

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Helen Lunn. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to worship

Here we are, Creator God, Lord and Spirit,
standing before you, grounded on the earth,
our hands stretched high like a tree.
You fill us with amazement, wonderful God.

Amen.

Hymn – The Kingdom of God is justice and joy (Singing the Faith 255)

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqCOggQhFyo&t=20s>

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know,

and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcasts are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory
to God all in all!

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

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Let us pray together

Creator God,
we bring to you all that is growing within us:
for you to bless and nurture.

We bring our prayers for the spread of your kingdom:
for you to bless and nurture.

We bring the initiatives for justice multiplying among
nations:

for you to bless and nurture.

We bring the hopes and dreams, tiny and big,
of all your children around the world:

for you to bless and nurture.

In Jesus' name.

God of mystery,
Sower, Saviour, Spirit,
we worship you;
and we ask you to give us:
eyes to notice where the seeds of your kingdom are
growing,
courage to show them to others,
faith enough to help nurture them,
and a heart that delights in their harvest.

God of all,
you do not force growth but nurture it.
Forgive us when we want too much too soon.
You do not start big but start small.
Forgive us when we want too much too soon.
You do not sow greedily but graciously.
Forgive us when we want too much too soon.
You do not hurry the harvest but hallow it.
Forgive us when we want too much too soon.
Forgive us, and accept the work of our hands,
in Jesus' name.

Living God,
from a mustard seed to a tree, from I to we,
in you we grow.
In the mystery of the unseen, from brown field to green,

in you we grow.

By faith and not by sight, by day and by night,

in you we grow.

Forgiven and freed, through word and deed,

in you we grow.

As we sow and reap, as we laugh and weep,

in you we grow.

May your kingdom come, Father, Spirit, Son,

as in you we grow.

God of grace and growth,

you have called us to plant the seeds of your kingdom

in the fields of your world,

and to trust you for their developing and flourishing –

and so we praise you.

For the abundance of your creativity:

we praise you.

For the transforming nature of your Spirit:

we praise you.

For the power of small beginnings:

we praise you.

For the mystery of hidden growth:

we praise you.

And for the harvest we are invited to delight in:

we praise you.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Today's Reading from the New Testament

2 Corinthians 5:6-17

⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹¹Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹²We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Today's Gospel Reading:

Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the

largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Time to Reflect

'Stuck-up, half-witted, scruffy-looking, nerf herder' is not a description spoken about Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, or Saul of Tarsus, but of Han Solo, a pilot and smuggler who was introduced to our universe with those immortal words back in 1977, in the very first film to be released in the cinematic revelation that is *Star Wars*.

To those not familiar with the *Star Wars* story, the running order of the films is somewhat erratic: it began with episode 4 in 1977, followed by episodes 5 and 6; then a while later episodes 1 to 3; and then, more recently, episodes 7 and 8 – with episode 9 still to come.

To confuse matters further, this film, '*Solo: A Star Wars Story*', is not one of these nine but a stand-alone story which fits in somewhere before episode 4.

This new story takes us into the past to give a new perspective on the formation of the character of Han Solo, a scoundrel who grows up through the criminal underworld on a not very interesting ship-building planet, before training as a pilot and escaping into space. His mentor warns him, 'Assume everyone will betray you and you won't be disappointed'.

Like St Paul, Han has many near-death experiences along the way. And, like Paul, he has an annoyingly confident swagger – and yet, despite his best efforts to embrace the life of a smuggler, it would seem that underneath it all he has a heart for good. Sometimes when you are looking for a hero, you also need to find new perspective in your searching.

The challenge to his apostolic authority leads Paul to defend himself. This is awkward because he must speak about himself while stressing that he is significant only as Christ's slave.

He will urge that the Corinthians should not be 'thinking that we are defending ourselves' because everything has been 'for the sake of building you up'.

He has spoken about 'the confidence we have through Christ towards God', while wondering: 'Are we beginning

to commend ourselves again?' – and now his renewed emphasis on being 'always confident' will again be associated with affirming that 'we are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you an opportunity to boast about us'.

He will struggle with this again when he compares himself favourably with 'false apostles' and admits that 'what I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority but as a fool', pleading that 'I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches'.

The challenge to Paul seems linked with the weakness of his bodily presence, and he has suffered a near-death experience. Now he uses his awareness of his own fragility and mortality to urge that all must see our earthly lives as already forfeit with Christ's death.

This is not to say that existence in the body is unimportant, because it should already be shaped by awareness that only Christ's future judgement is of significance. This affords a point of view so transformative that it can be described as 'a new creation'.

In the Mark reading. Jesus is teaching the large crowd from a boat. Mark may be anticipating Jesus' authority over the sea and recalling his rising from the baptismal water to receive the creative Spirit that swept over the chaotic waters.

The two parables suggest that the kingdom is now present, but barely noticed, as if it were seed scattered on the ground. It will be fully manifested only in God's time and by God's grace.

