

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. This service has been pre-recorded for 2 reasons, firstly to have Communion – we are still working out how that can safely be done in the church building to comply with government guidelines. We hope to be able to hold Communion at church in November and December. And secondly, because our preacher today is Ruth Wilde, National Coordinator of Inclusive Church and due to Covid restrictions it was easier for her to send a video (and text) than to come to the church.

Some people have said to me why do we need to join Inclusive Church, we already are inclusive. That is precisely why we should join! Inclusive Church is a national register that recognises churches who are already inclusive. We like to think that the URC as a denomination is liberal and inclusive, but sadly not even all URC's are as inclusive as we are at Christ Church and Bridgwater Drive. And we are certainly the most inclusive church in Rayleigh and the only one able to conduct same-sex marriages, so we think we should celebrate and highlight that publically by registering as an Inclusive Church. It is similar to the 'child friendly' and Eco-Church awards we have – it signals to people outside the church what we believe in. There is no cost to do so and we will receive a lot of helpful resources.

The specific areas included under the Inclusive Church banner are gender, ethnicity (race), disability, mental health, poverty and sexuality and an understanding that we will aim to use inclusive language as much as possible, in other words not referring to God as he. Next week's service will be via Zoom, with Ruth, so that we can ask questions and discuss registering as an Inclusive Church. After which we will write to all members asking if you agree. Although I usually try to use inclusive language, today in particular I am using some prayers and hymns suggested on the Inclusive Church website.

As we prepare to worship God we will listen to the Toy Soldier's March by Fritz Keisler recorded at Christ Church, played by Gerald Usher and Evan Davies. If you do not already have them to hand you may want to use this time to gather the elements for Communion.

### **Call to worship**

Searching God:

To you No one is lost. No one is left behind

No one is the price to be paid for the greater good.

Give us the same restless desire; the same fierce joy

which finds grace in every child of earth and makes a community open to all. (IC)

Holy One, in Christ we are all made one, equal, loved and valued before God.

In Christ there is no male or female, rich or poor, black or white.

We come to worship you and celebrate the wonderful diversity you have gifted us!

### **Hymn** For the healing of the nations (R&S 620)

For the healing of the nations,  
Lord, we pray with one accord,  
for a just and equal sharing  
of the things that earth affords.  
To a life of love in action  
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom,  
from despair your world release,  
that, redeemed from war and hatred,  
all may come and go in peace.  
Show us how through care and goodness  
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,  
let it from the earth be banned:  
pride of status, race or schooling,  
dogmas that obscure your plan.  
In our common quest for justice  
may we hallow brief life's span.

You, Creator God, have written  
your great name on humankind;  
for our growing in your likeness  
bring the life of Christ to mind;  
that by our response and service  
earth its destiny may find.

**Opening prayer** (based on Exodus 33:12-23, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22)

Loving, living God,  
be among us now.  
Show us your ways.  
Guide our steps.  
Live in us,  
that we may be people of steadfast hope  
and powerful giving.  
Help us hear your words,  
challenging us to give you  
all the things that are yours.  
Help us remember  
that all we are and all we have  
are gifts from you,  
gifts to be shared in service and love.  
Holy One among us,  
help us be a holy people  
who receive your word with joy  
and live your message with love. Amen.

—Mary Scifres, on the **Ministry Matters** website.

**Confession**

You are tireless in seeking out the lost;  
We write them off.

**Generous God Share mercy with us.**

You do not give up on a single one;  
We give up even on ourselves.

**Generous God Share mercy with us.**

You have a joy that is without measure  
We accept limits to our compassion.

**Generous God Share mercy with us. (IC)**

**Assurance**

We are all created in the image of God. We are all created equal. We are created with the same capacity to do good and to make mistakes. Only Christ is without sin. God so loved the world that God came to us in human form as Jesus, through Christ and by the grace of God, all are forgiven. Amen

**Hymn** Inspired by love and anger

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Inspired by love and anger,  
Disturbed by need and pain,  
Informed of God's own bias,  
we ponder once again:  
'How long must some folk suffer?  
How long can few folk mind?  
How long dare vain self interest  
turn prayer and pity blind?'

