

# Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon

**Sunday 10 January 2021**

**Order of Service for 'Worship from Home'**



***Led by the Revd Alistair Cumming***

*(Church of Scotland minister, Clerk of the Presbytery of England)*

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

### ***Call to worship***

When the song of the angel is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and the princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins  
To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry  
To release the prisoner, To rebuild the nations  
To bring peace among people, To make music in the heart.

### ***Hymn – Praise the Lord, Ye heavens adore him***

Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore him;  
praise him, angels in the height;  
sun and moon, bow down before him,  
praise him, all ye stars and light.

Praise the Lord, for he hath spoken;  
worlds his mighty voice obeyed;  
laws, that never shall be broken,  
for their guidance he hath made.

Praise the Lord, for he is glorious;  
never shall his promise fail;  
God hath made his saints victorious;  
sin and death shall not prevail.

Praise the God of our salvation;  
hosts on high, his power proclaim;  
heaven and earth, and all creation,  
laud and magnify his name.

Anon.

In *Foundling Hospital Collection*, 1796/1801 altd. Based on Psalm 148: 1-6, 14

## ***Prayer of approach and confession***

Lord Jesus Christ, as we continue the first few steps of a New Year, we remember that all we have that is good comes from you, we remember that you have looked after us in the past, look after us today, and will continue to care for us and guide us tomorrow.

Bless us this year Lord, from the very young to the not so young, may we be filled with your compassion, grace and love and may we as individuals and as a church give people a glimpse of Love for the World.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, you are mighty indeed. Mighty and powerful. you are the Creator of all that is Good.

The Maker of Heaven and Earth. The skies and stars were made by you, the mountains and seas put into place by you. Everywhere we look in Creation - from great storms and grand canyons to mighty mountains and fast flowing rivers we see evidence of your power and might.

As we look ahead to this coming year we ask that you may bless us through 2021. Encourage us O Father by our successes of the past; - when we have truly served you with humility and dedication. Challenge us, O Christ, to face with fortitude and courage what this year may bring;

Guide us, O Heavenly Spirit, by your eternal presence, and give us strength to keep close by you in the days to come. We ask Lord that you may help and guide us this coming year: help us to be to be true and faithful to those whom we love and who love us; help us to be to be loyal to our friends, so that they may never feel distressed or let down by our actions; to work to the best of our abilities, using to the full the talents which you have given to us; help us to be to be reliable in all we do so that people may know that we are dependable.

Help us to resist temptation so that we may give strength to others who may be tempted;

Lord may our lives this year lead to others discovering you. May we be humble, gentle and kind; slow to anger and quick to forgive. May we learn to look at our own lives before commenting on others and may we be honest and true and obedient to You.

Lord we ask for your peace and love and strength in our lives. Help us to be worthy of You and to follow you faithfully.

We try to stop Jesus from coming into our lives, Patient God, for we know how disruptive he can be. He wants us to preach the gospel with our lives, but we prefer to complain how hard that is to do. He wants us to do what is right, yet wrongdoing comes so easily for us. He would like us not to

give up until justice is done, but we just don't seem to have the time.

We confess because we know we need to be forgiven by you, Glory and Grace. Bathe us in the lifegiving waters of your mercy so we can come up from the water, ready to do good for others, to give you all the praise, to learn justice, grace, and hope from your Servant, Jesus Christ.

### ***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 to God's Word**

### ***Bible Reading - Acts 19: 1-7***

- <sup>1</sup> While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples.
- <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."
- <sup>3</sup> Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism."
- <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus."
- <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- <sup>6</sup> When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—
- <sup>7</sup> altogether there were about twelve of them.

## ***Hymn - Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us***

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have come to us,  
you are one with us,  
Mary's Son -  
cleansing our souls from all their sin;  
pouring your love and goodness in;  
Jesus, our love for you we sing,  
living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
now and every day  
teach us how to pray,  
Son of God.  
You have commanded us to do  
this in remembrance, Lord, of you;  
into our lives your power breaks through,  
living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have come to us,  
born as one with us,  
Mary's Son -  
led out to die on Calvary,  
risen from death to set us free;  
living Lord Jesus, help us see  
you are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we would come to you,  
live our lives for you,  
Son of God;  
all your commands we know are true,  
your many gifts will make us new;  
into our lives your power breaks through,  
living Lord.

Patrick Appleford (1925-2018) altd.

## ***Bible Reading - Mark 1: 4-11***

<sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

<sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

<sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

<sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

<sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

## ***Sermon***

Our Gospel lesson today tells the story of the Baptism of Jesus.

In the news recently we heard of the trial and sentence of those found guilty of the incarceration and transporting and death of thirty-nine Vietnamese, there were deaths in Morecambe bay and Dover a few years ago. All people who were being trafficked. Modern Slavery. We train people now how to identify modern slavery, to be able to identify and assist those who are being detained against their will.

There seem to be more and more stories of people being held by others in situations akin to slavery, or kept under lock and key with no outside contact for the gratification of the kidnapper.

We here of the Stockholm syndrome. That is where the victim or hostage in a kidnap situation seems to fall for their captor and starts to identify with them and often their cause. Perhaps the most infamous example of this was the kidnapped heiress Patty Hearst.

