

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd 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

O Lord,
Open our eyes to your presence,
Open our minds to your grace,
Open our lips to your praises,
Open our hearts to your love,
Open our lives to your healing,
And be found among us.
Amen.

Hymn of Praise StF 26 -I rejoiced when I heard them say

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

<https://youtu.be/xMv319fhVWo>

1 I rejoiced when I heard them say
'Let us go to the house of God'
and now our feet are standing
in your gates, O Jerusalem!
Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here.
Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near.

2 Like a temple of unity
is the city, Jerusalem.
It is there all tribes will gather,
all the tribes of the house of God.
Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here.
Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near.

3 It is faithful to Israel's law,
there to praise the name of God.
All the judgement seats of David
were set down in Jerusalem.
Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here.
Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near.

4 For the peace of the nations, pray:
for God's peace within your homes.
May God's lasting peace surround us;
may it dwell in Jerusalem.
Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here.
Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near.

5 For the love of friends and kin
I will bless you with signs of peace.
For the love of God's own people
I will labour and pray for you.

Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here.

Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Opening Prayers

You are holy, Lord, the only God,

And your deeds are wonderful.

You are love; you are wisdom.

You are humility; you are endurance.

You are rest; you are peace.

You are joy and gladness.

You are all our riches, and you suffice for us.

You are beauty; you are gentleness.

You are our protector;

You are our guardian and defender.

You are courage, you are our haven and hope.

You are our faith, our great consolation.

You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord,

God almighty, merciful Saviour. Amen.

(St. Francis of Assisi)

O God, we bring you our failure:

our hunger, our disappointment, our despair,

our greed, our aloofness, our loneliness.

When we cling to others in desperation

or turn from them in fear,

strengthen us in love.

Teach us, your children, made in your image,

to use our power with care.

We turn to you, O God.

We renounce evil.

We claim your love.

We choose to be made whole.

After a moment of silence:

The Saviour of the World, Refuge of the repentant,

forgives and strengthens all who truly seek grace.

God accepts you as children and sets you free from the

bondage of the past.

For Christ died and rose to new life

That we might all share his wholeness and abundant life. Praise

him!

Amen.

A prayer for today:

Holy God,

whose name is not honoured

where the needy are not served,

and the powerless treated with contempt:
may we embrace our neighbor
with the same tenderness
which we ourselves require;
so your justice may be fulfilled in love,
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Reading: Amos 6: 1a, 4-7

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria!
Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Reading: Luke 16: 19-31

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they

will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” ’

Hymn StF 717 - We do not hope to ease our minds

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFAKgj2dmwE>

1 We do not hope to ease our minds
by simple answers, shifted blame,
while Christ is homeless, hungry, poor,
and we are rich who bear his name.
As long as justice is a dream
and human dignity denied,
we stand with Christ; disturb us still
till every need is satisfied.

The last line of each verse is repeated.

2 We cannot ask to live at peace
in comfort and security
while Christ is tried in Pilate’s hall
and drags his cross to Calvary.
As long as hatred stifles truth
and freedom is betrayed by fear,
we stand with Christ; give us no peace
till his peace reigns in triumph here.

3 We will not pray to be preserved
from any depth of agony
while Christ’s despairing cry rings out:
God, why have you abandoned me?
As long as we have hope to share
of life renewed beyond the pain,
we stand with Christ all through the night
till Easter morning dawns again.

Marnie Barrell (b. 1952)

Reflection on the readings

We’re in Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, around 750BCE. After a period of setback, the nation has re-established its strength under the long reign of King Jeroboam II. For some, there is the possibility of doing well – maybe even very well indeed. Israel’s economy seems to be booming again after a time of austerity. Some people are even beginning to whisper and speculate that maybe the kingdom’s best days are ahead of it. Maybe God has some big plans for them. Maybe their nation, though geographically small, and its sister kingdom of Judah to the south, with its great and historic and sacred capital city of Jerusalem, might yet become truly great among the nations of the earth. In the meantime, there is wealth to be enjoyed, and riches to squander. There are

parties to throw and feasts to indulge in and trappings to enjoy. And so, Israel's elites are getting on with just that, and enjoying their burgeoning lifestyle. Their champagne glasses can be heard toasting and clinking, way into the night, every night. Their exclusive beach resorts are full to overflowing. The nightclubs are packed. The strip clubs and casinos are busier than they've ever been. Israel has never had it so good.

But this isn't the sense of things shared by everyone. There's Amos, for one, an immigrant to Israel from Judah. He has been praying and pondering the nation's situation and the confidence feels misplaced for him. It feels arrogant, and he's worried by this outbreak of nationalism, this feeling that Israel is better than all the other nations and surely destined by God to be so. He isn't a stranger to wealth – he owns some land and makes a good living from it. But he finds himself utterly at odds with the spirit around him. He keeps his eyes on current affairs, and sense that the mighty empire of Assyria to the north of little Israel may one day soon have designs on her land and produce and resources. He's worried that Israel's covenant status with God won't carry much weight, if the people don't pay attention to what God might require of them. There's a lot of complacency around and, as he prays and seeks God's voice, Amos becomes more and more convinced that the people have wandered far, far away from their calling as God's chosen

people. To put it bluntly, they're not currently worth saving from the reckoning to come.

