

Christ Church, 18 July 2021 Written service circulated to both churches

Welcome to worship. Today we are acknowledging and remembering the 111th anniversary of Christ Church. I am not saying celebrating, because for today at least we are still under quite strict covid restrictions and we are not having the congregational lunch we usually have.

Today I have tried to keep the music more traditional, but other things will be different. Thank you to Kay for playing the organ and to our small group of singers.

A couple of weeks ago I went to a day on Culture, Faith and Art, organised by HeartEdge (<https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/life-st-martins/mission/heartedge/> in case you are interested in finding out more) at Shoeburyness and Thorpe Bay Baptist Church. It was a very interesting day and gave me lots of ideas for things we might try in the future to incorporate more art and culture into our worship and church life. The theologian and musician Maggi Dawn spoke about language and how we use it, and how often, because we use the same familiar words in worship, they begin to lose their meaning. I agree, though I also think part of the beauty of the communion service is using the familiar words. But for today, I will use different words for some of our prayers and communion so that we can reflect on them more and think about them differently.

We were also invited to create an image that expresses what God is. I did a sketch on the day and later created this painting. As you know, we have been discussing making changes to our building and the newly formed Building Committee recently met with the architect to look at plans. You will be hearing more about this at future church meetings. Any building project will encompass our wider vision for what we want to be as a church and how we want to reach out to the wider community, so I thought that we should try to use the building more as we hope it will be used once renovated, so that you can start to see the vision. One aspect here in the worship area is to make the area in front of the organ cleaner looking and more useful for presentations or having artwork. So today we have a plain backdrop for this piece of art, and that will be the focus for people watching at home during the hymns.

Call to Worship

As we remember the 111 years of this church, I read words from Rowan Williams*

“As a community of faith we don’t let go of the past...we listen to the narrative of the Bible, which is full of stories in which things that were supposed to be over and done with spring to life again in new situations.’

‘In the Eucharist, we deliberately bring to life the double memory of Jesus’ friends betraying him and Jesus himself offering them hospitality, offering the bread from heaven that is his own life. *This* past is emphatically not past... when the past is allowed to come to life in this dramatic way – in Jesus’ suffering and dying – it is not to cancel out what has happened in the meantime... it is not returning to where we were. Remembering our past involves something like letting light into more and more of the corners and byways of our identity; what returns in memory is now set in a larger landscape. We have learned; we have grown. The past is never over, but it is not everything.”

I am making a new heaven and a new earth, says the Lord. “See, I am making all things news.”

HYMN Lord for the years (R&S 603)

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Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt
him,
Loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us -
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Opening Prayer of thanks for Christ Church written by Jean

Living God, we praise you as we celebrate the 111th anniversary of this church.

We thank you for those who founded this church and all who have served you here over the years.

Hundreds of people have worshipped you here. There have been happy times and sad times - we have given thanks for the birth of a children and we have said goodbye to those who have died. We thank you for those who were married here – who have brought their children for baptism. In this building people have wrestled with the deep things of life – they have prayed urgently. They have wept – they have laughed.

God we thank you for this church on the hill. May it continue to be a beacon of light to those around. Please show us how you want us to continue to serve you here. In new and continuing ways may we show your love and grace to all. This we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

Opening Prayer +

“Walk into the darkness, sit and wait.
Wait for God who takes your breath away
And withers all your roots. Look at your feet
In silence till God gives you words to pray,
Or breaks your heart and turns the other way
And there is nothing left to do but wait.
Wait for God who sends the promised rain
And drowns the people, gives the living bread
And starves them, who is tender to the pain
They cause as they sever heart and head,
Destroys the living and revives the dead,
Exalts with loss and crucifies with gain.
Observe his wound; you cannot staunch the blood
That seeps and darkens through the patient wood.”

Offering

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

Following on from the service two weeks ago, today we look at the second half of chapter two of the Letter of James.

