

# Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon



**Sunday 16 August 2020**

**Order of Service for Worship At Home**

***Gathering in God's presence*** (If you have one, light a candle.)

***Call to Worship*** (drawn from Psalm 67.4-5)

Come, people of all nations, with gladness and joy:  
sing the praises of God  
who judges with equity  
and guides the steps of all.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!

***Hymn***

In Christ there is no East or West,  
in him no South or North,  
but one great fellowship of love  
throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere  
their high communion find,  
his service is the golden cord  
close-binding humankind.

Join hands then all the human race,  
whate'er your nation be;  
all who my Father's image bear  
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet the East and West,  
in him meet South and North,  
all Christlike souls are one in him,  
throughout the whole wide earth.

*'John Oxenham' (altered). Public domain text.*

***Prayer of Approach***

*Take time to identify three things you want to thank God for, then join in the prayer (using the response in bold, if appropriate):*

All praise to you, God our Father,  
for your embrace is wide enough for all.  
You are the creator of earth and sea and sky in all their richness.  
You promised mercy to our ancestors  
and sent prophets to prepare the way for your coming.

Blessed be the Lord our God:  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

In Jesus Christ your promises took flesh  
as eyes were opened to your light, ears were unstopped to hear words of salvation,  
worn-out limbs danced for joy,  
and the captives were at last set free.  
Through him your good news comes even now,  
lifting up the downtrodden  
and filling the hungry from the richness of your table.

Blessed be the Lord our God:  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

In the power of the Holy Spirit,  
your people are brought to unity and renewal.  
You share out gifts and grace to all:  
so that what seemed dead may bring forth life,  
so that the lowly may know your favour.

Blessed be the Lord our God:  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

In you is perfect generosity, perfect love:  
for even our faults and our wrongdoing  
cannot shut us off from your goodness,  
the assurance of welcome and mercy and redemption.  
Hear us now, good Lord,  
as we bring our thanksgivings  
for the blessings we each name before you  
by which we have sensed your gracious presence...

Blessed be the Lord our God:  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

Receive our praise, Holy God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit;  
and teach us afresh to look for the coming of your Kingdom -

as we join in words which Jesus gave his friends, saying together...

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

*Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:*

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

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 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 forever. Amen.

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.

## ***Listening for God's Word***

### ***Bible Reading: Matthew 15.21-28***

**21** Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' **23** But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' **24** He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' **26** He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' **27** She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' **28** Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

***[In the video of the service a Theme Introduction will be included here, followed by an introduction to this week's Junior Church activities]***

### ***Hymn***

We are one in the Spirit,  
we are one in the Lord;  
we are one in the Spirit,  
we are one in the Lord;  
and we pray that all unity  
may one day be restored.

*And they'll know we are Christians  
by our love, by our love,  
yes they'll know we are Christians  
by our love.*

We will walk with each other,  
we will walk hand in hand;  
we will walk with each other,  
we will walk hand in hand;  
and together we'll spread the news  
that God is in our land.

*And they'll know...*

All praise to the Father  
from whom all things come,  
and all praise to Christ Jesus,  
his only Son,

and all praise to the Spirit  
who makes us one.

*And they'll know...*

*Peter Scholtes (abridged) © 1966 FEL Church Pub. Ltd, assigned to Lorenz Publishing Company.  
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### **Bible Reading: Isaiah 56.1, 6-8**

**1** Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,  
for soon my salvation will come,  
and my deliverance be revealed.

**6** And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,  
and hold fast my covenant—

**7** these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.

**8** Thus says the Lord God,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather others to them  
besides those already gathered.

### **Reflection**

*There are two sermons that could be preached today.*

*The first – is a message of encouragement, a message of persistence in faith and a determination to keep on even when the going is difficult.*

*That's what we see in the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter: she, the girl's mother, refuses to take no for an answer. Even when the disciples are closing ranks around Jesus, trying to have her sent away, she begs Jesus to help her; and her faith is recognised and honoured. The girl is delivered from her demon-possession.*

*In a sense it's a topical theme, in these times that seem to push the boundaries of our resilience and patience. Because there may be situations when we're forced to find that same sense of urgent focus – whether in the strange circumstances of a pandemic, or in the course of our regular lives. Perhaps it might be anxiety for a friend or loved one in trouble; perhaps it might be our own need. Situations that make us acutely aware of our dependence upon God, and of just how vital – and difficult – it is for us to keep believing, keep praying, keep going.*

*The Canaanite woman who comes seeking Jesus, calls out to him as "son of David" – she identifies him within the line of Israel's kings and Israel's history, and she seems to sense that it is through Israel's God that hope may come to her. And so she*

*perseveres, even in the face of rejection; and she wins healing and restoration for her daughter.*

