

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Dr Jonathan Dean. 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**

#### ***Psalm 100***

O shout to the Lord in triumph, all the earth:  
serve the Lord with gladness,  
and come before God's face with songs of joy.

**Know that the Lord is God :  
it is God who has made us, and we belong to God;  
we are God's people and the sheep of the Lord's pasture.**

Come into the gates with thanksgiving,  
and into the courts with praise :  
give thanks to God! Bless God's holy name!

**For the Lord is good, and God's loving mercy is for ever:  
God's faithfulness throughout all generations.**

***Opening Hymn: StF2 Come, let us sing to the One***  
Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here  
<https://youtu.be/UNp5zEmBSos>

Come, let us sing to the One  
To the Father of life,  
For His light fills the earth like the sun;  
Come, tell of the wonders He's done.  
Great is the world He has made,  
Are the mysteries untold,  
Is His measureless power of old;  
Come, come let us sing to our God.

*To our God, who is able  
To strengthen us in His grace,  
Beyond all we imagine,  
Be all glory and praise,  
Be all praise.*

Come, let us sing to the One,  
To the Saviour of life,  
Find the fullness of God in the Son;  
Come, tell of the wonders He's done.  
Wild is the mercy of Christ,  
Is the richness of grace,

Is the unending life we embrace;  
Come, come let us sing to our God.

Come, let us sing to the One,  
To the Spirit of life,  
Leading us in the way of the Son;  
Come, tell of the wonders He's done.  
Strong is the Spirit within,  
Is the boldness to speak,  
Is the power to run when we're weak;  
Come, come let us sing to our God.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Kirstyn Getty (b. 1980)

### **Prayers**

God of all life, God of goodness and grace and justice,  
We praise you for the world you have made:  
For its intricacy, variety and goodness,  
For its beauty and colour and majesty.  
From the smallest cell to the mightiest mountain, all is yours:  
created and nurtured and held in life by your power and  
tender care.

Jesus, son of Mary, child of Nazareth,

We praise you for your re-creation of all that God has made:  
For your life, which shows us how to live;  
For your self-offering, which points us to ultimate meaning;  
For your resurrection, by which we are born to the new life of  
your Kingdom.  
We are your people, formed and held by your grace and  
power.

Holy Spirit of God, nurturer, empowerer, life-giver:  
You embolden us with prophetic energy not only to speak the  
Word of God,  
But to *be* the Word of God, in this time and this place.  
We praise you for your presence in our midst,  
And ask you to make and re-make us in these days of challenge  
and change,  
That we may now be the agents of Christ's risen life, in our  
communities, and in your world.  
Amen.

### *A Prayer of Confession (from the Iona Community)*

O God, you are always true to us in love  
And we are left wanting to say sorry  
For our faithlessness to you and to one another,  
For our forgetting of the poor and the broken,  
For our failure to cherish creation.

Give us life, O God, to change  
And enable us to change, that we may live.  
Amen.

Spirit of truth and judgement,  
Who alone can cast out  
The powers that grip our world  
At the point of crisis:  
Give us your discernment,  
That we may accurately name what is evil,  
And know the way that leads to peace,  
Through Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

***First Reading: Jeremiah 1: 4-10***

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,  
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'  
Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak,  
for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me,  
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the Lord.'

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and  
the Lord said to me,  
'Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant.'

***Second Reading: Luke 13: 10-17***

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the  
sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit  
that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over  
and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw  
her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from  
your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she  
stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the  
synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath,  
kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work  
ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not  
on the sabbath day.' But the Lord answered him and said, 'You  
hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or  
his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it

water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

***Second Hymn StF 355 Jesus, lover of my soul***

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

<https://youtu.be/AvluR3KbPDs>

Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly,  
While the nearer waters roll,  
While the tempest still is high:  
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,  
Till the storm of life is past;  
Safe into the haven guide;  
O receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;  
Leave, oh, leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me.  
All my trust on Thee is stayed,

All my help from Thee I bring;  
Cover my defenseless head  
With the shadow of Thy wing.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;  
More than all in Thee I find;  
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,  
Heal the sick and lead the blind.  
Just and holy is Thy name,  
I am all unrighteousness;  
Vile and full of sin I am,  
Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
Grace to cover all my sin;  
Let the healing streams abound;  
Make and keep me pure within.  
Thou of life the fountain art,  
Freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart,  
Rise to all eternity.

Charles Wesley, (1707 – 1788)

### Reflection on the Readings

The other day, idling through videos on my phone, I came across a classic of TV comedy. It was scene from the show *Absolutely Fabulous*. Immensely rich and entirely clueless PR executive Edina was at home alone in her kitchen. And she was hungry. Ransacking the cupboards, she finally found a tin of custard she fancied. The only problem: how to open it. After locating the tin opener, it soon became obvious she was utterly unable to use it. She didn't have a clue. The only solution: rush across town, interrupt her sensible and practical daughter in the middle of a university lecture, and ask her, there and then, to open the tin for her.

