

Christ Church, 15 August 2021. Written service circulated to all

Welcome to worship from Christ Church. Today will be a Communion service – for the first time since the pandemic started, with shared bread and wine.

Call to worship (based on Psalm 111)

One: Praise the Lord!

In the company of the saints above and beside us,
let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

**All: Great are the works of the Lord,
full of honour and majesty, whose righteousness endures forever.**

One: The Lord is gracious and merciful;
the work of God's hands are faithful and just.

All: God's covenant is established forever in truth and justice.

One: Our redemption is in the name of our Lord.

All: Holy and awesome is God's name in all the earth!

written by Michael Morgan, organist for the Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia,

Hymn Praise to the Lord R&S 74

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
Come, all who hear; brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration!

Praise to the Lord, above all things so mightily reigning;
keeping us safe at his side and so gently sustaining.
Have you not seen all you have needed has been
met by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our work and defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
Ponder anew what the almighty can do,
who with his love will befriend us.

Praise to the Lord - O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the "Amen!" sound from his people again;
gladly with praise we adore him!

words: after Joachim Neander, Catherine Winkworth and others. These words are only slightly adapted from the original, and are therefore public domain

Opening Prayers

Welcome to this place:
where children and adults sit side by side,
where heaven and earth embrace in peace,
where God has been, is, and always will be.

Welcome to this place, as we gather with all of God's children:
where we find God's love,
where we hear the tender voice of Jesus, where the Spirit teaches us new songs.

Welcome to this place, where all is made ready by our God:
where we bring our hunger, and find food;
where we bring our problems, and find help and hope;
where we bring our selves, just as we are, and find acceptance.

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We will not find justice in apathy and doing nothing;
we will not find wholeness and happiness with our arguing and fighting;
we will not find our misplaced love with our hating;
we will not find the rest we crave in our overflowing diaries and social media;
we will not find the peace You offer in our well nursed and long held grudges.

But - we will find you in the brokenness of the Bread and in the breaking of our hearts;
we will find you when we drain the Cup,
refill it with our gifts, and offer it to a little child;
we will find you when we squeeze closer together,
making room at the Table for all your people.

~ written by Thom Shuman (amended)

And the table will be wide.
And the welcome will be wide.
And the arms will open wide to gather us in.
And our hearts will open wide to receive.

And we will come as children who trust there is enough.
And we will come unhindered and free.
And our aching will be met with bread.
And our sorrow will be met with wine.

And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.
And we will turn toward each other without fear.
And we will give up our appetite for despair.
And we will taste and know of delight.

And we will become bread for a hungering world.
And we will become drink for those who thirst.
And the blessed will become the blessing.
And everywhere will be the feast.

~ written by Jan L. Richardson

Help us to find you, God in Community, Holy in One, even as we pray together, saying,
Our Father . . .

Offertory

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.**

Talk

Song – Communion Song of Thanks & Praise (words and actions on screen - video)

Children leave for Sunday Club

Bible readings: **Psalm 111** Inclusive Bible version
 John 6:51-58

Today's lectionary readings are rather a mixed bag! And some preachers might want to side-track from the Gospel reading's repeated references to eating the actual flesh of Jesus. I certainly recoil from it myself and I'm not sure it's really very helpful. Of course,

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context is everything and the writer of John may have meant something particularly relevant for his first century readers that has been lost in the mists of time.

But what this passage does do, is give us the opportunity to talk about the Lord's Supper, or Communion. This thing we do once a month, sometimes more often, though we rarely talk about what it signifies and why we do it. The first meaning of the word 'communion' if you look it up in a dictionary or online is: "the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level." Muriel, the minister of a parish church in Glasgow, describes it as a counter-cultural act.

