

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 22 August 2021. Written service circulated to all

Welcome to worship from The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service here at Bridgwater. If you are a member of Christ Church watching at home and wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper, you may, however the Christ Church monthly communion was celebrated last week.

Next week, being both a 5th Sunday and Climate Sunday will be a joint service, café-style at 11am. Members from Bridgwater Drive are warmly invited to attend at Christ Church. However, I am aware that some of you will find it difficult to get to Rayleigh, so today's service will have a bit of an environmental and climate focussed flavour as well.

Call to worship (inspired by Psalm 84)

How beautiful are the places where you dwell, O Lord!
This house cannot contain your glory;
even the heavens are bursting with the goodness of your presence!
Happy are those who find their strength in you.
Hear our prayers this day, Holy God,
as we proclaim your praises to all the earth!

Hymn Praise the Lord MP920

Praise the Lord! you heavens, adore Him;
Praise Him, angels in the height;
Sun and moon, rejoice before Him,
Praise Him, all you stars of light.
Praise the Lord, for He has spoken;
World His mighty voice obeyed;
Laws which never shall be broken
For their guidance He has made.

Praise the Lord! for He is glorious;
Never shall His promise fail.
God has made His saints victorious;
Sin and death shall not prevail.
Praise the God of our salvation!
Hosts on high, His power proclaim;
Heaven and earth and all creation,
Laud and magnify His name.

Worship, honour, glory, blessing,
Lord, we offer as our gift.
Young and old, Your praise expressing,
Our glad songs to You we lift.
All the saints in heaven adore You,
We would join their glad acclaim;
As Your angels serve before You,
So on earth we praise Your name.

Opening Prayer from the URC Prayer Handbook p53

Offertory

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

God of abundant love, in you, nothing is wasted or destroyed.
Gather our offerings, as Jesus gathered up baskets of leftover food.
Gather our offerings, as Jesus broke bread and out of brokenness made wholeness.
Gather our efforts, as Jesus gathered the hopes of the people who looked for a true king.
Gather our service, as Jesus gathers people to God's heavenly banquet.
Bless the offerings we have gathered, that nothing may be lost. **Amen.**

Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2009, © 2008 Abingdon Press

Bible readings: Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:53-69 (there is deliberate overlap with last week's reading)

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To some of you it will seem like quite a stretch of interpretation to get a climate focussed sermon out of today's readings, but quite a few phrases in the passage from Ephesians leapt out to me as being applicable to the Christian response to the climate crisis:

'put on the armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For our struggle is against the authorities... against the powers of the present darkness'

There are lots of small things we can all do to help stop the climate crisis getting worse – eating less meat, if not going vegetarian, using less dairy, particularly milk, not wasting food, recycling... but when asked what was the most important thing individuals could do, a climate scientist responded – speak out – lobby the government to act quickly and decisively, boycott companies and products that still use plastic unnecessarily and damage the environment because this is where the big change will happen; educate people who don't know about the climate crisis or think it is not real, or think it is not affecting us now. It is affecting us now. It is mainly affecting poorer countries so far away you could pretend they don't exist, but it is also affecting America, Australia and closer to home there have been fires and extreme heat raging through Europe in the last few weeks. Or if that is not close enough for you, the weather here is getting hotter, there are more and more floods, and whole swathes of British coast are disappearing into the sea taking people's homes and livelihoods with them. If anyone still thinks that climate change is not real or does not affect them, they are deluded. Many parts of the planet are likely to be uninhabitable or very uncomfortable by 2040 if we do not act now. OK, if you are in your 80s you might escape with the rest of your life unchanged, but what if you are younger? What about your children and grandchildren? And there is increasing evidence that the pandemic we are living through is at least indirectly, if not directly, linked to climate change and there are likely to be more similar pandemics.

Which brings me to more phrases from Ephesians: 'so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day, having done everything.' Will we be able to honestly say that we did everything we could to prevent further climate change? I'm trying my best, but I can't honestly say I've done *everything* I could, and very few people will be able to say they have. Ephesians talks about taking on the armour of God which made me think of an eco-warrior. What do we think an eco-warrior is? A weird tree-hugger? A Greenpeace activist? An Extinction Rebellion rebel? No, the definition of eco-warrior is "a person actively involved in preventing damage to the environment." By that definition we should all be eco-warriors, putting on the armour of God to prevent damage to God's creation.

Now, I appreciate that the writer of Ephesians is not talking about the climate crisis, they are talking about spiritual battle, but the overall message of the second half of the letter to the

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Ephesians is to maintain the unity in Christ of Jews and Gentiles and to display the Christian values of truth, love, forgiveness and holy living. To my mind, protecting the planet is part of those values and we need to find the message the Bible has for us today, now in 2021, otherwise our faith is just a pleasant habit; what we've always done on Sunday; some comforting prayers and nice songs in our personal time of trouble, or a historical Bible study of what the text meant to people in 1st century Palestine. The gospel is more than that. And as you have probably heard me say several times, including at last week's service at Christ Church, the gospel of Jesus Christ is both counter cultural and revolutionary.

