

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 7 February 2021. Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church.

Music to start – Will ever come a time? What are the reparations? by Ray Stanyon

[https://youtu.be/1ecVc8\\_8IE](https://youtu.be/1ecVc8_8IE)

We will listen to some before the service and some at the end. If you are able, I encourage you to watch the whole video as it has the words. We can only listen to the audio in the Facebook service. It is used with permission; all credits are within the video.

**Call to Worship** (based on Psalm 147)

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.

Make music upon the harp.

How good it is to celebrate God's presence  
and sing praise throughout each day!

**How good it is to sing praise and give honor to our God!**

Our God rebuilds the people of earth.

The wandering ones are gathered together,

the brokenhearted are healed,

the hungry are fed,

the prisoners are freed,

the blind are given sight, the lonely are befriended.

**How good it is to sing praise and give honor to our God!**

All of nature sings aloud God's goodness—  
clouds, rain, grass, creatures great and small.

Our God creates and sustains our world  
with his ever-growing, never-ending love.

**How good it is to sing praise and give honor to our God!**

Grace and peace be yours in abundance  
through the knowledge of God and of Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

**HYMN** Fill your hearts with joy and gladness (tune R&S 344) recorded by Thora

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness,  
Sing and praise your God and mine!  
Great the Lord in love and wisdom,  
Might and majesty divine!  
He who framed the starry heavens  
Knows and names them as they shine

Praise the Lord for times and seasons,  
Cloud and sunshine, wind and rain;  
Spring to melt the snows of winter  
Till the waters flow again;  
Grass upon the mountain pastures,  
Golden valleys thick with grain.

Praise the Lord, his people, praise him!  
Wounded souls his comfort know.  
Those who fear him find his mercies,  
Peace for pain and joy for woe;  
Humble hearts are high exalted,  
Human pride and power laid low.

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness,  
Peace and plenty crown your days!  
Love his laws, declare his judgements,  
Walk in all his words and ways;  
He the Lord and we his children,  
Praise the Lord, all people, praise!

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**Opening Prayer** (based on today's readings)

Lord God, through Jesus you opened the eyes of the blind;  
you healed the sick and you fed the hungry.

**We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.**

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Loving Father, by the Spirit you restore strength to the weary  
and give hope to those who are in despair.

**We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.**

You call us Lord to proclaim your deeds and your wonders to all people,  
You call us to worship and serve you that all may be made whole.  
You offer us a new life of righteousness.

**We give you thanks and praise for your mercy and your love.**

Make us worthy, O Lord, to receive all your gifts.  
Descend on us like the light of a new day  
give light to our souls  
and put your praise upon our lips. Amen.

by Richard J. Fairchild

### **Offering**

You are reminded to continue to send in your gifts for the work of the church.

God, whose giving knows no ending,  
we offer up the treasure that you have entrusted to us;  
we offer up the skills and time that you have graciously given to us;  
we offer up ourselves in service and praise.

Receive these gifts by your grace.

Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit  
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

written by Joanna Harader, <http://spaciousfaith.com/>

The readings and reflections today while using the lectionary, will be a hint, looking forward to a series of services during Lent which will focus on social justice and creation and the environment, encompassing Church Action on Poverty Sunday (21 Feb), Fairtrade fortnight and next Sunday – racial justice. Our Lent House Group series will focus on creation, the environment and global warming and questions for reflection will be included in News & Chat for the five weeks so that all can join in even if you don't want to participate in the Zoom meetings.

### **Prayer of illumination**

Creating God, it has been told to us since the very beginning  
that you are truly the Lord of all that is and ever shall be.

You are the God of both the prince and pauper,  
of feast and famine, of the mighty and the weak —  
and yet, you do not favour the strong over the powerless.

