

An Act of Worship for Sunday 5 April 2020

ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE!

Let us prepare our hearts and minds to worship God.

Let us pray:

Holy God,
You have called us to be your people,
to live together in harmony,
to worship with one voice,
to be your Church in this city.
Lord, although circumstances keep us apart, unite us in our love for you.
Remind us of the faith that holds us together,
renew the commitment that we have made to you and to our brothers and sisters in your name,
Jesus Christ.
Bring us closer together
as we join our hearts in worship.

Gracious God,
you have forgiven us so often before
and so, we know we can return to you
seeking more of the same.
Forgive us for those times in this week
when we have thought first or only of ourselves;
forgive us when we have complained about being stuck at home –
teach us to be grateful for our homes;
forgive us when we have moaned
about a lack of choice of food
when others do not have the choice of eating;
forgive us when we have sulked
about lost time at work
while many have no employment
and others live in slavery.
Lord, help us to recognise that,
even in lockdown,
we are so much better off than most of the population of the world.
Absolve us from our sins and let us start over;
guide us by your Holy Spirit
to be the people you would have us be.
Remind us, as we look towards your Son Jesus Christ, just what it means to have free will
and choose to do the will of the one who created us.

As we move through this week;
as we draw nearer to Holy Week,
prepare us for the road ahead.
We do not know what tomorrow will bring.
Like Jesus, help us to put our trust in you,
believing that whatever befalls us
we are safe in your love.
Bless each person in our Church Family
and bring us all safely through the storm
to live on in your kingdom

– on earth or in heaven according to you will.
Hear us O God, as we pray in the words Jesus gave us: -

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

Reading: Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

The Wise and Foolish Builders

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Thought for Today

Let us pray.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

This comment appeared in response to a prayer on our Facebook page: -

“Ask your God to stop this virus now - it won't happen because there is no God”.

As comments go it is not impolite. Unlike some Facebook comments it is not offensive per se. I did not erase it from our page but decided instead to let it remain as a part of the conversation which was on-going. I have to say, however, it bugged me. After all, how can a non – existent God influence anything? How can I ask God to put a stop to the Coronavirus if God is not real? One of the things that has struck me in the last few weeks is the number of people who claim to have no belief in God – and yet want to blame God when things go wrong. We live in times when our churches are almost empty – and I don't just mean during the last two weeks of lockdown. Over a number of years fewer and fewer people come to Church and many people are, at best, scathing in their belief in a greater power.

Mention God, Father, Son or Holy Spirit and it can earn you a look of incredulity from those around you. While we are somewhat cocooned from these reactions when we hang around with fellow Christians, all it needs is a natural disaster, an accident on a large scale, or the Coronavirus Pandemic for the scathing brigade to blame the God they don't believe in.

Let me tell you – I don't believe in that God either!

The God in whom I place my trust is not a white-bearded old guy who is sitting on a cloud just waiting for an opportunity to point a stick and wreak havoc on the world he created. The God whom I have come to know and follow in Jesus Christ, is one who loves and cares for Creation. God cared for creation enough to ensure that human beings have influence over the things that go on around us. We have free will, intelligence, conscience and an understanding of the consequences or potential consequences of our actions. When God decided to interfere in the world it was with loving care found in the person of Jesus, who came to earth to show us our true potential. Jesus lived on Earth as a human being and demonstrated for us what it is to live a life of balance with Creation and with God. Jesus lived a simple life of caring for others, serving those who were in need, speaking out against injustice, and paying homage to God. By his sinless life he was the perfect example of all God calls us to be.

With all of this at our fingertips, how can we then blame God for the disasters which we set in motion by our overuse of creation, and our disregard for our own and other species of life? How can we live as if we are entitled to ravage the Earth, and then expect God to pick up the bill?

Jesus made it clear in the story of the Wise and the Foolish Builders that there are choices to be made. If we want the best in this world and the next, then we must build our lives on firm foundations. God has provided us with everything we need to do this – the right materials and the proper tuition to develop the necessary skills.

When we utilise our free will, intelligence, conscience and understanding of consequences, and when we follow the lessons Jesus taught about life, love and relationships, then we will begin to live more responsibly in God's world. The impact we have on the world's resources and on other living beings will be softened. Then life will be less stressful, more amenable, more in balance with our world and with our God. There will be less poverty, less hunger, fewer diseases and disasters. When the world turns back to God and lives on the firm foundation God has laid down for us, then there will be harmony in the Kingdom, in heaven and on earth and there will be no blame to lay at any door.

In the meantime, let's remember, and share with others with whom we meet,

- we have a God who is good,
- a God who must be faithful and true to God's self,
- a God who loves us and seeks only the best for us.
- a God who is seen in the person of Jesus Christ. Amen

Prayer

Loving God,
keep us safe in the days that lie ahead.
Bless our fellowship both in church and online
– especially those who are elderly, ill or lonely.
Teach us to reach out to one another
and to our neighbours in these difficult days.
Bless families of all shapes, sizes,
ages and composition.
Gracious God,
be with those who are dying
and those who have been bereaved.
We pray for all essential workers
– for health carers, social carers and funeral carers in these extraordinary times.
Keep them well,
safe and strong in body and mind.

Bless those who are working hard to find a COVID 19 vaccine which will make our world a safer place again.

We thank you for all in the food industry
who serve to keep people fed
– and we pray for the many, many people across our country and our world
who will go to bed hungry tonight.

Lord we pray for a fairer world.
Open every heart to your love.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Hymn 132 – to sing or pray
Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious,

the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
not wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains
of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish,
but naught changest thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render: O help us to see;
tis only the splendour of light hideth thee
Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you,
now and always. Amen

AFTER THE SERVICE WE USUALLY MEET IN THE CHURCH HALL FOR TEA AND COFFEE
AND A CHANCE TO SHARE TIME WITH FRIENDS.

SADLY, WE CANNOT DO THAT AT THE MOMENT – SO, WHY DON'T YOU MAKE
YOURSELF A NICE CUPPA AND PERHAPS PHONE A FRIEND FOR A CHAT – AND TELL
THEM ABOUT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE!!

OR MAYBE YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO LIVES ALONE WHO WOULD REALLY
APPRECIATE A CALL.