

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Helen Lunn. 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.

Welcome to the online service from Enfield Methodist Circuit as we continue looking at belonging to healthy multi-ethnic congregations. Today we shall be looking at how we deepen our fellowship and encourage meaningful friendships with people from different ethnic backgrounds to our own.

Call to worship

Loving God, you are a great welcomer, and you delight in drawing people to your table, seeking and saving those who have isolated themselves through their actions or words.

We pray for one another, as we gather to worship, that we too would be people of welcome, opening our church and our fellowship to those longing to be accepted.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen.

Hymn Lord I come before your throne (Singing the Faith 58)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fo1UV9pfrs>

Lord, I come before your throne of grace;
I find rest in your presence
and fullness of joy.

In worship and wonder
I behold your face,
singing what a faithful God have I.

*What a faithful God have I,
what a faithful God.*

*What a faithful God have I,
faithful in every way.*

Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;
through the storm you're the beacon,
my song in the night.

In the shelter of your wings,
hear my heart's reply,
singing what a faithful God have I.

*What a faithful God have I,
what a faithful God.*

*What a faithful God have I,
faithful in every way.*

Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
let me comfort those who suffer
with the comfort you have given.
I will tell of your great love for as long as I live,
singing what a faithful God have I.

*What a faithful God have I,
what a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
faithful in every way.*

Robert Critchley (b. 1959) and Dawn Critchley (b. 1965)
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A time of prayer

Lord our God, your perfect love surrounds us and casts out all fear.
You bring hope to the hopeless and lift us from defeat and failure.
You bring joy and peace to the downtrodden and to the despairing.
We celebrate your goodness and your faithfulness to us as the God of past, present and future.
We trust in your provision for our needs and acknowledge you as the source of every good and perfect gift.

In fellowship together, we worship you.
You break down the barriers of suspicion and mistrust.
You take away our dependence on our own achievements and our selfish desire for status.
You remove the masks of suspicion, pretence and hypocrisy.
You set us free to honour you in the words on our lips and in the actions and attitudes of our lives.

We worship you.
We lift up our hearts and hands in joy for the wonders you have done.
You have changed us in the past.
You will go on changing us.
You sustain us in the present and give us hope for the future.
In you is our hope of resurrection.
In you our horizons are open.

Maker of the world, Creator of all things,
we stand before you knowing we have abused your trust in us. You made us for peace and fellowship and everywhere we have turned our backs on your purpose.
Our words and actions stir up conflict; our thoughts are full of anger and resentment;
our lives reflect our brokenness.

When you lived a human life with us you showed us the full meaning of our humanity, but still, we turn against each other; still, we judge each other; still, we grasp things for ourselves, failing to live by your vision of community.

As we hurt ourselves and others, come amongst us and breathe your peace on us, for we are your lost children and in need of your healing peace.

Thank you, God, that you journey with us,
up our own mountains!

You are with us as we struggle;
comfort us when times are tough.

You lift us up when we stumble;
give us strength we never knew we had.

You are with us every step of the way.

You teach us to take each step at a time.

Thank you, God, for the shifting clouds of faith.

You are in the midst, though we cannot see you.

Your presence is like the changing mist.

Faith can be transient and hesitant

but we do not journey alone.

When we enter the cloud we need not fear,
for you speak to us.

Thank you, God, that you spoke to Moses.

Speak to us in words we can hear:

in the words of prayer,

in the verses of hymns,

in the teaching of Scripture,

in the challenge of sermon,

in the fellowship of friends,

in the love of family.

Amen.

Bible Readings

Ruth 1:1-18

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ²The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

³Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

¹¹But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹²Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

¹⁴At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

⁴I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection

As it is black history month, I am sure we have all heard stories of when black people haven’t felt welcome even within the church. At the beginning of the 2021 Methodist Conference

Rev Sonia Hicks told the following story as part of her presidential address.