Remind us of your love as we read the scriptures,  
O God of True Justice. Open our eyes – open our hearts –  
that we may be strengthened and renewed by your Word. Amen

by Amy Loving, <http://worshipcloset.com>

**Reading:     Isaiah 40:21-31**  
                  **Psalm 147:1-11**

### **Reflection 1**

Both psalm 147 and this section of Isaiah 40 were written for a scattered and demoralized people either during the exile or shortly after. They speak into times of chaos and say what do we remember about God. They can speak into our current difficult times and remind us what we know of the nature of God. They speak in beautiful poetry –

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Have you not understood from the foundation of the earth? It is God who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers – numerous and destructive. At high population densities and under certain environmental

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conditions, grasshoppers can swarm and are then known as locusts. I'm sure we've all heard about plagues of locusts which can have devastating effects on vegetation, causing famine. This is not unlike what humans have become to the planet. We are the swarm, the most numerous and most destructive species, destroying the equilibrium of our finely tuned world. Behind me is the poster from the BBC show *Perfect Planet*. The final episode described how we are destroying our world by overconsumption and carelessness and what we must do to stop that destruction before it is too late. The back of the poster shows a picture of humans from a distance, looking like ants or a swarm of locusts.

God sits above the circle of the earth and views the inhabitants. God brings the princes to naught and the rulers of earth to nothing. If only that were so, you might say, but at least we no longer have Trump and Bolsonaro's days may be numbered too. But while we are reminded of the attributes of God, we should remember that we are the hands of God on earth. We have to play our part to make a change by using less, campaigning more, lobbying our leaders to make the changes only governments and large corporations can make. We hear and are encouraged by verse 29 in Isaiah, God strengthens the powerless; those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint. When we think that signing another petition, or eating less meat will not make a difference, remember those words. I'm sure they bring hope to migrants escaping war and to those who will increasingly have to flee their homes because they are destroyed by rising sea levels and violent storms that used to come once in a blue moon and now come every year.

I don't want to give the impression that I watch a lot of television, but if you want a glimpse into that world of migrants and refugees watch the second episode of *Incredible Journeys with Simon Reeve*, though unless you are particularly unmoved by the suffering of others, you had better have some tissues handy.

I would encourage you to engage with the House Group material on caring for creation, even if you don't want to join the Zoom group. I know that Zoom is not everyone's cup of tea. It isn't really my cup of tea, but for some activities it is the best we can do while in lockdown.

Both Isaiah and Psalm 147 talk about the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem; an end to the despair of exile; and end we might say in 2021 to the despair of exile from touch and sociability an end to the agony of isolation and loneliness. They both also view God as Creator and the one who will heal our broken hearts and bind up our wounds. Just as in Isaiah the Lord will renew our strength if we wait for Him, in Psalm 147 God takes pleasure in those who hope in God's steadfast love. When the troubles of the world, the pandemic and global warming seem too much for us to bear, too much to keep fighting against, we can find strength and hope in God. The exile in Babylon lasted 70 years, and yet the Israelites kept hope; surely we can keep hope for an end to our 'exile.'

And so, we listen to a hymn that talks of God's healing and grace written by John Bell and Graham Maule.

**HYMN** We cannot measure how you heal  
<https://youtu.be/exr0oxZwZKA> (Hymn Channel)

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 hand, 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.

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**Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23**

### **Reflection 2**

The phrase that always stands out for me of this passage is Paul's claim that he becomes all things to all people, and it always make me want to respond – but you can't please all the people all the time! It is helpful to note the context. The overall context his Paul justifying his position as the original leader and teacher in Corinth, and in the beginning of chapter 9 his defence of the right of apostles to be given remuneration, at least enough to live, even though he goes on to say he will voluntarily not take any compensation. After this talk of work contracts and stipend as it were, Paul goes on to outline his evangelistic strategy. His tactics involve adapting his approach and presentation to different contexts. To the Jews he will be as a Jew. To those who follow the law (that is the Jewish laws) he will be like them, to those who don't, i.e. the Gentiles he will be like them. To the weak he will become weak; all so he can win as many people as he can for Christ. The church, in general, and our local churches, has had to adapt hugely due to the pandemic and the resulting lockdowns and restrictions. People above my intellect have had to discuss and decide if we can conduct communion online. We have had to come up with inventive ways to do worship, online – pre-recorded or live, sending written services to people, sending regular news. Congregations have had to support each other much more with phone calls and dropping off shopping or other items. We, like Paul, have had to adapt to our context, and not to save souls or bring more people to Christ, but simply to *be* the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The pandemic has forced us to use technology in a way we probably should have been doing for years, but before we had little incentive to change. We say we are inclusive, but have we previously thought that much about people who are housebound and how we include them? Have we thought that much about whether we are really inclusive of all disabilities? In the introductory programme for the new series of Art Club, we met again a visually impaired, wheelchair user who said in many ways lockdown hadn't changed her life that much, but it would have given other people an insight into her world;

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people would have learnt something of having to think and plan each time they leave the house, if they can even leave the house at all.

