

Sunday 11th July

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:

Beautiful God, thank you that you are with us as we gather in your Spirit – wherever we are – we thank you that you are with us all and each. We pause and recognise you are with us and bind us all together in your love. (pause)

Amen.

Hymn: StF 8 God with us: Creator, Father,
Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkaih98SO2A>

God with us: Creator, Father,
bringing everything to birth;
Mother of the whole creation,
fire of stars and life of earth:
down the countless years composing,
from the earth's evolving night,
love's response to love, and forming
mind and soul to seek your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,
Friend for ever at our side,
here, in flesh, you walked among us,
taking up your cross, you died.

Crucified, despised, rejected,
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,
streaming from the cross, your
judgement,
full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: Unwearied Spirit,
from the birth of time and space,
surging through unconscious being,
joyful, Life-Creating Grace:
through the centuries you find us;
you, as God, inspire our prayer;
Life and Power at work within us,
Love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,
closest Friend, unfailing Guide:
through the ages, wronged, affronted,
in your poor, still crucified!
God with us: convict, forgive us;
by your holy love destroy
all that hinders peace and justice:
fill this aching world with joy!

Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)

Let us pray together

God of Love and beauty, God for us, God with us, but God not only with us and

for us – God with and for every person – we praise you, we worship you.

For your all encompassing love that sets us free, for your transforming power that changes our lives. We praise you, we worship you.

We praise you God, for Jesus – for his coming to be among us, to show us what love is like by how he lived, how he engaged with people, how he welcomed, how he mixed with rich and poor alike, how he did not just sympathise, but challenged, and spoke up for justice. We praise you: we worship you.

We confess that our own lives do not always reflect your love, and your care for all. We ask your forgiveness (silence as we ask).

Thank you that you offer your forgiveness. We praise you, we worship you.

Thank you God for your Spirit to help us in our weakness and in our troubles, to comfort us in our pains, to infuse our lives with your joy and peace, we praise you, we worship you.

We bring our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading:

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and

rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Today's Reading from the Epistles: Ephesians 2: 11-22

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth,^[a] called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without

God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body^[b] through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.^[c] ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.^[d] ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually^[e] into a dwelling place for God.

Time to Reflect

This reading has some echoes of a parent saying to arguing siblings 'remember who you are and behave like it!'

This church, who themselves, as Gentiles, had been the strangers, the excluded, have been included into God's community, welcomed in, loved, are now debating and arguing: What should the criteria for acceptance be? How can we make sure only the 'right sort of people are included?'

The irony is striking and it speaks to us too – we who are also included only by God's grace. We who also can easily get sidetracked into debating who to keep out, rather than focussing on God who graciously includes us all.

Of course communities do need boundaries and limits about behaviour and ensuring safety. It is not 'welcome all, and behave exactly as you like'.

But that isn't the writers' point – it isn't even about the church all agreeing. It is instead about understanding what great grace we have received, and offering that to each other. It's about allowing God to be the most important one in our communities. It's about allowing the Peace that Jesus brings to make the difference, and to be the Peace between us (even if we never do agree on some things...). It's about deep listening to each other. It's about reconciliation in Jesus, which includes a real commitment and change to how we behave. It's about our debate being gracious, our focus being Jesus, our hearts being open to God's transformation.

Take a time to sit quietly.

Thank: thank God for God's grace in your life.

Think: how you can contribute to the graciousness of the church – from home, online, in conversations, in prayer?

Act: Who are you in contact with? Who could you pray for? How could you spread grace and peace, even from your own home?

If you have internet access, perhaps take some time to read the new Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21045/counc_mar_21_mc21-32-strategy-for-justice-dignity-and-solidarity.pdf

and Positive Working Together

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/introducing-positive-working-together/> How might these inform how

we are as a church?

A time of prayer.

At '(pray)', please pray for people and situations known to you.

We pray Lord God as your co-carers for your world.

We pray for people suffering. (pray) Please bring relief, help and healing.

We pray for people in power. (pray) Please give wisdom, compassion and commitment to justice.

We pray for people in wars and disputes. (pray) Please bring wisdom and a way to peace.

We pray for our church – locally and

nationally. (pray) Please give your wisdom, your guidance, and help us to understand your heart.

We pray for ourselves. (pray).

We bring our prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czd50a-gi0>

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace. (traditional)

A prayer of blessing

May our beautiful God, who holds us each and all in love, keep you close, help you to know that, and help you to live in the light of God's love and grace. Amen.

Original Materials by Ruth Yorke

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We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team. We aim to continue to provide these resources until the end of August 2021.