

**Sunday 7 March 2021**

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### **Opening Prayer**

God, whose temple is the whole creation,  
we praise you for the signs of spring:  
crocuses breaking through the cold earth,  
early morning sunshine through the clouds,  
days lengthening.  
We praise you that earth tells us of your presence.  
God, whose temple is found in community,  
we praise you for the people around us:  
our families and friends,  
the neighbours we'd like to know more,  
the strangers who surprise us with kindness.  
We praise you that we look at others and glimpse you.  
God, whose temple is written into our bodies,  
we praise you for our human bodies,  
and we praise you that our bodies

are a temple of your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

### **Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling (StF 503)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

[Love divine, all loves excelling \(StF 503\) \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, 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 (1707-1788)*

Let us pray together

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are  
wisdom in our world; you flow  
through creation and consciousness.  
Our attempts to house you in bricks  
and mortar are foolish. Come to us  
as we gather here within this church  
made to honour you, and lift the  
stones from our hearts, so that we  
may be your Church in word and in  
deed. Amen

**Today's Gospel Reading:** John 9:1-41

13 The Passover of the Jews was  
near, and Jesus went up to  
Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found  
people selling cattle, sheep, and  
doves, and the money changers  
seated at their tables. 15 Making a  
whip of cords, he drove all of them  
out of the temple, both the sheep  
and the cattle. He also poured out

the coins of the money changers and  
overturned their tables. 16 He told  
those who were selling the doves,  
“Take these things out of here! Stop  
making my Father’s house a  
marketplace!” 17 His disciples  
remembered that it was written,  
“Zeal for your house will consume  
me.” 18 The Jews then said to him,  
“What sign can you show us for  
doing this?” 19 Jesus answered  
them, “Destroy this temple, and in  
three days I will raise it up.” 20 The  
Jews then said, “This temple has  
been under construction for forty-six  
years, and will you raise it up in three  
days?” 21 But he was speaking of the  
temple of his body. 22 After he was  
raised from the dead, his disciples  
remembered that he had said this;  
and they believed the scripture and  
the word that Jesus had spoken.

**Time to Reflect**

When I am writing we are in the  
middle of a lockdown. Many of our  
church buildings are closed for public  
worship, though a few are open. We  
have had to get used to worshipping  
in our homes, using You Tube videos  
or Zoom video meetings, or through  
worship sheets like this one, or a  
mixture of all three and perhaps  
other possibilities. Many will miss the  
architecture and the atmosphere of

their building, or the fellowship and bustle and chatter before and after services. Some people have been deprived of that for nearly a year. This causes us to ask what makes a church?

In the story we just read, Jesus was forcing people to face the same question. Traditionally there was only one “house of God” for the Jews - the Temple. That was where God dwelt. There is very little archaeological evidence of synagogue buildings in and before Jesus’ time - some scholars would say there was none. There is evidence in Jewish writings that synagogue meetings happened in this period, but not perhaps in dedicated buildings. The house of God was the Temple. And, as you may imagine if there is only one house of God it becomes even more special. And here Jesus is, wading into this holy place, clearing it out and laying down rules as to who can do what there! What right had he? Jesus would appear to be claiming to be the “messenger of the covenant” whom God promised to send to his Temple in Malachi 3: 1-4, who would purify not only the Temple, but God’s people - starting with the religious officials! But then he gets even more radical. When he says “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days”, he is essentially saying God is not living in the Temple Herod built,

but in his own body. He is the real temple, the real house of God.

Do we tend to get too attached to our local building? Sometimes churches are called Bethel, which is Hebrew for “house of God”, and sometimes we think God dwells there and we feel we cannot worship him anywhere else. Jesus challenges that way of thinking. He is the one above all in whom God dwells. In him God became flesh and dwelt among us. And it is in drawing closer to Jesus in a personal relationship that we enter God’s house and offer him the worship he truly seeks. And we can do that anywhere - in our kitchen as much as in St. Paul’s Cathedral, or in our local chapel. Draw close to Jesus, and he will draw us close to the Father and the Spirit, so we can worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Take a time to sit quietly

### **A time of prayer**

In the name of the one who came to cleanse the Temple, we pray for the institutions by which we organise our society: for churches and chapels and house groups; for educational establishments; for places of healing, law and order, commerce and recreation.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to

redeem the world, we pray for those institutions by which we regulate global relations: for governments and rulers, democracies, monarchies and dictatorships; for bodies that regulate trade, diplomacy and the balance of peace; for environmental, development and welfare organisations.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to save us from ourselves, we pray for those institutions we have in our lives: for our friends, families and colleagues; for our local communities; for the church communities to which we belong.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father .....*

***Hymn: Listen to:***

<https://youtu.be/SnuRldNwiwg> or

**sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind**

### **A prayer of blessing**

The almighty and merciful Lord,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy  
Spirit,

bless us and keep us, now and  
always. Amen.

Original Materials by John E Staton

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