

**2023 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY: WORSHIP AT HOME: FOR EVERYTHING A TIME**

**MAY I WISH YOU ALL A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Dear friends,

I hope that Christmas has been all that you could wish and that you are ready to step out now into 2023. There has been so much disruption over the last few weeks and as I write this we have no idea when it will all simmer down, but we ourselves can continue our lives as we know we should, living Christ's way and letting the light of his love shine through us. We are asked this week, in the lectionary, 'what is time to do now?' and how do we empathise with one another when we look outwards as well as inwards.

Every blessing to you all, *Margaret*.

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**Call to worship:**

Come, old or young – or somewhere in between!

Come and worship the Lord.

Come if you are sorrowful or rejoicing.

Come all who are ready to build and develop.

Come, all who are searching or needing to let go.

Come everyone and worship the Lord. Amen.

Faithful God, we thank you for your presence with us for in trouble or in joy, you are always there.

Help us to see where you were with us last year, and open our eyes to new opportunities in this new year.

Faithful God, we thank you. Amen.

God outside of time, who is part of our past, part of our present, and part of our future.

As we begin this new year, may we recognise and remember all that has gone before, and look forward to all that will be.

Jesus, our great Redeemer and Saviour, who journeys into this new year with us, we come to worship you. Amen.

**The words to 'Take my life, and let it be' written by Frances Ridley Havergal [1836-1879]      StF 566**

1 Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2 Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

3 Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;

Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.

4 Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;

Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

5 Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;

Take my heart – it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

**Prayers:**

O Lord our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth – you have set your glory above the heavens. Lord of all eternity, mighty Saviour, you have given us a time for everything and we thank you for every season and time under heaven.

You created everything – you have breathed life into all things.

We worship and adore you. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ – there are times when we have not done as we ought –  
a time to embrace, to reach out – but perhaps we chose not to;  
a time to weep with others – maybe we chose not to;  
a time to laugh with others – but we kept ourselves to ourselves;  
a time to plant – we chose not to;  
a time to build up – again, we let it go;  
a time to remain silent and a time to speak up – but we chose not to do either.  
Forgive us for we are sorry.  
Help us to recognise the times we need to be present, and the times we need to act.  
Give us the courage to never walk away. Amen

Thank you, Lord, that for you it is always time to forgive.  
We are confident that you have forgiven us and restored us.  
You have made us whole – you have made all things new. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

### **Ecclesiastes 3: 1-13 – A Time for Everything**

‘There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

a time be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build up,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no-one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in their toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever – nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.’

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks and praise that you are always with us, no matter what.  
When we are rejoicing, you are with us – and when we are weeping, you are with us.  
When we are mourning, you are with us.  
When we need to speak up, you are with us – and when we need to remain silent, you are with us.

Thank you that a time is coming when there will be no more death and no more pain, no more tears and no more sadness – because you are making all things new.

Thank you that you are a faithful God who lives beyond the bounds of time but always close, never far away. Amen.

### **Comment**

The book of Ecclesiastes is from a group of Old Testament books known as wisdom literature. No-one can be sure as to when it was written but it is thought to be somewhere between 450 and 200 BC.

The book takes its name from the word for a person speaking before an assembly and is a teaching text designed to provoke discussion – a kind of fictionalised autobiography common in the ancient literature of the Middle East.

The book as a whole certainly confronts us with the challenges life brings, and the difficulty of holding on to the meaning of life when we each have only a brief span on this earth.

This particular passage puts before us a number of contrasting courses of action and implies that wisdom lies in knowing the appropriate action to take at a particular time. The text doesn't give us any guidance on how we should learn to do this, but it does provoke thought by listing actions that might be seen as being very negative alongside positive actions. The author's intention here seems to be to broaden our vision – to help us see more of the tasks that wisdom might require of us 'under heaven'.

