

Music before worship – Hymn, *It is God who holds the nations* to learn it

Call to worship (based on Psalm 22: 25-28)

God, our only God, we will worship You among the people;
here with your congregation,
we will bring you honour and praise.
The poor will eat and be satisfied,
and all who look for God will praise God and rejoice.
The whole earth will know that You are God,
and will worship You.
For the whole world belongs to God,
the world and all that is in it.
Let the people say Amen, Alleluia!

Hymn *It is God who holds the nations* (omitting v 3 from the Church Hymnary version)

It is God who hold the nations in the hollow of his hand;
It is God whose light is shining in the darkness of the land;
It is God who builds the city on the rock and not on sand:
May the living God be praised!

It is God whose purpose summons us to use the present hour;
Who recalls us to our senses when a nation's life turns sour;
In the discipline of freedom we shall know his saving power:
May the living God be praised!

God reminds us every sunrise that the world is ours on lease -
For the sake of life tomorrow, may our love for it increase;
May all races live together, share its riches, be at peace:
May the living God be praised!

Frederick Pratt Green (1903-2000) © Stainer & Bell Ltd

Children's Time – looking at induction of elders

Offertory

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**

Hymn *Angels from the realms of glory* R&S 163, verses 1, 4 & 5 only (modern version, words on screen)

Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight through all the earth;
heralds of creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth!
Come and worship
Christ, the new-born king;
come and worship,
worship Christ the new-born king.

Though an infant now we view him,
he will share his Father's throne,
gather all the nations to him;
every knee shall then bow down:
Come and worship

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*Christ, the new-born king;
come and worship,
worship Christ the new-born king.*
All creation, join in praising
God the Father, Spirit, Son,
evermore your voices raising
to the eternal Three in One:
*Come and worship
Christ, the new-born king;
come and worship,
worship Christ the new-born king.*

Children leave for Sunday Club. Say the Grace

Opening Prayer and Confession

We come to you, Eternal One, our rock and our salvation, to worship,
to find, in the wilderness of our lives, water from the rock and bread from heaven.
We approach you, O Christ, divinity embodied, coming in awe and
wonder, finding in your Way, love and grace, the bread of your body and the wine of your blood.
We feel your presence, O Spirit, energy of all creation, knowing you form
us as a mason works stone into things of beauty to reflect the glory of God.
You are to us the living water that sustains and wisdom from heaven.

As we come to You in worship, Eternal One,
we gaze upon You and become aware of our lack of holiness.
We become conscious of the times when our lives
have reflected selfishness and anger instead of kindness and grace;
insincerity and envy, instead of honesty and sharing;
slander and fighting, instead of love and peace;
we demand more and more instead of feasting on Your Word and being satisfied.
Give us time to change O God,
time to see ourselves as we really are – beautiful yet in need of work;
living stones yet in need of polishing, glorious, yet fallen. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

As of old when the Eternal One forgave the disobedient people;
Jesus forgave those who had hardened their hearts;
And the Holy Spirit forgave those who didn't wish to be changed;
so God forgives you now, and gives you the grace to change your lives.
Have courage, forgive yourselves and change! Amen

Hymn Just as I am R&S 364 OMIT v1

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind!
Sight, riches, healing of the mind
all that I need, in you to find:
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am! You will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am! Your love unknown
has broken every barrier down:
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.

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Just as I am! Of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871)

Bible readings: **Isaiah 65:1-9**
 Luke 8:26-39

The book of Isaiah gives us a deep theological reflection on the Jewish people's experience of threat, exile and restoration and considers questions about God's involvement in human history. Not only questions specific to Israel and Jerusalem when they were destroyed by other empires and nations and taken into exile, but questions for us now about how God can seem hidden during times of suffering. And questions about how much we, as human beings, should respond to God's interventions in our world with faithfulness. Today we will ask for affirmations of faith from the people we have elected to serve us as elders. And all of us will renew our commitment to each other and the gospel – our commitment to grow together, to build up each other in love, to nurture each other in the faith, and to proclaim the gospel of Christ. So while today's passage from Isaiah may not be easy to understand, it is timely – we'll call that serendipity, the work of the Holy Spirit, or the skill of the preacher in finding a link to the induction of elders! Or because the gospel reading from Luke is even trickier to talk about in a sensitive way!