Often our theology around the Last Supper or Communion focuses on the remembrance of Christ's death, as a place to 'taste and see' God's salvation through the death of Jesus. And, of course it is that, but it is also an enactment of resurrection as the broken bread is remembered in the community of faith. Traditionally, our statements of faith emphasise Jesus' birth and then move directly to his suffering and death. However, there is a comma between 'born of the virgin Mary' and 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' in the Apostles' Creed, and it is important. For renewal of the church, we need to rediscover what that comma covers - the life and teaching of Jesus as a radical non-violent champion of the poor, prophet, teacher, healer, and social commentator. In more recent times, particularly since the explosion of liberation theology in South America and South Africa, there has been a rediscovery of the radical strand of Christian thinking which has always been there, though sometimes submerged by state religion and all the hierarchical values implicit in that concept. Whether you picture Jesus as a revolutionary or not, there is unquestionably a counter cultural edginess to Jesus that is often overlooked. He is a man from the margins, in an occupied country, where extremes of riches and poverty were evident in the prestige buildings of the Romans, built by bonded labour - slaves in other words, in a society where many hung onto life by a fingernail, and illness or a poor harvest meant starvation and death. And for many now, a poor harvest, or fire or flooding caused by climate change can mean starvation or migration. While we talk obsessively about the weather spoiling holiday plans and whether we can really become vegetarian or not, for many people today, the destruction of our planet is a life and death situation right now. Far from being about 'pie in the sky when you die', communion teaches us not to wait for a future heaven, although that is promised, but to work for it now.

Just as the whole earth is full of God's glory as we hear in the psalms, so ordinary life is the site of our discipleship. Communion is the acting out of the transformation that is life in Christ. The Last Supper summarises the entire mission and life of Christ. In taking bread, giving thanks, breaking and sharing it, he is speaking of his own sense of what his life and

Christ Church, 15 August 2021. Written service circulated to all

death means, and also modelling the life he wants for his followers. The centre of our faith is not a holding onto dogma, tradition, or remembrance – it is the recognition that breaking and giving away is at least as permanently at work through Christ as joining and holding. The sensual image of this is the central Christian rite of Holy Communion: (and there are all five senses involved – taste, touch, sight, smell and sound in the words spoken) in which the ‘body’ of Christ is broken and given. It is shared out among all. Human impulse is to hold and to hoard, so breaking and giving away or sharing is profoundly countercultural. As we heard a few weeks ago in the feeding of the 5000, God’s culture is one of plenty. In God’s kingdom there is enough for everyone. Or as the quote attributed to Gandhi says, ‘there is enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.’ We see it time and again in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. The whole sweep of the story of land and slavery, Law and jubilee are struggles to realise God’s politics rather than ours. Jesus stands firmly in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. In breaking and sharing bread, Jesus is challenging the human impulse to grab and hoard. It is a counter intuitive, counter cultural action.

Communion is often seen as an intensely spiritual experience for the individual: our emphasis on taking it together and on the communion between and beyond us is also countercultural. Communion is not only about me and my Jesus. Real faith involves a journey from a consumer-style Christianity of the church meeting our personal needs, where many of us naturally started, to a sense of Christian citizenship in which every one of the faithful understands what God is calling them to be and do in order to build the future. Citizenship of God’s realm speaks of hospitality, generosity and transformation held up as values against those of an individualistic, consumer culture. The breaking and sharing of bread connects through time and across borders in a challenge to the impulse to gate and police the boundaries of our communities. Bread and wine are staples of human survival as well as potent symbols of faith, and recognition of that challenges the dangerous dualism that separates sacred from secular, Sunday from the rest of the week.

Taking what God offers us is an act of solidarity with these countercultural values. The New Testament and especially the gospels are stuffed full of communion, that is the sharing and exchanging of thoughts and feelings – from the wedding at Cana to the Road to Emmaus - and there are many meals, and many stories about meals, in between. And we also have the defining Hebrew story of deliverance from Egypt and daily food in the desert – the manna from heaven. This is not very surprising in a subsistence society, where one failed harvest meant disaster for many and especially the most marginalised; the widows, orphans, those who could not work because of disability or mental health problems. But in

Christ Church, 15 August 2021. Written service circulated to all

our resource-rich society we share the same vulnerability, although we do not know it, or may not recognise it. We are probably much closer to being homeless through a flood or dying in a heatwave than we care to think about, as this week's report on climate change highlighted.

As we celebrate communion each month, we can reflect on its many different aspects: hospitality; abundance; sustenance for the journey; Jesus' presence in us, the body of Christ; invitation to the lost and least; word become flesh; nourishment; broken bread that we might be whole; hunger for justice; harvest; ecology; communion with saints... Sharing a meal with thanksgiving expresses our sense of our fragility and our dependency on what earth provides, and our dependency on one another. It is good to remember and it is wise to realise that to share and be whole, we must first be broken.