The abduction of Hearst is well-known, as are many of the details of her story. Through the years her photo hung in every window of every shop and on every lamp post. Her father and her family appeared regularly on local, national and international news programs, begging and weeping for her safe return.

That was many years ago, coming up to date we can all recount the names of people who have gone missing, some have been found and reunited, others have not been so fortunate. Though certainly not all have met with some disastrous and fatal outcome. I think in particular of Terry Waite, and the other hostages of Beirut.

Many of the victims when telling their story have subsequently attested that they would not, could not, cry out and reveal their name, because they believed the threats to kill her or their family.

Only the captor, knew their name. But they never forget who they are.

Hearst knew her identity, even when no one else recognized her.

Let me fast forward you to halfway through Matthew's gospel, Jesus starts to ask about identity and indeed asks his disciples to identify him. By that time, Jesus has travelled the countryside preaching hope to hopeless people.

He has extended a healing touch to those cast off by society.

He has told cryptic stories of judgment that seem to be aimed at those in power.

People have begun to whisper about who Jesus might be and what he's up to.

And so, in a side moment, when Jesus is with his disciples away from the crowd, he asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" What is my identity? Who am I?"

The fact is people aren't sure.

The disciples respond that people think Jesus might be John the Baptist reincarnated, or Elijah, or another of the prophets.

So Jesus pursues the question and asks them, "Who do *you* say that I am?" And Peter--bumbling, brash Peter--responds, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Very soon thereafter, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James and John, and God's own voice from heaven *confirms* in their hearing the true identity of Jesus.

This is when Jesus' identity is made known publicly and explicitly, when others begin to recognize accurately who Jesus is.

But long before Peter's proclamation is Jesus' *own* recognition of his identity.

Jesus has known who he is since his baptism, he has known who he is since today's Gospel passage, since John immerses him in water and--to Jesus alone in both Mark and Matthew telling, to only Jesus' eyes and ears--the heaven of God opens and God's own Spirit alights upon Jesus.

Today, God's own voice names Jesus, saying, "You are my Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

For thirteen chapters, then, from now until Peter's proclamation in the middle of the Gospel, Jesus must walk through the world--including during a trip home to Nazareth on the streets of his own neighbourhood--knowing who he is but unable to cry out his identity, unable to share his true nature.

Throughout all that time, he is a stranger to those who purport to love him. In what must be a cruel irony for Jesus, only the demons he encounters recognize him for who he truly is.

It is a common literary motif: the character who knows his identity but cannot declare it, who must walk through the world hidden in plain sight. It is a painful thing, difficult to read or watch.

Strider is secretly Aragorn, the heir to the throne of men in *Lord of the Rings*. He lives in shadows, conflicted about the discovery of his true name.

Clark Kent is really Superman. Christopher Reeve was my favourite. His alternating urges to reveal himself to Lois Lane and to remain in disguise so conflict that he removes and replaces his eyeglasses as a nervous and romantic gesture.

I hesitate to pose the question, "What would it be like to walk through the world in this way, hidden in plain sight, unrecognized even by those who love us?"

Why did I hesitate, because it occurred to me that we already know the answer. Writers return again and again to this notion not because it is tantalizing fiction, but because it is agonizing truth.

We, each of us, travel the streets of the City, we walk through the hallways of our workplaces, even the rooms of our very homes, with our true identities unknown to any but ourselves.

Think how often both the accolades and the criticisms you receive seem to you to be spoken about someone else, about some stranger who only vaguely reminds you of yourself.

Remember those times when you believe if the world just knew the real you it would love you and rejoice in you, along with those times when you feel quite sure if the world knew the real you it would recoil in fear and disgust.

Think of the times you want to cry out your identity, to rip Clark Kent's glasses from your nose, to emerge from the shadows and claim your true name.

And admit the irony that the only ones who truly seem to know you—the *real* you--are your demons: your self-doubts, your anxieties, your weaknesses.

The demons know your identity, even when no one else does.

Except that today, above all other days, we are reminded that there is more truth than this, greater truth.

On this day of the Baptism of Jesus, we are called to remember *into whom we are baptized*.

At his own baptism, God spoke to Jesus, and half a Gospel later God spoke to the disciples, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

That only is truly Jesus. *That* is his identity.

And in baptism, in this sacrament that rehearses the action to which Jesus consented at the hands of John the Baptist, *Jesus'* identity becomes *our own true selves*.

Baptism is not primarily about the opportunity to unpack grannies traditional christening gown or take family photos or eat good cake.

Since the day that Jesus was baptised at the river Jordan, baptism has become a sign, a symbol if you will, of God's unconditional love for us.

In baptism, by the promises of support and nurture, by the water of new creation, by the faith we profess, and by the action of God, we are marked as God's forever.

Leaving aside any words concerning repentance, leaving aside any talk of sin and forgiveness, baptism is an act which celebrates the inherent value that God has placed upon us.

It is act in which we rejoice over the fact that we and whoever may come forward, or be brought forward by a parent, are creations of love, that we are the special children of God, a God who says to us - as he said Jesus, "You are my daughters, my sons, my beloved ones. With you I am well pleased."