Reading: James 2:14-26

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Faith without works is dead, says James. I believe that to be true, I believe we need to live our Christian lives not just with nice caring words, but with actions too. Jesus was a man of action as well as words. He preached and taught and prayed, but he also healed, he walked, he fished, he broke the rules, he turned over tables. If anyone here has read some theology, or heard sermons on Paul, you may think that the view of the reformed tradition is that we are saved by Grace alone, not by works. And that is also true. But I am not talking here of salvation. We are indeed saved, however you want to interpret the word saved, by the love and grace of God alone. We cannot earn merit or Brownie points by doing lots of good deeds. We try to act in a good and Christian manner, doing good and giving charity out of gratitude for God's love and following the example of Jesus, not to earn a place in heaven. What I am talking about here, when James says that faith without works is dead, is the living of our lives as Christians; as disciples of Christ – Walking the Way of the cross – discipleship for every day and every year of our lives. We are only here in the sanctuary, once a week, for one hour (usually), when we come to praise God and learn more about Jesus and God through studying the Bible, singing and praying. What about the other 167 hours of the week, how are we praising God and following the example of Jesus then? Or, as James puts it, 'If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?'

After my last sermon on James, someone asked me, what small things can I do – you seem to sometimes talk about big things that I can't do, or that overwhelm me. My last sermon on James, mentioned climate change as one of the most important things we should be taking action on as Christians. In that regard there are many small things we can do to make a difference, and we are including an idea each week in the News and Chat. Things we can all do include praying – that can be an action, not just hollow words, especially if we pray for a particular situation like the COP26 climate conference in November, or for a specific person or organisation which is doing activist work we maybe can't do. We can try to shop local. We can try to use less plastic – take a re-usable bag with you when you do your shopping. We can try to use less cow's milk and eat less meat. If we have gardens, we can plant plants that attract bees, or leave the lawn without mowing it for a month or two. We can sign relevant petitions and write to our MP. Most campaigning organisations make it very simple to click a button that in seconds emails a letter to your MP, so we no longer have the excuse that it is too much effort, although a hand-written, personal letter counts for more.

In the wider picture, looking to the whole church, rather than each of us as individuals. The elders hope to make the first presentation of plans for the building project to our September Church Meeting. The project is not only about the bricks and mortar, about making necessary repairs and a new lick of paint; it is about making our church fit – maybe not for the next 111 years, but at least for the next few decades. To living up to our aim as an Eco Church to eliminate heat loss and wasting energy. To make our building look and feel more welcoming to the wider community, rather than a private members club with relics from the last century. To trying some new ideas and activities to

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reach out to people beyond our church membership – maybe they won't work, but they certainly won't work if we don't try them!

I mentioned earlier that I thought that we should try to use the building more as we hope it will be used once the building work is complete. During August and September there will be some one-off events and new activities which will use the building in different ways, including this worship space, so we can start to get a feel for how the new building might work and enhance our mission and outreach. That is faith in action. And I hope as many of you as possible will come along and support those events and activities and maybe volunteer to help out too. Amen

The painting behind me represents what God is for me – neither male nor female; timeless; completely outside and beyond human comprehension. So often we refer to God in the same old ways, and so often using a male pronoun which doesn't truly represent what or who God is. So now we sing a hymn which tries to expand that vision of the Holy One.

Hymn Source and Sovereign (tune Aberystwyth)

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,
Fortress, Fountain, Shelter, Light,
Judge, Defender, Mercy, Might,
Life whose life all life all endowed:

Word and Wisdom, Root and Vine,
Shepherd, Saviour, Servant, Lamb,
Well and Water, Bread and Wine,
Way who leads us to I AM:

Refrain:

*May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth and feeds them all
is the God whom we proclaim.*

Refrain

Storm and Stillness, Breath and Dove,
Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire,
Comfort, Counsellor, Presence Love,
Energies that never tire: *Refrain*

Church Hymnary 4, #133

Lord's Supper

'Communion Table' +

"The centuries have settled on this table
Deepened the grain beneath a clean white cloth
Which bears afresh our changing elements.
Year after year of prayer, in hope and trouble,
Were poured out here and blessed and broken, both
In aching absence and in absent presence.
This table too the earth herself has given
And human hands have made. Where candle-flame
At corners burns and turns the air to light
The oak once held its branches up to heaven,
Blessing the elements which it became,
Rooting the dew and rain, branching the light.
Because another tree can bear, unbearable,
For us, the weight of Love, so can this table."

"They sought to soar into the skies
Those classic gods of high renown
For lofty pride aspires to rise
But you came down.
You dropped down from the mountains sheer

Forsook the eagle for the dove
The other gods demanded fear
But you gave love
Where chiselled marble seemed to freeze
Their abstract and perfected form
Compassion brought you to your knees
Your blood was warm
They called for blood in sacrifice
Their victims on an altar bled
When no one else could pay the price
You died instead
They towered above our mortal plain,
Dismissed this restless flesh with scorn,
Aloof from birth and death and pain,
But you were born.
Born to these burdens, borne by all
Born with us all 'astride the grave'
Weak, to be with us when we fall,
And strong to save."

