

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

Opening Prayer

Hymn: STF 357 Jesus – the name high over all.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3Jpx0Rnmno>

Jesus – the name high over all,
in hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly.

Jesus – the name to sinners dear,
the name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.

Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head;
power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead.

O that mankind might taste and see
the riches of his grace!

The arms of love that compass me
would all the earth embrace.

His only righteousness I show,
his saving grace proclaim;
'tis all my business here below
to cry: "Behold the Lamb!"

Happy if with my latest breath
I may but gasp his name;
preach him to all, and cry in death:
"Behold, behold the Lamb!"

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together:

God, most gracious and most holy, hallowed be your name. As we begin this day, we praise your glory.

Saviour Christ, for us and for all you gave yourself in love. Through all our lives, we will sing your glory.

Comforting, loving Spirit of God, the fire in our hearts. We worship you and open our hearts to your presence.

With all creation, we turn to you today, loving God. Open our eyes to your glory, our ears to your Word of life and our hearts to your perfect love and peace.

In the name of Christ, we bring our worship. Amen.

Today's Reading from the New Testament

Acts 16:9-15 (NRSV):

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

¹¹ We therefore set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen

eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Today's Gospel Reading:

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³ In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" ⁷ The ill man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a Sabbath.

Time to Reflect

At the end of the Gospel reading the punchline, “Now that day was a Sabbath”, tells us that what we have heard in Jesus’ encounter at the Sheep Gate pool is a story about priorities. Will Jesus conform to the expectations of the leaders and others (perhaps even the man who is offered healing)? Or will Jesus act? Is it that, as we hear elsewhere, the Sabbath has been made for humans, or vice versa?

In the healing work of Jesus, God’s kingdom priority is expressed. We are not designed to be stuck in the circumstances that threaten to hold us. We are designed rather for newness of life, for fullness of resurrection living. In these concerns, Jesus seems to be in a hurry.

At the pool in Jerusalem gathered all who would get themselves, sometimes with assistance, into the healing springs. In Western understandings, we often miss the deep meaning of the story behind the healing. We are sometimes tempted to think solely in terms of “disease”, the physical ailments of those who gathered and miss the wider implications. In Jesus’ day by the pools of Jerusalem, it is the social networks and relationships that have become disordered. A person in need of healing and wholeness stood apart from society, just as we heard with the man who had no

friends to help him into the pool. But in an even worse position would be someone who claimed they found healing on the Sabbath, for they would be challenging the covenant relationship between God and all creation.

What Jesus brings about, by not waiting for the Sabbath to pass, is a healing which challenges all the assumptions of those watching on and offers a reordering of Kingdom priorities. No wonder he asks the man, “Do you want to be made well?”. Healing, in this way, on the Sabbath, carried significant implications to live up to.

In Robert Capon’s book, *Between Noon and Three: Romance, Law and the Outrage of Grace* (Eerdmans, 1997) Capon explores the potentially offensive and radical nature of forgiveness. He offers three modern day parables that challenge us to stretch our understandings of forgiveness, Jesus-style, where:

“...his breaking of the sabbath seems pointless and unnecessary. He is not performing a good deed that, if delayed, would become unperformable. This is not a man who needs immediate rescue, not a man laying unconscious in a burning house. This is not even a man whose case is like the one Jesus cites to justify the healing -- a sheep fallen into a pit who would drown if left till sundown.”

For 38 years, the man has been coming to the same pool. Capon is asking, what made Jesus act *now*, on this Sabbath? And perhaps, we might also ask what makes Jesus approach *this* man and offer healing and wholeness, and not the others?

Perhaps there are some hints at potential responses to these questions. Is it that the man's 38 years of suffering are just shy of the 40 wilderness days of Israel, or is it that 40 years was the usual life expectancy? Is the Fourth Gospel drawing a parallel with the isolation of wilderness and the man's condition or is it that Jesus comes to bring life to all, at any and every stage of life?

Another perspective, as so often in the fourth Gospel, is the contrast between the one considered in need of healing and wholeness and the religious leaders and other onlookers. The man in John 5 is enabled to stand and to be brought back into full community. Those who are more concerned about the timing of the healing and the day of the week miss what it is actually going on. It is their expectations and their understandings that are dis-eased by the encounter as Jesus muddies the waters of what people thought they knew about God, and about God's kingdom.

So Jesus notices, stops, and acts. He acts in the right way at the wrong time, deliberately confounding the expectations of

those who wanted to see God acting, and of those who imagined they had no one to help them. Jesus' actions free the man and open up the possibility that others too might be drawn into understanding how the kingdom priorities might be truly life giving and healing.

In Acts we caught a glimpse of what happens when people are able to "take up their mat" and begin to see what Jesus is doing. The narrative switches to the "we" passages of Acts, which may possibly indicate Luke's own eyewitness accounts in authorship. On the Sabbath Paul and the others meet with Lydia, a wealthy cloth dealer. At her leading, her whole household are baptized and as her heart is opened, so she opens her home to the disciples. Lydia becomes a model for someone who is prepared to hear and take to heart the new sense of God's priority, as the good news stirs her up in new ways. No one is excluded from this healing and renewing power of God in Christ.

Jesus comes to show us God's priorities for us all, and those always are the things that make for our flourishing and resilient following.

What is it the healing we wait for? What do we long the Sabbath breaking Jesus to do in us and around us? How might we be made well?

A time of prayer

Let us lift our prayers to the Lord.

Together, we pray for those who have suffered and waited for a long time. We pray for all who live with chronic pain and with recurring distress and disturbance to their lives.

Together, we pray for all who seek to bring comfort and peace, healing and hope to others. We pray for all who are in any sort of need this day. We remember those who are finding it hard to make ends meet, anxious about work or their future. May we be ready to share what we have, and to work for justice and peace with all.

Together, we offer our continued prayers for the challenges to security and justice across our world. We remember those living in places of war and fear. We pray for an end to conflicts and tyranny. We pray for the Church in every land, for our shared mission and openness to where you send us.

Together, we bring our thanks for all who have shared in our journeys of faith. We give thanks for your saints and our communion with you and your people in every place and time. We pray that the risen Christ would come and stay with us.

We lift our prayers to the Lord, in faith and hope. Thanks be to God, in the name of Christ. 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.Hymn: STF 654 *The love of God comes close.*

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIQO1E6tpJ4>

The love of God comes close
where stands an open door
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor:
The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

The peace of God comes close
to those caught in the storm,
forgoing lives of ease
to ease the lives forlorn.
The peace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

The joy of God comes close
where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life
are found through smiles and tears.
The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

The grace of God comes close
to those whose grace is spent,
when hearts are tired or sore
and hope is bruised or bent:
The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

The Son of God comes close
where people praise his name,
where bread and wine are blest
and shared, as when he came.

The Son of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

John L Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

A prayer of blessing

Loving Christ, you call us by name and invite us to take our
place in your kingdom. May we hear your voice that our lives
might flourish in your love.

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

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