In our baptism, as in the baptism of Jesus, we celebrate God's welcoming love, a love that comes prior to anything we may have done and prior to anything we may yet do.

And the wonder of it all is that each day God renews his loves for us each day he speaks to us tender words about who we are and what we have done and what we can do.

God's love always remains unconditional - it always affirms us, it always nurtures us, and calls forth from us a like love.

All we need to do is remember our identity. All we need do is turn to Him and open our hearts and our minds to his caring presence, his gentle guidance, his quiet and encouraging word.

So as we start the New Year, lets us resolve to let God helps us begin our relationship with him, and he helps us continue our relationship with him each day, with his word of affirmation with his unconditional love, his unquestioning forgiveness, and his unfailing support.

God creates an environment of peace for us to dwell in, and to meditate on, and to pass on to others.

As companions to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and yes as parents, to others who are on the journey of faith, it does us well, I think, to hear these words once though I don't for the life of me know who said them, but to listen to them and to consider what they might mean for our care for one another, for our affirmation of one another.

If a child lives with criticism, they learn to condemn.  
If a child lives with hostility they learn to fight.  
If a child lives with ridicule, they learn to be shy.  
If a child lives with shame, they learn to be guilty.  
If a child lives with tolerance, they learn to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, they learn confidence.  
If a child lives with praise, they learn to appreciate.  
If a child lives with fairness, they learn justice.  
If a child lives with security, they learn to have faith.  
If a child lives with approval, they learn to like themselves.  
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, they learn to find love in the world.

Friends in SW London and maybe for those watching from beyond, God loves you - right here - and right now.

We are the baptized, bearing the seal of the Holy Spirit on our brows just as the dove alighted on Jesus.

We can walk the streets of our City, the hallways of our workplaces, the rooms of our homes--indeed, we can look in the mirror--and say, "Look at me, the *real* me. I am a child of God. I am beloved, and with me God is well pleased."

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

### ***Prayer of Intercession***

It is inevitable that Covid dominates our thoughts this week. In our prayers we will be bringing to God those affected by the virus, but please don't forget all the other issues that face people.

To remind us of why we pray, please respond to each prayer with "Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you."

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray.

Let us pray for your Church throughout world.

We think of all those in our worldwide fellowship..... those of exuberant faith..... those of quiet faith..... those persecuted because of their faith..... those whose faith and worship suffer through Covid-enforced separation. Help them all find how to witness for you - in both their church and secular lives.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray for Trinity.

We pray for our Vacancy Team as they lead us in shaping what Trinity will be like in the future..... how that may be different from the past. Help us all to not be afraid of change.

And be with all our members..... help us support and strengthen each other in Covid-enforced separation.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray for governments and leaders.

We pray for leaders here, and in all other countries, as they struggle with Covid problems. May they make their momentous decisions with both integrity and compassion..... may they accept there is no perfect solution..... give them strength to continue, knowing they will always be unfairly criticised.

We pray, particularly, for American leaders as their country faces an uncertain, and possibly violent, presidential transition.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray for teachers and pupils.

We pray for all children as they miss seeing their friends..... as they have no time away from their parents..... as they fear they will have learned less than they should..... as they fear the life-chance gap between rich and poor has widened. And we pray quietly for those we know.....

We pray for teachers with the additional workload of teaching both on-line and in the classroom..... with their role in Covid security, and the uncertainty of what risks they themselves run.

In particular, we pray for Claire with her responsibilities of headship.  
**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray for the NHS – staff and patients

We pray for all staff treating Covid patients..... for the long hours in unpleasant conditions..... for going daily to work despite the known dangers..... for facing an uncertain future knowing it might be worse than what they have already seen. May they be supported by knowing that they are so appreciated and loved.

We pray for all Covid patients..... those dangerously ill..... those not knowing how much worse they will get..... those recovered, but scared of the uncertainties of long Covid.

And help us not to forget those with other illnesses that are not being treated..... those delaying seeing the doctor..... those with mental illness caused, or made worse, by Covid.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Let us pray for the bereaved

We pray for those whose loved ones have recently died..... those who had not been able to see them because of Covid..... those who have not been able to celebrate their lives as they would have wished.

Help all of us remember, with love, those who have died..... remembering the good, not the bad.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you.**

Finally, our readings today about Jesus's baptism remind us of our union with him through baptism – and his death and resurrection.

In the words of our last hymn:

Let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

**Lord, help us keep our eyes upon you. Amen.**

### ***Offertory***

*This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness.*

Eternal God, and giver of all good,  
we give thanks this day for the gifts of life and love,  
family and friendship, and for the joy of the coming of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ to dwell among us.

We bring before you now a portion of the gifts you have given us to share,

And pray that you would take and use them for your glory  
and us for the service of your kingdom.

## ***Hymn - Love divine all loves excelling***

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver;  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

## ***Closing Prayer & Blessing***

Go in peace and walk in love to serve the Lord.  
And may the blessing of  
God the Father,  
God the Son, and  
God the Holy Spirit,  
be with you  
and all whom you love.  
This day and for evermore. Amen