

Teddington Circuit Worship at home sheet

Sunday 26th April 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. With thanks to Lorna Valentine, the Connexional team, David Innes, Mark Gilks and Jill Harker for the content.

Opening Prayer

As you come to worship you might like to picture a road that you know really well. Is it straight or twisted? Is it smooth or uneven? Is it busy or quiet? Who else uses it? Who have you walked the road with? Hold the picture in your mind while you pray.

As I come before you today God, I bring you my road recognising others are bringing theirs too. For some the road to worship today will have been difficult while for others it has been smooth. For some there will have been twists and turns, for others it may have felt straight and plodding. Some will have walked alone and others with companions. Thank you that you walk each road with us, uniting us as a community of faith wherever we are to the glory of your name. Amen.

Hymn: Christ is alive! (StF 297)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohxaG7ZlxzE

**Christ is alive! Let Christians sing
The cross stands empty to the sky
Let streets and homes with praises ring
Love, drowned in death, shall never die**

**Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.**

**In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.**

**Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.**

**Christ is alive and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.**

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Let me join my prayers with others today

Loving God, for the times I have seen you journeying with me, I am thankful.

Gracious God, for the times I have seen others journeying with you, I am humbled,

Holy God, for the times I have not recognised your journeying with me, I am sorry.

Forgiving God, thank you for the assurance that you will continue to journey with me.

Living God, in my journey this week help me to see glimpses of your good news so that my heart burns within me. Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 24:13-35

Reflection 1

We are so familiar with this story that may be there is nothing new to say. But the one image which stands out for me is of Jesus coming alongside those two people as they walked sadly, despondently home from Jerusalem on Easter Sunday evening. At this particular time, I think that is a message which can be specifically helpful for us. Jesus could perhaps have appeared to other people who were just as sad, but he chose to join this pair in their confusion, their depression and their feeling of loss of purpose. They wondered - had their understanding of Jesus been wrong? What would happen now? What was their reason for living now? Jesus answered their doubts, their concerns and their confusion. He not only came alongside them, he revealed himself to them in the breaking of bread. Their depression immediately changed to joy and they returned to Jerusalem to share their experience and their good news.

Jesus acted gently; he didn't tell them off for being silly, forgetting what he had said to them. He just gradually revealed himself to them through his explaining God's story. Take a few moments to think what that might have been like. May be imagine that you are the unnamed person with Cleopas. Do Jesus' words help you to understand what Jesus has done in acting through God's story.

When Jesus came alongside the couple he asked what their problem was, why were they so downcast and sad. They immediately opened up to him, which enabled Jesus to help them to understand God's story and his own part in it. This made me wonder – do we as readily open up to others when they ask us what the problem is? How often we try to cover up our feelings! What about Jesus – are we ready to open up to him with our worries, our concerns our fears for ourselves and others? Pause to

think about this.

The important message I hear in this story is that Jesus came alongside them before they knew who he was. He is always beside us, whether we are sad or joyous, anxious or full of faith.

Lord, help us to recognize your reassuring presence with us at all times. Amen.

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness (StF 526)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8mti7VL3gg

Reflection 2

Do you remember those quaint old times when we thought that Brexit was the most important issue facing the country? One of the words that we heard a lot about in the Brexit debate was 'xenophobia', the fear of, or even the hatred of, strangers. In the beautiful story (Luke 24:13-35) of the journey on the Emmaus road we come across the opposite concept 'philoxenia', the love of the stranger. Two grief-stricken disciples trudge back from Jerusalem at dusk on what we call Easter day. Their leader has been killed, and even though some of the women disciples claim he has risen from the dead, the travellers can't believe such 'idle talk'. They meet a seemingly ill-informed stranger and receive a Bible study session like no other. When they reach Emmaus, they open their home to the stranger and sit down to supper. The penny drops. They know the stranger, for he is none other than their leader, he is the risen Jesus. Suddenly everything has changed. They charge back to Jerusalem to share the most amazing story of all time. The disciples have travelled, not just down that road but from ignorance to knowledge, and from encounter to transformation.

There are so many themes in this most developed appearance story that we could have it as a Bible lesson for a month of Sundays without any repetition.