I have based some of my sermon on an essay by Muriel Pearson, Minister at Cranhill Parish Church, Glasgow

Hymn Spirit, lead us to the table (tune R&S 104 – Praise my soul the king of heaven)

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 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, 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.

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

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Lord's Supper

Friends, this is the joyful feast of unity.
Christ has gathered his people around the earth to commune at this table.
Across political lines and economic lines,
in places of powerfully protected affluence, and among the poorest of the poor,
we share a meal, remembering and celebrating the One who proved shalom possible.
And so, come:
Come with your doubts, come with your hopes,
come with your inadequacies and with your strengths.
Come, for this is a table where all are invited and all are welcome.

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.

Christ Church, 15 August 2021. Written service circulated to all

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

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made. You provide for all our needs and give us the bread of life when we hunger.

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 has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

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

Prayer after communion

Grain which once was scattered over the fields was brought together to feed us today.

Grapes pulled from the vine were squeezed to give us drink today.

Now our time of worship and feasting draws to a close.

Now we are dispersed like that grain,

off to give the food of life to a hungry world.

Now we who have shared the Banquet of Hope,

go out as people connected to the vine, go out to bring the juice of life

where the world has been drained dry. **Amen**

~ written by Rev Gord for World Communion Day

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Prayers of intercession

Holy God, bless our lives, sanctify us, and in your way, grant us our hearts desire.

Anoint us with your grace, that what we desire is also what you desire.

Help us to understand that our hearts' true desire is the love of you.

Thank you, God, for all our blessings.

Holy God, bless those who govern –

Bless the leaders of nations, countries, towns, and cities.

And those who lead in various ways – social, political, and religious –

Bless us all. Fill the hearts of all with your wisdom.

Guide us in the way of justice and integrity for all.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Holy God, bless those who fight for justice

for the planet and environment, for freedom and equality,

for a free press and the right to demonstrate

and this week, we think particularly of the critical state of our planet –

the climate change crisis. Help our leaders make the right decisions quickly, to halt the destruction of your creation. And help us to play our part in the way we live our lives and make our voices heard to those in power.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Holy God, tend to those who suffer in mind, body, and spirit.

Bless those who are broken that out of our brokenness may come resurrection

as it did for our Lord Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

In the silence we bring to mind those of our own congregation and our friends and families who particularly need your love and care at this time...

Tend to the tired, the dying, the poor and the hungry.

Help us to follow the love of Christ, a love which urges us on.

Help us to seek and serve Christ, bringing forth a new creation.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Holy God, we ask all this in the name of Christ, our redeemer.

Holy God, we ask all this by the Holy Spirit who activates your love in us.

Holy God we ask all this that your love may be like the bread broken – from one whole we are able to share many parts, so that there is enough for everyone's need and we may manifest in small and unexpected ways the greatness of your love and grace. **Amen.**

Hymn We sing a love (tune *Woodlands* R&S 740)

I know we had this hymn only 3 weeks ago at Bridgwater Drive, so those of you watching at home are getting it again quite soon, but they are great words and one of my favourite tunes, so I make no apology for using it again!

We sing a love that sets all people free,
that blows like wind, that burns like scorching flame,
enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear:
come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,
a love that, yielding, finds itself made new:
come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

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We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid
to be itself, despite another's wrath,
a love that stands alone and undismayed:
come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that, wandering, will not rest
until it finds its way, its home, its source,
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed:
come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a burning, fiery, Holy Ghost
that seeks out shades of ancient bitterness,
transfiguring these, as Christ in every heart:
come, joyful love, live in our hearts today.

June Boyce-Tillman © 1993, Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Blessing

As people who have been fed, go now to feed the world.
As those who have been given hope, bring hope in place of despair.
And may the God of justice, sustainer of the world, help us to do so.
Remember that we are never cut off from the Bread of Life,
the True Vine is with us always.
We always share in Hope's Banquet where there is enough for all.
Thanks be to the One who hosts the banquet! Amen.

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