

Worship @ Home

Christchurch 7th February 2021

Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid

Reader: Pauline Davis

Music: Tom Nichol

Technician: John Hamblin



Call to worship

Lift your eyes to gaze on God.
Hear God's Word and receive God's peace.
With all that you have been, all that you are,
and all that you hope to be,
offer yourself now to God in worship and praise.

Opening prayer with music [StF 651]

Let us pray

[Sung] Lord of life we come to you

Lord of all, our saviour be,

Come to bless and to heal

With the light of your love.

Catherine Walker

Everlasting God, creator of heaven and earth,
your love causes our hearts to soar.
You know the number of stars in the universe
– just as you know the number of hairs on our head.
Lord of life: **we come to you**

[Sung] Lord of life we come to you

Lord of all, our saviour be,

Come to bless and to heal

With the light of your love.

You call each star by name
– just as you call us each by name.
Lord of life: **we come to you**

[Sung] Lord of life we come to you

Lord of all, our saviour be,

Come to bless and to heal

With the light of your love.

You supply the earth with rain to make the grass grow;
and provide food for the animals and birds
– just as you provide all we need to sustain us.
Lord of life: **we come to you**

[Sung] Lord of life we come to you
Lord of all, our saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

You care about the details, seeing every tiny part of the bigger picture
– just as you care about the tiniest detail in our lives;
for you know the person you created each of us to be.
Lord of life: **we come to you**

[Sung] Lord of life we come to you
Lord of all, our saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

Mark 1: 29-39 with reflections

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Pause a moment.
Imagine yourself ill in bed with a fever.
How does it feel?
How does it feel not to be able to take your usual place in the household?
How does it feel not to be able to do the tasks that give you your identity?
How does it feel to be at the mercy of your feeble metabolism?
How does it feel to be reminded that you are mortal?



Imagine Jesus taking you by the hand.
Imagine sitting up.
Imagine feeling well again.
What is the first thing you want to do?



That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Pause a moment.

Imagine yourself at the door of Simon and Andrew's house.

The whole city is gathered here.

Amazing things are happening.

The sick are healed.

Demons are cast out.

You have never seen anything like this before.

How do you feel?



Imagine Jesus turns to look at you.

He speaks.

'What do **you** need?'

What do you answer?



In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Pause a moment.

Imagine you are Simon.

It is very early in the morning.

Everyone is gathering outside your house.

They are demanding miracles. Healings. Exorcisms.

They have seen it happening yesterday, and they want more today.

But he is not here.

There is no sign of the one who could make these things happen.

How do you feel?



Imagine hunting for Jesus.

Searching and searching with increasing desperation.

Did it really happen?

Was it all an illusion?

Why is he absent just when I need him most?



I wonder which character you most identify with?

Perhaps you have had COVID over the last year, so you know what it feels like to be feverish, to be laid up in bed, to be exhausted.

Like all of us, you will have had your usual life curtailed by the pandemic, whether you have been ill yourself or not.

So perhaps you can imagine how Simon's mother-in-law feels.

But there are other characters in this story too.

People who are amazed by the miracles they have seen.

People who are searching for Jesus.

People who are feeling bereft because Jesus is not where they expect him to be.

I suspect that all these people are part of our inner disciple.

There have been times, I'm sure, when we have been awed and amazed and excited by the things that God is doing in our lives.

There are times when we are desperately searching for a God who seems suddenly absent.

There are times when we feel completely debilitated, unable to commit to the simplest task.

That's normal.

That's what it is to be mortal.

The call to follow the life of faith does not make us superhuman.

Being part of a church community doesn't mean that we will never get discouraged, or have questions, or feel doubt.

But I want to invite you into one final act of imagination.

Can you think yourself into the life of Jesus in this story?

Perhaps this is an all too realistic picture of the life of faith.

On this first day of his ministry, Jesus is trying to construct a healthy work/life balance.

Focusing on the work he has to do.

Then time at home, relaxing with friends.

And making space for prayer, alone with his God.

Balance is important.

Or at least – an attempt at balance.

Notice in this story that Mark, with characteristic honesty, shows how everything can go wrong.

