

Worship at Home for Sunday 19 Sept. 21 **prepared by the Revd John Archer**

Welcome

As we continue to worship in different places, at the start of our service let us remember those with whom we have shared worship in the past and look to share with them in the future.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God we thank you that we can come to you in prayer, that for all your greatness and holiness we can speak with you as a friend.

We thank you that we can open our hearts to you and share our deepest thoughts knowing that you are there always ready to listen and understand.

So once more we lay our lives before you, the bad as well as the good, the doubt as well as the faith, the sorrow as well as the joy, the despair as well as the hope.

Gracious God help us to be truthful to ourselves and truthful to you, so that we can discover the renewing love which only you can offer. Hear our prayer in the name of Christ.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Read, pray or sing StF 263

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG5y_Gd3oZc

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!

Glory, glory, glory to the King of Kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of Kings!
Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!

Carl Tuttle (b 1953)

Readings:

Jeremiah 11: 18 – 20 Mark 9: 30 – 37

Prayers of Confession

Gracious God you have called on us to deny ourselves, putting ourselves last rather than first. Forgive us that we find that so hard and we fail so often.

Forgive us for the things we should have done but left undone, the acts of kindness we never found time for, the thoughtful word never spoken, the message of encouragement never sent.

Forgive us for all the opportunities we have missed, the plans we never made, the dreams we never brought to reality, the gifts we rarely used.

Gracious God save us from being a people of unfulfilled intentions. Help us to translate our thoughts into actions, to put our preaching into practice, to turn our good intentions into good deeds.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. **Amen**

Read pray or sing StF 700

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQLrFlgorFI>

God weeps at love withheld,
at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

God bleeds at anger's fist,
at trust betrayed,
at women battered and afraid,
and till we change the way we win,
God bleeds.

God cries at hungry mouths,
at running sores,
at creatures dying without cause,
and till we change the way we care,
God cries.

God waits for stones to melt,
for peace to seed,
for hearts to hold each other's need,
and till we understand the Christ,
God waits.

Shirley Erena Murray (b 1931)

Sermon: Ambition and Self Importance

I heard a story told about three past US Presidents who had died and were standing before God seated on his throne. They were Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

God asked Clinton what he had done to deserve a place in heaven. He listed the big support he had and the various good laws he had passed. 'Fine', said God, 'come in and take the seat on my left side.' Then God asked Obama to say what he had done. He spoke of being the first black president and passing the first Medicare bill. 'Fine', said God, 'even better. Take the seat on my right side.' Finally God asked Trump to speak. There was a pause. Donald Trump said, 'You are sitting in my seat!'

The disciples caught out

Picture the scene. Jesus was moving steadfastly towards the cross – his face set to Jerusalem, thinking about the trouble ahead, determined to stand tall, to do God's will, to face the trouble head on. The disciples were walking behind, misunderstanding the Kingdom - thinking of it in material terms and of themselves as 'heads of ministries'. They had been following this Rabbi for some time. They had travelled around Galilee with him, crossed the lake to the Gerasenes and back, witnessed the less than warm welcome Jesus' hometown offered them and ventured into Tyre and Sidon. Along the way they had listened to many sermons, watched miraculous healings, gathered baskets of fragments from satisfied supplicants and monitored the growing crowds insisting on a touch, a word, a hope. The light had dawned: here was the Messiah, saviour of their world. He would usher in the reign of God and the Kingdom of David would be restored. Visions of victory danced in their heads – visions incompatible with the ignominy of death.

They planned their own ascendancy as they caught the coat-tails of his rising star. On the way to Capernaum, flushed with success they argued about who would sit on his right and who sit on his left. They sparred over who was the best, the strongest, the wisest. So speaks the lie of power. They were bickering over who

should have the most important position - unaware that Jesus was behind them listening. He stops them and asks, 'What were you discussing?' They know that he knows! The Bible says '*but they were silent*' – reduced to an embarrassed silence. He had caught them out. They looked shamefaced and silently at their sandals. He wondered - had they not heard a word that he had been saying? What would it take for them to understand? Would they ever be ready to make the choices their initial 'yes' would lead them to?

Has not that happened to you? You have said something critical about someone and then realised they were just behind you or outside the door. Have you not done something not quite right and then got very embarrassed when you were caught out? I have!

It is very easy for us to look at a situation in terms of what it will do for us, rather than what we can do in it for others.

I came across an old poem written years ago, during the days when such places as Downton Abbey were more common:

Humility

You have a famous cook, 'tis true:
Your menage is the best.
You are a splendid hostess too,
And such an ideal guest.
But can you eat of humble pie
A truly generous slice,
Without one soft, regretful sigh
As if it tasted nice!

You're lithe and young as anything:
You're quite a sport at hockey
And you alone on deck can sing
When wind and waves are rocky.
You mount the highest horse in town
With ease that's good to see;
But say, can you do climbing down
With real agility?

You can from any instrument
Draw music sweet and clear:
Like Orpheus 'tis your gay intent
To soothe and charm the ear,
Harp, viol, 'cello – all of these
Your servants. Let me see!
Can you play second fiddle well
And make a melody?!

The example of a child

To try to jolt them out of their upside down thinking, Jesus uses a child as a teaching aid. Aside from normal family affection, children were not rated highly in the ancient world. They had no status or privilege, they had no influence. A child cannot give us things. It is the other way round. A child needs things, he must have things done for him. So Jesus took a child and set him amongst them, a 'nonentity' in those times. 'You want to be first,' he said. 'This is the way. Become least and last. Serve all not self . . . welcome those that the whole of society ignores. Kneel at the feet of the little ones, then you will kneel at the feet of God.' It is a hard teaching.

And finally

God has the last word in the debate. You can kill the messenger but you can't kill the message. So long as the stars shine above and the earth spins on its axis, so long as mountains reach for the sky and rivers flow to the sea, God will love this world he has created. It is the story of Easter and the sacrifice of God on the cross that makes real Christianity quite distinctive in its approach to violence and evil in this world.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only son that we might gain eternal life."

Amen

Read pray or sing StF 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKJgcv8SdnQ>

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat;
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Marty Haugen (b1950)

Offering Prayer

Gracious God, for all you have given us, and all you give us now and in the future, we offer you our thanks and ask your blessing on all our gifts. **Amen**

Prayers for our World

Firstly we spend some moments quietly remembering those we know who are ill or facing difficulties or carrying burdens.

Our heavenly father, we pray once more for our troubled and divided world, recognising that it is your world also.

We pray for those who strive, at risk to themselves, to bring freedom and liberty to people and to free them from religious and political persecution, racial bigotry and ethnic cleansing. We remember especially at this time the people of Afghanistan and in particular women. Strengthen their resolve and may the evil that holds people captive be overcome.

We pray for those who strive to bring peace and reconciliation in our world both at home and abroad.

We remember at this time the people of Haiti, desperate after the earthquake. We pray for the Christians there and particularly for the Methodist Church.

May your world become the one world that you long it to be.

Hear our prayers in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Read pray or sing StF 398

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8r-AkLkxtU>

There's a spirit in the air,
Telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working in our world!

Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
Tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

When believers break the bread,
When a hungry child is fed,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.

Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right;
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world.

May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways.
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

There's a spirit in the air,
Telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working in our world!

Brian Wren (b 1936)

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us, and those we represent, now and always.

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Acknowledgements

Some prayers based on Nick Fawcett
'Prayers for all Seasons'

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