Mark's first readers will have seen sowing seed as Jesus' preaching the gospel. It will have been of comfort to remember that, as Jesus' rejection was followed by his resurrection, so their proclamation, despite a sometimes-indiscernible response, would, by the working of God's purposes, be of universal significance.

Harvest may represent God's judgement on all nations, and the birds in the great shrub may suggest the salvation of people 'of every kind'.

Fifty-three years ago, on the 3rd April 1968, in the last speech of his life – he was assassinated the following day – Martin Luther King Junior said that he had been to the mountain-top and God had showed him the promised land.

Throughout his campaigning for civil liberties, his dream was not simply the end of racial discrimination but the transformation of society.

Unfortunately, he, like Moses, only glimpsed the promised land. What is our dream as a Church? What do we see from the mountain-top? How do we translate this into action?

Thirteen years ago, the church that I attended in Harrogate had a dream to have children attending the church again. They had had a legacy left to them so they used it to employ a children and family's worker. My husband Matthew was the person they employed and the church went from having no children or families attached to the church to having lots. It started with a family film night and grew from there.

Another church I have heard of realised that they didn't have children around the church but they had a lot of retirement homes, so they started doing work with them and the numbers of older people attending the church increased.

These churches had a dream and a view from the mountain top and translated it into action.

Much advertising plays on the before-and-after theme such as eat/drink/use this product...and look at the results! You often see adverts for beauty products that say I used to look like this but after using this product I now look like this.

In the mind of the Christians in Corinth, the concept of a before and after would have had a double resonance. A newly built city had replaced the old Corinth. And a disparate community of slaves and free, poor and rich, male and female have become – through the gospel, and to use Paul's words – part of Christ's new creation. They needed to learn a new way of living and thinking that reflected their new status. How can we encourage those who have recently come to faith to live a redeemed way of life? How can we help established Christians avoid slipping back into unredeemed patterns of behaviour?

As in many Roman cities, the *bema*, or judgement seat, in Corinth was placed in a prominent public position. Townsfolk would pass this conspicuous reminder of Roman justice and authority. Paul reminds Christians that we will face God's tribunal. Why does judgement figure so little in Christian preaching today? Do we confuse God's judgement with judgmentalism? How do we reconcile Paul's insistence on Christ's forgiveness of our sins, and his

equal insistence on the fact that, one day, we have to give an account of our actions and behaviour?

In Jesus' parable, and of course everyday reality, a tiny seed can give birth to a large shrub. Contemporary society is often dismissive of Christians and their influence or impact on the world. Paul and Jesus both faced similar challenges. In our Gospel reading, Jesus illustrates both the hiddenness and the potential of the kingdom with his parables. How can we use the potential of our faith, and its comparative obscurity, to make a difference? Are there examples of local initiatives that are helpful and affirming?

As our churches reopen, we have services, bible studies and much more to invite people too and we can also share our online services with people too.

Have you ever climbed up a large hill? What could you see? You can see different things on flowing out into the horizon, different coloured fields, animals, birds, buildings. You can see God's creation lying in front of you.

As I'm originally from Yorkshire I used to love going into the Yorkshire Dales or even to The Lake District on holiday and going up hills and seeing what I could see. Even living

in Muswell Hill I love going to Alexandra Palace and looking out over London.

What could you see differently? You can see more from on a hill than you can on a flat piece of land.

What about climbing a mountain? Does that give yet another perspective? The climb itself might well be tiring, but how do you feel when you reach the top? Invigorated? Refreshed? More in tune with creation?

Hills and mountain-tops can also have a spiritual effect. The Bible tells of several occasions when people encountered God on the mountains and hills, among them Moses on Mount Sinai, and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. On both occasions it wasn't just the landscape; God was seen differently too.

Some people may describe an experience as 'mountain-top' even when there has been no mountain – just a sense of seeing things afresh, or with new insight and understanding, or of seeing things in God's way.

Paul had more than one such experience, and because of them he says that he no longer sees Jesus from a human point of view – he has a new perspective. He sees Jesus not

only in terms of what he did and taught while he was there in person, important and precious as those times were, but also in terms of being Saviour, Lord and King. And this, Paul says, makes a difference to how he sees everything else in the world – everything is made new.

Celia Malmstrom, the EU trade commissioner, once accused President Trump of 'playing a dangerous game', as the US government fired the opening shots in a potential transatlantic trade war with some of its closest allies in Europe, Canada and Mexico.

To many this may seem like the actions of a double-crossing pirate, but in the midst of all this sabre-rattling President Trump seemed to reach out a hand in peace to Kim Jong-un, North Korea's Supreme Leader. This was the first time a serving US president had met a North Korean leader; an event made all the more remarkable considering the insults the two world leaders were firing at each other only a year previously.

The main focus of the summit seemed to be nuclear disarmament in North Korea, and commitment to work for peace in the Korean Peninsula. President Trump described their conversations as 'honest and direct' and went on to say that the 'past does not have to define the future'.