In the February issue of *Reform*, Commitment-Phobe talks about the Sunday service. The column is written by someone who used to be an atheist and is now a Christian, but she is still a new Christian, still learning and trying different churches and different styles of church. She says, "I believe in the importance of worship but I am becoming far more attracted to those forms of worship that are quiet and working in the world...I pray for a church of more walks with and phone calls to people...and when allowed, home visits." As we start to look forward to an eventual return to our buildings and at Christ Church as we start to look at how we might refresh and refurbish our building alongside necessary repairs, let us be like Paul. Let us study our context and see how we can be more part of the community; how we can reach out to meet the needs both of our congregations and our neighbours, and while perhaps not being 'all things to all people' try to be as welcoming and inclusive of all as we possibly can be, including those who do not yet know Christ and may not want to, but may need a quiet, consoling place to soothe their battered nerves or make new friends.

**Music for reflection** – for a couple of minutes of reflection we listen to Gerald playing the organ (recorded last year).

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God of our life, our everlasting, never ending hope; by your great will and power you have created and sustained the vast and unfathomable universe. In the midst of all this greatness and splendour, you have set us, creatures in Your own image! By your grace you have called us to serve you and to be your people. In your love and mercy you have chosen us to be a light in the darkness! Teach us, O God, your ways. Help us, each day to turn aside and to listen for you, and to study your word, and to pray to you, so that we might live as your people, and give ourselves - all we are and all we have – in obedience to your will – so that we might have strength and hope - peace and joy - and so that we might be able to impart these to others in your name.

### **Lord, hear our prayer**

Lord, You are the giver of life. In the midst of suffering we celebrate the promise of Your peace. In the midst of oppression - the promise of your freedom. In the midst of doubt and despair - the promise of your presence and your kingdom. In the midst of fear - the promise of everlasting joy. In the midst of sin and decay - the promise of salvation and of renewal. In the midst of death the promise of life eternal. May we dwell in your promises and lift them up before others with love and compassion. **Lord, hear our prayer**

God, our healer, we pray for those who are sick, and for those who look after them.

We pray for those who are full of dread and anxiety  
and for those who carry the word of courage and faith.

God, our consoler, we pray for those who are sorrowful, and for those who have been bereaved.

We pray for the weary and for those weighed down by chronic illness, pain or frailty.

We pray for those exhausted by the demands of work or caring for others.

And we pray for those who are hungry, those who are without a home,  
and all those who live under the threat of war.

All this we ask in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray saying:

### **Lord's Prayer**

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**HYMN** Sing to the Lord a joyful song (R&S 77) recorded by Thora

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,  
Lift up your hearts, your voices raise;  
To us His gracious gifts belong,  
To Him our songs of love and praise.

For life and love, for rest and food,  
For daily help and nightly care,  
Sing to the Lord, for He is good,  
And praise His name, for it is fair.

For strength to those who on Him wait,  
His truth to prove, His will to do,  
Praise ye our God, for He is great,  
Trust in His name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above  
Cheer those who love His sweet employ,  
Sing to our God, for He is love,  
Exalt His name, for it is joy.

Sing to the Lord of heaven and earth,  
Whom angels serve and saints adore,  
The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
To whom be praise forevermore.

**Blessing** (based on 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Isaiah 40:21-31)

Go now, and trust in God's mercy for your strength.  
Proclaim the good news wherever God calls you,  
and do not set yourselves apart from others,  
but be all things to all people for the sake of the gospel.

And may God give you the strength and freedom of an eagle.  
May Christ be the bread that nourishes and renews you.  
And may the Holy Spirit be the rising wind beneath your wings.

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