

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

Faithful God, we gather from our scattered lives,
to be renewed by your Holy Spirit.

Open our hearts and minds
to listen for your voice
as you reach out to us today.

Amen.

Hymn – StF 161 – Speak O Lord as we come to you

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q388zBdRM8>

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963). Words and Music: © 2005,
Thankyou Music.

A time of prayer

Let us pray

God of perfect wisdom,
we approach you
acknowledging your holy love
and your perfect intent for our lives.
We gather to discern,
to hear your voice,
to recognise your Spirit's leading.
Give us ears to listen, we pray.

Lord of light and goodness,
we worship you, beautiful one.
We delight in your ways,
and we long to know you more deeply,
to give you all our praise.

O God, for the times
when we have closed our eyes to what is good for us,
behaved in ways that dishonour who we were made to be
and ignored the value you have given us –
forgive us for these choices,
for treating others and ourselves badly

and, in doing so, mistreating you.
Restore us to peace and clarity,
help us to re-assess where we are going;
open our minds to new ways of thinking
and our hearts to your gentle leading.
Where we have rushed ahead, unprepared,
grant us renewed wisdom,
a healthy view of ourselves
and a place to pause to right ourselves,
so that we can be ready to follow you.

Saviour, we know you hear us;
you assure us of your love.
Your arms are open to us –
our wounded hearts, confused thoughts and stumbling steps.
Thank you for being ready to embrace us,
to set us upright where we have fallen.
Help us to go forward in freedom and faith.

Thank you, O God, for your guidance and love,
for your presence embedded in our lives
through your Holy Spirit.
Thank you that you offer us counsel.
We thank you for your blessings

and for the hope you give us.
Thank you for choosing to walk beside us
and for being with us
on every pathway and all terrain,
as we go through our lives.
Amen.

Bible Readings

Philemon vv1-21

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— ² also to
Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the
church that meets in your home:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my
prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy
people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that your
partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening
your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake
of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and

encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the
hearts of the Lord's people.

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to
do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the
basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and
now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ that I appeal to you for
my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in
chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has
become useful both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ I
would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take
your place in helping me while I am in chains for the
gospel. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your
consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but
would be voluntary. ¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated
from you for a little while was that you might have him back
forever— ¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a
dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you,
both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would
welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you
anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my
own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me

your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a

delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Time to reflect

September is the start of the Methodist New Year and is often a time of change. Here in this circuit, we are in a time of change as we welcomed Rev Paul Weary as our new Superintendent Minister this week.

Change can be challenging. It is fairly clear that what Paul asks of Philemon is challenging. Change is a necessary part of life but nevertheless not always welcome. Some changes we would not choose. As Paul writes and sends this letter to Philemon, requesting that Onesimus, the runaway slave, be treated with leniency and as a brother in Christ, who is being asked to choose change?

Choices always have consequences. What are the possible consequences for Philemon, for Paul, for Onesimus? What are the consequences for you and for others in the choices that you make in the face of change?

The Church has always lived with change. Though we participate in the tradition that had been handed down to us, there are in fact very few things that have ‘always been done this way.’ Similarly, the new is often a rebirthing of the old. New ways of being church are rediscovering models from the past; creeds or icons are used in worship; café church adopts a model of hospitality that is described in the Early Church. Cell church may be new to some but small groups meeting in homes is not as new as we may think. How well does the Church prepare people for change, whether in the Church or in their individual lives? Do we tend to respond only to crisis?

What are the consequences of choosing not to change? Conservation is fashionable but does it restrict healthy growth and development? What do we want to keep as it is and why? Can the Church survive as a museum piece? A church might regularly reflect “Why do we do what we do in the way that we do it?’ Although we do not want to fall into the trap of being married to the spirit of the age and being widowed in the next, can we plan more creatively?

