

WELCOME

God welcomes us to worship this morning in person and online. Together we are reminded of Jesus' words in John 10:10 *I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness*. The Christian story is of the God who is Almighty, Immortal invisible and wise, yet who comes down to live among His people as the perfect human being in order that we might have a new fulfilling life which reaches beyond the confines of time, reaching into eternity. What a wonderful God we have.

HYMN 132 Immortal invisible God only wise

1. Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2. Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains, high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

3. To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

4. Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 - 1908)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Merciful Lord You created the universe out of love. We live only by Your grace and love. In Your image and likeness, You created us to form relationships with others. With thankful hearts, we worship You Loving and gracious God, we come before You to give thanks for what You have done for us celebrating Your Name and offering You praise because of Your Holiness, yet You are a living God in whom we

trust and believe.

God, thank You for the life we have, for the air we breathe and for our relationships with those who are both close and far away.

We thank You for Your infinite goodness, which deepens our trust in You. God of mercy, increase our faith so that we may develop a deeper understanding of You and a deeper relationship with You.

Gracious God, You who know us better than we know ourselves, there are countless times that we have sinned against You and our neighbour. **Have mercy on us and forgive us.**

Consciously or unconsciously, through our words, attitudes and actions, we have broken our relationship with You, with our neighbours and even with the environment. **Have mercy on us and forgive us.**

Restore, O gracious God, our broken relationships and guide us in Your paths. For Your glory and the building of Your Kingdom **Have mercy on us and forgive us**

In Jesus name we pray saying together the words He taught Our Father who art in Heaven Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done On earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever. Amen

READING

Matthew 6:5- 15

Read by Elissa Jones

Matthew 6:5-15

5 “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. 6 But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

7 “When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that their gods will hear them because their prayers are long. 8 Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him. 9 This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven:

May your holy name be honored;

10 may your Kingdom come;

may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today the food we need.[a]

12 Forgive us the wrongs we have done,

as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.

13 Do not bring us to hard testing,

but keep us safe from the Evil One.’[b]

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14 “If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you.
15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.

REFLECTION Kingdom People: Jesus Teaching

If I said the words PR I wonder what would spring into your mind? Big glossy adverts, well dressed business tycoons, media moguls, Personal Assistants rushing their charges round from one meeting to another, smoothing over potential problems. Public relations is indeed a multi million pound business because it is so important for businesses and important people to get their message across to the public. Those in power need to have folk willing to keep tabs on all that is going on and keep them on the straight and narrow. Sound bites need to be vetted, scripts changed to keep in tune with what is going on. PR work is hard graft, but essential for any business or any business person.

Christianity has the greatest PR person of all time. Last week we thought about Jesus being the Living Word – the one who tells it like it is, the one who is willing to bring power to the lives of those who follow him so that they in turn might become ambassadors for the kingdom (PR people for the kingdom). This week’s readings for the E 100 Bible Challenge will focus on the teachings of Jesus, starting with the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon which was for his disciples, his friends, his followers in other words for us.

The strap line for his teaching might be found in Matthew 7:12 do for others what you want them to do for you. This is the meaning of the Law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets. Put in another way, “Love one another as I have loved you,” says Jesus. The first part of the Sermon on the Mount is all about behaviour, behaviour in relating to others and the need to change it. Right in the centre comes Jesus’ teaching on **prayer** and the last part of the Sermon on the Mount is again about relating to others and relating to God.

I think that it is no mistake that Jesus’ teaching on prayer comes in the middle of his teaching about relationships because for me prayer is fundamental for every Christian, fundamental in helping our relationship with God to grow and as that happens it is fundamental in changing our relationships with others. It is indeed PR at its best.

Jesus tells us that there are two different types of right praying – he also tells us about a wrong type of prayer. His teaching is through story and through example.

He encourages private prayer, prayer alone where there is only the audience of 1 – God himself. He suggests we take time out from our busy lives to sit with Him awhile. When you love someone you don’t have to be speaking all the time. Sometimes it is enough to be in the person’s company, alone without

interruption – allowing the love to flow between each other. There's the story told of the man who went into the wee chapel every day at lunchtime and sat for about an hour. When asked what he did and what he said he simply said I look at God and he looks at me – love flowing from one to another. And sometimes that is all we can do for words fail us. But there is also time for speaking our prayers out loud. I love verse 7 – do not use a lot of meaningless words. Short pithy prayers are the order of the day for God. No special words, just telling it like it is.

Jesus spent a lot of time in private prayer, allowing his relationship with God to deepen, to remain strong despite all the temptations that this world flung at him from the beginning of His teaching life to the very end of it.

The disciples saw that, realising that this type of praying was totally different from any other that they knew; certainly different from the Pharisees. They were intrigued and intrigued people want to know more so they asked – teach us to pray which is why we have the Lord's prayer, the one that we say every week but I wonder how often we think through its structure and meaning. It's a prayer that can be used when we are on our own, but it is also one that can be used when folk meet together because Jesus also modelled group prayer.

In one way it models the 10 commandments – for the first part is all about God before moving on to our needs. And surely before we can begin to know what our needs are we need to centre ourselves on the author of our very being, the creator God, the author of our faith. For if we fail to do that then our prayers will be irrelevant.