Her Great Aunt Lize was one of her first family members to arrive in Britain from Jamaica. She came with her Methodist membership ticket – her proof that she had accepted the invitation to be at God’s table. On the first Sunday morning in this country, she got dressed in her best clothes – her Sunday best, as she had always done in Jamaica – and headed to the nearby Methodist church, just down the road from where she was now living. Not exactly sure when the service was to begin, Great Aunt Lize arrived as the congregation was singing the opening hymn. She sneaked in at the back and prepared to worship God with her Methodist family, as she was used to doing.

When the hymn ended, the minister came from the front of the church and, on reaching Great Aunt Lize, asked her where she was from. She explained that she was newly arrived from Jamaica and started to reach for her membership ticket in her handbag. “Your sort go to the other church”, said the minister not even noticing the ticket. Great Aunt Lize was confused: “My sort?”, she repeated, “Isn’t this a Methodist church?” “Yes, it is a Methodist Church” said the minister, “But people like you go to the church down the road.”

His words started to make sense to Sonia’s Great Aunt. By, ‘people like you’ this minister meant Black people. He was

saying that Black people were not welcome in that church, not even Black Methodists. Hiding her hurt, Great Aunt Lize asked: “Can I just stay until the end of the service today?” “No,” said the minister, “Your presence is upsetting my members. Please leave now.” So, my Great Aunt Lize gathered her things and left that place of worship.

This kind of prejudice is not ok; it was shocking hearing that it happened, but unfortunately things like this still happen today. I want to go to a church where all are welcome no matter who they are.

I feel blessed being in this circuit and also in the London District being able to mix with people from around the world. Getting to know them not just as church members but as friends. Spending time in fellowship over food especially Jollof Rice and Curried Goat and having discussions on different topics with differing opinions from people. I feel my life is being enriched by being part of a multi-ethnic church and the fellowship that it brings.

Throughout the Bible we see lots of references to Fellowship. The Greek word that is translated as fellowship is koinonia. It is a word that is rich in depth, meaning and challenge, and points to a quality relationship and activity which goes a lot deeper than just a friendly chat over a cup of tea or coffee. Koinonia is profoundly practical and deeply relational. John Stott argues that koinonia ‘is a Trinitarian experience, it is our

common share in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ One of the most famous passages that we see koinonia is in Acts 2 in which the followers of Jesus eat, pray and share goods together. They are sharing their lives with each other and with the world around them in that shows the kingdom of God as a powerful sign of a Spirit-filled way of life that stands against sinful selfishness; a wonder of hope, reconciliation and generosity. A true community of belonging and service.

Through the practical experience of Christ-like love, koinonia draws people to Jesus, nurturing and sustaining disciples. It is evangelistic, pastoral, practical and formative. But the risk is, that in deepening fellowship, we can become insular and only develop fellowship with people who are like us.

Fellowship is all about sharing, caring and living out our faith in actions. Fellowship doesn't just happen! There are many ways to build and strengthen it. It aims to include, not to exclude.

John Wesley was one among others who recognised that God can be encountered in Fellowship with those outside the Christian community and on the edges of society. The experience of meeting people we wouldn't normally spend time with can extend our ideas about Fellowship and remind us of the radical nature of Christian love.

When we think of the story of Ruth, we have a story of tragedy and tenderness, immigration and migration, mixed marriages and childless marriages and then a beautiful covenant

commitment between an older Israelite woman and a younger Moabite woman, that come what may, they stick together and journey together in life, in faith and in hope.

It's a story about God and how he restores those who look to him with hope. It's about God's covenant faithfulness and it contributes to the overall covenantal storyline that unifies the entire Bible. The author has gone to great care to honour Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz through the development of their characters in the story. They are character studies of how God works in mundane, everyday events in the lives of his people (and what human covenant faithfulness looks like in return).

Ruth is an outsider, a Moabite who breaks social convention to do right by Naomi. Ruth trusts in God and commits herself to his people. Naomi loses her entire family. But these tragedies do not surprise God, and he's able to steer Naomi's losses back into restoration. It is also a story of fellowship of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Corinthians reading tells us of the spiritual gifts that God has given to the people of Corinth, the gifts of speech and knowledge to enable them to fulfil the calling God has given them.

