

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.

Call to worship

Bring your poverty, bring your wealth.

Come in sickness, come in health.

Bring your faith and bring your fears.

Come in joy or come in tears.

Bring songs to sing and prayers to say.

Be kingdom people here today.

Amen

Hymn – StF 489 – All I once held dear, built my life upon

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLX6MH9hPI>

All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,

and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.*

*You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) Words and Music: © 1993, Graham Kendrick / Make
Way Music Ltd.

A time of prayer

Just as we are, together and apart,
we come to worship you, Lord God,
to hear your word and sing your praise,
to acknowledge our need and share your love.

God of richness beyond our imagining,
of love beyond our comprehension,
of giving beyond our worth,
of forgiveness beyond our earning,
of generosity beyond anything we need,
we adore you.

For our lack of generosity and giving, of caring and sharing:
Lord, forgive us.

For our neglect of need of body, mind or soul:
Lord, forgive us.

For our silence when words would have healed
and for harsh words that needn't have been spoken:
Lord, forgive us.

For our living that fails to put into practice
what we hear of you and from you:

Lord, forgive us.
For our ignoring of your truths, your ways, your words:
Lord, forgive us.

We have confessed our sins, Lord.
Jesus taught us to pray to you,
and Jesus promised that our sins would be forgiven.
We trust in your promises,
and amid the cacophony of noise that life throws at us,
may we hear your word 'my son, my daughter, my child,
your sins are forgiven.
Go and live well to the glory of my name
and the good of all'.

Praise be to you, creator God, for the world around us in all its
wonder and variety, for the richness and diversity it offers, for
nature, the sea, the air, the plants and animals, and our fellow
human beings.

Praise be to you, eternal God, that from one generation to
the next you are our God and we are your people. We are all
different to each other, but each of us is of equal value to you.
Praise be to you, loving God, for the love you have shown and
the love we have been given by those who know you. Praise to
you that you inspire us to share and receive such love.

Praise be to you, generous God, for sufficiency beyond our
imagining if only we will trust you and be guided by you.
Praise be to God, our Father and Mother, for the gift of Jesus.
Praise to be to God the Son, for walking this earth, teaching,
showing, guiding, giving, living, dying.
Praise be to God the Holy Spirit, for indwelling within us and
setting our hearts aflame with love for the world.
Praise be to God.

Amen.

Bible Readings

Colossians 3:1-11

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are
above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set
your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on
earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in
God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also
will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly:
fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is
idolatry). ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming on

those who are disobedient. ⁷ These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. ⁸ But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ ¹⁴ But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ ¹⁵ And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” ¹⁸ Then he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have

ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ²⁰ But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.’

Time to reflect

Today we are going to reflect on a story about a rich man. There is a challenge for us to see ourselves in the place of the rich man rather than hear this as a story about someone else, for there is always someone richer than us. Today is an opportunity for us to consider not how wealthy we are or aren’t, but how we think about wealth.

The language of the first four verses of the Colossians reading smacks of other-worldliness, with its heavenly Jesus and its call to heavenly-mindedness.

But abandoning old ways of living is not about detachment from everyday life. There is no place for ‘earthly’ things now that believers find their true being in God. But the old ways – including greed – exhaust social capital as well as individual character.

The 'new self' is humanity renewed in the image of Christ, and baptism is one of its principal symbols. Its ritual is reflected in the language of clothing. Old ways are 'stripped off' before putting on the clothes of a new social being.

Here those who are divided by culture, race, belief and social status are drawn into one, because 'Christ is all and in all. And, as we read further in Colossians, the new clothes are displayed in the Christ-like qualities that give shape to the body, both as church and household. If the rich man in Jesus' parable is soulless in his greed, this re-clothed humanity is soul-full in the way it parades the generosity of Christ.

The brother in the Luke reading who refuses to share his inheritance is like the man in the parable who hoards his possessions. The suggestion is that they are both driven by a greed that will prove to be their undoing.

The previous parables in this series of readings which have been the lectionary readings for the last couple of weeks have all included a neighbour. Their heroes have been generous and hospitable, at some cost to themselves.

But the rich man here is neighbour to no one. He is self-sufficient and self-obsessed. His moral values are embedded in

the way he talks about the material world. He regards the land's produce as 'my crops... my grain... my goods.'

He makes us think about what we mean when we speak of 'natural resources' rather than 'God's creation.' Are we seeing the earth's abundance as 'mine' or, at best, 'ours', with no obligation to use it for the benefit of anyone?

Speaking of 'creation' is not 'creationist' in an ideological sense, but a way of regarding the fruits of the earth as gifts to be shared.

The way the rich man sees his future reflects the ambitions of many in today's world: 'relax, eat, drink and be merry.' There is nothing intrinsically wrong about wanting to enjoy the fruits of labour. The rich man's mistake lies in his myopic vision of his land's abundance.

