

Christ Church, 19 Sept. 2021. Written service circulated to all

Welcome to worship from Christ Church. Today we have an unusual situation in that, for various reasons, it is both a Communion service and we have a church meeting, which is likely to be longer than I usually like Church Meetings to be. So, I promised to keep the worship service short. That does not mean it will be less. Sometimes less is more (as they say!), and it doesn't hurt sometimes to reflect on what we really need from a worship service, and what is the real essence of what we do in this place on a Sunday morning. And in case anyone is upset at the thought of a slightly shorter worship. I think a strong theological case can be made for saying that the Church Meeting, especially when we are discussing such an important aspect of our future, is an act of worship and Christian witness.

So, in what feels like a possible exercise from theological college (though we never did it) I made a list of the essentials (none of which necessarily need to be long and wordy):

Invocation of God – asking God to be with us

Praising God – a hymn or two

Gifts for the work of the church and in gratitude for God's love and grace

Prayer of confession – we don't include this every Sunday, though we probably should, but it is important on a Communion Sunday that we recognise that we all fall short of God's ideal

The Word – reading and studying Scripture

Communion – Some words or actions through which we share the peace of God, invoke the Holy Spirit, the words of institution, sharing bread and wine

Prayer for others

A Blessing and sending out to do God's work in the world

## LET US WORSHIP GOD!

### Call to worship

One: This is the day that the Lord has made

**All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it**

One: It is good to give thanks to God:

**All: for God's love endures for ever.**

**Hymn** Let all the world in every corner sing R&S 74

*Let all the world in every corner sing:*

*my God and King!*

The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.

The church with psalms must shout;  
no door can keep them out,  
but, above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.

*Let all the world in every corner sing:*

*my God and King!*

*Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!*

### Opening Prayer

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 people, those present, those present in their own homes, and those present in spirit: where we find God's love, where we hear the tender voice of Jesus, where the Spirit teaches us new songs.

Welcome today to the Table and to the Council of the church,  
And the Table, and the Meeting will be wide.

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The welcome will be wide and our hearts will open wide to receive.  
We come unhindered and free,  
and our aching and doubts will be met with bread.  
Our sorrows and fears will be met with wine.  
We will turn toward each other with peace.  
We will give up our appetite for despair.  
And we will become bread for a hungry world.  
We will become drink for those who thirst.  
And we, the blessed, will become a blessing to the world. Amen

**Confession and Assurance of Pardon**

If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.  
If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins.  
Let us confess our sins together and seek God's forgiveness:

**Holy God, we confess before you that we have not loved you with our whole being;  
we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.  
In your infinite mercy, forgive us when we turn from you,  
release us from the burdens of our past,  
and remake us in your image and likeness  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Jesus said, 'your sins are forgiven.' Thanks be to God.

**Gifts**

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,  
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

**Bible readings:      Mark 9:30-35  
                              James 3:13-4.3, & 7a, 8a**

Well, today's passage from James could have been written especially for a church meeting about a building project, couldn't it?! 'Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from?' The psychologists would tell us that change is a kind of bereavement, especially when it is change to something much loved. There are many memories and emotions tied up with a church, because it is not just a building. It is a family of sorts, and certainly a community that has its own traditions and ways of doing things. We like those ways of doing things, we think they have worked fine for years, we feel comfortable with them, and especially when we have had 18 months of decidedly not normal, of a life completely outside all our comfort zones, not being able to meet in our building, forced to do church online and by phone. But whether we like it or not, our building needs work. It needs a lot of work just to stay the way it is now without the paintwork fading, without mould developing from damp, without our precious heating and our Eco church aspirations leaking out of the cracks. So while we do that, should we not also see how our building and our church can be the very best it can be for the next generations? For the community around

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us who barely know we exist? For the people in need in our town, just waiting for the new project we start that might be the answer to their unspoken prayers?

James says to the recipients of his letter, 'Submit yourselves to God...Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.' Let us not get bogged down in the detail of items, that may be cherished and have memories, but are really no longer useful to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let us shake off that dust from our feet and take nothing with us for the journey, but our love of God and our commitment to do God's will.

Today, I am going to do the Communion a bit different to usual. More on that when we get to it. Some of you may not like it. I'm not sure I like it. But sometimes it is good to try new things, and see if we do like them, and sometimes we have change forced upon us – today, for example, by people at the last church meeting worrying about getting home for lunch, I said I would keep things short, and over the last 18 months by the pandemic, by government-imposed restrictions, some of which we are still living with. And we are having some change imposed on us by the need to carry out repair work on our building. We will be discussing that later – some things we have choices about, but most of the work we don't have any choice about.

I regularly read the daily devotions from the UCC and one in July struck me in relation to today's meeting, and to change in general. So, while it is not linked to either of today's readings, I'd like to briefly share some thoughts from that reflection. It starts with words from Acts chapter 21.