We hear in our gospel reading from John, Jesus saying, 'you have no life in you unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood', in other words unless we follow Christ's example, dying to evil and deceit and being resurrected into the kingdom of God. We are participants in bringing about the kingdom of God, here and now, not in some future heaven to come. And the kingdom of God is not reflected in fires, floods, starvation, wars, migration and refugees. The kingdom of God is about sharing so that everyone has enough; about taking care of creation. We were not given dominion over creation to subjugate and abuse it as some translations and interpretations of Genesis imply, but we were made co-creators and sustainers. God gave Adam the task of naming every living creature; working with God. God declared everything God had created 'good'. God surely cannot look on what we have done to his creation and still consider it good. Surely God must be weeping and despairing of the mess we have made of God's creation.

At the end of our gospel reading, we hear the disciples saying, 'this teaching is difficult, who can accept it?' And it is difficult. It is not easy to truly follow in the footsteps of Christ. It is hard enough sometimes to even speak civilly to our Christian brothers and sisters, never mind take care of the poor and the oppressed, speak out against injustice, and properly care for creation. Jesus responds to them saying, 'among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one who would betray him. Jesus knew that no one could follow him unless God made it possible. And we are told that because of what Jesus said that day 'many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.' And we know that Jesus was betrayed. We will say it again during Communion, 'on the night when he was betrayed', our Lord took bread, and broke it. We recite every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper that Jesus was betrayed, and we remember it.

Will we take up the amour of God and 'proclaim the gospel of peace'? Will we take up the amour of God as protectors of the Creation and the environment? Will we withstand the powers that seek to destroy our planet? Or will we be like the disciples who abandoned

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Jesus because the message was too difficult? Will we be the ones who betray Jesus and his message and who do not live in truth, love and forgiveness? Let us pray that we have the strength and humility to take on the armour of God and stand firm, knowing that we have done everything we can. Amen

Hymn Lord, we have come at your own invitation (tune *Epiphany* MP 65)

I know we had this hymn at the Communion service in July, but the words seem particularly appropriate not only for Communion, but also for our Church Meeting and election of Elders.

Lord, we have come at your own invitation,
Chosen by you, to be counted your friends;
Yours is the strength that sustains dedication,
Ours a commitment we know never ends.

When, at your table, each time of returning,
Vows are renewed and our courage restored:
May we increasingly glory in learning
All that it means to accept you as Lord.

Here, at your table, confirm our intention,
Give it your seal of forgiveness and grace;
Teach us to serve, without pride or
pretension,
Lord, in your Kingdom, whatever our place.

So, in the world, where each duty assigned us
Gives us the chance to create or destroy,
Help us to make those decision that bind us,
Lord, to yourself, in obedience and joy.

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Lord's Supper

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

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 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

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

We pray for the Church: that she may be a beacon of hope throughout the world, reminding us all of our responsibility to care for and protect God's precious gift of creation. Lord, in your mercy...**hear our prayer.**

We pray for the world, our common home: that through God's grace we may hear its cry of the damage done and be moved to protect it for future generations to enjoy. Lord, in your mercy...

We pray for those people who are already facing droughts, floods and storms: that God may grant them strength and hope for the future as they work to adapt to the changing climate. Lord, in your mercy...

We pray for our local church and community: that through the grace of God we may hear the urgent cry of the earth and of the poor and be inspired to respond at this crucial time. Lord, in your mercy...

We pray for the world we live in: that God may open our eyes to recognise the goodness of all creation and help us to do what we can to restore and care for the wonderful gift that we have been given. Lord, in your mercy...

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We pray for world leaders: that God may grant them wisdom to make just decisions which respect the earth and all that lives in it, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable. Lord, in your mercy...

We pray for our local community: that through God's grace we may be good neighbours to each other and to the whole of creation, restoring and caring for all that God has made. Lord, in your mercy...

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, and Haiti following the earthquake there. In the silence we bring to mind those known to us who particularly need your grace and healing at this time... Lord, in your mercy...

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 seed scattered—manifesting in small and unexpected ways—the greatness of You.

May your love take root in our lives, and may we walk in faith. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn A rainbow in the sky (tune at MP 89, *Down Ampney*)

A rainbow in the sky,
its colours arching high,
brings promise of our great Creator's caring;
tells that sustaining care,
will ceaselessly be there,
to keep our planet fruitful and life-bearing.

When summer droughts descend,
threat'ning to know no end,
our faith remains that somehow rains will
follow.

Each time new crops are sown,
We trust that we'll be shown,
God's promise of a harvest is not hollow.

Yet rainbows in the sky,
their colours arching high,
are also for us all a call to caring.
Our fragile planet needs
urgent, effective deeds,
lest we'd destroy and leave our God
despairing.

Now we must show we care,
working on world-repair,
united, to avoid self-wrought disaster;
tirelessly shift by shift,
strive to restore God's gift,
and for our children's sakes start working
faster.

Each rainbow in the sky,
its colours arching high,
invites us all to celebrate God's sharing,
but also recommit,
actively do our bit,
in grateful, vital, planetary caring.

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Blessing

Just as God's Word was sent into the world to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day to be light and love, healing and hope.

Go now to be light for the world!

And may the grace and peace of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer
be with us today and remain with us always. Amen

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