In these days of lockdown, the story provides insights into hospitality, how we recognise Jesus and provides helpful guidance for our journey in life.

Every church community is judged by the hospitality it offers to newcomers. A church is an organisation that is run for the benefit of its non-members. Jesus gives the two saddened disciples the opportunity to show hospitality, and they pass the test. Jesus joins them at the supper table and goes from stranger to guest to host. Food fellowship is a strong feature of Luke's Gospel, and is a key part of any Church's hospitality. How we embrace and support "even the least" will be how we and our church are to be held to account (Matthew 25:31-46). The stranger may well be someone we don't recognise. Jesus will often be in the people we help. We have a God of surprises!

As we journey through these challenging times, we must not let physical isolation lead to xenophobia. Hospitality must be at the heart of our faith. When things are bleak for us it's easier for us not to see Jesus in the stranger. But he is waiting to become a guest in our lives. Our prayers will help us to see the Holy Spirit working in those around us, yes, even in the most unlikely of people. We recall that the Bible is full of times when God worked his purpose out through apparently marginalised folk, and sometimes through total unbelievers.

There's somewhere else that we want people to recognise Jesus: in us! Christ is the host within by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Our acceptance of Jesus as the guest in our daily lives means that we are always striving to imitate him. Several Bible scholars have argued that the unnamed disciple on the road to Emmaus was a woman, that she might even have been Cleopas' wife. So why no name? It could be a cultural thing, but Luke is acknowledged to be the most positive of the Gospel writers on gender issues. Could it be a clever device that Luke is employing in the story? Is he trying to include us, a sort of "write your name here" moment? Brothers and Sisters, we can find ourselves on the road to our Emmaus, a place we go to when we are full of grief, a place we go to escape. On that road we too have the chance through our individual and collective hospitality to welcome in Jesus. When we do, it can't stay private. We must tell the world, even if many will think it's an "idle tale". Just like the downcast disciples travelling the Emmaus road we too can burn with understanding as we open our scriptures to learn about God.

We will be free again for our hearts to burn in the intimacy and hospitality of breaking bread with others, be they friends or strangers. We do this because we are the bearers of hope. Jesus is alive, in us! Praise the Lord!

Hymn - On the journey to Emmaus (StF 308)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rYYd6nRurg

A time of prayer

As you prepare to pray, you may find it helpful to reflect on this hymn verse:

'This, this is the God we adore,
our faithful unchangeable friend,
whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end'

Joseph Hart, Singing the faith 66

Faithful God, you are present in all aspects of life even when people don't see it. We call on you today to send your Spirit to bring comfort and peace to all who find their path ahead difficult.

We pray for your church and all those seeking ways to be church in these times.

May they recognize your living presence.

We pray for the world and all those seeking to offer leadership in the midst of uncertainty.

May they recognize your living presence.

We pray for all those who suffer at this time in body, mind or spirit.

May they recognize your living presence.

We pray for all who are bereaved whether through the loss of loved ones or the loss of human contact.

May they recognize your living presence.

Merciful God, accept these our prayers today in and through the name of the living Christ.

May we too recognize your living presence in the week ahead and trust in you for all that is to come.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to or read StF 635 My troubled soul - www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-50XxDg_wQ

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to your mind

My troubled soul,
Why so weighed down?
You were not made to bear this heavy load
Cast all your burdens, upon the Lord
Jesus cares, He cares for you.

Jesus cares, He cares for you
And all your worrying won't help you make it through
Cast all your burdens, upon the Lord
And trust again, in the promise of His love.

(I will) Praise that mighty name of Jesus
Praise the Lord, the Lifter of my head
Praise the Rock of my Salvation
All my days are in His faithful hands.

My anxious heart
Why so upset?
When trials come, how you so easily forget
To cast your burdens, upon the Lord
Jesus cares, He cares for you.

Jesus cares. He cares for you
And all your worrying won't help you make it through
Cast all your burdens, upon the Lord
And trust again, in the promise of His love.

(I will) Praise that mighty name of Jesus
Praise the Lord, the Lifter of my head
Praise the Rock of my Salvation
All my days are in His faithful hands.

Robert Critchley

A prayer of blessing - adapted from a traditional Celtic prayer

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
The sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the presence of Christ
Wherever you are on the road.

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