From those for ever shackled  
to what their wealth can buy,  
the fear of lost advantage  
provoked the bitter cry,  
'Don't' query your position!  
Don't criticise your wealth!  
Don't mention those exploited  
by politics and stealth!

From those for ever victims  
of heartless human greed,  
their cruel plight composes  
a litany of need:  
'Where are the fruits of justice?  
Where are the signs of peace?  
When is the day when prisoners  
and dreams find their release?'

God asks, 'who will go for me?  
Who will extend my reach?  
And who, when few will listen,  
will prophesy and preach?  
And who, when few bid welcome,  
will offer all they know?  
And who, when few dare follow,  
will walk the road I show?'

**Bible readings:** Matthew 22:15-22, Exodus 33:12-23

**Sermon – Ruth Wilde, National Coordinator Inclusive Church – Give to God what is God’s**

One of my favourite passages in the Bible is written on the font in Salisbury Cathedral. It is from Isaiah and it says: ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’ It’s so powerful, because it communicates the deep truth that God knows and loves us all intimately. We belong to God, and nothing whatsoever can take that away. I was reminded of the passage in Isaiah when reading the lectionary reading from Exodus for today. God says to Moses ‘I know you by name and you have found favour in my sight’. The Isaiah passage is like an echo of this other passage – an important theme which repeats itself throughout scripture.

In the readings for today, there is also a well-known passage from Matthew about paying taxes. Jesus gets out of a sticky situation, where he’s asked about whether people should pay taxes to Caesar – head of the oppressive, colonial force which is the Roman Empire. In a manner of speaking, he’s damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t say yes to this question. Jesus’ answer is extremely clever, but it also contains that deep truth again – that the important things belong to God and nothing – not Empires or anything else – can take that away. ‘Give to God what is God’s’, says Jesus. This answer has been interpreted in all manner of ways by Christians, from ‘taxes are good’ to ‘respect and obey the government’ to ‘everything belongs to God, so it is a trick answer to a trick question’. I don’t know what Jesus meant exactly, but the repeating passages of Isaiah and Exodus can lead us to a conclusion about ourselves at least: we belong to God, and no one else. Money might belong to government, taxes might be owed to government, but we belong to God. No one else owns us. We are God’s children.

When I think about Inclusive Church, and the things we stand for, I see a vision of the Kingdom, where everyone is a precious child of God. All those who have been for far too long marginalised and made to feel ‘wrong’ are centred and given the most important place at the banquet. The gay person who has been called sinful is told ‘you have found favour in my sight’; the disabled person who has been treated as a burden by churches is treasured by God and seen as a gift with leadership qualities – ‘I have called you by name’; the person who has faced racist attitudes in their congregation is told ‘you are mine’.

Inclusive Church brings churches and Christians together to work for inclusion both nationally and locally. We run national conferences, like the annual Conference on Disability and Church, and our regional ambassadors work with churches to educate and bring about change in their own contexts. It’s wonderful that you are looking at becoming an inclusive church. I am very happy to answer any questions you have about this. Above all, being an inclusive church is about working for the inclusive Kingdom of God, and showing everyone that they are important to God. I hope you will take the first step to that beautiful vision of God’s future for the church today. We have all been called by name – our first task is to make sure that everybody knows that. Let’s give to God what is God’s. Amen.

**Hymn** Spirit, lead us to the table (tune R&S104)

Spirit, lead us to the table  
where the feast of life is laid:  
bread of hope and wine of healing,  
freely for us all displayed.  
Spirit lead us, Spirit feed us  
with the food that Christ has made.

Spirit, help us here remember  
selfless deeds by which we’re cured:  
secret pains and public torture,  
all, for us, by Christ endured.  
Spirit reach us, Spirit teach us  
how this death our life secured.

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Spirit bless us with your presence  
as we eat and then depart,  
that, replenished, fed and strengthened,  
each may keep a Christ-like heart.  
Spirit know us, Spirit show us  
how to share your loving art.

Spirit, in the name of Jesus,  
draw us closer, make us one:  
all the guests around God's table  
here united in God's own Son.  
Spirit hold us and enfold us,  
'til your healing work is done.

John Campbell, © Kevin Mayhew Ltd

**Lord's Supper as you follow at home, please say the words in bold**

Let us celebrate this joyful feast.  
People will come from east and west and north and south,  
and sit at table in the kingdom of God.

