

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Sandra Rose. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you. And so, we are in the third week of Black History Month.

A Prayer for Black History Month

Compassionate God
who sent Jesus Christ
to deliver us from all manner of injustices and inequalities,
create in us new hearts and the enlarged visions,
to see the image of God in every person irrespective of
background, race and ethnicity.
May we be generous in our love of others
as we work towards ending racism and injustice;
creating communities of human flourishing,
through Jesus Christ your son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Hymn: We are marching in the light of God (Singing the Faith 483) *Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl24_27wW1E

We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, oh,
we are marching in the light of God,
we are marching, oh,
we are marching in the light of God.

We are living in the love of God,
we are living in the love of God.
We are living in the love of God,
we are living in the love of God.
We are living, oh,
we are living in the love of God,
we are living, oh,
we are living in the love of God.

We are moving in the power of God,
we are moving in the power of God.
We are moving in the power of God,
we are moving in the power of God.

We are moving, oh,
we are moving in the power of God,
we are moving, oh,
we are moving in the power of God.

South African traditional
v1 Anders Nyberg (b. 1955) © 1987, WGRG Iona Community, Glasgow
vv 2,3 Andrew Marles (b. 1949) © Sovereign Music UK

Prayer of Approach

All praise and glory,
honour and power be to Your name,
God Almighty.
You are holy and majestic in Your person
and in Your ways.
High and lifted up, nothing escapes Your view.

Jesus taught us that You even know when a sparrow falls from
a tree
and You tend to the flowers of the field
as if each one was irreplaceable.
How much more are we, all humankind,
the work of Your hands and the apple of Your eye.

Such a reminder is staggering,
difficult for us to comprehend,
especially when we know ourselves to be far from perfect.

Yet, because of Christ, You look past our faults to our potential,
You show mercy rather than condemn us,
You express interest in what we can be
rather than what we have been,
You grant grace upon grace.

Thank You, Lord.
Thank You that rather than write us off and leave us without
hope,
You draw ever closer to us and promise that,
where we turn away from our past failings
You will bring restoration.

Thank You, Lord.
Thank You that in Your hands
our brokenness is not something that resigns us to the rubbish
tip.
Instead, You are the original recycler,
taking what we are,
wasting nothing of our life experience,
and fashioning us into something beautiful.

Thank You, Lord.
Thank You that despite our waywardness
and because of Your compassion,
there is still hope for us to be purposeful in the things of Your
Kingdom.

In this regard, the stories of old,
the tales of those who have gone before us,
both in bible times and since then,
give us reason to believe that all is not lost.

And so, we pray that You will speak to us clearly today
as we read from and reflect upon each passage from the Bible.
May Your written word be brought to life
by the presence of Your living word.

Take our lives, then,
as we once more lay them before You,
as we submit to You and Your ways,
as we put fresh faith in Your plan and purpose,
as we again take on trust the promises of Christ.

Prayer of confession

Lord God, we know that even as we tell you what you mean to us and thank you for what you have done for us, that we have to confess the things we have done wrong. We know that we don't always live our lives in the way that you would want us to.

In a time of silence we think about what we have done that we shouldn't have done ...

Lord, we are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

Amen

Assurance of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
He says to each and every one of us,
"Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven."

Amen

Readings:

Genesis 1: 27

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Galatians 3: 23-29

Children of God

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor

Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Revelation 7:9

The Great Multitude in White Robes

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Reflection

If we read the first chapter of Genesis, we find the account of creation. We are told that partway through the sixth day God looked at his creation and 'God saw that it was good'. And then he makes human beings. My first thought is why bother? Creation is good. Why spoil it by creating people – people like us. After all we just mess up creation – cut down forests, pollute the oceans, poison the air, cause climate change, and that's just for starters. But we're told that 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created

them.' We're not told that everyone except for ... (insert your own thoughts here!) was created in God's image, but that mankind – all of us, was created in His image. There is equality right from the very beginning. Whoever we are, whatever our background, we're all made in the image of God. When God looks again at what he had made it wasn't good any more. We're told 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.' That word 'very' is my favourite word in the whole Bible. That creating human beings can change creation from being good to being very good is a wonderful feeling. God made us in an all-sorts mixture that pleased him.

