

# Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon



**Sunday 29 March 2020**

**Order of Service for Worship At Home**

## ***Preparation***

*You might like to use this resource at 11am on Sunday: it will be good to know that, even whilst we can't meet in person at the church, Trinity folk will be 'gathering' for worship at the same time. However, it can be used at any time on Sunday or during the week. A video of this service will be made available via Trinity's website in time for 11am on Sunday (though with slight adaptations), so you may like to follow along.*

*If possible, find somewhere to sit where you won't be distracted. Turn off your mobile phone, and have some calm music playing beforehand. You might like to have a candle to light, a pen and paper to hand, and a jar in which to place your offering.*

*It may seem odd, but try reading aloud for the parts of the service in normal type (you don't need to recite the sections in italics, which are for information, instruction, or reflection). You could even try singing the hymns – but if that makes you feel too self-conscious, then simply read the words!*

## ***Gathering in God's presence***

*If you have one, light a candle.*

### **Call to Worship**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. *2 Corinthians 1.3-5*

### **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...*

*Percy Dearmer (altd.) - public domain text*

### **Praying our Praise & Thanksgiving**

*Pause to make a note (mentally or on paper!) of three things for which to be thankful. If you're sharing in this act of worship with others in your household, you might like to talk about and identify these three things together. Then recite this prayer.*

Intimate God,  
we praise you because you know each one of us;  
the worries that nag us,  
the achievements we are proud of,  
the hopes and expectations  
that we hold, half-recognised, in our hearts.

We praise you for what we know of you;  
the ways in which you have welcomed and met us,  
your quiet, constant, presence in our lives.

Today we give you thanks for... *(name the thanksgivings you've noted)*.

And we praise you  
for what we do not yet know;  
the mysteries of your creation,  
the questions that baffle us,  
the wonders of discovery awaiting us.

Unknown God,  
may we be open to meet with you  
in unexpected ways;  
discerning your presence  
in what is strange to us,  
and seeing the familiar  
with newly-opened eyes.  
Amen.

*(Adapted from A Service of the Word, "Worship: from the United Reformed Church", p.86)*

## **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  
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.

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.

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

### **Bible Reading: Matthew 25.31-46**

*This "parable of the sheep and the goats" (also referred to as the "judgement of the nations") is a remarkable illustration of the primacy of practical care in Jesus' ethical teaching: for what we do (or fail to do) for "the least of these" vulnerable neighbours, we are deemed to have done (or failed to do) for Christ himself.*

31 `When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." 37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." 44 Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" 45 Then he will answer them,

"Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

### **Theme Introduction**

*Reading this particular Bible passage whilst we're all under enforced "lockdown" is quite a bittersweet experience. The deeds of loving care that are described and commended by Jesus here – welcoming, providing, visiting – mostly depend on a face-to-face contact that is largely impossible for us just now. Indeed, for some of us, it might even feel like we're the ones "in prison".*

*I'm told that in New Testament times, prisons were quite different from those we know now. They weren't used as places to serve a sentence of punishment; rather, prisoners were kept in jail until their trial (no-one was let out on bail), or between conviction and physical (or capital) punishment. But food and clothing were not provided: if prisoners' friends did not visit to care for them and bring them what they needed, they would suffer and starve through neglect.*

*Whatever else is happening at the moment for us, the Coronavirus restrictions make it all the more important to remember and care for people who are especially vulnerable – who might otherwise be neglected. Some of us may still be able to run errands for others, such as shopping for isolated neighbours. But even if we can't do that, we can all help by being careful about when and how we do our own shopping – resisting the temptation to stockpile for ourselves, and not forgetting to contribute to FoodBank collections whenever we see the opportunity.*

*All of us can bring a little light in these anxious and confusing times, by remembering to care for everyone who might be in need.*

### **Hymn**

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, (x3)  
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

The light that shines is the light of love,  
lights the darkness from above.  
It shines on me and it shines on you,  
and shows what the power of love can do.  
I'm gonna shine my light both far and near,  
I'm gonna shine my light both bright and clear.  
Where there's a dark corner in this land  
I'm gonna let my little light shine.     *This little light of mine...*

On Monday he gave me the gift of love,  
Tuesday, peace came from above.  
On Wednesday he told me to have more faith,  
on Thursday he gave me a little more grace.  
Friday, he told me just to watch and pray,  
Saturday, he told me just what to say.  
On Sunday he gave me the power divine  
to let my little light shine.     *This little light of mine...*

**Bible Reading: Isaiah 56.1-8**

*The prophet affirms that God's mercy is not restricted to Israel alone: for to all who are faithful in seeking God's ways and God's justice - whatever their background - God gives a protected and honoured place within the community.*

**1** Thus says the Lord:

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

**2** Happy is the mortal who does this,  
the one who holds it fast,  
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,  
and refrains from doing any evil.

