

Christian Aid Sunday Service 9th May 2021

Music before the service - 'Let all creation sing'

https://www.resoundworship.org/song/let_all_creation_sing

CCL# 7148792 © Paul Zach, Andy Zipf / Resound Worship, used with permission

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

Call to Worship

Sing to the Lord a new song for He has done marvellous things. Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music.

Opening prayer

Leader: Come and celebrate our common home

All: we gather with the family of humanity.

Leader: The mountains, islands and deserts

All: we honour the glory of God in creation.

Leader: The lakes, rivers and seas

All: we come to the source of living water.

Leader: With the land, its soil, seeds and sustenance

All: we give thanks for God's generous provision.

Leader: With the forests of great trees, the lungs of the planet

All: we will sing with joy and clap our hands.

Leader: We join with the whole of creation, inspired by those who have gone before and the prophetic voices of today.

All: We dare to praise and pray for another possible world. Amen

(Adapted from 'We are the Amazon', an ecumenical act of solidarity and justice for the Amazon and its people.)

For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the Love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:
GRACIOUS GOD TO THEE WE RAISE
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light:
Gracious GOD, to Thee we raise
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight:
Gracious GOD, to Thee we raise
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above;
For all gentle thoughts and mild:
Gracious GOD, to Thee we raise
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

For each perfect Gift of Thine
To our race so freely given,

Graces human and Divine,
Flowers of earth, and buds of Heaven:
Gracious GOD, to Thee we raise
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

For Thy people evermore
Lifting holy hands above,
Offering up on every shore
Their Pure Sacrifice of Love:
GRACIOUS GOD, to Thee we raise
This our Sacrifice of Praise.

Prayer of praise and confession

Our souls sing out a joyful song,
Our souls sing out how great thou art.
We consider the works you have made
The stars of the night, the leaves
of the trees
The birds of the air the oceans and streams.

Our souls sing out a mournful song,
Our souls grieve before our God.
We consider the works our hands
have made;
The warming of the planet,
the rising of seas
The wilting of the harvest,
devastating communities.

Our souls sing out a contrite song
Our souls bow down low.
We regret the works our hands
have made
The impact on the poorest,
the livelihoods lost
The deepening of poverty, the
environmental and human cost

Our souls sing out a penitent song,
Our souls turn back to what is right.
We consider the good works our
hands can make;
The words of justice we can speak,
the acts of love we can give
The hand of solidarity we can extend, for
others to fully live.

Our souls sing out a hopeful song
Our souls look to the Lord, where
our hope comes from
We consider the works you call us to;
The love of our neighbour,
the stewardship of the earth
The flourishing of all creation,
the wonder of its worth.

(Source: Christian Aid/Jess Hall)

Lord's prayer

Offering and prayer

Please continue 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.**

Reading: Psalm 98

The climate crisis is having a significant impact on communities in Kenya. The main problem is the lack of access to a reliable source of water to help them withstand the unpredictable weather made worse through the climate crisis. Drought has become more frequent and intense, resulting in millions of people being short of food as they are unable to grow crops. In parts of Kenya in 2020, drought was followed by relentless rainfall and flooding, which damaged crops that had struggled to grow. With no access to reliable water sources or a way to capture rainfall, many communities are struggling to survive. The coronavirus pandemic has only increased the urgent need for families to access a reliable source of water for handwashing.

Rose strives to provide for her grandchildren who live with her and the climate crisis is driving her to the brink. In times of drought, Rose sets out on a long and dangerous journey every morning to collect water for her family. There is a nearby earth dam just minutes away from Rose's home. It should be a lifeline. But it's not wide enough or deep enough for everyone's needs. It runs out of water too quickly.

With a reliable source of water, people like Rose would be free from long, painful journeys. They would be able to grow fresh vegetables to eat. And they would be able to protect themselves from the dangers of coronavirus. With such dire need, every last drop of water that falls in Rose's community is precious.

But there is hope for people like Rose. A few years ago, Florence's husband died, leaving her a widow. At that time, she had no water to grow crops. Next to her farm, Florence is proud to show something remarkable – a dam, full of fresh water. It's thanks to Christian Aid Week donations like yours that Florence and her community have built this water dam. With this dam, Florence can grow tomatoes, onions, papayas and chillies on her farm. Her children can eat healthy, nutritious vegetables. It's her source of life and joy. Florence also uses the water from the dam to keep honey bees. She sells the rich, golden honey for cash at the market.

