

This short act of worship has been produced by Revd Dan Haylett 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.

Opening Words

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen.**

Hymn: Faithful One (Singing the Faith 628)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PjSO5Ihl0M>

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

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Let us pray together

Faithful God, we call out to you today.
In our distress you meet our needs.
In our pain, you bear with us.

We offer praise to you, the source of comfort and strength.
We thank you for the gift of Jesus, who lifts us from our despair.

We give thanks for God's Spirit poured out into all creation,
working out God's purposes of justice and peace around and within us.

Faithful God, we are safe in your presence. We bring before you our needs and the needs of the world. We confess that we have not always turned to you in hope and confidence. We confess that we have shrunk from others whom you are working in and through.

In turning to you again today, we pray for forgiveness and for the courage to accept your grace filled way with us.
Here is good news for all who will turn to you: Christ came into the world to save sinners. We depend on God's mercy and grace offered to us in Jesus. In Christ, we are forgiven and renewed. Thanks be to God!

Gospel Reading: Mark 9: 38-50 (NRSV)

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Reflection

Jesus tells his disciples, who are apparently piqued that someone outside of their group is doing God’s work; “Whoever is not against us is for us”.

It’s a hard lesson. Hard for the disciples who have been called, commissioned and trained for their role alongside Jesus. Hard for those who are already suspicious about Jesus’ apparent lack of concern for the “usual channels” of how grace was expected to be found and received. Hard too for us, if we are honest.

For the mindset of “whoever is not against us is for us” can be difficult for us to get our heads around, and hard to put into practice. How can we measure who is an appropriate partner for us in our kingdom work? How can we assess if a sort of amiable tolerance to the message of good news is enough to be counted as truly “for us”?

Jesus’ words here are a sort of spiritual precursor to John Wesley’s famous understanding of the “Catholic Spirit”. Despite Wesley’s own certainty over some non-negotiables in Christian faith, he argues for the need for acceptance and humility as we realise that “we” do not possess the totality of truth about God over and above the experience of others.

Being “friends of all, and the enemies of none” becomes the consequent aim of a Church that accepts that we do not have any monopoly on truth, on goodness, or on God.

That brings us to the heart of the gospel passage. We do not own God, or have control over how God chooses to work. This can be both liberating and at times somewhat frustrating!

It is frustrating when we are most sure that we are right, or that we have the best in mind for someone else. When we hold the power, or when we play host, or give charitably we know what we are doing. We are in control, and, if we are not careful, we mistake that for the illusion of control over how God is acting.

It can be liberating to recall that we are not after all in control of God. It changes the dynamics for us when we feel overburdened with care or responsibility, or when we are tempted to try and fix things for someone else. It brings us to our senses to read that Christ promises a reward for those who are prepared to offer a cup of water to someone else, not to those who claim to be the source of all water for all people in themselves!

Being open to God having control, and speaking and acting through others isn't always easy, straightforward or

convenient to us. Are we open to the potential that the kingdom's purposes are being enacted through the protests of those who block motorways to cause us to remember the effect of our choice on climate change? Are we alive to the kindness and goodness of those outside the Church which can be far more Christlike than our own actions and attitudes?

Reflecting on the Gospel message, we are shown again that the kingdom is far bigger than our imagining or our fears. We are reminded again that we do not control and cannot domesticate God. In practical application, we are not encouraged to lop off bits of ourselves, despite the extreme language of v42 onwards. Instead though, we might consider how ready we are to do the work of the kingdom. We might consider how prepared we are to welcome the work of God's Spirit in others, inside and outside the Church. We might wonder what “whoever is not against us is for us” means for the way we approach our personal relationships.

We might, after all this, accept our place as part of God's kingdom, and find the peace that Jesus promises. Amen.

A time of prayer

Pray today for the situations and people who have made the headlines. Pray for those whose stories have troubled you and for those who have reflected something of God's love, joy and peace.

Pray today for those in any sort of need or trouble, and give thanks for all who support and care for them.

Pray today for all those who seek to do God's will, and for those who set themselves against the Kingdom.

Pray for the Church in every place, giving thanks for our shared calling to serve Jesus.

Pray for those on your hearts, and offer your own needs and thanks to God.

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus. 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but

deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: The right hand of God (Singing the Faith 715)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUqaj0ND-Xg>

The right hand of God is writing in our land,
writing with power and with love;
our conflicts and our fears,
our triumphs and our tears,
are recorded by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God is pointing in our land,
pointing the way we must go;
so clouded is the way,
so easily we stray,
but we're guided by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God is striking in our land,
striking out at envy, hate and greed;
our selfishness and lust,
our pride and deeds unjust,
are destroyed by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and lifted now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.

The right hand of God is healing in our land,
healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
so wondrous is its touch,
with love that means so much,
when we're healed by the right hand of God.

The right hand of God is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.

Patrick Eugene Prescod

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A prayer of blessing

We go to do the will of God, inspired by Jesus' presence. We go in the power of the Spirit to be alive to all that God is doing around us. We go in peace.

May God's blessing be with you, the blessing of God the Three-in-One and One-in-Three go with you always. Amen.

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