We all have different experiences of the various times and seasons of life – and the list here may seem more relevant when we look back at the more testing times. For example, we can all relate to the time during Covid when embracing others was not allowed, however much we might have wanted to hold them. In our lives we can all find positive and negative times, some short-lived and others enduring. But, because our experiences are all so different, there is a message here for understanding and empathy, knowing that others are in a different place from us right now – not everybody enjoyed Christmas or is looking forward to the New Year. We should aim to be better at supporting people in their current season, especially when it isn't where we are.

There is a challenge in the words 'a time to build and a time to tear down' and the new year seems a good opportunity to consider prayerfully where we are in our faith and in the church communities to which we belong. Perhaps some things are no longer fruitful – other things may have started which need support to help them to grow, to be built up. We can look into our own lives as well – a new year spring clean perhaps!

### **Prayers**

Father, at this turn of the year we pray for your world and all your children in it.

As Christ stood alongside us in all our sinfulness and the poverty of our lives, enable us to stand with all those who are facing the brunt of human wickedness.

We pray, Lord, that as you send us out you will fill us all with the love and tenderness of Jesus Christ. Send us to love the helpless, hold the broken, and risk our own peace for the sake of others.

Lord, we pray for all people and all nations whose intentions for good are undermined by the emptiness and foolishness of those around them – we pray for those whose lives are being spoilt by the selfishness and self-centredness of others – we pray for all whose hopes and joys are being eroded by the lack of responsibility of others. Give us the love and compassion to stand with those who stand alone.

Lord, we pray for those who are robbed of their innocence – for children who are physically and sexually abused or exploited – for those who are treated differently because of their colour, nationality, gender, ability or disability. Give us the determination to share the love of Christ which knows no boundaries and accepts no barriers or limitations.

Lord, we pray for all who are being made slaves to drugs, and those who are drawn into petty crime to pay for their habit – for those who have stepped over the threshold into ruthless crime which causes others

fear and insecurity. We pray for those who confuse self-centred ambition and greed with personal freedom and personal choice. May our lives in Christ continue to be salt for the world.

Lord, we pray for the elderly, who are so often and so easily terrified by violence and neglected by a fast-changing world – for all who feel isolated and vulnerable in a society designed for the young, the fit, and the active – for communities which have lost the sight of your love and compassion. Enable us, we pray, to be channels of God's love as we share in the hurt of our neighbours.

Lord, we pray for all who are confused by the pain and suffering in your world and we pray that all Christians may demonstrate in the way they live and speak and by their care and understanding, that the God of love is still present and active in his world and he is entering fully into its pain and distress. Give us, Lord, the ability to begin where people are, and, by your grace, lead them gently closer to you.

And, Lord, in this New Year of 2023, we pray for ourselves. Give us new words to say – new things to do – and new lives to live, that we may, by the power of your Spirit, be ever more open to your life-changing, world-transforming grace. Help us to realise all over again our uniqueness in your sight and teach us once more that our value is measured only by the empty cross and empty tomb.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayers in the name of Christ, the one who walked where we walk and shared all that life means to us. Amen.

### **The words to 'Fill thou my life' written by Horatius N. Bonar [1808-1889] singing the Faith 73**

1 Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise,  
that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways.

2 Not for the lip of praise alone nor e'en the praising heart  
I ask, but for a life made up of praise in every part:

3 Praise in the common things of life, its goings out and in;  
praise in each duty and each deed, however small and mean.

4 Fill every part of me with praise; let all my being speak  
of thee and of thy love, O Lord, poor though I be and weak.

5 So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me receive the glory due;  
and so shall I begin on earth the song for ever new.

6 So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free;  
but all my life, in every step, be fellowship with thee.

**Blessing:** When life is hard – it is time to trust God.  
When life is full of joy and fun – it is time to thank God.  
When God seems far away – it is time to look for God.  
When God is close – it is time to sing to God.  
Through all our lives – it is time to praise God. Amen

And the blessing of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be with us, and all whom we love, and all for whom we pray this New Year and through eternity to come. Amen.

