

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME: 9th January 2022

Preparation

Take a moment to be silent, and to be present with God in your own way.

Call to Worship

North, south, east, west,
wherever we go, wherever we are,
the Lord is near.

Night, day, morning, noon,
whatever the time, whatever the season,
the Lord is near.

Darkness, light, joy, despair,
whatever the day, whatever the moment,
the Lord is near.

Near to help, near to care,
near to shelter, near to comfort,
praise the Lord who is always with us.
Amen!

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Be still and know that I am God (StF 18)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyDr9-Mpc_s

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Anonymous
Based on Psalm 46.10-11

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Loving Lord, we praise you
for you have created us and redeemed us.
You know each one of us and care for us.
You call us by name to come and worship you.

You draw your people together to be with you.

As a mother bird gathers her young to herself,

draw us near to you, Lord Jesus.

Hide us under your wings of love,
and keep us secure in your care.

Tell us once more that we are precious in your sight,
and that in all things you are there with us.
Make us aware of your presence now,
that we might give ourselves in worship to you.

Silence

For the times when we meant to help somebody, but forgot:

we are sorry, Lord.

For the ways in which we have not shared good things with others:

we are sorry, Lord.

For the bad habits that we don't really try to give up:

we are sorry, Lord.

For the chances we miss to tell other people about Jesus:

we are sorry, Lord.

For the missed opportunities to draw near to your Word, or come to you in prayer:

we are sorry, Lord.

Silence

Lord God,
we thank you, that even when we break our resolutions, you never break your promise to forgive us.

We thank you
that you are always with us,
that you call us by name,
and that you call us to work for you in your world.

Help us to listen and respond.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Read Isaiah 43.1-7

Read Luke 3.15-17, 21-22

Reflection

One of the big 'life questions' that has really intrigued and fascinated me over the years is: what, at a very personal level, motivates us to be the people we are? What do we think is truly important in life? What do we really want to achieve in life, or to get out of life?

There are many motivations that come to mind, some more noble than others: the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and understanding; the pursuit of wealth, power, success, or acquisition; the desire for family and community; the need to love, and to be loved. But one motivation that isn't so obvious is the need to be known. All of us, I believe, deep down, have an innate need to be known. To feel that we are known for who we truly are - that we are understood and accepted as we are - is fundamental to a fulfilling and purposeful life. In contrast, when we're made to feel misrepresented, misunderstood and alienated, the psychological consequences for us can be disastrous. Think about it for a moment: every facet of the you that is you – your gender, ethnicity, sexuality, family history, status, beliefs, etc. etc. etc. – inform your entire sense of self and the story you inhabit every day. When you find you have something in common with another, when stories align, then invariably you feel just that little bit more known and understood than you did but a moment before.

I suspect many of us have had the experience of trying to explain something very personal about who we are, or what we are, or what we believe, to a close friend or family member. As you bear your soul it soon becomes clear that, either because of the response the other gives you, or just because of the look on their faces, they simply do not get where you're coming from. It's very

frustrating, especially when the other person, trying so hard to understand, summarises what you've said almost completely oppositely to the way you'd intended it! I'm sure I'm not the only one to have experienced that. Furthermore some of us, I'm confident, have experienced the sheer joy of having shared with another and been met with understanding and acknowledgement to the extent that a burden has been lifted and a new window has been opened into the inner reaches of our beings.

This need to be known reveals something about the baptism of Jesus that is often overlooked. When we think of baptism we usually think of sin, death, sacrifice, and the symbolic power of water. These are all hugely important and central to our theology of baptism, but they don't – in and of themselves – tell us why they're important. When Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan, the crescendo of that encounter wasn't the baptism itself, it was what followed. What followed was the voice of God saying to Jesus: *'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'* In other words: 'I know you, I love you, I delight in you.'

None of us can know how much Jesus really knew about his destiny, or his divinity; possibly a little less than we might imagine. I'd certainly wager that Jesus was at times filled with doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety about the purpose that God had for him. To deny him that would be to deny him his very humanity. So, what must it have felt like to Jesus to hear God, his heavenly father, not only acknowledging him, but claiming him as his very own? In that exchange Jesus knew beyond all doubt that he was truly known and loved by God; that God knew every hair on his head, and every burden on his soul.

