

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 21 March 2021

Music to start – Kyrie from Messe basque sung by Cambridge Voices

Welcome to the joint worship for Christ Church and The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service so please have bread and wine or juice ready for us to share in the Lord's Table each in our own homes. Today is also World Down Syndrome day, so I hope some of you are wearing lots of coloured socks as mentioned in News & Chat. Do please take pictures of your socks and post them on social media to help raise awareness of today and of Down's Syndrome.

Call to worship

Each day is a gift from God,

**each moment is that opportunity to reach out
in service to all creation.**

Each day is a reminder of the new covenant:

**not written on stone tablets easily broken,
but inscribed on our hearts filled with joy and hope.**

Each day we draw closer to God:

**who has forgotten more than we ever learn;
who has forgiven us more than we ever acknowledge.**

written by Thom Shuman

Hymn Take this moment, RSCM Hymn for the day #88, sung by the Choral Scholars of St Martin's in the Field (based on Psalm 51) https://youtu.be/ymXD_4R292Q

Take this moment, sign, and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me.

© WGRG, The Iona Community, John Bell and Graham Maule

Bible reading: Psalm 51:1-12

The first 17 verses of Psalm 51 are usually read on Ash Wednesday at the start of the litany of penitence. We are, of course, still in Lent, a time of reflection, prayer and penitence, and not just of giving up chocolate or crisps, and so our music at the start, end and during the Lord's Supper reflects that mood. These first twelve verses of the Psalm read like a prayer of confession. And so, we continue in prayer with the prayer of confession from Ash Wednesday. Please join in the words in bold at home.

**Holy and merciful God,
we confess to you and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.**

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 21 March 2021

We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.
Have mercy on us, O God.

We have not listened to your call to serve as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ.
We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, O God.

We confess to you, O God, all our past unfaithfulness:
the pride, hypocrisy and impatience in our lives,
we confess to you, O God.

Our anger at our own frustration
and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
we confess to you, O God.

Our negligence in prayer and worship,
and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
we confess to you, O God.

Accept our repentance, O God,
for the wrongs we have done.
For our neglect of human need and suffering
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
accept our repentance, O God.

For all false judgements,
for uncharitable thoughts towards our neighbours,
and for our prejudice and contempt
toward those who differ from us,
accept our repentance, O God.

For our waste and pollution of your creation
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
accept our repentance, O God.

Restore us, O God,
and let your anger depart from us.
**Favourably hear us, O God,
for your mercy is great.**

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made,
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent.
Create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you
and confess our sins we may receive
your full and perfect forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Offertory

You are reminded to send in your gifts for the work of the church by cheque or bank transfer.
Holy One, receive our 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.**

Bible reading: John 12:20-33

To understand today's gospel passage, we really need to read from the end of chapter 11. The Jews are going from all over the country to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover. Six days before the Passover Jesus is at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who he had raised from the dead. When the crowd of Jews heard that he was there, they went to see both Jesus and Lazarus, the miracle man raised from the dead and the gospel says that it was because of Lazarus that many of the Jews were "deserting" and believing in Jesus. Needless to say, that was not going down well with the religious authorities even before a great crowd went out to meet Jesus with palm branches, shouting Hosanna and proclaiming him to be the "King of Israel". All of this happens in chapter 12 before we get to the section we read today. The Jewish leaders do not like people wanting to see Jesus, not least because they fear retribution from the Roman occupying force if anything out of the ordinary happens. There is always the possibility that the Roman authorities will ban the Jews gathering for their religious festivals if there is any trouble. (Interesting parallel with modern day Israel, where the Israeli police and military often stop Muslims going to the Al Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.) Verse 19, just before the passage we read, has the Pharisees saying to one another, "see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." They are very vexed by Jesus and his popularity.

Verse 20 is the start of Jesus' final public teaching in the gospel of John and it is delivered to a group of both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, it is the arrival of the "Greeks" who "wish to see Jesus" that seems to prompt Jesus to say that his hour has come. In John, seeing and hearing are the ways people come to know Jesus, to believe or trust in him, and to recognize his unity and singleness of purpose with God. The opening verse of this gospel reading takes us back to chapter one, when Jesus said to Andrew, "Come and see," and to Philip, "Follow me."

Now, some Greeks say to Philip, "We want to see Jesus." We do not hear whether the Greeks actually got to see Jesus, or not. After Andrew and Philip speak to Jesus, Jesus talks only of his death and the Greeks are never heard from again! Earlier in the gospel, readers have been told that Jesus' hour had not yet come, and two of those references are in the context of Jesus' opponents not being able to harm him because the time is not yet right. Now the time is right; the hour *has* come. The rest of the story, until Jesus' arrest and trial, will have an urgency about it as Jesus tells his disciples as much as they can bear about his death and the coming of the Spirit.

