

Welcome to worship

As this week is Christian Aid Week, our prayers today draw upon the themes of climate and trade justice. We still ourselves ready for worship, to focus on God and his loving presence with us. We light a candle – we remember that Christ is the Light of the world.

Call to Worship:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.
Psalm 96:11-13

Hymn: StF 499 Great God, your love has called us here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXYp9Gkprfl>

1 Great God, your love has called us here,
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

2 We come with self inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half free, half bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined
yet seeking hope for human kind.

3 Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

5 Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

Brian Wren b.1936

Prayers

Our souls sing out a joyful song, Our souls sing out how great thou art. We consider the works you have made, The stars of the night, the leaves of the trees, The birds of the air, the oceans and streams.

Our souls sing out a mournful song, Our souls grieve before our God. We consider the works our hands have made; The warming of the planet, the rising of seas, The wilting of the harvest, devastating communities.

Our souls sing out a contrite song, Our souls bow down low. We regret the works our hands have made The impact on the poorest, the livelihoods lost, The deepening of poverty, the environmental and human cost.

Our souls sing out a penitent song, Our souls turn back to what is right. We consider the good works our hands can make; The words of justice we can speak, the acts of love we can give, The hand of solidarity we can extend, for others to fully live.

Our souls sing out a hopeful song. Our souls look to the Lord, where our hope comes from. We consider the works you call us to; The love of our neighbour, the stewardship of the earth, The flourishing of all creation, the wonder of its worth. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

For the beauty of the Earth desecrated by pollution extinguished by forest fires choked by plastic waste Christ, our God, to you we plead forgive us for systemic greed.

For the urgency of this hour ignored by apathy or procrastination wasted by ineffective decisions denied by economic interests Christ, our God and Saviour, forgive us for selfish short-term behaviour.

For the joy of human love fractured by forced migration crushed by bereavement lost to typhoons, floods, starvation Christ, our God, bringer of justice forgive us for this climate crisis.

Assurance of Pardon

God you know us. You know that we can be loving and kind; and you know that sometimes we get things wrong. We're sorry for the times we hurt other people, forget to listen to you and don't bother to take care of your world.

God forgive us. Jesus bless us. God's Spirit help us to grow in love. Amen.

Hymn: StF 663 Teach me my God and king

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgNlslvSIH4>

Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything
to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake;
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.

George Herbert 1593-1633

Gospel Reading : John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my

friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection by Frances Carr.

In today's gospel reading we see in the very first line how important it is to Jesus to have love and unity. Jesus tells us that the Father loves him and that He in turn loves his Father and his disciples. And he urges his disciples to remain in his love and Jesus immediately tells his friends how they can remain in his love, namely by keeping his commandments.

Throughout his Gospel John reminds us of the close relationship that exists between God and Jesus. We read at the very beginning of John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through him. Without Him was not anything made that has been made (Jn1:1-3). There are many more references in John's Gospel about the bond which exists between God and Jesus, but these are not recorded in this reflection.

Jesus, speaking to his disciples in this chapter of John's Gospel, wants the disciples to stay close to Him, although he has told them that he is going to leave them as we read in Chapter 14. So how can the disciples and how can we stay close to Jesus who is no longer with us?

Well, Love seems to be the essence of Jesus's discourse to the disciples at the Last Supper. The word is mentioned 31 times in this passage of John's Gospel. The love Jesus speaks of is not trivial or sentimental. That would be too easy. The source of this love, is the love which the Father has for the Son. Parents amongst us will know what kind of love this is. Parents would do anything to protect their children and to give them whatever they need to grow up well. Parents would go out of their way, make sacrifices, in order that the children will have sufficient.

