

Call to worship

Sing praises to God, and to God's Holy name!
Shout joyfully to the One who rides the clouds.
Father to the fatherless, defender of widows
God gives shelter to the desolate and freedom to prisoners.
This is our God, whose dwelling is holy.
Bless the Lord, the God of our salvation,
who sustains and strengthens us, day after day!
Let's worship God together!

Hymn Dear Lord and Father of mankind R&S 492 omit v6

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise, in deeper
reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee, rise up and follow
thee.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,

where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love, interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace, the beauty of thy
peace.

J.G. Whittier

Children's Time

Gifts

God, receive these 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.**

Hymn Be still for the presence of the Lord Red folder 9

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here ;
come bow before him now with reverence and fear :
in him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around ;
he burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned :
how awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light !
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place ;
he comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace :
no work too hard for him, in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

David J. Evans

Let's talk to God now before our Sunday Club goes out:
Generous God, Help us to be more like you, To see people as you do,
To care for them as you do and to share what we can with others.
Be with our young people as they go into Sunday Club to learn more about you. Amen.

Opening Prayer (Christian Aid)

Creator God, you have planted the seed of love in our hearts, in our souls, in our lives.
We long for the brightness of your presence drawing ever closer to you and to one another,
as we join with your people at all times in all places to worship and to serve.
We confess those frequent times when we have been stony ground,
too hard to value the tiny seed, the generous smile, the heartfelt word.
We confess those frequent times when we have been stony ground,
too hard to see beyond our selfish desires
and for tacitly accepting a world that smothers the dreams of those with less power and wealth.
Creator God, once again, you have planted the seed of love in our hearts, in our souls, in our lives.
We draw near today in the knowledge that your forgiveness waters the seed and nurtures us with
the power of your Spirit to grow, to flourish and to bear the fruit of your justice now and forevermore.

Hymn Christ be our light Red folder 65

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people
Light for the world to see.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Christ, be our light!

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

Bible readings: **Psalm 68:4-10, 32-35**
 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

The phrase that most stands out for me from today's reading from Peter to the Christian exiles in the diaspora is, 'Cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares for you.' Anxiety is the particular theme of this year's Mental Health Awareness Week. We all experience anxiety – from a bus being late and worrying about missing an appointment, to money or health worries, whether our child or grandchild will get into a good school, interview or exam nerves and so on but sometimes it can get out of control and become a mental health problem, often leading to other conditions if not treated. I hope we all know that we can take our cares and worries to God. If we were really doing a Memory Worship or a whole dementia-friendly service, we would no doubt have sung 'What a friend we have in Jesus' – 'what a peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.'

I'm intrigued by Peter's use of the word anxiety, rather than worries, concerns or something similar, although he is writing to people living in very difficult times. These are people who once participated in the social and cultural life of their communities, but who since their

conversion to Christianity have been marginalised and abused. Is that not a similar situation to many people who experience a mental breakdown or mental illness – they are often then shunned by their former friends and colleagues, discriminated against, even reviled and abused. It is no coincidence that many people with mental illnesses end up in prison or homeless. These new Christians Peter is writing to were often unwelcome or considered dangerous, and suffered because of being Christians, but Peter tells them not to consider it a disgrace – ‘if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of God rests upon you.’

These members of the early church were living in the midst of fiery trials of faithfulness in a faithless world. When we, like the early Christians, come face to face with suffering, it can cause us to weaken in our trust of God, to feel abandoned by God, or at the very least, to reckon that we are the victims of God’s arbitrary allowance of suffering. Peter’s pastoral encouragement reminds us: the afflicted church is not the abandoned church; the afflicted church is the authentic church. It is the afflicted church that is formed in the way of Christ’s sufferings so that we might be transformed by Christ’s subsequent glories.

Earlier in the letter, in chapter 1, Peter reveals that the “various trials” that we undergo as Christians are not futile; they are formative. Through resilience in the midst of our many struggles, our faith is tested precisely so that it might persevere and reach its intended goal, namely, “praise and glory and honour”. The formative power of resilient virtue during seasons of suffering was not an idea that originated with Christians like Peter and Paul. Virtue ethics, the idea that acting in righteous ways builds habits and dispositions that result in the formation of a virtuous character and so happiness or contentment was an ethical principle that was ubiquitous amongst the ancient Greco-Roman moral philosophers.