*So, that would be the shape of the first sermon that could be preached today – a message of encouragement, of assurance that we are not alone; a message of persistence in faith.*

*But there is an elephant in the room in this story.*

*Because according to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus first ignores the woman – he 'blanks' her – and then he effectively dismisses her and her kind as "dogs": "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs".*

*Now for us who have learned of a Gospel of God's love in which there is "neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free..." - this is surely disconcerting, uncomfortable for us to consider. This is not what we expect or want to hear from the lips of Jesus.*

*Well, different Biblical interpreters and commentators have approached this passage in different ways. Some have suggested that Jesus is speaking somehow tongue-in-cheek, opening the opportunity for the woman to respond in faith, so that the prejudice of the disciples can be shown up.*

*Others see this as a rare instance where Jesus finds his own worldview challenged and found wanting, an occasion where Jesus himself is ministered to, where he is forced to learn something new.*

*To be honest, I don't think there's enough in the text to really confirm either of these interpretations. The tones of voice, the body language – any of the cues that might help us to read between the lines – we don't have the luxury of such details.*

*So perhaps we just have to live with the discomfort, with the disorientation of this very tense verbal exchange. And this, I guess, would be the territory of the second sermon that could be preached today. The idea that faith isn't always about easy answers, that sometimes we may find ourselves grappling with a God whom we don't understand, and a Christ who refuses always to conform to our expectations.*

*But here's the thing – in this passage from Scripture, the discomfort is not just ours.*

*Matthew's Gospel isn't the only one to record this encounter between Jesus and a Gentile woman in foreign territory – but it's Matthew's Gospel that we're reading at the moment, so we do well to try and enter the thought-world of Matthew and his original readership, his original community, as we try to work out what he might be telling us by including this account.*

*Now, Matthew's Gospel is sometimes spoken of as the 'most Jewish' in flavour of the Bible's four accounts of the life of Jesus. It's full of little stylistic touches and references to Old Testament prophecy, that all suggest its original audience may have been an early group of predominantly 'Jewish-Christians'.*

*Within that audience, the reference to Gentiles – foreigners – as "dogs" would be less unexpected, less jarring, than it is to us.*

*So that the surprise, the discomfort within that context – is not that Jesus refers to the distinction between Jew and Gentile – but that as a result of the woman's determination to push the boundaries, he overcomes it.*

*And that, surely, is the key to this passage. Yes, it's about a healing, but as with so many of the healing miracles, the physical illness or the demon-possession is only one facet of a deeper issue. What this passage highlights is that there is salvation to spare – that even with the assertion of Jesus as Israel's Messiah, God's saving work through him is not confined to Israel.*

*Isaiah's prophecy, as we heard just now, contained this truth. To a community on the cusp of a long-awaited return to their homeland after the trauma of exile under foreign rule, God's messenger proclaims that the LORD will not only gather Israel's outcasts, but will even find faithful foreigners to save.*

*And again – to us this seems commonplace, unremarkable. But not so in the thought-world of the Ancient Near East, among competing peoples whose national pride asserted that their nation alone had been chosen and favoured by their own god (be that Marduk for Babylon, or Ashur for the Assyrians, or indeed for Israel and Judah, the LORD whose name was so holy that no mere mortal should dare pronounce it).*

*Indeed, for Isaiah's hearers also, the shock of this oracle is the sheer breadth of grace that is on offer from Israel's God, from the One true God. This is no privatised deity, interested only in the affairs of a single race (and let the other nations go hang). No, this is the LORD who is rich and overflowing in mercy, who pushes the boundaries of our petty tribalism to affirm that all may find salvation.*

*Back to the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman – and look at how she responds to the apparent slur, the idea that she and her kind are mere 'dogs'. "True, Lord" she says, "yet even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table". She says nothing to challenge the suggestion that her whole nation is inferior, second-rate. She seems to accept a lower status - because her situation is beyond the limits of pride, whether personal or national. And yet, as she shows, it's when we're beyond the limits that we're best-placed to push the boundaries.*

*Two sermons that could be preached today – one on persistence in prayer, the other on the jarring effect of having our religious preconceptions challenged.*

*Or perhaps it's just one sermon after all. Perhaps today the Lord would have us know:*

- that just as we who identify ourselves as the Church are to take courage, to believe and keep on believing, to watch and pray in faith that God hears and will answer*
- so likewise God hears and cherishes the heartfelt cries of those who have not found their place within the Church, those whose courage is spent, whose faith is shattered*
- and yet whose persistence is intact, and bold, and sacred.*

*Let our churches and our communities alike be told: that God's salvation pushes the boundaries, breaks down the barricades that we have erected – to proclaim salvation for the jobless, the addict, the abused, the vagabond, the victim of a faceless algorithm – for all.*

*And let the world hear this truth: That even when the best of the bread is hoarded by those who've grabbed the best seats at the table - still by God's providence, even the tiniest crumbs of grace that fall, can prove more than enough to save.*

## ***Responding to God's grace***

### ***Praying for Needs & Concerns (led by Michael Young)***

Dear Lord, we come unto you this day with our prayers of intercession.