Today's reading offer us a variation on a common biblical theme, echoed in that scene: technology, however basic, isn't the only thing we often fail to know how to use properly. All too often, our religious beliefs and behaviours fall into the same category: gifts which we fail to know how to put to use to improve the life of the world: and our lives along with it.

Jeremiah was born into a world of alarming political instability, empire-building and cultural fragility. In 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Judah, living in Jerusalem, he finds himself amongst a people with a

noble religious tradition, and a rich sense of their own calling as God's people, but unable somehow to allow that to make any difference to how they meet the challenges they face. A hostile, ruthless enemy army is approaching their land with murderous colonial intent; their way of life is breaking down and breaking apart; their political institutions look frail and lacking. But Judah's religious leaders don't seem to be able to help. Too close to the nation's failed political leaders, too concerned with their own prestige and comfort, too complacent and self-absorbed in the face of change and challenge, they retreat to a place of tired, uninterested religion, going through the motions without truly seeking the life of God. Worsening rather than challenging the social injustice of Israelite society, they cannot lead God's people. Just when they need God's word and strength the most, there's a disastrous collective failure to remember how to use the gifts God has given them.

It's a theme among the prophets, too. Seven centuries later, Jesus experiences something rather similar. He is born also into a nation under colonial oppression, weighed down and assaulted by the Roman Empire and denied the freedom to organise their own lives by sometimes draconian limitation of

their self-expression. Too often though, instead of finding in their relationship with God and its expression in religious life a source of liberation, joy and strength, some religious leaders seem to double down on the weight of Roman domination by inflicting on others a stern and unbending interpretation of the moral codes of Judaism that only make things worse. They have fallen into a sort of collaboration with their masters, failing to use their religious life for its real purpose of illumination and inspiration and instead placing others under heavy burdens.

Even worse than not knowing how to use a gift is to use a wonderful gift for destructive ends for which it was never intended.

The scriptures point us to a failure common in all religions, and especially in the life and history of Christianity, before we start to feel any kind of complacency. We are often very bad at knowing exactly how to put this great gift we have, our religious life, to use in the way that God intends. It's for the free-ing of people; it's for producing joy and fulfilment and a glad determination to reshape the world in justice and peace.

Anything that doesn't lead to those outcomes represents a misuse of a wonderful gift.

I've seen ornate crucifixes in military museums, attached to spears. And there's a Lutheran Church in Berlin, built in the mid 1930s, decorated with swastikas, and with a carved relief on the front of Nazi soldiers: even great gifts can become lethal if misused. At least Edina does not use her tin opener as a weapon.

Alongside this pattern of failure, there's an interesting pattern in the Bible too, of God's corrective to it. The people chosen, called, equipped and sent to be messengers of a true message of peace and grace are often themselves subversive, challenging and unlikely. Jeremiah, in his call narrative, is described as a boy: probably a young man, unlikely to carry much authority or weight in his community. God knows that Jeremiah will struggle with others' tendency to dismiss his message because of his youth. God has to strengthen him in the face of that. Later in the prophecy, we learn also that Jeremiah was a young man who felt keenly the weight of his work and of the world's woes. He frequently experiences depression, anxiety and periods of deep despair and

hopelessness. More than once, he questions his vocation and his ability to carry it out. He finds in his faith, and in his assurance of God's presence, the gifts he needs to pursue his mission and follow the path set for him. But it's another reason for his fellow country-people to despise and deride him.

Nevertheless, despite his youth, despite his struggles with mental illness, indeed because of these things, because of his sensitivity and openness, Jeremiah is the one God chooses and calls and equips and sends, to help God's people in a time of crisis to rediscover the unique gift of their faith, and how to use their common religious life, not as a further tool of division, but as a means of grace, and comfort, and hope.

In the Gospel reading, we have two such figures: Jesus, himself young and ill-qualified and hardly an auspicious herald of God's Word, but also an elderly woman. Derided and marginalised by her gender, her age and her infirmity of many years, she nevertheless understands more of God's goodness and love than the religious leaders. She knows that the God of Israel is for her. She is unashamed to seek God's healing. And she finds in Jesus a fellow rebel in demonstrating the primacy, the fundamental centrality of God's inclusive, healing love to all

God's purposes. It's not that Sabbath is a bad idea – it's actually another of God's revolutionary ideas, that we have time not only for work and the demands of the empires and idols we live under, but also for God, and our spiritual lives, and our own renewal and growth, that we learn to recognise and resist the demands of the empires and idols. Rather, it's that the Sabbath gets turned by some of these religious leaders into another means of oppression, marginalisation and division. The old woman is having none of it. And she finds in Jesus a prophet more than happy to prove in her life, right there, right then, where God's heart is to be found.

