

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Rev. Valentin Dedji. 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 & Invocation:**

Dear friends, it is my great joy to connect with you at this moment on this on-line platform. Thank you for welcoming me in your homes. We meet in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen!

For those who may not know me, I am Rev. Valentin Dedji, a minister in the Enfield Methodist Circuit, in North London. Our first hymn is an invitation to greet each other and serve one another in the name of our unity in Jesus Christ...

## **Hymn:** StF 691 '*What shall our greeting be*'

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYpnNPZD9PI>

1. What shall our greeting be:

Sign of our unity?

JESUS IS LORD!

May we no more defend

Barriers he died to end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

One Church, One Lord!

2.What is our mission here?

He makes his purpose clear:

One world, one Lord!

Spirit of truth descend,

All our confusions end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

JESUS IS LORD!

3.He comes to save us now:

To serve him is to know

Life's true reward.

May he our lives amend,

All our betrayals end:

Give me your hand, my friend:

JESUS IS LORD!

Fred Pratt Green: (1903-2000)

**Prayers of Adoration: (Psalm 95)**

***Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.***

***For the LORD is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.***

***Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;  
for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.***

***Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***

Through Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen!**

**Call to Repentance & Words of Forgiveness**

**First Bible Reading:** Luke 6: 31-36 (NRSV)

<sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you. <sup>32</sup> “If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Second Bible Reading:** Matthew 4:19, 20; 8:27

“Follow me” ... immediately they followed him... They were amazed and said, “what sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”

Dear Friends, I would like to share with you on the theme:  
**'LIVING, LOVING AND SERVING JESUS, HIS WAY'.**

Allow me to start this reflection by asking you some personal questions:

-Would you confidently consider yourselves as followers or disciples of Jesus Christ?

-If yes, why have decided to embrace the Christian faith?

-Are you just following in your parents' footsteps or was it your personal choice?

-Are there any aspects of Jesus' teachings that stood out for you?

As for me, the following extracts from what is known as Jesus' Sermon on the plain has always been eye-opening and thought-provoking for me: **'Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.'** (Luke 6: 36-37 & 38).

To understand why such teachings by Jesus became radically new and transforming, let me remind you that long before Jesus, respectable teachers of the Jewish law of life (such as

Moses) taught the rule and practice of a proportionate revenge: 'Eye-for-eye, tooth-for tooth'.

Therefore, it was quite a spiritual revolution when people heard Jesus teaching about compassion, love and forgiveness, not only for their friends, but also for those who were different from them, including their enemies.

Here, let me invite you to focus on what happens to people when they truly commit themselves to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ:

"Follow me" ... immediately they followed him... They were amazed and said, "what sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Matthew 4:19, 20; 8:27)

Having left their livelihood and followed him we later find Jesus' disciples responding to him with amazement and wonder. "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Is this Jesus just a team leader, a gifted teacher, a miracle worker? **Who is this Jesus and what does he mean for those who put their trust in him?**

It took Jesus' disciples three years of following, in obedience and communal living to find the answer to their question.

In the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth is often called a Rabbi - and his followers are called, his disciples. A disciple was someone who had chosen to be with his Rabbi as much as possible in order to learn everything they could from him and not just during formal teaching times. A disciple was with his Rabbi all the time.

This commitment of the disciple to stay in the presence of the Rabbi he followed, was beautifully expressed in the blessing: "May you always be covered by the dust of your Rabbi."

That is: may you follow him so closely that the dust his feet kicks up and covers your clothing and face! Very much like a baby duckling whose image of its mother has been imprinted on its brain, disciples never wanted to let the Rabbi out of their sight. So, the question remains:

**"What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"** The disciples' collective memory and answer is: "This man Jesus is that self-giving love of God made visible. He is that transforming power of God that changed us to be like Himself in love and self-service. In him we saw the world and its needs with a new awareness, and we knew that to serve others in their suffering was to serve God.

He made us realise that **we came from God, we belonged to God; we were made for God**, who gave us a mind to know him, a heart to love him and a will to serve him. And when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, we were on fire with the conviction that through this man- Jesus we had become literally sons and daughters of God.

We were pioneers of a new humanity, founders of a new Kingdom.

A Kingdom of forgiven sinners: forgiven for our past sins, given new life in the present and hope for the future. We were committed to each other regardless of our ethnic background, gender and material possessions. Every day we were filled with passion and gratitude, unable to get over the sheer amazing Grace of God."

## WHO IS JESUS AND WHAT DOES HE MEAN FOR THOSE WHO PUT THEIR TRUST IN HIM?

That, for me, remains the critical question of our time.

The French novelist Victor Hugo said that, “There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world: and that is, an idea whose time has come”. **Corporate-discipleship: fraternal-belonging was Jesus’ big idea, and plan for the renewal of society;** a catalyst and engine for building God’s Kingdom.