God is here.

**Her Spirit is with us.**

Blessed be the names of Love.

**They touch our hearts with grace.**

We open our hands in thanks.

**Our song is one of welcome.**

We thank you, Holy God,

For being a fool in the eyes of the world.

We thank you for abandoning control,

for creating a universe, new and strange.

We thank you for nurturing life, diverse, evolving, surprising and strange.

We thank you for calling a people who did not walk straight or know their limits.

We thank you for different bodies and desires

for different ways of thinking and speaking

for different ways of belonging and believing.

May our thanks cut a path through dividing walls to free the Spirit's song:

**Holy, holy, holy One**

**God of life and love.**

**The world overflows with your glory.**

One came who upset the rules:

who accepted the grace of the outsider,

who looked for wisdom in those who did not count,

who took his food in the company of the rejected.

One came who walked a strange path:

who did not think anyone was unclean,

who did not look for scapegoats

who refused to put a price on anyone's head.

The tables of the moneychangers he threw over.

The tables of liberation he threw open.

On the night before he gave himself up,

He ate and drank to the end of slavery.

He took the bread and broke it, and said:

'This is my body. Do this to remember me.'

He took the wine and poured it, and said:

'This is my blood. Do this to remember me.'

May the Spirit of creation take these earthly things and show us in their brokenness,

the life-giving plenty

the end of all poverty,

the body and blood of Christ.

This is the mystery of faith:

**Christ took the form of a slave**

**Christ took the cross of shame**

**Christ gives the free gift of life.**

Into our hands he delivers himself, Jesus, the Victim, the Excluded One,  
who is now a sign of hope for all.

So we celebrate this event of love; this rising from death,  
unpredictable and full of wonder.

We pray that we will be a community defined by what it is open to  
not by what it fears; by the excess of its love not the walls along its borders.

May our prayer be welcome to you, the God who is in all, and with all and for all. **Amen (IC)**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine.

Prayer after communion

**Prayers of intercession – Geoff**

Holy One, today we are thinking about inclusivity

What does it mean? Who should we include?

The other week we considered your teaching about the poor, the hungry, the ill,  
the naked and the imprisoned.

You taught us that we should help them all.

They are perhaps easier to see and to help than some others who are excluded

What about hidden disability?

What about our unconscious biases and prejudices?

Your teaching tells us that we should love all -

All genders and orientations should be treated equally

All races too – in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, black or white

People with learning disabilities and mental health issues

Those living in poverty

The able bodied and those with physical disabilities.

All are made in God's image and all are united through Christ, and so we pray

For those of us whose lives are strained and stressed.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose hold on life is fragile.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose illness makes them vulnerable.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

For all whose lives are in turmoil through the effects of mental illness.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

For those of us whose families struggle to understand them.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

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For families and friends, nurses, doctors and therapists and all who seek to walk alongside the stressed and strained, the vulnerable and the fragile.....

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace.

For the dying, and all those who mourn loved ones.

Hear our prayer and pour out your peace. Amen.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn** Now let us from this table rise, (recorded by Thora in August)

Now let us from this table rise  
renewed in body, mind, and soul;  
with Christ we die and rise again,  
his selfless love has made us whole.

To fill each human house with love,  
it is sacrament of care;  
the work that Christ began to do  
we humbly pledge ourselves to share.

With minds alert, upheld by grace,  
to spread the Word in speech and deed  
we follow in the steps of Christ,  
at one with all in hope and need.

Then grant us grace, Companion-God,  
to choose again the pilgrim way,  
and help us to accept with joy  
the challenge of tomorrow's day.

### **Blessing**

May God our creator continue to create a world of equality and just living where the whole of creation enjoys life at its fullest; where there is neither the ruler and the ruled; nor the powerful and the powerless; nor the dominant and the dominated, but where all experience God's grace and live happily knowing that it is God the giver of life, who cares for all of us.

Go therefore and work together for the good of all.

A blessing from the Philippines  
(*A World of Blessing*, ed. Geoff Duncan)

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen

I can't include this in the service for copyright reasons, but if you have access to YouTube, I recommend watching this version of *Blinded by Your Grace* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciy7XqZZmY0>