Chapter 64 of Isaiah, is a communal lament – a direct appeal to come and see what is going on with the people and deliver them from the terrible time they are having. The people say that it is because God hid himself that they transgressed, misbehaved and didn't do what God asked of them. Why do you keep silent and punish us so severely, they ask God. In chapter 65, we hear God's comeback. 'I was ready to be sought out, ready to be found,' says God, but you didn't look for me. God said, 'here I am,' but the people did not call on God's name. God held out God's hands all day long to the rebellious people, who continued to do wrong and do things that were offensive to God. Here Isaiah mentions some things very specific to the Jewish religion of the time – 'sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks', which we might think sounds quite nice – who doesn't like meditating in the garden or burning some incense or a scented candle now and then? – but this refers to pagan fertility rituals. And the other things mentioned like rituals in graveyards to worship or consult the dead, or eating pork, are of course unclean and totally prohibited in the Jewish faith. God is pretty fed up with the false worship of the people and the fact that they are blaming God for their behaviour. The people say God abandoned them and left them alone. God says, I didn't leave you, I was here all along, but you didn't look for me.

Last week was Trinity Fair. I have to confess, I'm not predisposed to like that sort of thing, because I don't really like crowds, but while I was at the Fair, I have to say I wondered where is God in this? We had volunteers so our church could be open, and while quite a lot of people walked past, only three women went inside, and that was because one of them had been married at Christ Church. Not even free refreshments could entice people to stop and have a look. Churches for Rayleigh had

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a presence there and some people had posted ideas on their board asking 'what did they want to see the churches in Raleigh doing' – none of the answers related to proclaiming the Gospel or holding worship services, or even any other activities in church buildings, but asked for things like the Fun Day to be brought back, to re-open Mill Hall, which isn't up to the churches, and have a foodbank, which there already is. Most people mainly seemed interested in the free sweets. But apart from that stall, I saw a town and a people only interested in themselves, in eating, drinking, buying rubbish and listening to not terribly good music. Now don't get me wrong, I've nothing against people having a good time, if eating a hot dog and dancing to music in the street is your idea of fun, I'm happy for you. And of course we've had an awful two years with the pandemic when things like Trinity Fair and a great many other things couldn't happen. But it made me rather disillusioned, when combined with the JPIT conference on justice which I attended on Saturday. Considering JPIT is the URC, Methodist and Baptist churches combined team for social justice, and that it was a national conference open to anyone, not only church leaders, there were not many people there. Where are the people who care about climate change? Where are the people who care that refugees are being sent to Rwanda despite that policy being heavily criticised by church leaders, the UN High Commission on Refugees and many organisations who work with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

I see a town and a nation beset by selfishness and apathy. I see a town that is not interested in church, or God, or anything that we Christians do. A council that has no plan to combat climate change. An area with no provision for people living with dementia and their carers, an area with no provision for people living with mental illness. A council, with apparently no plan to provide amenities to all the new housing going up around us. I feel God's pain, when God says 'Here I am, to a nation that did not call on my name.'

One thing I did learn at the JPIT conference was that to get anything done, we need to focus on the world as it is, not the world as we think it should be. We are blessed in this church with a good number of worship leaders and a good number of elders, and we give thanks today for the willingness of Sue, Robert and Joyce to become serving elders again with all that that entails. We have an overflowing toddler group and a very active Messy Church thanks to Sandy, and we are fortunate to be able to afford a dedicated Children's Worker. We have a plan to start Memory Worship in September, together with the Methodists, to fill that gap in provision for people living with dementia, and as an Eco church we are playing our part in the battle against climate change and with the building work we will undertake we will become even more sustainable and eco-friendly for the future.