In Simon and Andrew's house, someone else's needs get prioritised over Jesus' down time.

The desperation of the crowd, and the insecurities of the disciples, overtake his desire for quiet prayer.

This is reality.

I expect most of us have experienced this over the last year.

We intend to create a balanced life.

We intend to exercise every day.

We intend to commit quality time to our nearest and dearest.

We intend to make space to relax, to read, to pray.

But stuff happens.

To us, as it does to Jesus.

We have all found ourselves living in the gap between the perfectly balanced life we intended, and the complications of what actually happens.

I draw strength from the fact that this happened to Jesus too.

On the day of my ordination, I was given the same book by two different friends.

It's called *Jesus' Day off*.

In this story, Jesus wakes up one day exhausted from saving the world.

The miracles don't go quite so well...

... nor do the stories.

His GP advises him to take a day's leave.

So he goes for a walk.

He does cartwheels in the desert.

He has a picnic.

He has a refreshing swim.

Then he feels guilty, because he hasn't done anything.

He goes up a mountain to have a word with his father.

God tells him to look back at where he has been playing and relaxing.

Flowers have bloomed in the desert.

His fishermen friends have had a good day on the boat.

Passers-by have felt refreshed and re-energised.

'So you see,' says God, 'when you're feeling better yourself,

You can only make others feel better too.'

'Thanks Dad,' says Jesus, with a big smile and a thumb's up.

When he gets home, the disciples have cooked him a lovely supper.

Now, I can see why two of my friends thought I needed this book!

But to be honest, it's a bit of a fantasy.

I think Mark is more realistic.

We don't get much evidence in the gospels of Jesus' plans for a quiet retreat working out – he's always interrupted, called back to do something, meet someone, say something.

But – all credit to him – he does keep trying.

Scattered throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry are the many times he goes up a mountain, onto a boat, into the desert, for a bit of space.

I love it that when he teaches his disciples how to pray, he tells them to go into an inner room and SHUT THE DOOR.

He knows how easy it is to get distracted.

So the message I take from the first day of Jesus' ministry is not to give up.

Life is never perfect.

When I used to teach change management, I always used to start by drawing a straight line on a flip chart (that was our high-tech training tool back in the 90s).

Then a squiggly bit.

Then another straight line.

This was life before change happened.

The scribble is the change.
Then afterwards – another nice straight line.
But – and here’s the learning point – like my ordination book, this is a complete fantasy.
Life is all scribble.
Those straight lines are in our imaginations, not in reality.
Yes, COVID has disrupted the pattern of our lives.
But things are always disrupting us.
Even Jesus experienced that.
Our challenge is to keep on finding small ways to make space for ourselves.
And for God.
It may not be perfect.
But it is what we have.

Yesterday I attended an online retreat at Belmont Abbey.
In a perfect world I’d like to go to Belmont.
Or to Turvey, my usual retreat house.
To take a couple of days out of a busy life.
To be cared for.
To relax.
To soak myself in the rhythm of prayer and holiness in these Benedictine communities.
But I can’t.
So instead I took a day out – well most of a day: I still had a sermon to write! – to pray and study with the golden gospel of Duccio.
And my take-home learning point from a painter of the early 14th century is this: the greatest religious art finds a way to bring together the divine and the all too human.
The reflections are still on the website if you fancy it yourself.

So perhaps, even though it won’t be perfect, we should do what we can.
Make space – even if it is only a small space, even if it is interrupted.
Learn from a day in the life of Jesus’ ministry that things can and do go wrong.
But God is still there.
Christ is still alongside us.
The divine and the human can still meet in our daily lives.
And flowers do bloom in the desert when we make a little time to look out for them.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

People. People. Everywhere! Day in. Day out.
Seeking you, Lord. Hunting you. Following you.
Hungry for your presence. Wanting your attention.
Yet not once did you complain.
We’re sorry, Lord, that the weight of life’s demands causes us to stumble,
to lose our temper and at times to buckle under the pressure.
Help us to be more like you, Lord.