His idea, which has lasted over the centuries, was simply this: a mixed community of sinners called to be saints, a divine society where the risen Christ in the midst of it is grace and truth, and the Holy Spirit is at

work within it. An inclusive and generous friendship, where each person is affirmed as of infinite worth, dignity and influence. A community of love, overflowing in gratitude and wholehearted surrender, because it participates in the life of God.

This corporate-discipleship, that we call the Church, is called to worship God and to **infect the world with righteousness.**

As Martin Luther said: “St Paul was strong in faith, soft and more flexible in love... and ready to yield into everything.” May God give me **faith and love** in equal measure.

Let us begin to answer that question by paying particular attention to the meaning of **corporate-discipleship.**

**You see, the call to corporate discipleship is a call to God’s promised glory. For Christ did for us that which we couldn’t do for ourselves.**

God’s acceptance of us just as we are, enables us to overcome our alienation and to experience the joy and the fulfilment of personal communion with God.

Through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there came into the world a new power that transforms human character and human communities; and liberates us from anxiety, fear, meaninglessness, evil, ignorance, guilt and shame.

**God’s Good News isn’t for the chosen few: it is for everyone,** whether they hear it or whether they don’t.

There is nothing more needed by humanity today than the recovery of a sense of what I call **‘beyond-ness’** in the whole of life to revive the spring of wonder and adoration.

**So, whenever we feel that we are called to be followers of Jesus Christ, the ultimate call is to live, to love, to serve and be good news to everyone. It would be fantastic if people not only said of Jesus Christ, “What sort of man is this?” but said of us, his followers, “What sort of people are they? Their gracious actions, and the language on their lips is of God’s goodness and love. Let us get to know them. There is something extraordinarily normal and wonderful about them.”**

As a little child, as I followed my late dad during a number of heart-warming ‘Evangelisation campaigns’ in many villages in our native Benin, in West Africa, it was Christians like that who created in me a thirst for Christ, the living water. ‘I stooped down and drank, new life flooded my whole being’. Many decades later, up-to-day, I am still amazed by God’s constant love and forgiveness for someone like me!

God is working in the world today quite beyond the limits of our budgets, structures and expectation. His gospel, lived out in corporate-discipleship, has the power to transform our individual and corporate lives, our families, our communities and our nations. It has the power to break beyond our timidity and insufficiency.

The voice of God is active today as it has been down the centuries – provoking us to move, change, and recognise who we are and what – by God’s help – we can become.

Because we are Christ’s Body, called out and called together, this ought to affect our worship, our evangelism and our response to social, political and economic realities.

The Jesus who calls us to follow him is saying to us today:

**“Hear, O you my people, the Lord our God is the only Lord,**

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart,**

**With all your soul, with all your mind**

**And with all your strength**

**Love your neighbour as yourself”.**

**And Jesus added His special touch of blessing by saying:**

**‘Blessed are the merciful and those who seek righteousness, for they will see God’.**

**May it be so for us now and forever. Amen!**

### Prayers of Intercession

O Heavenly Father,

We pray that through the transforming power of your teachings, Love may be real among your people.

We pray for a world where every vulnerable person finds welcome in a sheltered place, where love is tender, undefiled, and firmness intertwines with grace.

Lord Jesus, we pray for a nation just and fair that seeks the welfare of all, where leaders guide with prudent care and nurture life for great and small.

We pray for our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised; you show us how old pain and wounds for new life can be used.

We pray especially for families in our churches and local communities that are bereaved and those who are struggling with all sorts of diseases. Lord, may have mercy on us and show us your healing power.

We bring before the throne of Grace our broken selves, confused and closed and tired; then through your gift of healing grace, may you awaken in us a new purpose.

We pray for a world where all have voice, a place where humility and servanthood would reign over a spirit of competition and selfishness. Till then, may all have rightful choice for compassion, solidarity and mutual care. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. **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.**

## **Final Hymn: (StF) 615 'Let love be real, in giving and receiving'**

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

<https://youtu.be/GfRN5dDkym5>

1. Let love be real, in giving and receiving,  
without the need to manage and to own; a  
haven free from posing and pretending,  
where every weakness may be safely known.  
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,  
give me your love wherever we may go:  
  
As God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.
2. Let love be real, not grasping or confining,  
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;  
that helps us face the risk of truly living,  
and makes us brave to be what we might be.  
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,  
give me your love in spite of all you know:  
  
As God loves us, so let us love each other, with no  
demands, just open hands and space to grow.
3. Let love be real, with no manipulation, no secret wish to  
harness or control; let us accept each other's

incompleteness, and share the joy of learning to be  
whole. Give me your hope through dreams and  
disappointments, give me your trust when all my failings  
show.

As God loves us, so let us love each other, with no  
demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

## **Blessing**

May the amazing transforming power of Jesus enable you to  
shine as children of His light. Let the Gospel become flesh in  
you. And may the love, peace and joy of Jesus Christ  
continually radiate from your life and for His Glory. **Amen!**

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