Not only that, but Amos is acutely aware of the underside of all the feasting and partying and outrageous and ostentatious wealth of Israel's elites. It's a nasty, unpleasant brutal underside – grinding poverty for some; ruthless exploitation of others; endless misery for many. Not far beneath the glittering surface of champagne corks popping and dancing girls entertaining and all the excess, there's a desperate, inescapable life for many others: the workers, slaves, servants, prostitutes and labourers on the land. Israel's proud nationalistic boasting, and its attendant lifestyle, is exacted at a terrible price in the lives of the poor. It's impossible to see any hint of Israel as God's chosen nation in the unrelenting wickedness they live through daily, nor in all the blind eyes being turned to their plight by those enjoying the fruit of all their unrewarded labours.

Jump forward almost eight centuries, to Jerusalem itself. Although we're still in Israel/Judah, we're now in the Roman Empire, and in that small part of it given a tiny measure of self-rule under Jewish kings. Roman rule poses a huge threat, in 30CE, to influential Jewish leaders. Collaboration can bring great prizes, both in money and power. And the Romans are

only too well aware of the ways to divide and conquer a people, by rewarding those who help them colonise the nation and keep the lower classes in their place. For some Jews, there may be a sense that the freedom to practice their religion although under Roman rule may be a sign that God hasn't given up on them. There are certainly arguments about what response to Roman domination the Jewish faith requires. In any case, First Century Jerusalem society is a telling picture of divisions, class structures, wealth disparities, and all manner of disputes, conflicts and inequalities. In the Roman Empire, the rewards for good behaviour can be very great indeed. There's a gap between Roman citizens and those they've colonised and conquered. And in every colony there's a chasm between the influential elites and the ordinary people whose labour and the sweat of whose brows fills the granaries and the treasuries and keeps the Empire marching forwards.

To a people wondering in the face of all this what their obligations are to one another now, to the successors of Amos's hearers, influential and leading Jews struggling amid changing times, Jesus tells a stark and terrifying story. His audience are precisely those most likely to be tempted by Roman offers of wealth and influence in return for co-operation against the oppressed. It's a story about the meaning and purpose of the Law, and of the Covenant with

Israel itself. It's a story about mutual support and responsibility. It's a story about taking seriously what our religious traditions teach us, even and especially when the voice of our own wealth and self-sufficiency threaten to drown them out. It's a simple story about a rich man, who ignores the needs, and the cries, of the poor man at his gate. Only to find the roles reversed in the hereafter, and God deaf to his pleas for help and mercy. And, as God not unreasonably points out to the tortured rich man, the Law and the Prophets could not have been clearer about wealth, and what to do with it, for the people of God. So, he must suffer the consequences of his own refusal to pay attention. And his neighbours are on their own too: free to listen to or to ignore the demands of God's Kingdom. The ball's in their court.

And it's in ours, too. I want to be clear: I don't believe, and I don't believe Jesus believed, in the very literal kind of post-mortem torture described here. It's a parable, using familiar images about the afterlife. But I do believe there's a judgement to come at some point about our stewardship. And a judgement too about how well we've been God's people, the Covenant nation of God, in our own turn. The judgement for us won't be all that different perhaps to that faced by the rich men, and it boils down to a simple question. All those Sunday School lessons, and Bible studies, all the small groups and class

discussions, all the sermons we've heard and books we've read and prayers we've prayed, all the Christian camps and conferences and talks we've attended – what difference has any of it made, to us?

Most critically, of all, what difference has it made to what we do with the thing we find it hardest to sit light to: our wealth?

Wealth – having it and not having it – is right at the heart of many of the questions asked by our faith, and the faith of our Jewish siblings before us. It's a very this-worldly concern, as our faith very often calls us to be. I don't believe, like the 19th century hymn writer, that God has "ordered our estates" in terms of how much money we have. Rather, the wealth we inherit or acquire seems to me very much a matter of human devising, and of chance. We have made of the world over the centuries a place in which the spread of resources is vastly unfair. Deserving has really very little to do with it. Hard work doesn't often have all that much to do with it. Mostly it's to do with where you're born, and to whom. In the global scale, it's monumentally and grotesquely unjust and iniquitous. So, the question becomes: what difference will your faith, and your practice of it, make to the way you receive, use and treat the wealth you do – or do not – have?

There isn't time here to go into great detail about this huge topic. So let's just note a couple of things as we try to allow these readings to speak to us, here and now.