Your gifts this Christian Aid Week could help communities build better earth dams to harvest more water; sow drought-tolerant crops that grow even with the fewest of drops; or set up an advocacy group to demand change at the highest level and put a stop to this climate crisis.

So what is the new song we are encouraged to sing this Christian Aid Week as mentioned in our reading from Psalm 98? Whatever the song, it is one that we sing with the whole Earth. Throughout Psalm 98 people are just one of the many participants in praise of the presence of the Lord. The world and those who live in it are on a par with the roaring sea, the clapping hands of the floods and the singing hills in the joyful anticipation of the Lord, coming to set things right in the world.

In this psalm we see clearly that all parts of creation point us to God and give praise to God. All parts of creation are loved and cherished by God. And God's judgement requires that all parts of creation are treated with care, justice and respect. This emphasises that there is nothing in all of creation beyond God's redemption. This Psalm invites us to hope and work with creation for that day when the rightness of God will reign.

In the Psalm we read that God 'will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity. The judgement of God in the context of climate chaos leads us to consider that the world and some who live in it might be the subject of God's judgement. Such feelings of concern might lead us to confess and repent of complicit actions, and cause us to lament what we have no control over. Our lament becomes an act of resistance and solidarity with those who suffer most but are the least responsible. Creation's praise and rejoicing in anticipation of the judgement of God is a reminder that God's judgement is an act of liberation which will bring about the transformation needed for all of creation to fully flourish and glorify God with a new song!

Christian Aid Week Prayer

Great God,
Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the heavens
Hear the cry of the people
Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair
Hear the cry of the people
Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and homes submerged

Hear the cry of the people,
When creation is hitting back, with rage and resistance
Give us hope, grant us salvation,
Give us a new relationship with creation
With reverence to tend this gift from You
And say once again of the earth and all you created
It is GOOD

(Source: Bob Kikuyu Global Theology Advisor, Christian Aid)

A new commandment I give unto you
that you love one another as I have loved you
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this shall all know you are my disciples
if you have love one for another.
By this shall all know you are my disciples
if you have love one for another.

Bible reading - John 15: 9-17

'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.' John 15:11
This verse is the purpose statement of this long parting speech from Jesus to his disciples. To speak of joy when he himself is on the threshold of deep trial and suffering is an indication of what joy is. It was for the joy set before him he endured the cross. Despite the suffering of Good Friday and the silence of Holy Saturday, this is a joy that believes that Sunday is coming. This joy does not deny sorrow or suffering but co-exists with them. Jesus' parting words to his disciples are an encouragement to abide in the love of God and dig deep into consistent, uncircumstantial joy. And he knows that they are going to need each other to get through. Their love for one another and their sacrificial giving for their friends will strengthen them to endure. It is not duty, obligation or command that will enable them to remain faithful and bear lasting fruit. It is love, friendship and joy. Love, friendship and joy is what we hope lies at the heart of our experience of Christian Aid Week. We hope that it is our love for one another that inspires our generous giving.

It is our friendship with communities we get to know through the stories of Rose and Florence that motivates us to sacrificial acts of solidarity. And it is through our generous giving and sacrificial actions that we bear lasting fruit and know complete joy. The joy that we participate in and experience in and through Christian Aid Week does not lead us away from suffering and struggle, but towards it. We choose to look towards the pain and see the possibilities for transformation. This Christian Aid Week, as we choose to enter into the struggle with Rose and celebrate transformed communities with Florence, may our joy be complete.

In the experiences of Rose and Florence, we see clearly the relationship between humans and creation and their inter-connectedness and the need to nurture creation in order to protect the environment and climate. By the ways in which we love and nurture God's creation we also show our love for the people who are most at risk from the impact of climate change and in doing this we follow Jesus' command to love one another as God has loved us. In many ways it seems that we have lost or forgotten this intricate connection between the natural world and the humans who live in it.

