

Teddington Circuit Worship at Home Sheets

Sunday 7 March 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

God, whose temple is the whole creation,
we praise you for the signs of spring:
crocuses breaking through the cold earth,
early morning sunshine through the clouds,
days lengthening.
We praise you that earth tells us of your presence.
God, whose temple is found in community,
we praise you for the people around us:
our families and friends,
the neighbours we'd like to know more,
the strangers who surprise us with kindness.
We praise you that we look at others and glimpse you.
God, whose temple is written into our bodies,
we praise you for our human bodies, and we praise
you that our bodies
are a temple of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling (StF 503)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it
here:

[Love divine, all loves excelling \(StF 503\)
\(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,

perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are wisdom in our world; you flow through creation and consciousness. Our attempts to house you in bricks and mortar are foolish. Come to us as we gather here within this church made to honour you, and lift the stones from our hearts, so that we may be your Church in word and in deed. Amen

Today's Gospel Reading: John 2: 13-22

Time to Reflect

When I am writing we are in the middle of a lockdown. Many of our church buildings are closed for public worship, though a few are open. We have had to get used to worshipping in our homes, using You Tube videos or Zoom video meetings, or through worship sheets like this one, or a mixture of all three and perhaps other possibilities. Many will miss the architecture and the atmosphere of their building, or the fellowship and bustle and chatter before and after services. Some people have been deprived of that for nearly a year. This causes us to ask what makes a church?

In the story we just read, Jesus was forcing people to face the same question. Traditionally there was only one "house of God" for the Jews - the Temple. That was where God dwelt. There is very little archaeological evidence of synagogue buildings in and before Jesus' time - some scholars would say there was none. There is evidence in Jewish writings that synagogue meetings happened in this period, but not perhaps in dedicated buildings. The house of God was the Temple. And, as you may imagine if there is only one house of God it becomes even more special. And here Jesus is, wading into this holy place, clearing it out and laying down rules as to who can do what there! What right had he? Jesus would appear to be claiming to be the "messenger of the covenant" whom God promised to send to his Temple in Malachi 3: 1-4, who would purify not only the Temple, but

God's people - starting with the religious officials! But then he gets even more radical. When he says "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days", he is essentially saying God is not living in the Temple Herod built, but in his own body. He is the real temple, the real house of God.

Do we tend to get too attached to our local building? Sometimes churches are called Bethel, which is Hebrew for "house of God", and sometimes we think God dwells there and we feel we cannot worship him anywhere else. Jesus challenges that way of thinking. He is the one above all in whom God dwells. In him God became flesh and dwelt among us. And it is in drawing closer to Jesus in a personal relationship that we enter God's house and offer him the worship he truly seeks. And we can do that anywhere - in our kitchen as much as in St. Paul's Cathedral, or in our local chapel. Draw close to Jesus, and he will draw us close to the Father and the Spirit, so we can worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

In the name of the one who came to cleanse the Temple, we pray for the institutions by which we organise our society: for churches and chapels and house groups; for educational establishments; for places of healing, law and order, commerce and recreation.

May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to redeem the world, we pray for those institutions by which we regulate global relations: for governments and rulers, democracies, monarchies and dictatorships; for bodies that regulate trade, diplomacy and the balance of peace; for environmental, development and welfare organisations.

May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to save us from ourselves, we pray for those institutions we have in our lives: for our friends, families and colleagues; for our local communities;

for the church communities to which we belong.

May they serve the greater good,
and adapt to the changing needs of the time. Amen.

A second reflection

A little girl was drawing. Her teacher asked, "What are you drawing?", she replied "a picture of God". The teacher remarked "But nobody knows what God looks like". The little girl responds, "They will in a minute".

Don't you love that confidence. It must be treasured and nurtured. But as we smile, we are reminded that our image of God can often feel partial at best. Where do we get our image of God from? Well, we build it up over time both consciously and subconsciously. Key pieces of our faith experience, along with our Biblical knowledge, sketch out a mental canvass. Events in our family, school, church life dynamically builds up the picture.

We begin to see God in the world around us, in nature, in music, in dance, in other people's Christian love. We even draw on our own feelings of love for God and others.

As we mature, we revisit our early thinking, we question ideas as we seek deeper meaning. We probe Bible passages that we have long known, prayerfully searching for insight.

Let's take for example one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament that crops up at this point in the Lent season—the Ten Commandments. Many Christians were raised with the idea that the Jewish faith believed that you had to obey the law in order to be 'saved' but Christians preached that you were 'saved' by God's grace and love.

However, if we look at that famous passage about the law (Exodus 20:1-17) God rescues (saves) his people from slavery then he gives them the law. This pattern of God loving first is repeated throughout the Old Testament:

-I saved you so you now must behave thus...

- I have planted you as a vineyard so now you must bear fruit....

- I freed you from slavery so now you must not have slaves...

And that's how it works for us. God gives first.

Amazingly a piece of the divine is shared with us. It's the Holy Spirit at work guiding your understanding of God, building his image for you, in you.

This is not a one-off occurrence. It's a daily happening. Yes! Even in Lockdown! Yes! even when you get things wrong!

The theologian Richard Rohr is famous for saying "you become the god that you worship". If the god you worship is tribal, judgemental, exclusive, then that is how you will become. That's the image you will carry. If the god you worship is friendly, loving, forgiving, inclusive, then that is how you will become. That's the picture you hold.

We carry our own individual picture of God, but we need to think about seeing our picture as one piece of a beautiful mosaic that is created by bringing our church family's mosaic pieces joyously together.

This why testimony is so important. It's piecing that collective mosaic together.

When we work in small fellowship groups, we not only develop our own picture, but we enhance the whole mosaic. This especially true when we do Bible study

together. We not only learn more about God, but we allow the inspiration of the word to give our image of God detail, colour, and depth. It's as if we are in an art class guided by the Holy Spirit.

This collective inspiration is the bedrock of our faith, and our relationship with God. It drives our worship, our prayer, and our Christian outreach.

Constantly God is showering us with his love. It is freely given. We are called to respond each day. It is down to us, like that little girl with her drawing of God, to let everyone know about our Lord as we paint his picture with our lives.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

**Hymn: Listen to: <https://youtu.be/SnuRldNwiwg> or
sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind
A prayer of blessing**

The almighty and merciful Lord,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
bless us and keep us, now and always. Amen.

Original Materials by John E Staton

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Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here