We've come, in our imaginary timeline, to London, in 2022. There is a brutal war of imperial colonisation on our doorstep. The richest 1% of the world's people own 46% of its money. 55% of the world's people have less than \$10,000 to their name; but their collective wealth is merely 1.3% of the world's money. The UK has one of the most unequal income divisions among major economies. And there is about to be a cost of living crisis on a scale not experienced before in our lifetimes. It will not only affect the very poorest in our society, but those not currently below the poverty line as well. There are credible estimates that 3 million of our neighbours in the UK will fall into deprivation this winter – that means, not merely poverty, horrible as that is, but the complete inability to survive, to remain housed and fed at all. We have never seen anything on that scale before. So, what will we do, as God's people? What does our religious tradition teach us? What would it look like to be people who follow Jesus, in this country, in 2022?

Firstly, I think both Amos and Jesus would warn us, sternly and starkly, against the worst aspect of being even relatively wealthy people in a time of crisis. Wealth, more than anything,

cuts us off from reality and prevents us from knowing the truth. We must not allow that to happen. We must find a way to allow the voice of our faith to sing to us, call to us, over the lure of our riches. The problem is not to have wealth at all. The problem is the notorious capacity of being comparatively well-off to render us entirely ignorant of and insensible to the hard reality of the situation of most of God's children. We must find ways, especially now, not to let that happen.

Secondly, Jesus and Amos would also advise us to listen to the poorest and most marginalised in every society and in our world. God does not require or mandate their poverty or their marginalisation. But God is always to be found among the poor and marginalised in a powerful, real and tangible way. God, according to the Scriptures, has a bias to the poor. And it is almost always from amongst the poorest and most marginalised that God's call to renewal and wisdom and rebirth is best and most clearly heard. So: where and how will you listen for it, as you seek to stand in solidarity with others, and learn what your faith requires of you at this time?

Methodism was born in and of and among the poor. Like Amos, John Wesley came from relative affluence to find himself scandalised in three ways: by the scale of poverty in his own land, by the ability of rich people to ignore and dismiss it,

and by the ways in which he found God most powerfully among the poor. It led him to insist to all the Methodists that they had to allow God to convict them again about their use and misuse of money; and to insist also that there was no way of following Jesus authentically and faithfully that did not involve engagement with and learning from the most poor and marginalised people around us. And so he broke all the rules of polite society, talking about religion and politics at every turn, and in particular their relationship to money which, as the epistle set for today reminds us, is the root of most, if not all, human evils and depravities.

So: it's London, 2022. And you are now the prophet, summoned to discover and rediscover the calling of God's people, and to speak, and act out, to the particular world you inhabit the Good News of the Gospel. The Gospel which sets us free: even from our worship of our wealth. The Gospel that brings life in all its fullness: even to those of us with most to lose. The Gospel that signposts for all God's children that a better life is possible, the life of God's Kingdom, founded on justice, and love, and peace. How do you start to answer the call? And what will need to change in your own life, that God's liberating voice can reach you? What company will you need to keep? What resources will you take up, and lay down?

These are compelling and urgent questions for us all right now. But God is with us. And, in the prophets, and supremely in Jesus, we are given the counsel and the company we need to heed and to keep. A different world is possible. Indeed, it's already begun in Jesus. Will we have the courage to follow him?

Prayers, using StF 700

Holding these words in our minds and God's world in our prayers, let us offer to God our prayers and our lives, that God's Kingdom may come.

God weeps
 at love withheld,
 at strength misused,
 at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

Silence

God bleeds
 at anger's fist,
 at trust betrayed,
 at women battered and afraid,

and till we change the way we win,
God bleeds.

Silence

God cries
 at hungry mouths,
 at running sores,
 at creatures dying without cause,
and till we change the way we care,
God cries.

Silence

God waits
 for stones to melt,
 for peace to seed,
 for hearts to hold each other's need,
and till we understand the Christ,
God waits.

Silence

Spirit of Christ, sanctify me.
Accept and transform

My small energy of desire
That it may become
Part of your great energy of desire
For the redemption of the world.
Your will be done!
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 413 - Send down the fire of your justice

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

<https://youtu.be/2cSkI0IiiOM>

Send down the fire of your justice,
Send down the rains of your love;
Come, send down the Spirit,
breathe life in your people,
and we shall be people of God.

Call us to be your compassion,
Teach us the song of your love;
Give us hearts that sing,
Give us deeds that ring,
Make us ring with the song of your love.

Call us to learn of your mercy,
Teach us the way of your peace;
Give us hearts that feel,
Give us hands that heal,
Make us walk in the way of your peace.

Call us to answer oppression,
Teach us the fire of your truth;
Give us righteous souls,
'Til your justice rolls,
Make us burn with the fire of your love.

Call us to witness your Kingdom,

Give us the presence of Christ;
May your holy light
Keep us shining bright,
Ever shine with the presence of Christ.

Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

Blessing

And so may the blessing of God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Be with you, and those you love and pray for,

Today and always.

Amen.

[Notes on sources:

The Call to Worship is by David Adam;

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The Absolution is from 'Worship in an Indian Context';

The Prayer for the Day is by Janet Morley;

The conclusion to the intercessions is by Evelyn Underhill.]

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