Choices present opportunities. When we look back over our own lives, it is possible to be consumed by ‘what if’ questions. One of the most important implications of choosing change is

developing the ability to leave the baggage of the past and move on. There are always new opportunities, new possibilities. We must begin where we are and have the faith and confidence to move forward. We cannot always be in control, but we determine our own response to both chosen and unchosen, welcome and unwelcome, change.

The opening statement of the Gospel reading can appear shocking. The exhortation to ‘hate’ is difficult for us to read and understand. It is certainly provocative language. It is important to note that it is addressed to large crowds who had been following Jesus as he moved through the Judean countryside. Perhaps the time had come for those who had been enjoying the spectacle to decide whether they were really ready to follow Jesus, and accept the path of radical discipleship that he demanded. There is a clear choice to make, and even loyalty to family cannot be greater than the commitment Jesus required. The early readers of this Gospel may well have been very aware of the immense cost of devotion. Are we?

The central section of the Gospel reading presents two parables. These contain messages about planning, looking at what the future holds, and being prepared. Both the builder

and the king need to think carefully about the projects they are to embark upon. They must consider whether they can see their project through to fruition. There is a strong element here of engaging the head along with the heart.

Who are we as individuals? How do we define ourselves? Many of us might readily describe what we do, but just as in the first century, we could also define ourselves by where we belong, i.e., by the family we are part of, and our roles within it. There is a call in the Gospel reading for us to redefine ourselves as disciples. This requires a redrawing of the boundaries by which we define ourselves. We are asked to prioritise our discipleship and consequently our relationship with Jesus above all else.

To what extent does committing ourselves to the work of Jesus Christ for truth, Justice and peace plunge us into the dark areas of life? Can we know what it means to be with the frightened, the ignorant, the anguished, the lost, the victims of socio-economic, cultural and political exploitation? Sharing such hardship means taking risks, becoming involved in complicated struggles, linking creatively with a variety of structures and searching deeply for inner light.

Such work is sometimes exhausting and often thankless, but strengthened by God's Spirit, we can work with those who share a passion for 'peace on earth, goodwill towards all humankind and to whole of creation.' It will involve openly and unashamedly speaking out against oppression and injustice, and taking positive action to overcome persecution and degradation. It's not easy. People often feel threatened by this attitude and the world can seem a hostile place.

Even within our own families there are times when speaking out against injustice and selfish social structures can make us unpopular. Jesus didn't set out to provoke division, but as people rejected his teaching it became inevitable. This engagement with contentious issues ushers in the kingdom.

The Greek word for witness *martureo* implies martyrdom. In July 1941, Maximilian Kolbe a Polish Franciscan priest, died in the concentration camp at Auschwitz because he took the place of one who had been condemned to death.

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was murdered in March 1982 because he had utterly defended God's cause. He saw God in the faces of the poor, the oppressed and the repressed. In the midst of a corrupt and inhuman regime, he

spoke God's truth about the hopes and griefs of his people and used it as a weapon in the struggle for liberation, justice and peace.

Most of us would feel it is impossible to emulate these extreme examples of total selflessness, but every day we too are given opportunities to speak and act in total commitment to God's values.

A school chaplain once invited the children to write down what they had decided to do for Lent, put the paper in a sealed envelope and post it in a specially made 'letterbox'. One child addressed the envelope 'To God, with love'. Although our journey with God is challenging, the love that accompanies us drives us forward and energises us.

If we are whole people, our words and lives should be integrated. How can we advocate justice, love, generosity, and forgiveness if we don't attempt to live this out in our own lives. We have a choice, if we choose the dream, the only way to transform it into reality is to do something to bring about that transformation.

I wonder what you're saving up for? Perhaps it is for something new, a holiday or even to pay for the rising gas and electricity bills? How do you do it? What choices do you have to make to save?