In our gospel reading, we hear how Jesus crosses the sea to the other side of the lake to reach out to the man possessed by demons. Jesus goes to him, he doesn't wait for the man to find Jesus. Jesus shows compassion and brings hope to those like the man possessed by demons who had become hopeless and lived not in a house but among the tombs. Today that man would be someone with a mental illness, abandoned by overwhelmed health services, ending up living on the

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street. Jesus brings hope and healing, but he asks something in return. The healed man wanted to go with Jesus, to stay in the comfort zone of his newfound faith, or community or church, you might say, but Jesus told him to go home and declare how much God had done for him. To go and profess his faith. We too must declare how much God has done for us, but not only in words, but actions too - the faith we profess needs to make a difference in the world, otherwise we are like the Israelites who blamed God for abandoning them. God says, 'here I am, I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people.' Who will reply to God saying, 'here I am Lord.'

Hymn I the Lord of sea and sky Red folder 41

I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky,
I Have Heard My People Cry.
All Who Dwell In Dark And Sin,
My Hand Will Save.
I Who Made The Stars Of Night,
I Will Make Their Darkness Bright.
Who Will Bear My Light To Them?
Whom Shall I Send?

*Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?
I Have Heard You Calling In The Night.
I Will Go Lord, If You Lead Me.
I Will Hold Your People In My Heart.*

I, The Lord Of Snow And Rain,
I Have Borne My People's Pain.
I Have Wept For Love Of Them, They Turn Away.
I Will Break Their Hearts Of Stone,
Give Them Hearts For Love Alone.
I Will Speak My Word To Them
Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord...

I, The Lord Of Wind And Flame
I Will Tend The Poor And Lame.
I Will Set A Feast For Them,
My Hand Will Save
Finest Bread I Will Provide,
Till Their Hearts Be Satisfied.
I Will Give My Life To Them,
Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord...

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Induction of Elders:

Introduction and Statement of Purpose

All read the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC – R&S 761

Affirmations and Induction

Renewal of Commitment - all

Lord's Supper

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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 peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

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.**

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 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

Most gracious God, three in one, 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

Loving, listening God, ever-attentive to the voices of those in need,
we call on your name so that we might live. Hear our prayers:
For the church that bears Christ's name,
that the world may know we are his disciples
by the love that we have for one another. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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For leaders of nations and all persons in positions of authority,
that their lives may be marked by Christ-like service and love.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For all who are oppressed and living in captivity,
that they may escape from evil and death
to find the land of freedom you have promised.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are hungry and thirsty this day
and for those who have too much,
that we may learn to share your generous gifts, O God.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are dealing with loss or facing death,
that the presence of Christ may bless and keep them.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

...prayers from this week.... *Silence...* in Jesus' name we pray.
Father's Day, refugee week, Rwanda policy...

Lord's Prayer

Hymn We come to you who called *Tune at R&S 72 Nun danket*

We come to you who called
both Abraham and Sarah,
that we may journey, too,
with you as guide and carer;
old comforts leave behind,
risk all to follow you,
exploring by your side,
each day our whole lives through

We come to you who came
to live and die among us,
that we, by grace, might live
the life your death has won us;
that, leaving self behind,
for others now we'll care;
with you we'll walk each day,
each pain and pleasure share.

We come to you who saved
slave peoples from oppression,
that justice here and now
might be our bold obsession;
the manna of your love
must feed us, keep us strong,
through wastelands yet unknown,
'til right has conquered wrong

We come to you who sent
disciples to each nation,
that we, in turn, might go
to live out your salvation;
'til here, on city streets,
and all across this land
our liveliness declares
your kingdom is at hand

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Blessing

In the name of God who plants the seed of justice: Be hungry.

In the name of Christ who hangs on the tree of love: Be fruitful.

And in the name of the Spirit who inspires God's will in our hearts and our lives: Be celebrated.

You are Christ's people, here and throughout the world now and forever. Amen.

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