

**2022 – 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH – WORSHIP AT HOME – LENT THREE**

Dear friends,

As I write this the war in Ukraine is ongoing and there is such destruction and death wrought for no sane purpose. For most of us it is only our money which we can use to help to underpin the aid being sent out and, of course, we can pray. I have family members who are able to sponsor refugees to come to their home now that their own children are adult - and I take my hat off to them – and hope to be able to help financially with that also. Whatever we do seems but a drop in the ocean, but many drops eventually make large seas. Let us keep the people in our prayers – and let us pray for a swift resolution to the horror.

Every blessing to you, *Margaret*.

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**Call to worship:** let us come before the loving God. let us bring our pain and suffering, and the pain and suffering of our world – and let us pray for healing.

Let us bring all the burdens we carry, and the burdens of our world – and let us ask for strength.

Let us bring our grief and sadness, and the grief and sadness of our world – and hope to find comfort.

*God say, incline your ear and come to me – listen so that you may live.* Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

**The words to ‘O sacred head’ written by Paul Gerhardt [1607-1676] translated by James Waddell Alexander [1804-1859] and Rupert E Davies [1909-1994] Singing the Faith 280**

1 O sacred head, sore wounded, with grief and pain weighed down,  
How scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown!  
How pale thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!  
How does that visage languish which once was bright as morn!

2 O Lord of life and glory, what bliss till now was thine!  
I read the wondrous story, I joy to call thee mine.  
Thy grief and thy compassion were all for sinners’ gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.

3 What language shall I borrow to praise thee, dearest friend,  
For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?  
Lord, make me thine for ever, nor let me faithless prove;  
O let me never, never abuse such dying love!

4 Be near me, Lord, when dying; O show thy cross to me,  
That I, for succour flying, my eyes may fix on thee;  
And then, thy grace receiving, let faith my fears dispel,  
For whoso dies believing in thee, dear Lord, dies well.

**Prayers:**

Lord of all, in reverence and humility, awe and wonder, we worship you. Meet with us now wherever we are and be with us always.

We step aside from the busy routine of our lives – a few moments away from our daily activities and humdrum concerns; an opportunity to bring them quietly and prayerfully before you, and to place them in your hands.

We bring ourselves – our strengths and weaknesses – our faith and doubts – our hopes and fears.

We bring our families, our friends, and neighbours – those we love, those we know, and those we simply pass by in the street.

We bring our community – our town – our country and our world – places near and far; maybe integral to our lives or far removed from our experience.

In quiet confidence we entrust all into your loving care, knowing that your love is more powerful and your power more loving than we can ever know or imagine.

Lord of all, we come to worship you, bringing ourselves, our loved ones, and bringing you our all.

Meet with us now and be with us always. **Amen.**

Merciful God, we know that we fail you in so much – in the things we have done and in those we have not done, and yet still you accept us. We have not loved you with heart and mind and soul – we have not truly loved our brothers and sisters in Christ, nor have we always loved our neighbours as ourselves – and yet still you love us.

Merciful God, forgive us, cleanse us, restore, and renew us.

Assure us once more of your forgiveness for we are truly sorry.

Send us out in newness of life to live and work for your glory.

For your unfailing pardon, Lord, we thank you. **Amen.**

And the Lord's Prayer: our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen**

### **1 Corinthians 10: 1-13: [William Barclay]**

Brothers and sisters, you must never forget that our ancestors all journeyed under the pillar of cloud, and all passed safely through the Red Sea. In the cloud and in the sea, they were all baptised as followers of Moses. They all ate the same supernatural food, and they all drank the same supernatural drink, for they drank from the supernatural rock which accompanied them on their journey – and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, most of them incurred the displeasure of God, and the desert was strewn with their dead bodies. These events are intended as symbolic warnings to us not to set our hearts on evil things, as they did. Nor must you become idolaters, as some of them did. As Scripture says, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to indulge in their heathen sport.' Nor must we commit fornication as some of them did, and in consequence of which 23,000 died in a day. Nor must we try to see how far we can go with God and get away with it, as they did, and in consequence were destroyed by serpents. Nor must you grumble against God, as some of them did, and in consequence were killed by the Angel of Death. What happened to them is intended as a symbolic warning to us. Those events were recorded as advice to us, for we are living in the age to which all the ages have been leading up. One warning emerges from all this – anyone who thinks that he is standing securely must be careful in case he collapses. You have been involved in no trials except those which are part of the human situation. You can rely on God not to allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to cope with. No! When trial comes, he will send you, along with it, the way out of it to enable you to bear it.

### **Comment:**

Times of trial are part and parcel of religious life. 'No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone' [v.13] Paul advises the Corinthians to learn from the experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness. He names their mistakes – desiring evil, worshipping other gods, indulging in sexual immorality, putting God to the test, and complaining. Attractive as all those things might have seemed at the time, they ended up damaging the Israelites. Paul urges his new converts not to be complacent. 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall!' [v.22] In their own strength they will fail, but if they turn to God, who is eternally faithful, they will find the strength to endure.