Yet, Peter offers something more here than simply a Christianized version of that philosophy. The uniqueness of Peter’s claim can be observed in 1 Peter 5:10-11 – after suffering, God will restore, support and strengthen you. The result of enduring hard times is not a superior ethical character, or happiness as the Greeks suggested. No, for Peter, the end result of Christian resilience is glory. Glory! It is such a glorious word, isn’t it? But are we so familiar with the term that we don’t stop to ask if we can define it? What is glory, and what is its larger significance in 1 Peter?

In the Old Testament God’s glory is often associated with the splendour and majesty of God’s visible presence manifested to his people. In Exodus 16:10 “the glory of the LORD” appeared to the people of Israel in a cloud. In the New Testament, when the Son of Man returns, he will come “in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26). And, similar to 1 Peter, the apostle Paul teaches that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth

comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). As we behold "the glory of the Lord" we are "transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). This glory is none other than "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

Other times, however, when the New Testament talks about "glory" it is referring to "honour," "respect," or "reputation." The Greek word *doxa*, for example, can refer to the head-coverings of a woman as "her glory". In Philippians, our righteous acts are said to bring "glory and praise" to God. Here "glory," refers to "reverence" and "honour" that is directed toward God as a result of the righteous behaviour of human beings.

In 1 Peter glory means both the visible manifestation of God's majestic nature and honour or respect. We need to recognize the function of "glory" as "honour" in the midst of Christian suffering and persecution. In the ancient world, the concept of shame was a significant ethical motivator. The opportunities and experiences afforded to an individual, and by extension to their entire family, were directly related to the reputation of the family name. Bringing shame on a family was not just a matter of causing damage to an individual's personal feelings, but of disrupting their very livelihood. There was a direct link between shame and social ostracization. There was also a direct link between disability and shame and ostracization. We see that some of the people Jesus healed, like the blind beggar, needed to be healed less of their physical affliction and more of the discrimination it brought which left them homeless and unable to work.

When we think of glory only as our spiritual state in the presence of God, we miss the paradox presented by Peter: suffering is supposed to lead to shame, but in Christ Jesus suffering will result in everlasting glory, honour, and respect. The abiding antidote to suffering in the present is the defeat of suffering's shame in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Far from being cast off due to a shameful reputation, God will himself "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us by nothing less than God's grace.

Another phrase that struck me was, 'Discipline yourselves, keep alert.' This refers to those early Christians keeping alert to danger and temptations, but it struck me that discipline and keeping alert can help our mental health. I am not at all suggesting that anyone with a serious mental illness can rid themselves of it simply by being disciplined, but there are many things we can all do to help and maintain good mental health.

Meditation – this can take the form of prayer

Exercise, particularly out in nature – giving thanks to God for God's creation

Getting enough sleep and eating healthily

Connecting with people and talking about how you feel.

In our opening hymn we sang the line: reclothe us in our rightful mind. What does that mean? In some places this hymn has fallen out of favour because of the misconception that being in our right mind is saying something against people with a mental illness, who are often described as not being in their right mind. But I'm not convinced that being reclothed in our rightful mind is a bad thing. Being in our rightful mind, means being right with God, and we can be right with God whether we have a mental illness or not; whether we have dementia or not, whether we have a learning disability or not, or whether we have a physical illness or disability or not. In the well-known verse from John chapter 10, Jesus says 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' There are many stories of Jesus healing people in the Bible, often of conditions which we would nowadays think of as a mental illness. But healing does not mean curing. Curing means eradicating an illness or disease. Healing is something different, something deeper and more soulful. To be healed one learns how to live well with one's illness. Healing has to do with how we find health and life in the midst of our illness. Healing has to do with finding wholeness, inner beauty and peace – life in its fullness. In the Bible such wholeness is described as *shalom*. The Bible has no word for health in the way we use the term today. Shalom is not the absence of illness; rather it is the presence of God. To experience shalom is to be in a right relationship with God; to be reclothed in our rightful minds with God, irrespective of the state of our bodies and brains. To be healthy is to love God in all things and at all times. As Christians we are called to heal as Jesus healed. We are called to walk alongside those with mental illness, those with dementia, those with disabilities, to help them experience God's love and shalom. We are called, particularly as an Inclusive Church to work towards eliminating all forms of prejudice and discrimination. We are called to raise awareness that in Christ we are all one. We are not the same, each one of us is unique, but we are all created in the image of God, equal in the sight of God. So now, as we prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper we place into the hands of God all the things we cannot do. We place into God's hands all the things that trouble us; all the things we cannot change, and all the friends and family we love who may be living with mental illness or dementia and those who care for them.