We're sorry for not getting our priorities right.
Help us to know, as you did,
the importance of spending time with and drawing refreshment from the Father.
We're sorry for allowing other people and things to take over and squeeze out our time with you.
Help us to draw daily on your refreshing strength in order to cope with whatever our day holds.
Lord, hear our prayer.

The Son of God loves us.
And because of his love,
healing us and setting us free from sin's guilt and power,
we are forgiven. Amen.

Music [StF 450]

Open, Lord, my inward ear, and bid my heart rejoice!
Bid my quiet spirit hear thy comfortable voice,
never in the whirlwind found,
or where earthquakes rock the place;
still and silent is the sound, the whisper of thy grace.

From the world of sin and noise and hurry I withdraw.
For the small and inward voice I wait, with humble awe.
Silent am I now and still,
dare not in thy presence move.
To my waiting soul reveal the secret of thy love.

Thou hast undertook for me, for me to death wast sold;
wisdom in a mystery of bleeding love unfold.
Teach the lesson of the cross;
let me die with thee to reign.
All things let me count but loss so I may thee regain.

Show me, as my soul can bear, the depth of inbred sin;
all the unbelief declare, the pride that lurks within.
Take me, whom thyself hast bought,
bring into captivity
every high aspiring thought that would not stoop to thee.

Lord, my time is in thy hand -- my soul to thee convert.
Thou canst make me understand, though I am slow of heart.
Thine, in whom I love and move,
thine the work, the praise is thine,
thou art wisdom, power, and love -- and all thou art is mine.

Charles Wesley

Prayers for ourselves and others

God of love,
you give power to the faint and strength to the powerless.
Many of us are exhausted,
juggling with school at the kitchen table,
responding to demands of work or family life
or dealing with isolation, joblessness and fear.
We pray for the leaders of our church,
Ordained and lay.
Encourage and strengthen us in our work,
give us all fresh vision for the future of church
and renew our imagination, creativity and wisdom
as we address the challenges of this time.
Turn us towards each other in acts of loving service.
then turn us outwards to carry your gospel of healing into the world.
Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
God of love,
Help us to hope in you.

God of love,
you restore what is broken and you bring together what has been split apart.
Today we pray for Myanmar in the aftermath of a military coup
where there is now a year-long state of emergency.
We ask for peace in a dangerous and fragile situation,
where streets are once again full of fear.
Although the past is marred by compromised leadership,
we pray for a negotiated political settlement for the country
and for the free and fair votes of the people to be recognised.
Although our leaders may often fail us,
may we trust again that there is a world of possibility
where the mistakes of the past can shape a better future.
Renew our strength and bind up our wounds
God of love,
Help us to hope in you.

God of love,
we pray for the renewal of our cities
so that in them people can live, work, play and find space to breathe.
We ask that priorities would work for people rather than speculative investment;
for the common good rather than corporations.
We pray for the social cohesion of our neighbourhoods
and are aware of lost networks of support and care.
We pray for charities struggling because of the pandemic, especially Phase, the Hitchin Food Bank, our

partners in Manila and in Egypt;
and as we look to the future,
may we work to build connection rather than separation
and restore the fabric of community.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds

God of love,

Help us to hope in you.

God of love,

you heal the broken hearted and you gather in all who are lost.

We give thanks today for the life of Captain Sir Tom Moore;

and we pray for his family

and for all who are mourning the loss of family members or friends.

We offer to you all who are suffering in mind or body...

asking for peace, and for your healing presence in their need.

Send your blessing on all who are afraid or alone or hungry,

on those whose lives are being destroyed by abuse or violence,

and on all for whom home is not a safe place.

Renew our strength and bind up our wounds

God of love,

Help us to hope in you.

God of love,

your kindness is everlasting.

Surround us with your arms of love;

keep our eyes fixed on you

and make us ready to follow where you lead,

trusting that you will provide for us – today and always.

Amen.

Lord's prayer

A sending out prayer

Lord Jesus,

go with us into the world this week.

Help us to find small moments to be focused on you

and to make your priorities our priorities

in all the places you are sending us.

Amen.

Music [StF 655] *tune: Ye banks and braes*

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain,
and make your broken people whole.

John L Bell and Graham Maule

*Prayers are taken from Roots for Worship 7.2.21
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