

Order of service for Morning Worship

On Sunday August 29th 2021 at Christchurch

Call to Worship

Unchanging God, refresher and restorer,
give us wisdom and discernment today.

We come to seek you and to hear you,
be still and present with you and be transformed.

So today in our worship, may will bring to God not only the words on our lips
but the praise in our hearts.

May we bring our honesty, our anxiety and fears, all we carry inside us.

We come to meet with our God who accepts us, who forgives us, who loves
us.

So let us worship him with all our being.

Amen

Good morning, I do welcome you to our worship today from Christchurch. I am
Christine, a local preacher in the North Herts Methodist Circuit and a member
at Christchurch, our music is led by Steve, Toby and Mandy, our reader today is
Pauline and John is behind the scenes dealing with all the technical stuff.
Thanks go to each one of them.

So let us continue our worship by singing **STF103 God is love: let heaven
adore him**

God is Love: let heaven adore him;

God is Love: let earth rejoice;

let creation sing before him

and exalt him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation,

he who spread the heavens above,

he who breathes through all creation,
he is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and he, enfolding
all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
then they find the selfsame aching
deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness
sin afflicts each human soul,
God's eternal loving –kindness
holds and guides and keeps them whole.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is love, so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees

Prayer of Adoration

Creator God,
we praise you for the immensity of your love:
the love that brought the universe to birth;

the love that designed and ordered our world;
the love that breathed life into humankind.
Creator God, we praise you for the immensity of your love.

Saving God,
we praise you for the endurance of your love:
the love that came to share our human life ;
the love that died for us upon the cross;
the love that triumphed over hatred and death.
Saving God, we praise you for the endurance of your love.

Strengthening God,
we praise you for the power of your love:
the love that brought your Church to life;
the love that transforms hearts and minds;
the love that dares and cares and unites.
Strengthening God, we praise you for the power of your love. *[Christine Odell]*

We pray turn us inside out as we come to worship you today so that your light will shine through us from our hearts, most merciful and gracious God whom we worship and adore. Amen

Introduction to the readings

Near the end of his life, Moses climbed the mountain and looked over Jordan to the Promised Land knowing that he would never enter it but that his people would, under Joshua's leadership. Inspired by that sight, he sets out God's will for them, in words that probably took their final shape during the exile in Babylon. Life in God's land depends on allegiance to God's law. But in these 2

verses that we are to hear there is a warning – ‘do not add nor take anything away from it. ‘

And this will have relevance as we move onto our reading from Mark’s gospel. The lectionary has now returned back to Mark [we have had readings from John during the past month] and flows on from a time of busyness for Jesus, healing the sick , feeding 5000 but in this chapter it begins with an account of hostile opposition.

Deuteronomy 4: 1-2

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take anything from it but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. [For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots and bronze kettles.] So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of their elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ He said to them, ‘Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human traditions.’

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, ‘Listen to me, all of you and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.’

For it is from within, from the human heart that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.'

Reflection – Inside, outside

Hearing this reading from Mark's gospel may spark off thoughts of rituals which have become very important to us over the past year. Washing our hands has become a part of our lives since the pandemic began. We have been encouraged to sing a song or hymn to make sure we wash them for the full 20 seconds. But what we have been doing is not really the same as the practice of the Pharisees in Mark's gospel. Hopefully we do this to keep others safe as well as ourselves.

In Chapter 7 of his gospel, Mark moves onto a section where Jesus is beginning to face opposition to his ministry particularly from the Pharisees. They are grumbling because Jesus' disciples are not following the ritual hand washing laws. It is as though they are saying to Jesus, 'If you are a trustworthy teacher, you should be making sure that your followers obey these laws.' It is interesting to note that Mark goes into some detail as to what these hand washing rituals were and also the tradition of washing pots and other vessels. This was because Mark was writing his gospel mainly for a Gentile community. Ritual hand washing before food, and of the cleaning of cooking vessels, was one key part of a highly complex and developed system of purification regulations. These were eventually codified and written down about two hundred years after Jesus' day, but they were already well known in the form of oral traditions by his time. The laws that were given to Moses before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land had become more and more complicated. They had been passed down from generation to generation. Over the years, to the time of Christ, this nation had been subjected to the rule of many different nations. Of course at the time of Christ, it was the Romans. It is little wonder that the religious leaders clung onto, and gave enormous importance to their oral laws that had been passed down. It was what made them distinctive from their conquerors.

So what was Jesus saying to those listening? Firstly he seems to be challenging the Pharisees about the laws that they keep. The laws that were so precious and dear to them, the laws which they rigorously kept and looked down on others who did not. They may be keeping their hands clean but this separated

them from others and they were not involving themselves in caring for the sick or the marginalized because these persons were regarded as unclean. [And please do not let's confuse these laws with the risk assessments that have to be made in churches, in places of work, in cafes, shops, theatres for the safety of everyone at this time.] Jesus has very strong words to say to them quoting the prophet Isaiah - 'These people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.' And then later to the wider crowd Jesus says 'There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.' Jesus is saying to them and to us that what we think and feel and say in and from our hearts is what we have to get right and then generous and loving action will follow. Outward signs are not enough.

