

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Tim Swindell. 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 and pray for them as they pray for you.

Call to Worship:

Almighty God, as we gather, physically and online, let us be quiet and find your presence.

We rejoice in the mystery of your loving justice.

Help us to understand what your love means, and how we can share that love with others.

Father, we come to worship you.

We meet as your people.

We seek your kingdom and its outworking among us, yearning for the world's sufficiency, searching for peace and harmony, justice, and fairness.

To you, our God, we come.

Amen.

Prayer of Adoration:

You, God, are the centre of our being, the standard by which we measure our lives.

For you are God of all, and all are your children.

You are the promise of what is right and the measure of what is wrong.

You are the teacher of love, respect and understanding.

In you we find sufficiency and more.

It is you, O God, we worship.

It is you and your ways we adore.

It is you and your giving that shows us how to live our lives.

Amen.

Hymn: STF 345 And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood

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

<https://youtu.be/dC8HSEKtuio>

And can it be that I should gain

an interest in the Saviour's blood?

Died He for me, who caused His pain?

For me, who Him to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be

that thou, my God, should die for me?

'Tis mystery all: The Immortal dies!

Who can explore his strange design?

In vain the first-born seraph tries

to sound the depths of love divine.

'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,

let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
so free, so infinite His grace –
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayer of Confession:

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
our prayers we have offered –
words spoken, erudite or muddled,
thoughts turned, feelings felt.

But all of this is for nothing
if we do not live out the longings of our praying.
All of this is for little,
if we do not turn our prayers to action.
In penitence and sorrow,
we offer now our lives to you,
seeking to know your forgiveness
and desiring to live by your ways.
Amen.

Let's spend a moment in quiet, reflecting on our lives.

Assurance of forgiveness

Our words, dear God, are so often hollow and empty,
your word is full and forever,
your word promises to forgive us,
it assures us of our freedom from past sins,
failings and wavering.
Let us now hear your word
and be set free to live our lives for you.

Our sins are forgiven,
Thanks be to God
Amen.

Today's readings:

Psalm 138

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

Thanksgiving and Praise

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
- ² I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and
your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.
- ³ On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.
- ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
- ⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
- ⁶ For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
- ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.

- ⁸ The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Luke 11: 1-13

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

The Lord's Prayer

11 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' ² He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

Perseverance in Prayer

⁵ And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." ⁷ And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you

anything.”⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹‘So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Reflection

I think we need to recognise that some of us British people – and that’s me – have some very strange attitudes and reactions. I hope that you might recognise that whether you consider yourself British or not – or indeed whatever your heritage within these islands. If you come from a different heritage, there might be things you rightly wonder about, or indeed find amusing, about the way some of us behave. There are rules of behaviour that we teach to anyone growing up here from a very young age. Let me give you some examples:

- If we have occasion to visit the doctor, when asked “How are you?”, we reply “I’m fine, thank you. How are

you?” We might, of course, actually be very ill indeed, but that’s not the way to begin – even with your doctor!

- We feel guilty for making traffic stop at the lights when we want to cross the road – and give a little nod to drivers in thanks and acknowledgement. Nobody wants to be an inconvenience!
- As we squeeze past people in a crowded room, we say “Excuse me, sorry, do you mind if I just...?”, without ever actually completing the sentence. We know what we mean!
- If we don’t quite catch someone’s name at the second time of asking, we consequently never speak to them again. Nothing personal, just embarrassing!

Our favourite words are ‘please’ and ‘sorry’. We like to use them much more often than might be considered reasonable by any other group of people.

And can I please say that, if you don’t understand that last sentence, I am so sorry – I hope I’m not losing you here... And if you aren’t even vaguely amused by what I’ve just said and you’ve taken it as a personal insult – again, I’m sorry!

It’s in that cultural context that I approach the readings today.