**3** Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say,  
'The Lord will surely separate me from his people';  
and do not let the eunuch say,  
'I am just a dry tree.'

**4** For thus says the Lord:

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,  
who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,

**5** I will give, in my house and within my walls,  
a monument and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that shall not be cut off.

**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**

*In the culture of Isaiah's day, it was common to regard those who were foreign-born as deserving a much lower social status; and whilst in some of the surrounding nations eunuchs were entrusted with particular duties as royal attendants, their lives were considered entirely expendable.*

*So the prophet's message here bucks that trend. It's not a person's background or circumstances that should determine their status in God's sight – rather it's nothing more (and nothing less) than their readiness to "maintain justice, and do what is right". And no-one is to be dismissed as expendable.*

*That word "justice" is a really important one in the Bible, and particularly in the writings of the Prophets. When we think of justice it brings to mind a sense of truth and fairness - and that's broadly how it's meant to be understood in passages like this. But significantly there are a number of passages in Scripture asserting that God's justice doesn't entirely match our idea of impartiality – rather, that it's weighted in favour of a special concern for those who are impoverished, dependent, or in need.*

*If that's the case, then our Gospel reading today (the "parable of the sheep and the goats") offers more than just an indication that kindness will be rewarded and neglect condemned: it shows us what God's justice looks like, affirming that it is seen in human acts of mercy towards the vulnerable here and now.*

*Of course, that kind of justice is all the more important in these deeply testing times. If we're in a position to do so, we need to be looking out for our neighbours, making sure that they're not left without practical assistance and even the emotional support of a card through the door or a friendly conversation. Meanwhile if you yourself are in isolation and you're worried there's no-one to look out for you, it's really important to get in touch – with us at Trinity, or really with any of the organisations or voluntary groups that are working to offer help – so that no-one is going to be overlooked.*

*What's more, I think the kind of justice that's envisaged here has the capacity to go beyond what each of us might do personally. As this crisis plays out, we're all being confronted with a hard truth: that there's huge danger in the trend of recent years towards individualism and the atomization of society. Have we privileged consumerism over community? Have we capitulated to the easy narrative that some categories of people are inherently less important or valuable than others?*

*Isaiah's prophecy reminds us that we can't expect God to endorse human prejudices – whether against the eunuchs and foreign-born of his own day, or against benefit claimants or the low-paid or migrants and refugees in our day. Perhaps, when all this is over, we'll find ourselves with work to do: to re-shape a society in which we've learned again, truly, what it is to live in community. A society in which all are cherished and cared-for, where integration not individualism is the guiding principle, and we all find our place together.*

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

### ***Praying for Needs & Concerns (NB may differ from prayers in video service)***

*Pause to make a note (mentally or on paper!) of three individuals or groups for whom you want to pray: one local to you, one elsewhere in the UK, and one elsewhere in the world. If you're sharing in this act of worship with others in your household, you might like to talk about and choose these together. Then recite this prayer.*

Living God, you are always near to those who call on you.  
I ask you to lift from me all that weighs me down,  
all that spoils my relationship with others or separates me from you.

*(short silence)*

In Jesus, you have given assurance  
of forgiveness of sins and renewal of life.  
So make me confident in prayer and responsive to your word,  
that I may know your peace in my heart  
and your healing in my life.

*(Adapted from Prayers for Healing, "Worship: from the United Reformed Church", p.114)*

I pray for my neighbours and local community,  
especially today for... *(local concern...)*.  
Guide your people, Lord, each day,  
that they may become  
"the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." *(Isaiah 58.12)*

I pray for this nation,  
especially today for... *(national concern...)*.  
Keep your people, Lord, each day,  
that they may be given  
"as a covenant to the nation, to establish the land." *(Isaiah 49.8)*

I pray for the world we share,  
especially today for... *(global concern...)*.  
Tend and nurture your people, Lord, each day,  
that they may grow  
"and fill the whole world with fruit." *(Isaiah 27.6)*

These and all my prayers  
I offer, loving Father,  
in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit,  
through Jesus Christ your Son. 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**

Jesus, united by thy grace  
and each to each endeared,  
with confidence we seek thy face,  
and know our prayer is heard.

Help us to help each other, Lord,  
each other's cross to bear,  
let all their friendly aid afford  
and feel each other's care.

Touched by the lodestone of thy love,  
let all our hearts agree,  
and ever toward each other move,  
and ever move toward thee.

To thee, inseparably joined,  
let all our spirits cleave;  
O may we all the loving mind  
that was in thee, receive.

This is the bond of perfectness,  
thy spotless charity;  
O let us, still we pray, possess  
the mind that was in thee.

*Charles Wesley (altd.) - public domain text*

### **Blessing**

Together and in our separate places,  
let us be bringers of love,  
makers of peace,  
and messengers of hope;  
in the assurance that the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
shall be upon us  
and among all who are dear to us,  
whether near or far,  
today and always. Amen.