

Sunday 27th September

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

As we still ourselves we recognise that wherever we are, we are in God's presence and the God we know in Jesus waits patiently for us.

Lord our God, help us to know your ways and teach us your paths.
Lead us in your truth for you are the God of our salvation.

Hymn: StF3 Eternal God

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/hymns/eternal-god-your-loves-tremendous-glory-stf-3/>

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
cascades through life in overflowing grace,
to tell creation's meaning in the story
of love evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
in you, deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
embracing us in love serene and pure:
you nurture strength to follow Christ
our brother,
as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;
love which commands, enables and obeys:
you give yourself, in boundless joy,
creating
one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us, seek love and serve love's purpose,
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)

Let us pray together

Loving God, all worship and adoration belongs to you for you alone are Lord,
you alone are the mighty God, Creator of all that is good.

And yet you are closer than our very breath.

You are closer than my breath and I thank you Lord that you are always with me,

whether I know it or not,

whether I recognise it or not,

whether I delight in it or not.

You are always there to comfort and to challenge

Thank you for your saving presence.

Amen

You might like to bring to mind the things you are sorry for this week, confident in God's loving mercy and forgiveness.

Today's Reading from the Old Testament

Exodus 17: 1 - 7

Water from the Rock

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with

this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 21: 23 – 32

The Authority of Jesus Questioned
When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

The Parable of the Two Sons

‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Time to Reflect

‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ This is the question behind both the Old Testament and the first part of the New Testament readings.

Is the Lord among us when we are thirsty in the Wilderness and have no water?

Is the Lord among us in the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth?

No doubt in the last months the question ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ has been asked as we contend with the global pandemic with all its implications not least the different ways of worship.

“Is the Lord among us or not?”

The answer of faith is **yes**. We have God’s promise resounding down the generations in the words “I will be with you” and “I am with you”

Is the Lord among us when we are thirsty in the Wilderness and have no water?

Yes, the Lord provides water from the rock.

Is the Lord among us in the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth?

Yes, the Lord is the source and strength of all they do.

God’s presence does not depend upon us and how we feel. God’s presence is a gift to us, born out of love for us. God’s presence is promised in fire and flood (Isaiah 43:2) because we are precious in God’s eyes and loved.

And ours is the call to respond as God asks us, as the father asked the sons, to work in the vineyard. That is our situation. Whether we have been aware of that challenge for many years or have newly come to faith we are called to tell of the saving love of God in word and deed.

Take a time to sit quietly and to reflect on the times you have felt distant from God and the times you have known God’s presence.

Take time to pause and be present to God

A time of prayer

Lord we have set aside this time to pray, yet as people and situations pop into our minds today and in the week to come help us to take time to hold them in your love and to pray for them.

Now Lord I use this time to bring my concerns to you. I ask for your Holy Spirit to be in me to guide my thoughts that I may pray in accordance with your will and for your glory.

I pray for those who have suffered this week...

I pray for those who have rejoiced this week...

I pray for those I have seen this week...

I pray for those I have longed to see this week.

I pray for myself..

Lord with me here, take these prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: StF 530 To be in your presence

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=typ7cueKdT4>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

To be in your presence,
to sit at your feet,
where your love surrounds me,
and makes me complete:

*This is my desire, O Lord,
this is my desire.*

*This is my desire, O Lord,
this is my desire.*

To rest in your presence,
not rushing away,
to cherish each moment --
here I would stay.

Noel Richards (b. 1955)

A blessing for you

May you know the Lord with you each day of your life, may you answer the call to listen and the challenge to follow.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit will be with you as you go. Amen

Original Materials by Rev'd Anne Smith

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