

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

### Opening Prayer

We will bless the Lord at all times; God's praise shall continually be our song.

Our souls boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God's name forever.

God of all, receive our praise and prayer. In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

### Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness (Singing the Faith 526)

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

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

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares can destroy,  
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,  
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,  
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,  
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,  
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,  
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,  
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,  
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Jan Struther (Joyce Placzek) (1901-1953) ©From *Enlarged Songs of Praise*, 1931, OUP

### Prayer

Gracious God, to you we lift our hearts as we offer our worship today.

In your faithful care we find what we need and learn to see the way of love.

Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Bread, you give yourself for the life of the world. In you the hungry and thirsty find all that sustains and nurtures. We praise you, opening our hearts to all you inspire within us.

Holy Spirit of God, gentle power at work within us and upon us, we rejoice in your life blowing through us and around us. Lift our hearts and spirits as we bring our thankful prayers.

Holy God, surround us with your presence as we turn to you. We recognise our need for you, for your peace and love to work within us. We know we do not always reflect your graceful life in our actions, words or choices. We know we need forgiveness.

As we turn to you today, hear us and heal us. Restore us in love, giving us food for the journey ahead. Transform our struggling and conflicts into a pilgrimage of faith with Christ ever with us.

We make our prayers in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**Today's Readings:**

**1 Kings 19:4-8:**

[But] Elijah himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked

that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." <sup>8</sup> He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

**John 6:35, 41-51:**

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." <sup>42</sup> They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. <sup>46</sup> Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the

Father. <sup>47</sup>Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

### Time to Reflect

The readings together tell us about where we might find food for the journey, and food for the soul. I wonder if today you are hungry and where and how far you would go to find what you need?

I've never yet met anybody who would willingly choose to spend their holiday in a motorway service station! Yet, I am sure most people who have ever driven anywhere have been grateful that such service stations exist up and down the motorway network.

If you have ever found yourself in one, you will know they are unusual places. Places of transition and momentary stoppages, where people can fill up on food or petrol (I was always warned off this as a child for the prohibitive pricing for those not remembering to fill up on petrol or snacks before hitting the motorway).

People come and people go, with very different destinations and varied reasons for travelling. Football shirts of all colours on a Saturday give you a clue about the fixture lists, whereas black ties and suits represent a journey to a funeral. The service station sees all kinds of people united briefly in their need for rest, food and fuel. We used to live in Fleet in Hampshire, a town that is probably best known for its services on the M3. Yet of course living locally meant you never visited the local landmark!

Every day, journeys of all kinds are broken at service stations. These temporary stoppages allow the final destination to be reached – they are not the end point in themselves.

Elijah the prophet, in our first reading, finds himself in the Broom Tree Service Station. Not long after what should have been his greatest triumph, he finds himself on the run. Elijah is desperate to escape the clutches of the Queen after his victory over “her” prophets, so he goes away, quickly, on the motorway to Horeb.

We are given a profoundly sad but brief account of Elijah's flight in the reading. He goes a day's journey into the wilderness, just enough to get outside of Jezebel's jurisdiction. There, at the service station, his plight overcomes him. What's the use? What is the use of keeping on going if I'm left on my

own? The questions for Elijah pile up as he sinks into a spiritual depression the moment he can break his journey to nowhere.

Yet at the Broom Tree service station Elijah finds more than he bargained for. He finds hope and strength. Sat under his tree, with only thoughts of failure and seeming isolation surrounding him, he finds something to eat and drink. Food for journey and for the soul amount to strength to go on. The riches of the resources of faith are opened up to him just when he needed it most.

That sustaining vision of God's miraculous provision of food for the journey in the wilderness is a repeating theme in scripture, and in hymns too. Thomas Aquinas' famous verses of 'Panis Angelicus' are a sublime expression of the rejoicing over the "Bread of Angels":

*May the Bread of Angels  
become bread for humankind;  
The Bread of Heaven puts  
all foreshadowings to an end;  
Oh, thing miraculous!  
the body of the Lord will nourish  
the poor, the poor,  
the servile, and the humble.*

The bread of life is food for the journey and we learn from Jesus, it is available for all who will come to him. In John's Gospel, Jesus explains that in him spiritual hunger and thirst is met. Despite the now familiar objections of the crowds ("how can *he* claim all of this?"): Jesus makes the point that all who are drawn to God through him will find fullness, eternal life.

Those who travel on motorways will need occasionally to stop at service stations. Those who face disappointments and know the real struggle of the journey as Elijah did will need the shelter of the Broom Tree on occasions. But Jesus tells us, and all who are hungry, in him we find and have been given the resources we need to go on with the journey.

Although the passage from John's gospel leaves us wondering with the crowds about how this comes to be; perhaps for us today it is enough to remember that out of God's self-giving we are entrusted with all we need to walk on. *All* we need. The resources of faith, God's love and grace meet us just as the meal was set before Elijah, as the body of Christ is given for us, as life itself. When we find ourselves tempted to despair, or when the going seems hardest, it can be hard to hold onto this vision of hope and grace in the wilderness.

Perhaps that is why this theme of bread being given in the wilderness, of strength coming to those at their lowest ebb

keeps being repeated throughout scripture. Maybe it is like a map of the service station network, reminding us where we are to go, to whom we are to turn, when we need rest and food for the journey and for the soul.

Jesus gives of himself for the life of the world.

In the days when you need to know God's gentle power at work to uphold and sustain, may you find courage to trust.

In the days when the going is good and all is well, may you rejoice at God's life and love within you.

In the days when all you can do is sit and wait, may Christ's presence be as a feast set before you.

May you live to point the way to the living bread you have found in Christ, as a sign points to the service station.

### **A time of prayer**

In our prayers we give thanks for the resources of faith held out before us:

We give thanks for the gift of prayer as we open our hearts to the Living God.

We give thanks for love that has found us, sat with us, watched over us and now bids us serve those around us.

We give thanks for the gift of bread and wine, for food for the journey, and all that inspires and sings within us.

We give thanks for companions on the road who walk the hard path and lift us to God.

In prayer we remember those who are struggling to find the resources of faith they have been given, and for those who find themselves emptied at this time.

In prayer we lift to God all who feel lost and defeated, bowed and beaten down. We remember those who hunger for all that would sustain them. In prayer we remember those who are making new starts and those who are feasting as they rejoice.

We pray for our world, for people who are known to us and for those whose needs and giftings are known to you alone. We lift our prayers to you as we trust in your mercy and faithful care.

God with us, as you hear our prayers, make us ready to hear you, and in your love and power make us ready to follow in the way of Christ. **Amen.**

### ***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: Longing for Light (Singing the Faith 706)**

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT-p828ugQQ>

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.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts,  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts,  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

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

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts,  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

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

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts,  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

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**A prayer of blessing**

God, hold us in love and renew our trust in you.  
Jesus, our brother, may your grace meet us on the road.  
God's Spirit be with us, now and forever.  
May Almighty God bless us, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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