Paul issues a warning that it isn't enough to be going along with the crowd jogging in the same direction but not up for the real implications and purposes of the journey. After listing all the things which the

Israelites got wrong, Paul warns them not to make assumptions about their own strength and uprightness. Instead, when tested, look to God for the way out.

**Luke 13: 1-9. [William Barclay.]**

It was at that time that some of the people who were there told Jesus the story of the Galileans whom Pilate had murdered at the very moment that they were offering their sacrifices. Jesus said to them: 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than the rest of the Galileans, because this happened to them? Far from it, I tell you. But, if you do not repent, you will all suffer the same fate. Or do you think that the eighteen men who were killed when the tower of Siloam collapsed on them were worse sinners than the rest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem? Far from it, I tell you. But, if you do not repent, you will suffer the same fate.'

He told them this parable: 'There was a man who had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit on it and found none. For the last three years,' he said to the vine-dresser, 'I have been coming and looking for fruit on it, and I have never found any. Cut it down! Why should it exhaust the fertility of the soil?'

'Sir,' he answered, 'leave it for this one more year, and let me dig round it and put in manure. If it bears fruit next year, well and good. If it doesn't, you can cut it down.'

**Comment:**

*Thought for the day: We have God's invitation to come and drink freely of his Spirit, but if we keep refusing his offer it can eventually be withdrawn.*

When we are seriously thirsty, we really aren't bothered about the choice of drink – simply desperate for it. A nomadic people wandering in the desert would have known all about the power of such thirst. The image of 'spiritual water' is a strong one as it draws on our life and death human need – a need which is both physical and spiritual.

God's offer is open to all – and it is odd why all people don't go straight to him rather than depend on poor substitutes.

God's offer is open to – such good news; but there is also a serious shadow which we need to address. As Susan Sayers writes: 'God is no fool. He is wise to all our excuses for rejecting his offer. For all kinds of reasons we continue to invest in values and lifestyles and spending and habits which sell us short and bankrupt us spiritually. Sometimes we half convince ourselves that God doesn't notice – or even, doesn't mind; that his understanding of why we do the things we do is so tolerant and accepting that we can mostly live as we like, especially if we are being "true to ourselves"!'

In this passage Jesus is at pains to point out the dangers of living and thinking in this way. Of course it matters how we live – of course God knows exactly what we are doing and how we are living. And if we go on and on refusing to accept him on his terms, the truth must be faced that his invitation will eventually be withdrawn.

Lent is an excellent time for us to look carefully at what our real response to God is – and then to act on what we see.

**Short prayer which seems apt for these times:**

Lord,

I've gone through every emotion in the dictionary.

I've shouted till my throat hurts.

My head aches with the thoughts of senseless violence – of mindless actions -that have robbed people of their hopes, their dreams, their lives.

I cannot pretend to understand or find an answer to the jigsaw of events that froze a moment in time for ever.

Tears sometimes say more than words can express.

A cry from the heart speaks more wisdom than a thousand wise men.

But all I can say is that I don't understand, Lord.

All I can pray is that somehow -for all those involved – you would bring peace and understanding, while I place my life in your hands.

Lord, keep me safe – keep me willing to hear your voice and your heart. **Amen.**

Father, we lean on your love as we pray for your church – collectively and as a mixed bag of individuals, with needs, disappointments, and fears.

We lean on your wisdom as we pray for local, national, and international leaders, subject to pressures and conflicting values. May they work for the good of others and put aside vainglory.

We lean on your affectionate understanding, as we pray for our homes and all homes in the area, with their expectations and misunderstandings – their security and insecurity. And we pray for all those who, because of war, have lost their homes and have, somehow, to start again.

We lean on your compassion as we pray for everyone who is hurting in body, mind, or spirit

We lean on your faithfulness as we pray for those who have died, and those who mourn.

We lean on your accepting love as we pray in thankfulness for all that you are doing in our lives, and all you have in mind for us in the future.

In all things, Lord, we pray your kingdom in.

**Accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**The words to ‘My Jesus, my Saviour’ written by Darlene Zschech [b. 1969] Singing the Faith 363**

My Jesus, my Saviour,

Lord, there is none like you.

All of my days, I want to praise the wonders of your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter,

tower of refuge and strength,

Let every breath, all that I am, never cease to worship you.

*Shout to the Lord – all the earth – let us sing*

*power and majesty, praise to the King.*

*Mountains bow down and the sea will roar at the sound of your name.*

*I sing for joy at the work of your hands.*

*Forever I’ll love you, forever I’ll stand.*

*Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.*

**Closing Prayer:**

Lord God, you look for growth and fruit;

Help us this week to grow closer to you,

And to be patient when we have to wait, as you are patient with us. **Amen.**