It's a prayer that brings the whole of God before our lives and the whole of our lives before God. Let me show you what I mean. We're reminded that God is our Father – our creator God, the one who gives us all we need, we're reminded too that God the Son is the one who can forgive us and has died to save us – He is our redeemer God. And the prayer asking for help to avoid temptation is answered by God the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. He is the challenger, the guide, the comforter of our lives day by day.

Praying the Lord's Prayer is a radical prayer for once we have acknowledged God as Lord of all, the first request is that HIS kingdom will come and HIS will; will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I wonder how often we really mean that when we say it. As one person has said prayer should never be an attempt to bend God's will to ours rather that our wills would be submitted to His. That is radical, that is hugely difficult, that cannot be done on our own. We need God's help to do it and we need the help of one another and this side of heaven we will never get it always right. The challenge for us today is what are we praying for right now? Is it something that we want and are asking God to do for us or is it that we are asking Him to tell us what He wants us to do?

Praying the Lord's Prayer not only brings the whole of God into our lives but brings the whole of our lives to God. Have you noticed that the requests that we make are **material** – bread – the basic necessities of life or even maybe the bare necessities of life! Sufficient for one day. They then go on to our **spiritual** needs – forgiveness and finally to our **moral** needs – keeping us safe from the temptation of the evil one. So modelled on Jesus' prayer it is perfectly correct to ask Him for material things, spiritual things and moral things too.

The prayer starts with worship, seeks forgiveness before finally putting our requests to God. Our relationship with God is strengthened both by our worship of Him and allowing Him the opportunity to show us His love, our relationship with Him is strengthened by our willingness to confess our sins and then seek His forgiveness and as that happens our needs will become more apparent and in tune with His. Prayer is not easy – Jesus never said it would be – He never modelled it as easy – just think of the blood sweat and tears of the Garden of Gethsemane. He invites us though to persevere. As we do God assures us that we will meet with Him, the One who is love, the One who is able to overwhelm us with His love a love that will change and transform us.

In Luke's gospel you'll be reading stories that many of you will know very well – the Good Samaritan and the stories of the "lost" sheep, coin, son. Can I suggest that when you are reading them you keep some questions at the forefront of your mind.

- a) Which person would you most identify with in the parable of the Good Samaritan and why? Ask God to show you His response to your answer.
- b) As you read through the stories of the "lost" invite God to show you how much He loves and cares for you.
- c) What would your reaction be to the son's request and his return and indeed the request of the older son? Again invite God to speak through your thoughts and feelings in order you might know His love and His challenge to follow in a deeper way.

These stories bring us to the R of the PR of faith of Christianity. Restored relationships. The wayward sheep gathered back into the fold by the searching love of the shepherd. I suppose the sheep could have wriggled away out of reach if he'd wanted to, but instead was content to remain in the shepherd's safe arms of love. The Father/son relationship restored by the willingness of the son to acknowledge the wrong he has done and come back into the family himself. Forgiveness matters. It is the one part of the Lord's prayer on which Jesus elaborates.

The PR exercise of faith, of Christianity, prayer, relationship building through our acknowledgement of the wrong we do, the acceptance of the forgiveness offered to us is essential for the life of faith, living distinctive lives, counter cultural lives, lives that have an impact on society, lives which bring a

knowledge of God's beauty out of brokenness; the brokenness of our lives as we present them to God for transformation and renewal. Lives which then bring hope from despair – our fragile lives strengthened by the power of His love bringing hope to the hopeless, healing to the broken.

HYMN 259 **Beauty for brokenness**

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair
Lord in the suffering, this is our prayer
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.
God of the poor, friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain
Come change our love from a spark to a flame

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctu'ry, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need. *God of the poor . . .*

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame,
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *God of the poor . . .*

Graham Kendrick Make Way Music 1993

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Alison Blackadder

Heavenly Father, In the Gospel According to Matthew we learn about the teachings of Jesus. He taught his Disciples, and he taught his followers, and throughout history his stories have been told.

We thank you that You gave us Your Son so that we can continue to practise in His ways. He taught us how to pray, and to pray wisely and thoughtfully; not to be hypocritical or dishonourable.

Loving God, be with us in our prayers today as we think of the World we live in; a World which is in turmoil. Help us to deal with the failings and injustices in our society.

We cannot ignore the troubles we see around us. Our hearts pour out to those who have lost all hope, and who can see no future. As we search for ways in which we can offer our help, we look to You, Dear Lord, to guide us in our thinking.

God of Compassion, give comfort to those who find themselves in circumstances that, through no fault of their own, have led them down a path that knows no end. Give strength to the weak, those in ill health, and those suffering loss or bereavement. In these strange and difficult times help us to alleviate their pain and suffering.

In our Prayers, we bring to you our own Teachers, who still have a mountain to climb in the education of our children. Encourage them to do their best.

Give hope to our carers, hospital workers, and others in the medical profession. Let them know how much You care.

Your Love is all encompassing. It has no barriers. Teach us to lead by Your example.

And as we pray, allow us to consider our own lives; how we can follow a path that encompasses all that is good and wise.

Now, in a moment of silence, we think of our own families, neighbours and friends.....

May each one of them know Your Love. Amen.

HYMN 519 Love divine all loves excelling

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver;

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let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation:
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee,
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707 - 1788)

BENEDICTION

The good and gracious God grant you refreshment, renewal, restoration that in His power you may live and work to His glory. Go, knowing the powerful, tender, holy, yet intimate love of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit blessing you today and everyday. Amen