Has he sown, tended and harvested his land without help? Hardly. So his workers too have rights to share the benefits of the harvest.

Is grain so plentiful that other farmers have done equally well this year? Not necessarily. Like the time when there was grain in Egypt but not in Canaan, he can relax only because others

are forced to pay high prices for what he treats as a commodity rather than a gift. In a world of shortages and competition for scarce resources, what looks like security comes at a price.

The man is judged to be a fool, not simply because others will enjoy the fruits of his labour once he's dead, but because he is essentially soulless. There is no one else in his world.

His god inhabits barns full of grain. He is content to live off material capital, with no social or spiritual reserves to draw on when crisis comes. The indiscriminate generosity of God means nothing to him. So he is not fit for God's kingdom, and can expect to share the fate of another rich and selfish man in a later parable.

During a demonstration against government austerity measures, someone carried a banner that read, 'There is enough to go round.' This makes big assumptions, notably that we would prefer to distance ourselves from the rich man in Jesus' parable in favour of the more hospitable vision of the new self in Colossians.

Despite the evidence presented in *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate

Pickett, that the world's most unequal societies are also the unhappiest, we continue to be beguiled by the prospect of having more, whatever that means for the poorest.

But as the writings of Paul show, what we might call 'being more' – when this is measured by Christ – makes life infinitely richer at all levels.

The choice is between soulless and soul-full wealth. And it will be increasingly forced upon us by the changes that are already appearing in a world in which investors treat grain as one more commodity.

Greed and selfishness personified! In the gospel reading the farmer thinks only of himself and his needs. He has no concern for his neighbours and thinks he has no obligation but to lay down stores for himself and his future.

Jesus paints us a picture in which it is easy to see where the farmer's mistakes are being made. Even if we ignore the beatitudes that come before, and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus that comes after, we get the message that greed is bad.

‘You fool!’ In what ways are we foolish about wealth? We probably don’t have large stores of food in barns, but Jesus is drawing our attention to our attitude towards what we do have.

‘You fool!’ In what ways are we foolish about wealth? We probably don’t have large stores of food in barns, but Jesus is drawing our attention to our attitude towards what we do have.

Do we feel self-satisfied by our achievements in life? Do we feel obliged to help others, but look for ways to minimise our involvement? Do we look forward to a time when we can sit back in life and relax, but in the meantime work ourselves into the ground?

Jesus challenges us to see all that we have as God-given gifts to be enjoyed as gifts of grace. We also need to accept the obligation to help others, promoting more just sharing and allowing the kingdom to flourish.

There are no pockets in a shroud! The joke is told of an old miser who died, having lived incredibly frugally, showing generosity to no-one. ‘How much did he leave?’ asked a neighbour. The reply came, ‘All of it!’ As individuals and as

church communities, we do not know when our time will come to an end, so we need to assess now what we are doing with what we have. What resources has God given us? And how are we using them for the sake of others?

Dear God,

We pray for people who resort to desperate measures to make ends meet.

We pray for people who struggle to feed themselves and their children;

for those whose homes have been repossessed.

We pray for the credit unions that help people manage their finances and for the food banks that feed families who would otherwise go hungry.

We pray for those who run pawnshops and loan companies.

May they be fair and compassionate in their work.

We pray for the very wealthiest people in our country.

May they not grasp their fortunes to themselves, but use what they have for the benefit of others.

We pray for Score – sharing the Gospel with sportsmen and women – and for the witness of Christian athletes amongst their teammates.

We pray for ourselves, that we will be slow to judge others and generous in our forgiveness.

Amen

Hymn StF 615 – Let love be real, in giving and receiving

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZUo4gGaq2c>

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.*

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.*

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) Words: © 1995, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray

We pray for our world today.

We remember all those who have nothing but themselves and their lives:

refugees, the homeless, the destitute.

We pray for all those who care for such people,
that they may have the inner resource of God's love in their hearts at all times.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

We pray for those who think that they are failures:
the bankrupt, dropped-out, lost.

We pray for them, and for their families,
that they may know that they are close to God's heart.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

We pray for those who are angry today,
that their anger may be just,
that they can take their anger and use it to right wrongs,

that they can live with their anger and use it for God's kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

We pray for those who are experiencing loss
of loved ones or of material goods,
that they may know how much they can live with,
and without,
yet still be loved by God.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

We pray for ourselves,
acknowledging the hurts within,
the pain and loss.

May we know the love of God in our lives always
and pass that love to others who are hurting.

May God's love radiate out from our hearts
as we give that love to the world.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom

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 – StF 545 – Be thou my vision

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-xFSDgMx1s&t=104s>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century *translated* by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931) versified by
Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (*alt.*)

A prayer of blessing

We go now, assured of God's love:
for Christ is all and in all;
assured of God's hand on our lives:
for Christ is all and in all;
assured of God's blessing:
and remaining in God's love.

Amen.

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