I'm not going to labour the point, drawing comparisons between our biblical worlds, and the one we inhabit. Suffice it to say that we are clearly living in a time of great upheaval, challenge and fragility. Millions of people are displaced by war and persecution and seeking a home and comfort; the very climate itself is in crisis because of our misuse of it, God's greatest gift; we are all facing a future of great uncertainty, financial challenge and material difficulty; narrow nationalism is on the rise everywhere, and often clothed in a religious garment, another idolatrous misuse of the gift of faith. It will be tempting – it is already tempting – to fail to use or even to

misuse all the gifts we have, and to retreat into selfishness, into ensuring that we are safe, no matter what happens to others. It's tempting to follow the example of some of our political leaders, who are merely echoing many of our neighbours, in drawing more tightly the boundaries which keep us in and others out, and which protect our resources and hoard our wealth, and allow others to go without. It's tempting to fall into using our faith as a reason for apathy or a badge of false belonging, a guarantee of God's privatisation: God belongs only to us.

But I think our faith teaches otherwise. I think now is a time when the gift of our faith in Jesus, God's Word made flesh, most needs to be used rightly and shared generously. The Gospel, let's remember, leads to the liberation of all God's children. It produces the fruit of joy, of life in all its fullness, and of peace. Anything else is a denial and a perversion of it, and of God's life and of God's purpose. In the trials and tribulations of our contemporary life together on this planet, there's a fundamental question for us, as Christians, to be asking – what difference is our faith, and our practice of it, making? What hope and help is it offering, to the weakest and most marginalised of God's children? To those excluded, on

whatever grounds? To those suffering unimaginable pain and persecution? To the vulnerable, the broken and the traumatised? What hope and help is it offering, our faith and our practice of it, to our neighbours, our streets, our communities? To what use are we putting this amazing gift, the very life of God, given to us in Jesus? To what extent is it challenging and changing us? This may be the most important test of all.

I've been reading Pope Francis's words lately, on fraternity and friendship. Reflecting on Jesus's seminal story of the Good Samaritan, he poses this challenge to us, quoting one of the early Church's greatest preachers:

One detail about the passers-by [in the story] does stand out: they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God. A believer may be untrue to everything that his faith demands of him, and yet think he is close to God and better than others. The guarantee of an authentic openness to God, on the other hand, is a way of practising the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters. Saint John Chrysostom expressed



this pointedly when he challenged his Christian hearers: “Do you wish to honour the body of the Saviour? Do not despise it when it is naked. Do not honour it in church with silk vestments while outside it is naked and numb with cold”.

We have this great gift, from God, in Christ, of grace and peace and the key to how to live and enable ourselves and others to experience joy and fulfilment. Let’s keep on learning how to use it rightly, so that it changes us, and enables us to be a witness to our world in these difficult days. The life of the world may depend on it – and on us, learning to use our faith properly.

***A Time of Prayer (using StF 719)***

We pray for peace,  
but not the easy peace  
built on complacency  
and not the truth of God.  
We pray for real peace,  
the peace God's love alone can seal.

*We pray for those we know enduring conflict, division, and unease...*

We pray for peace,  
but not the cruel peace  
leaving God's poor bereft  
and dying in distress;  
we pray for real peace,  
enriching all the human race.

*We pray for those in our world who suffer from poverty and marginalisation...*

We pray for peace,  
and not the evil peace  
defending unjust laws  
and nursing prejudice,  
but for the real peace  
of justice, mercy, truth and love.

*We pray for all who endure prejudice and injustice, asking for change...*

We pray for peace:  
holy communion  
with Christ our risen Lord  
and every living thing;  
God's will fulfilled on earth

and all his creatures reconciled.

*We pray for the conflicted parts of our world, and for all people longing for reconciliation...*

We pray for peace,  
and for the sake of peace,  
look to the risen Christ  
who gives the grace we need,  
to serve the cause of peace  
and make our own self-sacrifice.

*We pray for ourselves, asking for wisdom about how to act for justice in God's world...*

God, give us peace:  
if you withdraw your love,  
there is no peace for us  
nor any hope of it.  
With you to lead us on,  
through death or tumult, peace will come.

**Amen.**

***The Lord's Prayer***

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.

***Closing Hymn StF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell***

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

<https://youtu.be/FhPnjA7wsIY>

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive;  
built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:  
All are welcome,

all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

3. Let us build a house where love is found  
in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground,  
where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space,  
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger:

5. Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Marty Haugen (b.1950)

***Closing Responses and Blessing***

God, lead us, that we may stand firm in faith for justice.

**Teach us love. Teach us compassion.**

**Above all, out of love and compassion,**

**Teach us to act. Amen.**

And the blessing of God, who makes us, re-makes us in Christ,  
and sustains by the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

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