The psalmist makes perfect sense to me. He begins by humbling himself before God – singing praises, bowing down,

begging to be regarded as lowly. You can almost hear the writer, David, apologising, and asking God if he wouldn't mind, just possibly, sparing just a moment to listen to his humble plea. And the Lord responds. Thank you, Lord!

Against that, the Reading about prayer from Luke makes no sense. Sorry!

A disciple asks Jesus to teach them how to pray. And the pattern shown to them, to us, by Jesus, is radical. It's at odds with the prayers that many of us offer, at least in my experience. It's direct, demanding. No 'please', no tentative requests, no 'if you could just...', not even a hint of 'if you've got a moment omnipotent God.' or 'Dear Father, could you hear us.' It's straight in – direct demands:

- Give us...
- Forgive us...
- Lead us not into temptation...

Jesus continues on:

- Ask and it WILL be given,
- Seek and you WILL find,
- Knock and the door WILL be opened.

Not a please, or thank you, in sight!

I'll be honest. These readings are suddenly a real challenge to me – particularly Luke's approach to prayer – his words from

what we now see as the opening sentences of the Lord's Prayer. Why? Because I've prayed the Lord's Prayer like this for as long as I can remember. Sometimes the words simply wash over me, on other occasions particular phrases have more meaning or relevance, but I seldom notice the directness of my demands of God.

Give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us – we state. We end our prayers with 'Amen' – meaning 'So be it.' No 'please' or 'thank you,' no apology for taking up valuable God time.

It's the confidence, the certainty that God will act that I hear in the words that Jesus gives us. A confidence, a certainty that I am not sure I wholly connect with.

And let me set that confidence and certainty against that the uncertainty, the difficulties we see and face in the world we live in today.

- Continued difficulties with COVID after two and a half years of disrupted lives, deaths, upheaval and underfunding of public services – both in this country and around the world;
- We have war and conflicts in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Yemen, Myanmar and elsewhere;

- Heat and wildfires in Portugal, Spain and even closer to home;
- Floods in Australia;
- So many signs of climate change;
- Political turmoil in our government with entrenched dishonesty;
- Rising prices;
- Increasing poverty – again at home and around the world.

We've made a mess of this world that God created. It's a long list of uncertainty and insecurity. Little confidence, little certainty. We've made a mess, Lord, can you fix it for us?

Thinking about the church in particular throughout Great Britain, we too face uncertainty and, dare I say, we have lost our confidence in a future where communities follow Christ and live out the Christian faith – or any faith. We see congregations shrinking, churches closing – all accelerated with the experience of COVID, but a trend that began even before our parents' generation.

What do we do? What is our future? Where is God in all this?

Perhaps the answer to the first question, 'what do we do?' is a simple one. Put our trust in God. It's not our job to restore the

church, to grow membership, or to restore the faith of the peoples of the world. Nowhere in the bible does it tell us to build churches. All of that is God's work, not ours – although he might ask us to help from time to time.

Our reading today tells us that we have some much simpler tasks to perform:

We need to worship God and give him thanks;
we need to take the hand that God offers to us – the Lord will fulfil his purpose, not us;
we need to ask, search, and knock.

We are the friend who is knocking on God's door, whatever the time of day, whatever our needs.

God is available to us – he doesn't sleep.
Knock, search, and it will be given to us.

But keep knocking, keep searching, keep asking.
And, have confidence. We don't need to offer apologies; we don't even need to say 'please'! Have confidence. God has sent his Holy Spirit; God will give us the resources he needs us to have for his work. As the prophet Micah tells us, our attitude to work is to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly. We can't be complacent about that, but we can be confident.

We can be confident in telling other the story of the things that God is doing in our lives, and confident in sharing testimony about God's work in our communities. Let's find those stories and share them. The tendency we have to constantly apologise is matched by our tendency to find things to say sorry for. That leads us to bad news rather than good news. We are called to share Good News. That's the reason why, when I lead worship in our churches these days, I love to take time at the beginning of services to share good news from the congregations – good things that are happening in our lives. I love the stories you share, and it gives me hope.