Hymn Father, I place into your hands R&S 518

Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do,
Father, I place into your hands the things that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands the way that I should go,
For I know I always can trust you.

Christ Church, 21 May. 2023

Father, I place into your hands my friends and family.
Father, I place into your hands the things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands the person I would be,
For I know I always can trust you.

Father, we love to see your face, we love to hear your voice.
Father, we love to sing your praise and in your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with you and in your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust you.

Jenny Hewer

Lord's Supper (Inclusive Church)

The peace of Christ be always with you
And also with you
Let us celebrate this joyful feast.
People will come from east and west and north and south,
and sit at table in the kingdom of God.

God is here.
Her Spirit is with us.
Blessed be the names of Love.
They touch our hearts with grace.
We open our hands in thanks.
Our song is one of welcome.
We thank you, Holy God,
For being a fool in the eyes of the world.
We thank you for abandoning control,
for creating a universe, new and strange.
We thank you for nurturing life, diverse, evolving, surprising and strange.
We thank you for calling a people who did not walk straight or know their limits.
We thank you for different bodies and desires
for different ways of thinking and speaking
for different ways of belonging and believing.
May our thanks cut a path through dividing walls to free the Spirit's song:
Holy, holy, holy One
God of life and love.
The world overflows with your glory.
One came who upset the rules:
who accepted the grace of the outsider,
who looked for wisdom in those who did not count,
who took his food in the company of the rejected.
One came who walked a strange path:
who did not think anyone was unclean,
who did not look for scapegoats
who refused to put a price on anyone's head.
The tables of the moneychangers he threw over.
The tables of liberation he threw open.
On the night before he gave himself up,
He ate and drank to the end of slavery.
He took the bread and broke it, and said:
'This is my body. Do this to remember me'.
He took the wine and poured it, and said:
'This is my blood. Do this to remember me.'
May the Spirit of creation take these earthly things and show us in their brokenness,
the life-giving plenty, the end of all poverty, the body and blood of Christ.

This is the mystery of faith:

Christ took the form of a slave

Christ took the cross of shame

Christ gives the free gift of life.

Into our hands he delivers himself, Jesus, the Victim, the Excluded One, who is now a sign of hope for all.

So we celebrate this event of love; this rising from death, unpredictable and full of wonder.

We pray that we will be a community defined by what it is open to not by what it fears; by the excess of its love not the walls along its borders.

May our prayer be welcome to you, the God who is in all, and with all and for all. **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

Gracious God, we pray today with all those living in poverty. We pray especially for those in our own country who are suffering greatly due to the cost-of-living crisis, and in this Mental Health Awareness week we think of all those with mental health issues and those who care for them, and for all those who have become mentally unwell due to worry and stress about paying bills and having enough to eat.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for unity and equality and an end to discrimination and prejudice of all kind. We pray for those who have experienced discrimination because of their mental health, or abuse and stigma because they live with dementia. Help us to truly remember that in Christ we are all one, created in God's image.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray 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.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for scientists, for doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners, carers and their families, as they continue to care for our health and wellbeing and we pray for the NHS.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

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. We pray for journalists who risk their lives to bring us the truth and for aid workers in challenging conditions.

We pray for peace in all places, especially in Ukraine, Sudan and the Middle East.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Christ Church, 21 May. 2023

We pray for and with all who feel lonely and sad. For the homeless, those with addictions and those who are neurodivergent.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those awaiting test results or treatment, for the dying and those who mourn.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Now let us from this table rise - R&S 463

Now let us from this table rise
renewed in body, mind, and soul;
with Christ we die and rise again,
his selfless love has made us whole.

To fill each human house with love,
it is sacrament of care;
the work that Christ began to do
we humbly pledge ourselves to share.

With minds alert, upheld by grace,
to spread the Word in speech and deed
we follow in the steps of Christ,
at one with all in hope and need.

Then grant us grace, Companion-God,
to choose again the pilgrim way,
and help us to accept with joy
the challenge of tomorrow's day.

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Blessing (Christian Aid)

Go into the world working together for change

so that everyone can thrive and share life in its fullness.

And in all we do let us show the love of Jesus. Let us treat everyone with dignity.

We will show the love of Jesus. Let us stand up for equality.

We will show the love of Jesus. Let us fight for justice.

We will show the love of Jesus.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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

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