If we think about the Galatians passage, the apostle Paul is sharing similar ideas. He tells us that through faith we are all children of God. He says that the baptised have clothed ourselves with Christ. That is an odd idea. How can we wear Christ? There may be reference here to a custom which certainly existed later. The candidate for baptism was clothed in new, pure white robes, symbolic of the new life into which he or she entered. Just as the initiates put on their new white robes, so their new, baptised lives were clothed with Christ.

The result was that in the church there were no differences between any of the members – they had all become sons or daughters of God. In verse 28 Paul states that distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free person and male and

female have been eliminated. In the morning prayer that Paul would have said daily in his pre-Christian days the Jew thanks God that he hasn't been made a Gentile, a slave or a woman. Paul has taken that prayer and reversed it. The most obvious opposites are wiped out.

Baptism produced a real union with Christ. For the early Christians it wasn't only an outward symbol of an inner change. When converts to Judaism were baptised they entered into the Jewish faith, when converts to Christianity were baptised they entered into Christ. Baptism was a real life – changing deal. And so, we are told we are 'all one in Christ Jesus'. Baptism unites us to other Christians.

It is only the love of God which can unite a disparate and disunited world.

And so, if we look at the verse from Revelation chapter 7, we share in John's vision of heaven. The Jewish – Christian John is writing to Greek speaking Gentile Christians in Asia Minor. There is a multitude of God's people 'so great that no one could count'. We're told that they were from 'every nation, tribe, people and language'. The people of God are multi-ethnic, and very numerous. It is good to see the hosts of God around the throne in their white robes of purity, carrying palm branches as signs of victory and joy.

The Christian church has always been multi – ethnic. God created us because He wanted to, not because he had to. The making of human kind changed creation from being good to **very** good. Despite Jews having the reputation of keeping themselves and their families 'pure' it has always been of paramount importance what a person believes, not what they look like, or where they come from, or who their family are. Christianity spread from the first apostles who were Jewish out into the Gentile world including people of all nations and ethnicity.

Our challenge is to live this out in our lives, not just personally but also outwardly. To share our lives with all people not just people 'like us'.

Prayers of Intercession

God of all peoples, whose Son reached across the ethnic boundaries between Samaritan, Roman and Jew, help us to break down the barriers in our communities, enable us to see the reality of racism and bigotry, and free us to challenge and uproot it from ourselves, our society and our world.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all victims of racial hatred and discrimination, and we seek your protection for those affected in our churches, our schools, our places of work and our communities.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for all in our world, of whatever race, who suffer the horrors of modern slavery. Your Son came to bring good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed. We pray for all working to combat modern slavery and to end human trafficking: for governments and agencies, for Church and other faith leaders, for businesses, charities and individuals.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer

We pray for ourselves. May we be voices against oppression and channels of the transforming power of the gospel. Open our hearts to all who suffer in our midst but out of sight. Help us to work for a world where human beings are valued, where no one is enslaved, and no one used against their will for another's pleasure or need.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer

We pray that we may know the power of reconciliation. Wherever there is division between us and others, because of our race or ethnicity, we pray that we may all be led to reconciliation. We pray for all who work to bring communities together in ways that are just and equal for all.

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer

As we pray for reconciliation, we pray also for restoration. We pray for those whose spirits and communities have been weighed down by racism. Guide us as we strive to ensure everyone has equal dignity.

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you (Singing the Faith 611)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttW9oQ-yiuU>

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh, I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Richard A.M. Gillard (b. 1953) ©Scripture in Song. Administered by Song Solutions CopyCare

Prayer of Blessing

God knows our name, and calls us to serve others in his.
Go then, to love and serve the LORD,
by loving and serving all of those with whom we share this
earthly life.

And, the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, today and every day.

All God's people say – AMEN!

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