Hymn Spirit of the Living God (R&S 309) sung twice

Spirit of the living God, move among us all;
make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love;
humble, caring,
selfless, sharing,
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!

~~~~~  
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 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**

"This bread is light, dissolving, almost air,  
A little visitation on my tongue,  
A wafer-thin sensation, hardly there."

**The body of Christ, broken for you**

"This taste of wine is brief in flavour, flung  
A moment to the palate's roof and fled,  
Even its aftertaste a memory.  
Yet this is how He comes. Through wine and bread  
Love chooses to be emptied into me.  
He does not come in unimagined light  
Too bright to be denied, too absolute  
For consciousness, too strong for sight,  
Leaving the seer blind, the poet mute;  
Chooses instead to seep into each sense,  
To dye himself into experience." \*\*

**The blood of Christ, shed for you.**

**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 unity and equality and an end to discrimination and prejudice  
of all kind, especially following the awful racist abuse of England football players. Help us to truly  
remember that in Christ we are all one, created in the image of 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, like  
Marcus Rashford with his campaign for children.

We pray for scientists and all those working to deliver vaccines, for doctors, nurses, porters and  
cleaners, carers and their families, and for those advising the government and for those who now  
have to make difficult decisions about relaxing restrictions without the support of the law.

We pray for world leaders and democratic systems. Let them not be abused and help us not to be  
overtaken by apathy and despair when it seems that democracy is flawed. Especially this week, we  
pray for the people of Cuba fighting for more liberty and for food and vaccinations.

We pray for those who feel lonely and sad. For those for whom 19 July will not bring freedom, but  
more isolation as they try to protect themselves while society lowers its guard. We pray for all those  
who have had COVID-19 or lost a loved one to the virus and for those who are currently isolating  
due to contact with someone infected.

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

**Lord's Prayer in a different voice**

Our Father, who art in heaven,

**Our Creator, you are all around us and within us.**

Hallowed be thy name.

**We praise you with many different names.**

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

**Help us to live as we understand we should from knowing you –**

**In harmony and connectedness with each other.**

On earth as it is in heaven

**With all creatures of the earth, and with the earth and the universe itself.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

**Help us to use your resources wisely so that we might be sustained.**

And forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

**Help us to take responsibility when we fail to live harmoniously, and help us**

**Understand and forgive when others let us down.**

And lead us not into temptation.

**Let us know you well enough that we are not tempted to live outside of your love.**

But deliver us from evil.

**And empower us to work together to overcome evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.

**We believe you created the world and that you will be all around us and within us.**

Amen.

**We are open to you. Amen ++**

**Hymn** Thy hand, O God, has guided (R&S 567)

Thy hand, O God, has guided  
thy flock, from age to age;  
the wondrous tale is written,  
full clear, on every page;  
thy people owned thy goodness,  
and we their deeds record;  
and both of this bear witness:  
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Thy heralds brought glad tidings  
to greatest, as to least;  
they summoned all to hasten  
and share the great King's feast;  
their gospel of redemption,  
sin pardoned, earth restored,  
was all in this enfolded:  
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Thy mercy will not fail us,  
nor leave thy work undone;  
with thy right hand to help us,  
the victory shall be won;  
and then, by all creation,  
thy name shall be adored,  
and this shall be our anthem:  
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

A reminder that on Wednesday at 7.30pm we will hold a church meeting here in the church. It is not after Sunday worship this time, as the elders felt that in light of the ongoing pandemic, worship plus a church meeting would be too much time spent together in the same space. However, by Wednesday we will no longer be 2m apart so we should be able to accommodate anyone and everyone who would like to attend. We have various important matters to discuss and decide, most notably the time that Sunday worship starts. The meeting will start with worship so the business will not commence until 7.45pm.

**Blessing**

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,  
so that we will work for justice, equity and peace.  
May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war,  
so that we will reach out to comfort them and change their pain to joy.  
And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that we can make a difference in the world,  
so that we will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.  
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all now and ever more. Amen

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352

\* *Candles in the Dark, Faith, hope and love in a time of pandemic* Rowan Williams, SPCK 2020

+ *The Singing Bowl: Collected Poems* Malcolm Guite, Canterbury Press Norwich, 2013

\*\* *Sounding the Seasons* Malcolm Guite, Canterbury Press Norwich, 2012

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