This weekend the G7 leaders are meeting in Cornwall. During the meeting the leaders of UK, USA, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy and the EU who are meeting together for the first time in two years. In precious years the G7 has taken action to strengthen the global economy and combat tax evasion, save 27 million lives from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and supported the education of millions of children in the poorest countries. This year they are going to be asked by Boris Johnson to seize the opportunity to fight and build back better from Coronavirus, uniting to make the future fairer, greener and more prosperous.

It seemed that the seeds of hope have been sown. We, too, can but hope this is the beginnings of a 'new creation', along the lines of which Paul wrote about to the troubled church in Corinth.

Alongside this potentially new perspective on world politics comes the welcome return (for many) of a game which had its beginnings in something as simple as kicking an inflated pig's bladder around a field!

Yes, the football Euro 2020 or 21 is back! It seems strange to think that a game that focuses on two teams kicking a

small round object about a bit, captures the attention of so many on our large round globe.

Footballers have been getting a lot of abuse recently especially online. Supposed fans tagging someone in on a conversation that is abusive or insulting somebody for the colour of their skin. Fans booing when players take the knee. This is so wrong. Gary Lineker tweeted this week 'If you book @England players for taking the knee, your part of the reason why players are taking the knee.'

Also, Gareth Southgate the England manager has written a letter entitled Dear England to the fans and as part of the letter he tells them that reading abusive comments on twitter or Instagram is never going to help the performance of a player and reminds them unfortunately for those people that engage in that kind of behaviour, I have some bad news. You're on the losing side. It's clear to me that we are heading for a much more tolerant and understanding society, and I know our lads will be a big part of that.

Teams and true supporters alike will hope that this kind of behaviour is something that will be left in the past and will be looking confidently for a fresh start at this year's tournament.

In the Star Wars film, Han Solo is simply known as 'Han' to begin with. At a border-guard checkpoint an official asks his surname, only to find out he doesn't have one. So, the guard decides to make one up for the sake of the paperwork he must fill in. Han is all alone, so the official names him 'Solo'.

We seek a new perspective in a world where so many live in isolation from God through crime, dangerously divisive politics or spoiling the simple beauty of team sports. Paul, like a spirited team coach, urges those to whom he writes in 2 Corinthians 5.6-17, to play a team game. He talks collectively in terms of 'we', rarely 'I'. He warns of becoming lost to the ways of this world, this earthly 'body' we inhabit. Instead, it is faith in the one who died for us all which will keep things in perspective.

So, while we inhabit a human body, with all its failings, we strive to live in faith and be at home in Christ. Don't go solo! Leave that way of life in the past and instead join others and know what it is to become new in Christ! And like the trees God planted in the passages from Mark, may we like birds all find shelter together. **Amen**

A time of prayer

God of the rich and the poor, of the powerful and the vulnerable,
we pray for the leaders of the G7 nations meeting in Cornwall,
for the people they govern,
for the people of other nations they can support,
and for the world they can protect through their decisions.

May wisdom be planted, generosity grow, and co-operation flourish.

We pray for a growth in resilience, awareness and togetherness across all the nations of the world as they continue to tackle the Covid Pandemic, as they confront environmental issues, and as they reach out to communities crippled by need, war and natural disasters.

May integrity be planted, urgency grow and healing flourish.

We pray for the church in this place and around the world as we seek to serve those around us,

to reach out to those in trouble,
and to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

May faith be planted, compassion grow and hope flourish.

We pray for those in the charity sector
who seek to support those in crisis,
to feed the hungry,
to embrace those displaced by war,
to protect wildlife and the environment, and planet that
we all call home.

May trust be planted, resources grow and lives flourish.

We pray for those in sport,
for those they inspire,
for the enjoyment they bring,
especially all the nations taking part in the Football Euros,
for those preparing for and hoping that the Olympic Games
will take place,
for all those at grass roots level struggling to keep their
clubs going.

May respect be planted, opportunities grow and talent flourish.

And we pray for those whose faces we have seen on our
screens and in our papers this week.

for the family of Sarah Everard,
for little Artin and his family, and all those who have died
crossing dangerous waters,
for Jimi Olubunmi-Adewole and his family and all who have
died trying to save others,
for all who have enriched our world and for all who are at
the mercy of others.

**May justice be planted, goodness grow and peace flourish
- in Jesus name. 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 – We are marching in the light of God (Singing the Faith 483)

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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl24_27wW1E

We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching in the light of God,
we are marching in the light of God.
We are marching, oh,
we are marching in the light of God,
we are marching, oh,
we are marching in the light of God.

We are living in the love of God,
we are living in the love of God.
We are living in the love of God,
we are living in the love of God.
We are living, oh,
we are living in the love of God,
we are living, oh,
we are living in the love of God.

We are moving in the power of God,
we are moving in the power of God.
We are moving in the power of God,
we are moving in the power of God.
We are moving, oh,
we are moving in the power of God,
we are moving, oh,
we are moving in the power of God.

South African traditional

v. 1 Anders Nyberg (*b.* 1955)

vv. 2, 3 Andrew Maries (*b.* 1949)

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A prayer of blessing

Go in peace to love and serve God's world.
It is beautiful and you are part of it.
It is our sacred commission to help God love it.

Amen.

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