What are we prepared to do often shows how much we really want something. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells the crowd that staying with him is going to be hard. They need to really want this. They need to be determined enough to walk all the way to the cross with him. Jesus knows that he is on the way to Jerusalem and all that that means. But, why are they following? They need to prioritise. No one else, nothing else. Have they really thought about it? Like the tower builder and king they need to be sure before they commit.

I wonder who you would relate to in the crowd following Jesus? Are you one of the disciples who has already recognised that being a follower is challenging? Are you one of the crowd enjoying the feel-good factor of following, but it's not changing who you are? What difference does it really make to be a follower of Jesus? What are the consequences?

The other readings that are set for this week add to this message and help our understanding. The psalmist in Psalm 1 declares that unless we're rooted in God's word, we'll be like tiny bits of straw disappearing when the wind blows – like the crowd do when the going gets tough. Moses in Deuteronomy 30 offers the people a similar choice: live the way of the people around them and perish or choose to live in God's way and truly live.

And Philemon is given a hard choice. Onesimus was his slave who ran away. Now Philemon is asked not only to forgive him but to welcome him back as a brother. This is an example of walking God's way, to be willing to risk others judging him, because you put love before pride and hurt.

Consider the last week or so; in what ways have we noticed that being a follower of Jesus means prioritising God's way? In everything? For some of us it's obvious and challenging. We know that there's bad practice or treatment around us, that people are being mistreated or systems are unjust. We need to decide what to do. As Christians we can't ignore this. Is there injustice in our community? Do we need to name it and try to change it? We'll also have more personal choices, do we

allow our faith to influence the things we shop for, the way we treat the environment, our attitudes to other people? This might be costly. To buy Fairtrade bananas or eco-friendly cleaning products might mean less money for something else. Standing up for justice might mean changing job or risking staying and enabling better practice.

I wonder what you're saving for? Have you allowed for how costly following Jesus might be?

Amen

Hymn – StF 558 – Lord you have come to the seashore

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uogKtTxs4ZQ&t=29s>

Lord, you have come to the seashore,
neither searching for the rich nor the wise,
desiring only that I should follow.

*O Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side I will seek other shores.*

Lord, see my goods, my possessions;
in my boat you find no power, no wealth.
Will you accept, then, my nets and labour?

*O Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side I will seek other shores.*

Lord, take my hands, and direct them.
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
returning love for the love you gave me.

*O Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side I will seek other shores.*

Lord, as I drift on the waters,
be the resting-place of my restless heart,
my life's companion, my friend and refuge.

*O Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
gently smiling, you have spoken my name.*

*All I longed for I have found by the water,
at your side I will seek other shores.*

Cesáreo Gabaráin (1936–1991) *translated by* Robert C. Trupia. Words and
Music: © 1979 Cesáreo Gabaráin.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray

Lord, we pray for all who carry crosses this day.
For those who bear the burden of ill health: we pray especially
this week for those who are known personally to us who are ill.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who bear the burden of poverty: we pray for those
who are struggling with making ends meet. For those who are
deciding between eating or heating and for those who are
worrying about how they will cope with the cost of the gas and
electricity over the winter.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who bear the burden of bereavement: we pray for those who are known to us who have died or lost loved ones.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who struggle under the weight of neglect: we pray for those who are suffering through isolation and don't have people checking in on them.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who struggle under the weight of abuse: we pray for those who are abused in any way.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who struggle under the weight of persecution:

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for areas around the world that are needing your help: Pakistan, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and all the other areas that don't make it onto the news.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

We pray for Rev Paul Weary and the Enfield Circuit staff as they start the Methodist New Year.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord, bless all those who carry crosses this day.

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 563 – O Jesus I have promised

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFrm6O-h7PE>

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
my master and my friend;

I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me;
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me, and within;
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874)

A prayer of blessing

Lord Jesus, we want to follow you,
but we are pulled in many directions.
As we go from this place,
help us to root ourselves in your word.
Give us the courage to speak truth to injustice,
that your kingdom may come
and your will be done.
Amen.

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