It is hard to imagine that all Corinthian Christians felt as if their work was a special occupation designed individually for them by God. Most of them were slaves or common laborers, as we will see. What Paul must mean is that whether or not each

person's occupation seems special, God gives the gifts needed to make everyone's work contribute to God's plan for the world. No matter how insignificant our work seems, no matter how much we long to have a different job, the work we do now is important to God.

In most situations today, professionals are obliged to identify areas for improvement, and they are advised to begin their comments by identifying the strengths of the individual.

In the reading from Corinthians, Paul is being positive about the Christian community at Corinth. He says they have been 'sanctified', called to be 'saints'. He gives thanks for them because of the 'grace of God' they received.

Paul uses the word 'church', our translation of the Greek, *ekklesia*, but this can't have meant a building. Christianity didn't exist as an entity separate from Judaism at this time, so would not have had its own buildings. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, says, 'The Church is not built with bricks and stones. The Church is built with love in the hearts.'

In verse 9 Paul speaks of us being called together into 'fellowship with God's Son Jesus Christ'. The use of the word fellowship here signifies a coming together of people for a purpose, in this case, to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and serve him in the world.

Deepening fellowship together in churches that are multicultural requires us to commit as people from different ethnic backgrounds to journeying together for the sake of Christ in our world. It assumes a love covenant towards one another similar to the relationship that Ruth made to Naomi. This means that as Christians we are committed to one another in the continual process of building healthy, integrated, multi-ethnic churches regardless of the ups and downs that will come our way.

Fellowship might be comfortable when we are sharing and spending time with people with whom we agree. Fellowship however can also be uncomfortable. Christians are called to live, work and worship together despite different deeply held views and so demonstrate God's love in the way we engage with each other and the world.

John Wesley reflects on this in his sermon 'On a Catholic spirit', 'Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.'

Throughout our fellowship, things will need to be discussed, diverse voices listened to and wisdom prayerfully sought. We can only endure this if we are committed to one another in and through the love of Christ. It becomes a powerful statement of our intentions therefore when we are able to look one another

in the eye and say that because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we will be friends.

Let us pray

God of all, we praise you for the diversity found in your Church.

We give thanks for the ministry of Fellowship Groups and language-specific congregations, for though we are many, we are still one body and we share in one faith.

Help us to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, to celebrate our different cultures and spiritual traditions and to rejoice that we have all been baptised in one Lord.

Give us grace to be ourselves while also working for unity in your Church. **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=QO92Lw9v8PE>

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 Christ-light for you
in the night-time 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)

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A time of prayer

Gracious Lord,

We pray for the worldwide church community, seeking to live in the light of your love...

We pray for situations where fellowship has broken down and church communities are fractured.

May judgement make way for respect, and harsh words for gentleness.

Jesus, light of the world:

let us live honourably.

We pray for the nations of the world...

We pray for all situations where trust and good will have been destroyed; and we give thanks for those who remain generous and kind situations of oppression.

Jesus, light of the world:

let us live honourably.

We pray for the community of which we are a part...

We pray for homes where relationships are strained and under pressure, asking that small acts of neighbourliness may ease their unhappiness.

Jesus, light of the world:

let us live honourably.

We pray for those who we know who are unwell...

We pray especially for those who suffer as a result of abuse or attack or conflict. May they meet people who genuinely value and appreciate them.

Jesus, light of the world:

let us live honourably.

We pray for those who we know who have died...

We pray that we too may come to know the light and love of community in your eternal kingdom.

Jesus, light of the world:

let us live honourably.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is 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 The Church of Christ, in every age (Singing the Faith 415)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STH3kquNdOs>

The Church of Christ, in every age
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise,
a caring Church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:

to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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Blessing

Your people, Lord, are one people.

Your people, Lord, are holy people.

Your people, Lord, are found in all times and all places.

Your people, Lord, are to work with you for the Kingdom.

We want to be your people, Lord

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be your strength,
wherever you go;
may the love of God be your joy, whatever your circumstances;
and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be your inspiration,
whatever you do.

Amen.

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