Focus on the Good News, the positive things – count our blessings as my grandma would have said. Seeing good things happen leads to confidence in more good things. Confidence in the future, confidence that God is working in our lives.

Let us learn from the Psalmist, and learn from Luke's narrative: Let us give thanks, sing praise, seek, knock, ask – and do it in confidence. The Lord is doing good things.

Amen

A time of prayer

Let us remember the Methodist Church throughout our own Circuit in Enfield, but also throughout the United

Kingdom and in the wider world. Let us hold in our prayers the many communities of faith that are working and sometimes struggling to find an appropriate way forward during the continuing pandemic.

Let us pray:

In this moment Lord, we bring our prayers and our concerns for others.

The world seems so full of problems way beyond our imagining and understanding. Emergencies seem to be almost daily, and we move from one to another so quickly. But these emergencies are still there, and people are still impacted and in need. Our prayers we bring knowing that even if we fail to listen to you, you always listen to us, you listen to our words, our silences, our yearnings, and our longing.

- For those in crisis this day, we pray that someone will listen to them.
- For those in poverty and destitution, we pray that someone will give them a gift.
- For those in pain and anguish, we pray that someone will offer relief.
- For those who are hungry, we pray that someone will feed them.

- For those who are thirsty, we pray they may be given clean water.
- For those in grief, we pray that someone will simply be with them.
- For those who are near the end of life, we pray that someone will hold their hand.
- For those who are lonely, we pray they may be befriended.
- For those who are frightened, we pray they may be soothed and calmed.

Lord, there are so many needs of so many people in so many places, we remember now.

Those seeking to rule our country, may they do so with justice, honesty, and compassion, seeking an agenda for all and not just for themselves; may those who wish to lead listen to the needs and voices around them.

Those in Ukraine facing uncertain futures with the war seeming to be an ongoing crisis they are living through. And for those who have left family and friends behind and moved to neighbouring countries, including our own, may we, with others, listen to their stories and their anguish. For the people of Sri Lanka where seemingly the cost of living is daily forcing thousands into poverty way beyond our understanding, and with a government in turmoil.

For the people of Afghanistan whose freedoms and life choices are being daily eroded by a government who fails to listen to the voices of the world.

For those who fear the impacts of climate change, who are challenged by excessive heat and flood.

For those in our own country who are hungry this day, may they find the kindness and support of neighbours and strangers, of foodbanks and more, to feed not just their bodies but their minds and their souls.

For refugees risking all they have left, life and limb, to escape to a country which is safer, more secure, and more welcoming.

For those seeking purpose and point in life, may someone listen to them and bring them to you.

For those in dark places, may they see light and here words of comfort and welcome and hospitality.

Lord, these are our prayers this day, we offer them and ourselves. knowing you hear our every word.

Lord, hear us and bless those for whom we pray.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

As we pray the Lord's prayer together today, let's do it with a renewed sense of confidence that God is already answering our prayers.

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

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

Amen.

Hymn: STF 404 God's Spirit is in my heart

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

<https://youtu.be/9VTQvYG-bl4>

God's Spirit is in my heart;
he has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do:

*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down-trodden free,
and go tell everyone*

*the news that the kingdom of God has come;
and go tell everyone
the news that God's kingdom has come.*

Just as the Father sent me,
so I'm sending you out to be
my witness throughout the world –,
the whole of the world:

Don't carry a load in your pack;
you don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep –
can earn their own keep:

Don't worry what you have to say;
don't worry because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart –
will speak in your heart:

v. 1 and refrain Alan T. Dale (1902-1979)
vv. 2-4 Hubert Richards (1921 - 2010)

A blessing and sending out prayer

Lord, help us to think before praying,
and pray before acting.
May we see our community
and the people who make it up

as precious to you and precious to us,
as we seek to preserve all that is beautiful
and build up all that is holy and Godly.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now, every day and evermore.
Amen.**

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