

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John. 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.

Introduction

Today is the 9th Sunday after Trinity. Our readings and prayers draw widely on the priority of faith as we continue to consider life transformed by the birth and ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are called to live our lives in the light of our faith in God who is accepting, loving, and forgiving of all people everywhere.

Call to worship

God of Infinite Wisdom, today we hear your words in which you reassure us that we are surrounded by a great a cloud of witnesses. Open our ears and our hearts that we might lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely. Help us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. **Amen**

Opening Hymn- STF 692: Your hand O God has guided
(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here.)

<https://youtu.be/esJ7WWqG-dI>

Verse 1

Your Hand, O God Has Guided
Thy flock, from Age to Age;
The wondrous tale Is written,
Full clear on every Page.
Our forebears owned your goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness:
One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

Verse 2

Your Heralds brought glad tidings
To greatest as to least;
They summoned all to Hasten
and share the great King's feast.
their gospel of redemption
sin pardoned, right restored
Was all in this enfolded
One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

Verse 3

Your mercy will not fail us,
nor leave your work undone;
with your right hand to help us,
The victory shall be won.
And then, by all creation
Your name shall be adored,
And this Shall be our Anthem:
One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

Edward Hayes Plumptre (1821-1891)

Prayer of Adoration and Thanksgiving.

Let us pray.

Caring God, we come into your presence with thanksgiving, deeply grateful for your unfailing love and faithfulness. We thank you for the beauty of your creation, for the blessings that make our lives enjoyable and for the fortitude when things are not so good. We thank God for the earth, the sea, the sky, the gift of summer, for the various sporting events that have brought people together from around the world and for the joys of the outdoors.

Today we hear your words in which you reassure us that we are surrounded by a great a cloud of witnesses. We give you thanks for the whole company of your saints in glory. We

continue to wander at your mercy and grace. Enable us to receive the gift of your Holy Spirit so that we may be made perfect in your love to lead us into a richer and deeper faith. Blessing and honour, glory and power and might be given to you almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, we come to you in penitence and say that we are sorry for our sins. We confess that we do not always live by faith and miss those opportunities to reach out in the power of your resurrection. Forgive us, O God, and help us to become more faithful followers and the people you created us to be. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Silence

Absolution

The Bible tells us that those who are in Christ are a new creation.

Everything old has passed away. Behold everything has become new

Hear then Christ's word of grace to you:

'Your sins are forgiven.' **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

1st Reading: Psalm 82-New International Version

⁹ *A psalm of Asaph.*

¹ God presides in the great assembly;

he renders judgment among the “gods”:

² “How long will you^[a] defend the unjust
and show partiality to the wicked?^[b]

³ Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

⁵ “The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing.
They walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶ “I said, ‘You are “gods”;
you are all sons of the Most High.’

⁷ But you will die like mere mortals;
you will fall like every other ruler.”

⁸ Rise up, O God, judge the earth,
for all the nations are your inheritance.

2nd Reading: Hebrews 11: 29-12:2 -New International Version

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.^[a]

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning;^[b] they were sawed in two; they were killed by the

sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Time to reflect

Along with countless others who could not physically attend the commonwealth games or the UEFA Women's Euro last week, I was glued to the sports coverage on TV even though I was miles away on holiday. It was amazing to see such a huge crowd of supporters in the various stadiums and venues.

I am sure that a lot of people enjoyed the various competitions. It was great to see so many medal events across different sports and para sports. It was very heartening and encouraging to celebrate with the medal –winners, cheering and giving them the thumps up, wherever they came from! I think it will be fair to say that we entered another plane of experience with the Lionesses in the UK. I was moved to tears when Chloe Kelly scored that all important goal. The winning witness of all our medallists will go a long way to inspire and encourage more people to take on the sports. It was a truly wondrous occasion both at Birmingham and at Wembley. We were part of an audience that was full of expectation, just like our congregations whether they are attending church in person or online, being open to the promptings of the readings, prayers, music, or sermon that we are privileged to be a part of.

And so today we have this beautiful image of a stadium in our reading from the book of Hebrews in which we, the readers, become the contestants and are encouraged to persevere in “the race of faith” especially because we are not alone. The stadium is filled with saints cheering us on as we run the race. Imagine yourself as a contestant with thousands of saints chanting your name, giving you a high five or holding up a banner with your name on it. How awesome is that!

Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we are surrounded by “a great cloud of witnesses” who have gone ahead through the millennia, and by their lives and stories of triumph and disappointments bore witness to the power of faith in God, shaping the path for us to follow. The writer reminds us of some heroic figures in Biblical history- people who were renowned for their faith and perseverance in the face of great difficulties – people like Gideon, Barak, David, and Samuel for example- “whose weaknesses were turned to strength. There are also some unnamed prophets in the text, who were prepared to take risks, grappling with anything from lions to foreign armies, enduring enormous personal privations, such that the writer sums them up as people "of whom the world was not worthy". The writer stresses that these stories are bound up with our own stories, because "they would not, without us, be made perfect" and that it is only through the sacrifice of Christ that they, or we, could reach the completion of our faith. We could say in a nutshell that however far one has gone in their suffering; Christ has gone further, so we are encouraged to not give up even in hard times but to remain faithful disciples.