In many ways we are very fortunate: in where we live, and that for the most part, most of us have not suffered from the worst effects of this terrible pandemic. And for this we thank you, Lord. However so many people in this land and abroad have not been as fortunate. We ask that you will be with all those who have been affected by this disease in so many ways. We especially think of those who have contracted the disease; we pray for those who have lost loved ones; those who care for the sufferers, those who are recovering; and those whose lives and livelihoods have been disrupted, in many cases changed for ever.

We think of the people of Aberdeen, of Leicester, Blackburn, Oldham, Melbourne in Australia, and other hotspots around the world. Lord, be with all those who are working so hard to produce medication / vaccines that will relieve the suffering and lead to a return to a reasonably normal life for us all.

As the children of the United Kingdom start to return to school – already some in Scotland, in a couple of weeks in the other nations – we pray that this will not lead to a further spike in cases of Covid-19, and that schools will be able to cope with the changes that they will have to make. Be with the head teachers, the governors, teachers, teaching assistants, administrators, caretakers and cleaners who have already been hard at work preparing for the reopening. Be with all the students, especially those who have suffered during the period of absence from formal teaching. Some schools will find this much harder than others; be with all those in local authorities and government who have control over education, that they will be able to ease things for these schools.

Be with all those who have suffered because of the cancellation of formal examinations this Summer, and whose grades may not reflect their true ability. Be with university and college admissions officers, that they are able to be fair with the offers of places. For those students not proceeding to higher education: be with them in their quest for satisfying and rewarding employment.

Lord, be with all those in care homes, who have been particularly affected by not being able to see and hug their loved ones. Be especially with those who are confused, and do not understand why they have not had visits. Be with all who care for the elderly, whether paid or unpaid; grant them wisdom, courage, strength, and above all patience.

Lord, we ask that you will be with the people of Beirut as they slowly recover from the tragedy that befell that city just over a week ago; especially with those who have been bereaved, and those who were injured, as well as those who have lost their homes and livelihoods, or had their homes or businesses damaged. We pray for those who are in authority in Lebanon, that they will put the needs of their citizens ahead of their own interests.

Normally at this time of the year, far more people will be on holiday than is the case this year. Be with all those who are on holiday, that they will return home safely and fully refreshed. For those who have not been able to have a holiday: be with them in their disappointment, and in their hopes and prayers for a better year next year.

Lord, we thank you that we can come together to worship you in this way, thanks to modern technology; and ask that you will be with those who either do not have access to this, or find it difficult and frustrating. Be with all those in authority, that they will appreciate this and not force the use of modern technology onto everyone.

Lastly we ask that you will be with all at Trinity, and look kindly upon the prayer requests on our prayer boards. Be with Dominic and Miriam as they prepare to move to North London in a few weeks' time; and be with us in our vacancy.

All this we pray for in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

### **Offertory**

*This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. You might like to put it in a jar for now, ready to be brought in person when circumstances allow. Then say the prayer below (if you already participate in Trinity's Planned Giving scheme via direct bank transfer, then simply recite the prayer – no need for a jar!).*

Generous God, your gift to me  
is life, and sustenance, and hope.  
I bring to you my gift, and myself.  
Receive, Lord, and bless:  
so that both gift and giver  
may bring blessing to others,  
and glory to your name. Amen.

### **Hymn**

God is love, his the care  
tending each, everywhere.  
God is love – all is there!  
Jesus came to show him,  
that we all might know him:  
*Sing aloud, loud loud, sing aloud, loud, loud,  
God is good, God is truth, God is beauty: praise him!*

Jesus came, lived and died  
for our sake, crucified,  
rose again, glorified:  
he was born to save us  
by the truth he gave us:  
*Sing aloud...*

None can see God above;  
Jesus shows how to love;  
thus may we Godward move,  
joined as sisters, brothers,  
finding him in others:  
*Sing aloud...*

To our Lord praise we sing -  
light and life, friend and King  
coming down love to bring,  
pattern for our duty,  
showing God in beauty:  
*Sing aloud...*

### ***Closing Prayer and Blessing***

Let us go from this time of worship  
resolved to maintain justice, to do what is right;  
for God's purpose of salvation is being revealed,  
and by God's grace,  
even the outcasts shall be gathered in joy.

So may the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be upon us, and among all who are dear to us,  
whether near or far,  
today and always. Amen.

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