

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Dr 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, on this Sunday after Ascension, 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 surrender ourselves to God, as we are, as we prepare to engage in this time of worship... 'Come, now is the time to worship'

Hymn: StF 24 '*Come, Now is the Time to Worship*'

<https://youtu.be/Za4roZrWpc8>

1. Come, now is the time to worship,
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come, just as you are to worship,
Come, just as you are before your God, come.

2. One day every tongue
will confess you are God,

one day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

for those who gladly choose you now.
Come, now is the time to worship . . .

(Brian Dorerksen b. 1965)

Prayers of Adoration:

Let us pray: O Merciful Lord,
here we are, in this time of worship.
Come O Lord, give us your Spirit;
Come O Lord into our lives.
Come O Lord, open our hearts to receive your word.
Come, Spirit come.
In your loving-kindness hear our prayers.

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

Bible Reading: John 17: 20-26 (NRSV)

²⁰ “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,^[a] so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.”

Dear Friends,

I have just listened to a fascinating interview by Emma Barnett with Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the 43 year’ old lady who was imprisoned in Iran for 6 years on the false allegations of being

a spy. During that one hour long interview on BBC Radio 4 ‘Women’s Hour’ programme, Mrs Ratcliffe gave a detailed account of eight main factors that kept her going in her solitary confinement in a number of prisons in Iran during those 6 years of detention. What particularly caught my attention was when she revealed that her faith and her baby daughter Gabriella’s visits helped her survive detention. She went on to explain that though she was not a practicing religious person, during her solitary confinement her ‘faith got a lot deeper and a lot stronger’. As a consequence, knowing that thousands of people across the UK were campaigning and praying for her release helped her overcome all the vicious strategies put in place by her jailers to break her down and to mess up her mind.

It is with this in mind that I started my reflection on our today’ Gospel passage in John 17: 20-26. I am inspired to reflect on the **Theme: Prayer: An Unbroken Chain from Jesus.**

Let me start by asking you: How do you feel when someone prays out loud for you? When I asked a few friends this question, the following words surfaced: comforted, vulnerable, grateful, honoured, humbled, awkward but appreciative, like someone really cares.

A Humbling and Honouring Prayer

Obviously, we are not in control as we listen to people pray for us. They, not we, are the ones doing the asking, and God, not we, is the one answering the prayer. If Jesus were exhorting his disciples, and by extension us, we could strive to meet his expectations then. If he were exhorting us, we would have a mission, namely, not to disappoint him. Instead, we overhear a prayer on our behalf and are not called to action in that moment as much as we may wonder why the Father and the Son spend their time discussing about people like us and our little community of faith.

And there is more. There is more to wonder at than the fact that followers of Jesus are a topic for discussion among members of the Trinity. The content of the prayer is equally humbling and honouring. At the centre of the prayer in John 17 is the relationship that the first and second members of the Trinity share and the work of the Son, as a result of the Father's sending (verse 8), to draw everyone into that relationship. The Son is "close to the Father's heart" (John 1:18), or as the KJV puts it, "in the bosom of the Father."

Throughout his ministry, Jesus has revealed God's Personhood that was within Him and whom he knew so well. Now, in our

Gospel passage Jesus prays, "As you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us..." (John 17:21). Jesus prays that those who follow him may be drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity. The Father sends the Son to humanity precisely so that the Son may draw all humanity into the relationship that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A Prayer that looks to the future

Let me remind you that, on the Christian liturgical calendar, we are today on the Sunday after Ascension, just a week before Pentecost. As such, we are in-between-times. This is where Jesus' prayer for his disciples and for us in John 17 fits perfectly in these in-between-times. For, though Jesus prayed this prayer at the end of his ministry shortly before He went to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples, it is a prayer that looks to the future. Jesus was praying not only for the people seated around him at table that evening but also for his future followers, which thanks be to God, includes us. And it is a prayer that focuses on unity, on all being one. In that sense, that prayer by Jesus represents an unbroken chain connecting us – that means you and me – to Jesus. How comforting, how reassuring to know that, though many of us today, like Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe we may be fighting all sorts of solitary battles,

we are never alone. For the Lord Jesus Himself is watching over us. As St Paul quite rightly put it *'The Spirit helps us in our weakness. When we do not know what we ought to pray for, the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.'* (Romans 8: 26). This reminds me of the beautiful song 'His eyes are on the sparrows and He watches over me.'

A Prayer of Reconciliation

In the gospel of John, "the world" is often a way of describing those who oppose Jesus. Nonetheless, it was for love of the world that God sent the Son (cf. John 3:16), and in this prayer, at the close of his ministry, Jesus intercedes not only for his own but also for that world. Jesus asks for unity and love between those given to him and the Father, "so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). Nothing less than the reconciliation of all things is in view. The goal of the prayer is that even those who had been hostile to the coming of the Son (that means "the world") may believe that the Father sent him. Such believing, we know, leads to life in his name (cf. John 20:31).

As we have just reflected afresh on this prayer by Jesus, I pray that Jesus Himself may help us to let go off any issues of the past that may still holding us captives to bitterness, anger,

stress or brokenness so that we may feel liberated to make a leap of faith into the future of Hope, Joy and wholeness that the Lord has prepared for us.

Here, let me conclude with these encouraging and promising words from Prophet Jeremiah:

'For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.' Amen! (Jeremiah 29: 11-12).

Loving Jesus, As
you prayed for us your people, long before we could know anything about it.

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!**

Final Hymn: (StF) 707 'Make me a channel of your Peace'
https://youtu.be/mT8bybL_DqY

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord, and
where there's doubt, true faith in you:

***O Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be
consoled as to console; to be understood as to
understand; to be loved, as to love, with all my soul.***

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light; and
where there's sadness, ever joy:

***O Master, grant that I may never seek so much to be
consoled as to console; to be understood as to
understand; to be loved, as to love, with all my soul.***

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving to all men that we receive;
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Sebastian Temple (1928-1997)

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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