That's one of the things I love about God's gift to us in Jesus; that Jesus experienced so many

of the feelings that we too contend with; that I can relate to Jesus and that I can be known by God through him. That's the facet that is so often forgotten in baptism. Just as Jesus was known by and claimed by God, we too can experience that same longed-for acknowledgment through our journey with Christ.

Isaiah 43.1-2 says: *'Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you'*.

Again, when thinking about baptism we spend much time acknowledging the redeeming quality of it but sometimes ignore the part about being called by name, about how God says to us: 'I know you, I love you, you are mine, now and always'. In baptism we use water to convey not only its cleansing properties which represent our redemption through Christ, but its life-giving qualities, and not only at a physical level, but at an emotional and spiritual level too. As water gives us life, and is the basis of all life, so too in its spiritual sense, does it open our eyes to know God, and to be known by God. When we confirm our baptism or revisit our promises to God in other ways, part of what we are doing is acknowledging that first moment, just as Jesus experienced, when we realised how much God knows us, accepts us, and loves us.

To be known by God is one of our very greatest joys. Praise God that in our worship we can find God and be truly known by him. May God help us to draw ever closer to him, to allow him to minister to our deepest needs, and to release us to minister to the needs of others. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Jesus taught his disciples always to pray and not lose heart.

God all just, all merciful,
your compassion is over all that you have made:

We pray for your Church throughout the world:
for its faithfulness in proclaiming the good news,
for its mission to reach out with Christ's love to all who are in need,
for its witness, to shine as light where darkness prevails,
for its peace and unity,
to be a sign of reconciliation in a divided world.

We pray for justice for those who are denied it,
who suffer for their beliefs, or who are persecuted for who or what they are.
May their rights and dignity be upheld.
We pray for those who are exploited or enslaved at work or in the home, that their cries may be heard;
for the many who go poor while the few prosper, that the earth's resources may be fairly shared.

We pray for the world in all its need:
for the victims of war, terror, famine and disease,
that they may be freed from all afflictions;
for those who are forced to flee their homes,
that they may find safe lodging;
for those who misuse power, that they may learn to serve others, not themselves;
for those who nurture hatred in their hearts,
that they may come to know the true meaning of the Cross.

We pray for the earth itself, polluted and despoiled, that the fragile balance of the natural order may be respected, its beauty

and variety preserved, and greed and selfish gain be put aside, that harmony may be restored between ourselves and our environment.

We pray for nations and societies across the world, and for our own.

For national and local government, that those who rule may serve with wisdom and integrity.

We pray for families and children, that they may be secure and strong;

for friends and neighbours, wherever they are;

for the sick, the lonely, the neglected, the dying and the bereaved, that they may know the healing touch of Christ;

for those who have lost hope, that light will shine in their darkness;

for those in any kind of need.

We remember with joy those whose journey has now ended and whose lives among us helped us on our way.

We pray that, in time, we may come with them to where there are no endings or beginnings, but one equal joy in your eternal presence.

These prayers we offer through Jesus Christ, who gave his life that all might be reconciled and your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you (*Do not be afraid*, Rejoice & Sing, 591)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2rOOLhSWJO>

*Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name; you are mine.*

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you, you will never sink beneath the waves.

Do not be afraid ...

When the fire is burning all around you, you will never be consumed by the flames.

Do not be afraid ...

When you dwell in the exile of the stranger, remember you are precious in my eyes.

Do not be afraid ...

You are mine, O my child; I am your Father, and I love you with a perfect love.

Do not be afraid ...

Gerald Markland, 1978, from Isaiah 43.1-4

Dismissal and Blessing

Go into a needy world
filled with the knowledge
of all the good things God gives you.
May God grant you joyful lives
to spend in the service of others.

And may the blessing of God;
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
be our way, our truth, our life
now, and always. Amen

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Service prepared by the Revd Tim Searle.

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