Some Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd. They seized Paul, shouting, "This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against our people and our law." (Acts 21:27-28)

Some of Paul's fellow Jews believed he was teaching a complete repudiation of everything that defined them as a people. So, they were angry - murderously angry.

Church leaders can identify with the Paul of this situation. You preach new angles on the tradition, suggest trying out other ways of doing church, ask people to re-think their assumptions, and you get angry pushback and criticism. But leaders can also identify with the angry folk, because let's be honest, who really likes change?

The church needs challenge, fresh imagination. Some traditions need rethinking or abandoning. But sometimes the drive to renew things can convey the message that everything old is bad, traditions are outmoded simply because they're traditions, and if you want to keep them, you're outmoded, too. And that can be upsetting.

Change can be unsettling, especially if you have no control over it. Fortunately, we do have some control in the form of the Church Meeting to discuss and decide things and discern

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what God wants us to do. Change routinely prompts resistance. But it also surfaces honest questions about the meaning of the past and the human need to feel honoured, and about our hopes for the future. Whenever change seems the faithful thing to do, for the sake of mutual love and empathy, let's attend to these things. Holy Spirit, change is hard, but we can do it well if you give us insight, empathy and respect. Amen

**Hymn** We all too easily assume (tune R&S 161, Good Christians all, rejoice)

We all too easily assume  
that worship needs a special room,  
solemn words with hang-dog face,  
all offered in a gloomy place.  
You cry out for love and care  
that's practised freely ev'rywhere:  
worship all can share, offered ev'rywhere!

And ministry, the whole world knows,  
is done by those in special clothes:  
those who preach and lead and pray,  
and help the faithful go God's way.  
You want ev'ryone you call  
to live your love for one and all:  
ministry is care, offered ev'rywhere!

We seem to think that holiness  
means separation from the rest,  
keeping safe and nice and good,  
not mixing in the neighbourhood.  
You, instead, would send us out,  
for that's what you are all about:  
holiness to share, offered ev'rywhere!

And when we'd build community  
we think we know how that should be;  
safe, secure, without a doubt,  
so 'we' are in, and 'they' are out.  
You persist in pulling down  
each bound'ry wall we build around.  
All are asked to share, here and ev'rywhere!

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### **Lord's Supper**

When I attended the HeartEdge workshop on faith and culture at the end of June, the speaker Maggi Dawn, spoke about a 5 minute mass she had developed for the university where she was Chaplain – distilling a Communion worship into the most essential elements – the whole service lasting only five minutes. Obviously we are not doing that today, but I have deliberately reduced the Lord's Supper down to what I feel is the minimum required, not only to save time, but so that we can reflect more deeply on what these very important words and actions mean.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

As we are not able to shake hands or hug, we will put a hand over our heart, or make the 'namste' sign to the people immediately around you.

This is God's table. There is enough for all, and all who love the Lord Jesus Christ are welcome.

Holy God, 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

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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 come now to pray for ourselves and for the world and its people:

We pray for all areas in the world where deep divisions run between ethnic groups because of race, religion or past history. Especially we continue to pray for Afghanistan. Lord, help your people to be your friends and to make friends – your family in Christ.

We pray for our communities where different traditions shape different outlooks on things. Lord, help your people to listen well to each other that we may learn to live together knowing that though different we are your family in Christ.

We pray for our own families and friendships, where harsh words spoken in anger are not easily taken back, and hurtful or thoughtless actions can endanger relationships. Holy One, empower us, your children to be patient, slow to anger and to be wise in our speaking and acting as your family in Christ.

In the silence we bring to mind all those known to us who are ill, those in hospital, those receiving treatment or waiting for test results, and those who mourn...  
Wrap them in your love and grace and grant them peace. And we bring all these prayers together in the prayer Jesus taught us: **Our Father.....**

**Amen**

**Hymn** Let us talents and tongues employ R&S 453 We will sing along with this video  
<https://youtu.be/7aGWmCan-40>

Let us talents and tongues employ,  
reaching out with a shout of joy:  
bread is broken, the wine is poured,  
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Christ is able to make us one,  
at the table he set the tone,  
teaching people to live to bless,  
love in word and in deed express.

Jesus calls us in, sends us out  
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,

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gives us love to tell, bread to share:  
God (Immanuel) everywhere!

Fred Kaan

**Blessing**

Go out into the world to make a difference. Go out to be the light of Christ in the darkness of poverty, oppression and injustice. Go out with a loving heart and an open mind. And may the grace of God the Creator, the love of Christ the Redeemer, and the peace of the Holy Spirit our Sustainer be with us now and remain with us always. Amen

Hymns used under the Christ Church CCLI licence 63352