When Jesus says: *Abide in my love*, he means that we should be immersed in his love. It is almost like diving into a swimming pool, not filled with water, but filled with the love of Jesus. When we find the courage to dive in, we will find ourselves in a totally different place, quiet, supportive, refreshing, a place where we are upheld by Jesus's love. This love begins with the Father, through to the Son, handed on to us in Jesus' word and deeds. This love, as we see from Jesus's words, depends entirely on obedience. Just as Jesus was obedient to the Father, in becoming Incarnate and dwelling amongst us, bringing the Father's message of love into the world, so are we asked by Jesus to be obedient to his commandments. After all Jesus says: *IF you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandment and remain in his love.*

That is where the central point of today's message lies. If only we are obedient to Jesus' words and deeds, can we show the same love in our world today as exists between the Father and the Son.

Obedience is not a word we cherish, yet we do expect it. Parents expect obedience from their children, teachers expect obedience from their pupils, and we are all expected to be obedient to the law. Without obedience a society cannot operate and will soon turn into what we call anarchy.

However, the obedience which Jesus calls for in today's gospel passage, goes further than rules and regulations. In verse 13 Jesus tells us: *No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.* We see that this quiet, supporting and refreshing love also demands **sacrifice**.

After all, Jesus himself, in accordance with the will of God, sacrificed himself so that the sins of the world could be forgiven.

The final twist in this passage comes at the end where Jesus says: You did not choose me, but I chose you. In other words, Jesus deems us strong enough to be ambassadors for him. Jesus wants us to go out and bear fruit for him. How can we do that?

First and foremost, we must share God's word freely and without reservation with the people whom we meet. Jesus's life was immersed in preaching.

Secondly we must try as best as we can to put the commandments of Jesus into practice: These are, To love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And..... To love your neighbour as you love yourself.

Finally, we must continue to walk in the same direction as Jesus. Jesus walked towards Golgotha. This asks for self-denial and love. John Wesley reminds us in his sermon on self-denial, that we can only deny ourselves if we always walk in the footsteps of Jesus. This means that we follow wherever he leads. The final promise Jesus makes to us is: If you bear fruit, you can ask anything in His name and the Father will grant us what we ask for.

So let us love as Jesus loves, in total obedience to the Father's will. After all that is what we promise God, every time we pray the Lord's prayer: Thy will be done on earth.....

Hymn StF 345 And Can it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOelGbKqiw8>

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley 1707-1788

Prayers of Intercession

God of abundant life, we see your goodness all around us and we thank you for every part of it; from the plants and animals which play their part in complex ecosystems, to the dry deserts and stormy seas which test the limits of life.

We pray that in this time of climate crisis and ecological emergency, you may help us to rediscover your love of creation and to reflect that in our own lives.

God, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

God who speaks through unexpected people, we thank you for contemporary prophets who are challenging us to act on climate change; for indigenous people and their invaluable knowledge of the land and sea where they live, for scientists dedicating their careers to warning us about changes to the planet, and for young people striking for their future.

We pray that you will help those in power to hear their prophetic voices. Help them to see beyond short-term political priorities and business plans and give them wisdom and courage when they face difficult decisions.

God, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

God of second chances, we recognise the damage we have done to the Earth and the injustice we see in society every day, all of it fuelled by worship of profit and possessions.

We pray for the coming of a better world with justice, kindness and humility at its heart. We ask that you guide us to be co-creators of this new world. Give us confidence to follow the prophetic voices to stand against injustice to people and to planet. So that together, in your strength, we stop this climate crisis.

God, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

We ask all this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together. Our Father..

Blessing of our Gifts

Thank you Lord that you have loved us from the very beginning and showered us with good gifts. Bless the gifts that we bring to you now; our money, our skills and our time that they may be used in your service and bless our lives that they may reflect your love. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF 487 You shall go out with joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivfUKd6AFXw>

You shall go out with joy
And be let forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills
Will break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the fields
Will clap, will clap their hands.

And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.

Stuart Dauermann and Steffi Rubin

A prayer of dismissal

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory.
May God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling. May
God bless us with courage at this critical hour. And
may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
rest upon us and on all creation, this day and for the
future to come. **Amen.**

THE GRACE We say together...

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all ever more.
Amen.**

Prayers taken from Resources for Christian Aid Week

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