In the synoptic gospels, following Jesus requires self-denial, even a willingness to take up one's own cross. Would-be followers are told that losing one's life is the way to *find* it, in Matthew, to *save* it in Mark, or to *keep* it in Luke. In John's gospel, something else is in view.

In John, following Jesus is the path of abundant or eternal life. Also, in John, the word "hate" means "reject"; it usually refers to what the world does to Jesus and by extension, to his disciples. So, when Jesus says, "Those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life", he is encouraging others to follow his lead in rejecting this world's definition of life as a small and isolated existence.

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 21 March 2021

He will not, and his followers should not either, hold onto the seed and thereby fail to bear much fruit. Jesus will fall into the ground and die, literally, so that the grain of wheat will bear much fruit. By implication we must too – not literally die, but give up our old ways and live as “children of light” – live in a new way which glorifies God, which stands against the old ways of outdated religious rules and meaningless sacrifices, against the abuses of the empire, and gives life in abundance not only to ourselves, but to those around us.

Bearing much fruit, for Jesus, does mean losing his life. He does not do this lightly – his soul was troubled and he considers asking God for another way, and does so again in Gethsemane. And even from the cross he cries out asking why God has abandoned him, but he submits that God might be glorified. God responds, bearing witness to Jesus, but that witness is missed by the crowd who think God’s voice is thunder and do not know that it is for their benefit. But the story offers hope that those who do not understand now, will once Jesus is “lifted up” by his crucifixion and resurrection, which will draw all people to him.

For John’s Gospel, it’s not enough just to come to Jesus or “want to see” him; we must have our ears unclogged and our vision corrected by the trauma that is Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection. As Jesus explains, we cannot avoid darkness and death, but instead, must trust that God will bring about life. This message is perhaps even more important this year as we prepare to spend another year of Easter services online, unable to join with family and friends in person; as we’ve endured this time of pandemic and seemingly endless death. We may not be able to avoid the darkness, but we can cling to Jesus’ promise that he will light our paths toward life; life abundant and eternal.

Hymn Now the green blade riseth (R&S 243) recorded by Thora

Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

In the grave they laid him, love whom men had slain,
Thinking that never he would wake again.
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green,

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for three days in the grave had lain.
Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Thy touch can call us back to life again;
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.

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

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,

to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

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.

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,

and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,

and we may be ready to live for you

and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

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 is 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 (music – Hear my prayer, O Lord, sung by Cambridge Voices)

Prayer after communion

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, we pray today, for all those who go hungry and for the people who help them,
through volunteering at foodbanks, by donating food and money, or by speaking out and raising
awareness of issues.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for scientists and all those working to deliver vaccines, for doctors, nurses, porters and
cleaners, carers and their families, as they battle tiredness and depression to keep going.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all people in leadership, locally, nationally and around the world that they may act with
wisdom to bring about and maintain peace and order. We pray for the police, here and around the
world, that they may learn to treat all people equally without prejudice or racism and that they be
more caring to those with disabilities or mental illness, and more respectful of women.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who feel lonely and sad, locked in their homes again, not able to see family or
friends. And for all those who have had COVID-19 or lost a loved one to the virus.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

On this World Down Syndrome Day we pray for all those living with Down's Syndrome and their
families. Help us to remember that we are all your children, created in your image. And we pray for
those living with neurological different – autism, ADHD and other challenging conditions.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those awaiting test results or
treatment, for the dying and those who mourn. May your infinite love and grace surround them and
bring them peace, in Jesus' name. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Now let us from this table rise (R&S 463) recorded by Thora last 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.

Christ Church and the Bridgwater Drive Church, 21 March 2021

Blessing (based on John 12:20-33)

Go now, to serve Christ and follow him.
Let your old life fall like a grain of wheat into the earth
so that you may bear much fruit
as you allow God to reshape your heart
and live in obedience to the law written within you.

And may God centre you in truth and steady your spirit.
May Christ renew your joy and strengthen your will.
And may the Spirit teach you God's hidden wisdom
and fill you with songs of rejoicing. Amen

© 2003 Nathan Nettleton

Music to end: Just as I am, R&S 364 (based on Psalm 51) sung by Mahalia Jackson
<https://youtu.be/tw-g4-DTKfU>

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352