I like the book of Hebrews- It highlights the superiority of Jesus

Christ above all things, presenting him as the Author and Perfecter of our Faith. Although its author is unknown, most scholars believe that it was written by the Apostle Paul. And so, there is so much before us in this Epistle today. The writer is very specific about how we are to run the race to win- Going back to the world of sports- Athletes have to train hard to be fit for their races. They must be disciplined whether it's their eating habits or sleep patterns etc. We are urged to discipline ourselves in order to sustain our faith. We must lay aside the weight of sin which often entangles us- we are encouraged to have an ongoing relationship with Christ, to keep on running the race and to look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

The author of the Hebrews goes on to explain that Jesus is first and foremost the "pioneer" of the Christian's faith. Jesus is the supreme example of endurance; for he endured the cross with all its pain, humiliation, and shame. Jesus demonstrates in the most profound ways, through his own suffering and his own death on the cross that good is always more profound than evil, that love will always triumph over hate and that eternal life will always be victorious over death. You and I, when we wear a cross, are identifying ourselves with what was basically

literally an instrument of shame and death, but we see it as something else. We interpret without even being aware that we are interpreting our faith. For us the cross is what it became in Jesus, a sign of love and faith and sacrifice. So, when we wear a cross that's who we are saying we are.

Apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 1:18 that the message of the cross is foolishness to the world. It is an embarrassment to people who are concerned with power and privilege and at the same time it is the wisdom and power of God. It is the mystery, the paradox. Jesus is the "perfecter" of our faith - the one who can provide the strength and endurance which re-ignites the Christian who is on the verge of collapsing or losing heart. It is not surprising that the world in secular and sacred context has been filled over the last two thousand years with images and songs and sculptures and poems describing the Christian faith.

Our calling is to live our Christian life as a witness to others. One which is generous, open, and non-judgemental— that is what Jesus urged on his followers, that is what the Hebrews were urged to do, that is what our faith urges us to do. In the midst of all the uncertainties that we are living with, we are commanded to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

The hymn written by the great hymn writer William Walsham How, which is our closing hymn “For all the saints, who from their labours rest.....”, is expressing the good news of God’s promises, Jesus’ love and grace, and the power of faith to free us from the fears that would bind us.

“For all the saints, who from their labours rest;
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed:
Alleluia, alleluia!.....”

Reflecting on the notion of “Sainthood” is a great reason to be faithful. I wonder what your faith journey has been like. Could you recall the people who witnessed to, or inspired you? Who are the people whose faith gave you hope and confidence? I urge you to Give thanks for them today. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we pray for your Church throughout the world as they continue to defend and promote the Christian faith. Give us courage to be bold in our witness to the good news of the gospel. We lift up all Christians who live in fear for their faith and pray for their safety. We pray for our congregations here in the Enfield circuit, whether gathering in church buildings or joining in worship online. Wherever we gather in your name, may you know our needs, and fill us with your love.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We pray for the terribly sad state of the world, economically and in all aspects - the cost-of-living crisis, the threat of Climate change, the senseless conflicts between countries, the slums and refugee camps around. We pray for justice and the restoration of dignity in people's lives.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We pray for those for whom today will be difficult, those whose plans and hopes for the future have been brutally undermined at this time. We pray for those who need your grace and mercy- all those struggling with debt, with poor health. We remember those whose mental health is deteriorating, those who have had devastating news, those

who are frightened of the future. Those who are troubled in body, mind, or spirit We pray that you will meet them in their need. Give peace where there is distress and the knowledge of your healing love and forgiveness.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We pray for world leaders. At a time of great concern and uncertainty we pray that you will give them energy and integrity to endeavour to make the world a better place. We pray for our own country- the United Kingdom, we pray that the current campaign to seek a new Prime minister will bear good fruits. We pray for all those working to maintain the services on which our society depends and that through Christ's love and mercy, all shall be well.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We pray for strength for all church leaders and their supporting families as they put time and effort in proclaiming the good news of the gospel. We lift our new Superintendent minister, the Revd Paul Weary as he starts his ministry in this circuit in September. We pray for his family for your blessing on his family as they continue to support Paul.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

In this holiday month, we pray for all who have or will be travelling; all who are seeking rest and refreshment. We pray for all children and students on their summer break, that you will Keep them safe and restore them in body mind and spirit.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We remember those who have passed away and for those mourning their deaths. We pray for peace and comfort for them. We pray that the souls of the departed may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

Heavenly father, we thank you for those whose influence has led us to come to this worship space today-those who continue to encourage and inspire us to embrace a richer and deeper faith. As we start out on this new week, we commend ourselves and all your creation to your unfailing love.

Faithful God

Increase our Faith

We share a moment of silence together for those who want to bring their own prayers to you O God. May they feel your love and embrace.....

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus 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.**

Closing Hymn – .STF 745 For all the saints who from their labours rest

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

<https://youtu.be/21GTTM2TIYA>

Verse 1

For all the saints, who from their labours rest;
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 2

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight,
thou in the darkness still their one true light.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 3

O may thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
and win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 4

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 5

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph-song;
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 6

The golden evening brightens in the west:
soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest,
sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 7

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
the saints triumphant rise in bright array
the king of glory passes on his way!
Alleluia, alleluia!

Verse 8

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest shore
through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
Alleluia, alleluia!

William Walsham How (1823-1897)

Benediction

As we go from here, may we rid ourselves of the weight of sin that entangles us. May we run the race that God has set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus on whom our faith depends. And as we run the race, may we know that the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Love of God and that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will rest, remain, and abide with us now and forever. We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen

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