come, **your will be done.**

Father God, we pray your blessing and healing touch on those who are suffering sorrow or pain, battling long-term illness, losing mobility, memory or ability to cope. We pray for all confined to their homes, in care, in hospital or isolating. May they know your comfort and peace through those who care for them.

Father, your kingdom come, **your will be done.**

We rejoice in the witness of the saints who have gone before us. We pray for our loved ones who have died, that they may know newness of life in your kingdom and enjoy your presence forever.

Loving God, we offer these prayers and the prayers of our

hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, **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 Longing for light 706 (Singing the Faith)

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt3Qc04uIOM>

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants of one another,
making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell (b.1957)

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Blessing

Lord, go with us into our week, that we may honour you in all
we do and say.

May our being and doing reflect your love, light, mercy and
grace, recognising with thanks the prompting of your Holy
Spirit.

And may the blessing of God, the Eternal Trinity, be with us
today and always. Amen.

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