Our relationship with God, each other and with creation could be seen as the 3 sides of a triangle. These 3 elements are connected and support each other to create a structure but the links between them have been broken by our greed and self-interest. We need to encourage each other and all people to become more aware and appreciative of the beauty and richness of our planet. There is an urgent need for us, particularly in the industrialised and polluting rich countries of the world, to reconnect with God through caring for creation. To quote Martin Luther "The gospel is not only found in the pages of the Bible but is written in the trees and the flowers, in nature all around us".

This year we have a critical opportunity to reshape our relationship with the planet and to create a more secure future for everyone, especially those who are least able to respond to the challenges of the climate crisis. In June a meeting is taking place in the UK of the G7 group of 7 leading democracies which is being hosted by the Prime Minister. Then in November the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties, also known as COP 26, is meeting in Glasgow. Both these meetings give us the opportunity to call on the UK government and other countries to increase climate finance to the most vulnerable communities around the world and cancel unfair debts so that countries can tackle the climate crisis. During the coming months the Faith in Action committee at Christ Church Rayleigh will be providing more information and actions you can take to make your voice heard at this most vital time.

Sometimes we may feel rather overwhelmed and useless when we look at the scale and complexity of the issue of environmental damage and climate change. How can we remain hopeful of a brighter future in the face of what seem to be such huge challenges? Firstly, there are things we can all do which will help to reduce and stop the harm being done to the planet. Secondly, we have the assurance that God's love for his creation will triumph over all things, through Jesus our Saviour. In Colossians 1 we read that all things were created by God through Jesus and for Jesus and that through Jesus all things are reconciled to God. So all of creation is included within the redeeming, saving, reconciling plan of God which is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And as we as churches take action and speak out about the vital importance of caring for creation and the need for climate justice for all, so we will take the message of God's love out to our local community and beyond and show clearly that God's love is as vital and relevant today as it has ever been.

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, teach us, your children, how to love your world;
How to be careful stewards of your creation
How to be responsible for fellow human beings
How to show concern for justice and human rights
Loving God, teach us how to love your world.

Loving God, teach us, your children, how to love humankind:
How to share with those who have not
How to show respect to each individual
How to pray and how to serve
Loving God, teach us how to love humankind.

Loving God, teach us, your children, how to love our neighbours:
How to listen and show acceptance
How to be with them in times of trouble
How to let you speak and act through us
Loving God, teach us how to love our neighbours.

In the name of him who lay down his life for his friends, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, Saviour and Lord.
(Intercessions by Christine Odell, Epworth Press)

And now we have a prayer for transformation
Our God,
we pray for transformation of hardened hearts and closed minds
resistant to the changes needed for a sustainable and thriving future for all of creation
for stones of apathy and indifference to become hearts of concern and compassion,
for stones of self-preservation to become hearts of secure generosity,
for stones of fear of scarcity to become hearts of generous abundance
for stones of judgement and shame to become hearts of mercy and grace
for stones of longing and consumerism to become hearts satisfied and in communion with your phenomenal creation.
Transform us by your Spirit, that we might be your people and You our God
in your name we pray. Amen
(Source: Christian Aid)

https://www.resoundworship.org/song/god_the_maker_of_the_heavens

God, the maker of the heavens,
and the planet that we share,
show us how to live, like Jesus,
lives of gratitude and care.
Make us mindful of the footprints
from the lives that we pursue.
Make us partners in your mission:
you are making all things new.

God, the gardener of Eden,
teach us how to tend this earth,
learning from the changing seasons,
times of fallow and new birth.

Lord have mercy when we're careless,
rich resources we misuse.
Use our hands to heal creation:
you are making all things new.

God of labour and vocation,
Lord of science, trade and art,
take our efforts and our passions
make them mirrors of your heart.
Every habitat and creature
loved and valued, God, by you.
May our lives reveal your Kingdom:
you are making all things new.

You are making all things new.
you are making all things new,
all things renewed.

CCL# 7126825 © Sam Hargreaves / Resound Worship used with permission

Closing Blessing

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory.
May God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling.
May God bless us with courage at this critical hour.
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Rest upon us and on all creation,
This day and for the future to come. Amen.
(ACT Alliance)

Music after the service - 'Nature shines with beauty'

https://www.resoundworship.org/song/nature_shines_with_beauty

CCL# 7157375 © Chris Juby / Resound Worship used with permission

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI Licence 63352