What does Jesus teaching mean for us? We all know [I know I do] how easy it is for our appearance to express one thing, whilst inside we may be harbouring resentment, or feelings of superiority or criticism. Jesus teaches that our mind, our heart and our soul have to express the love of Christ as well as the words we speak and the actions we do. And that isn't easy. But we also know that by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we can be given a new start if we confess the mistakes we make, if we look to Christ and learn from his teaching and his example. We find it so easy sometimes to jump to the wrong conclusion about others before we have even spoken to them or got to know more of them. This past week there have been so many pictures pouring onto our television screens of the unfolding tragedy in Afghanistan. We have seen people treated in very brutal ways but we have also seen some wonderful compassionate scenes. One of my lasting memories of the past week was of two strapping, severe looking American soldiers as they dealt with a crowd. At first I judged their behaviour as quite distant and stern [and of course this is what they had been trained to do.] Suddenly two little Afghan sisters moved forward - [must have been about 4 years old]. These two burly soldiers bend down and gently talked to the frightened children. And in their conversation, in their words you could tell how they empathised, connected with them, the little girls calmed down and in return gave a huge smile to these men. Here was compassion from the inside out. In our first hymn we sung those wonderful words which say this about our God 'With unfailing love He is holding every child of every race and when human hearts are breaking under sorrow's iron rod, then they find that self – same aching deep within the heart of God' We see this attitude in Christ and if we follow him then that should be our attitude as well. Our hearts should ache and respond to the needs of others.

So what does Christ' teaching mean to us, not just as individuals but as a church community. As we open up again, in common with many churches, we are reassessing the way we conduct our worship, our hospitality, our welcome. Is it really inclusive, are we practising things from the inside out, getting our attitudes towards one another and others, our thoughts, our actions, our understanding, our tolerance as Christ would have us be? There is a very simplistic story about a man who started coming to a church. He came for several weeks and no one took any notice of him, no one spoke to him. Then one Sunday he arrived with a hat on and didn't take it off. This was frowned on by some and so someone was nominated to go to him and tell him to take it off. This was the first and last time someone spoke to him at that church for he never came back again. Do we sometimes have to painfully look and see ourselves as other see us? Someone once suggested that if we were asked why we do this or that, would we sometimes struggle to explain. We have all been given the gift of love by God to use for good, love that comes from the heart, love that responds to all he has done for us.

Susan Sallis in her comments on this passage says this. 'Jesus is not so much turning the world upside down by his teaching as turning it right side up again, and inside out, the way God intended it to be.' Let us as individuals, as church communities help in this process of turning things inside out and shine God's light and love to others.

So as part of that process let us share together in a prayer of confession

Unblemished God, forgive us

When we adhere to laws that are not of you, when we criticise others because their ways are not our ways.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have not supported one another in love
nor protected those that are vulnerable

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have corrupted your laws and gone our own way,

or when we have not nurtured those in our families and communities and let them go astray

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

Help us to live as one community

bound together in love and grace.

Help so to live alongside one another and be there for one another.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

Silence

A prayer by Edmund Banyard

God of adventurous living,

You are always calling us to push back frontiers,

to re-evaluate rules and restrictions

and above all else, to reach out in loving concern,

far beyond our own immediate circle .

You have given us life and you call us

to take that life and live it in such a way

that we may discover our full potential as your people!

Lead us, we pray;

into generous, loving ways ,

that we may really feel with others ,

may willingly share their joys and sorrows

and seek to lighten oppressive loads

where we have means and opportunity.

And so take hold of us

that there may be less room in our living for the things that defile us ,
driven out because we have become more possessed of your spirit and are
living closer to your ways.

STF 508 Purify my heart

Purify my heart,
let me be as gold
and precious silver.

Purify my heart,
let me be as gold, pure gold.

*Refiner's fire,
my heart's one desire
is to be holy,
set apart for you, Lord.
I choose to be holy,
set apart for you my master,
ready to do your will.*

Purify my heart,
cleanse me from within
and make me holy.

Purify my heart,
cleanse me from my sin, deep within.

Refiner's fire

Brian Doerksen

Prayers for the people

So now we turn to God with our prayers for the people of His world. After each section, I will leave a time of silence for you to pray the prayers that are in your heart.

Our God is the source of all holiness. With the needs of the Church and the world and all his people close to our hearts, let us pray to the one who can renew and redeem.

Loving Lord we pray and uphold before you the people of Afghanistan, for those affected by the suicide bomb, families suffering loss, not only from Afghanistan but from USA and UK, for those injured in that atrocity, for those who are trying to get out of the country before deadlines and also for those who will continue living in that land. We uphold all those troops, aid workers, doctors and nurses and so many others who are helping the ones who are desperate to leave. We pray for wisdom, discernment and understanding from the leaders of government of the world.

Silence

We pray for communities that have experienced tragedy in the last few weeks. For Haiti, for those affected by forest fires or floods, for communities dealing with the on- going effects of COVID and for all vulnerable people who struggle to face what life throws at them.

Silence

We pray for the Church and especially this church here at Christchurch where next week we will be experiencing a new way of worshipping together. Father, we are all too aware of our temptation to place our trust in tradition and in the comfort of doing things the way we have always done them. Help us to release in the Church such a desire to serve the living God that nothing is allowed to get in the way of that.

Silence

Father we stand alongside all who are hurting in body mind and spirit at this time. All who need courage, support or practical help. Those facing hospital treatment, those for whom pain is constant, those caring for the needs of

loved ones, those nearing the end of their life, those grieving the loss of a loved one.

Silence

Father, write your Law of love on our hearts and help us to move on with thankfulness through the week ahead.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your Name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,

now and forever. Amen

STF 504 May the mind of Christ my Saviour

May the mind of Christ my Saviour

live in me from day to day,

by his love and power controlling

all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly

in my heart from hour to hour,

so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting-
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson

Final prayer and blessing

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives, to honour you in all we do and say.

May our being and doing reflect your love and grace.

And when we next meet, may we recognise with thanks the prompting of your Spirit.

Amen

And now may the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with us now
and for evermore. Amen

