

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Worship at Home: Sunday 23 January 2022
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Hello!

For years now, last thing on a Sunday I've been glad that the Bible verse for Evening Prayer is one that sets the local church, our denomination and even the world-wide Church in a fuller context. *'There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope held out in God's call to you.'*

The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25) is an annual reminder that the Church embraces a huge variety of people in hundreds of different denominations all over the world, who seek to worship and serve God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ, our one Lord and Saviour. Amen!

In our first hymn we remember also that the Church 'militant here on earth' is linked with the Church 'triumphant in heaven' in praising God, and we ask for the help of the Spirit in doing so.

Hymn: Singing the Faith (378)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAA_hTSCb5Q

Father of everlasting grace,
your goodness and your truth we praise,
your goodness and your truth we prove;
you have, in honour of your Son,
the gift unspeakable sent down,
the Spirit of life, and power, and love.

Send us the Spirit of your Son,
to make the depths of Godhead known,
to make us share the life divine;
send him the sprinkled blood to apply,
send him our souls to sanctify,
to bless and seal us with this sign.

So shall we pray, and never cease,
so shall we thankfully confess
your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,
with joy unspeakable adore,
and bless and praise you evermore,
and serve you as your hosts above.

Till, added to that heavenly choir,
we raise our songs of triumph higher,
and praise you with a bolder voice,
out-soar the first-born seraph's flight,
and sing, with all our friends in light,
with everlasting love rejoice.

(Charles Wesley 1707-1788)

Prayers:

Dear God, with all the friends of Jesus on earth and in heaven, we thank you for all that you are, at the heart of your creation and through your Spirit, offering us wherever we are renewal of life, as we respond to you in faith and love through Jesus. Amen.

Forgive us, dear God, when we act as if we are the centre of everything and lose sight of you, the needs of others and of your concern for them. Give us a growing vision of your all-encompassing love that will set us free from our self-made prison, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Day:

Loving God, through your Son, you have called us to repent of our sin, to believe the good news, and to celebrate the coming of your kingdom. Grant that we may hear the call to discipleship and gladly proclaim the gospel to a waiting world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an important annual reminder that, whatever our church denomination, Christians are part of the whole Church of God. Sometimes, when we meet for worship with those of other churches, we call it an 'ecumenical' gathering, but the Greek word translated as 'ecumenical' has a much wider meaning. It means 'the inhabited earth', an important reminder that God's purposes embrace the whole created order, something that we too easily forget, ignore or downplay.

Psalm 19 is an interesting reminder of God's place in the whole created order, as it links the

cosmos with personal faith and ends with a prayer. It begins: *'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands....'* Later, it continues, *'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul, the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple....'* It ends with this memorable prayer: *'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.'* (read the whole psalm if you wish)

David Attenborough's new BBC television series, 'The Green Planet', like other earlier series of his, provides many reminders of the amazing variety of life on earth, this time he's focussing in particular on plants, large and small and other vegetation.

Two thousand years earlier, Paul in writing to fellow-Christians pointed to the variety of life even in one human being. He used this fact as an analogy to help others ponder further what we mean by 'the Church'.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 (selected verses)
'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

'Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

'If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'

(I have typed selected verses but please feel free to read the whole of that part of Paul's letter.)

The Church is people, all sorts of people, enabled to respond to the eternal God by the work of his Spirit through Jesus, wherever we may live and work in God's creation. (To make that point, as often as I can, I refer to a church building as the 'chapel') But who are we to be? How are we to live and work as friends of Jesus?

Jesus must have pondered similar questions before he began his public ministry. He knew that he was called in a unique way to help people respond to God but how was he going to do this? It seems to me that this sort of deep questioning of heart and mind is part of what lies behind the accounts in the gospels of the dramatic testing of Jesus by the devil in the desert for forty days. Our gospel reading is about an event soon after that, as Jesus began his public ministry, and shows us how Jesus answered the questions that he faced as he worked out his calling.

Gospel: Luke 4: 14-21 .

'Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him.

'He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the

oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

'Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

No wonder that their eyes were fastened on Jesus - a young adult back in his home community and church! Their first response was - *'All spoke well of him.'* But when Jesus went on to say that God cares also about people of other ethnic origins besides them, *'all the people were furious'* and wanted to kill him, but he got out of their way, for the time being.

The wideness of God's all-embracing care comes through in a hymn which I first learned and sang while I was serving as a Methodist minister in Jamaica. The hymn was written by our District Chairman, Revd Hugh B. Sherlock, a Jamaican minister, and it has become known much more widely over the past sixty years. In it, we ask that God will help us to experience and to share his purposes of love.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 410

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnYUfhtz11Q>

Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.

We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place –
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within:
light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
As the Spirit give new life.

In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.

In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.
(Hugh Sherlock 1905-1998)

In the early years of his ministry 'Father Hugh', as he was affectionately known, was the highly effective leader of 'Boys' Town', located in part of the most needy and dangerous part of the capital, Kingston. That experience shaped much of his later ministry, both in local churches and in much wider settings. His deep concern for people as individuals and for community and national life is expressed also in what he composed and which became the winning entry in the competition for the new National Anthem when Jamaica became independent in 1962.

Hugh Sherlock is one of many people who give us inspirational examples that encourage us to rise to the continuing challenge to express God's care for people and his whole creation in every aspect of our lives.

None of us can do everything, but we can attempt to do our bit where we are! As Paul said, just as our bodies have many parts, so it is with the Church, the body of Christ, and that each is an essential part of the whole.

That is true also in the wider setting of being neighbours and citizens. The Covid virus has reminded us how we are bound up with each other - for good or ill. Let's do what we can to make sure that our effect is for the good!

Thank God for all who give us the inspiration to live and work as friend of Jesus, following his way. Above all, thank God for Jesus through

whom we discover the depth and extent of God's love and care, for us and for others.

On the birthdays of family and friends I gladly sing to them the blessing version of 'Happy Birthday' that I learned through our St Andrew's, Eastleigh church: *'Happy birthday to you, to Jesus be true, may God's richest blessing be bestowed upon you.'*

God gives untold blessings. Our part as Christians is to be as true as we can be to Jesus, wanting to know more of him and to absorb his way of life; and to work this out through every aspect of our lives. Richard of Chichester of the 13th century in his well known prayer expressed this in a memorable way and we will use it now.

Prayer of Richard of Chichester:

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day. Amen.

(In our prayers now, I'm leaving a line, as a way of inviting you to add your own thoughts and names.)

We thank you, dear God, for those in every age and place who are an inspiration for us. Help all who claim to be Christians to allow Jesus and his way of life to be the centre and source of every aspect of our life and witness today.....

We pray especially for those who feel very much alone in hostile situations, that others may reach out to them with understanding support to help them maintain their integrity in being true to Jesus and his way.....

We thank you for leaders in every aspect of our corporate life, and we pray that they may have the courage to be true to what builds up our common life, for the well-being of all and

especially for those who live on the margins and are extra vulnerable.

We thank you for those dear to us who have gone before us in faith and love and pray that we may follow their good examples.

Let's sum up our prayers with the prayer that Jesus gave us, The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours, now and forever. Amen

Prayer of Dedication

Here's a prayer to help express the commitment of our gifts of love and life, time and energy, as well as money, to serve God's purposes in the life of the Church and more widely in our common life, as we feel able.

With these gifts, gracious God, we offer you our lives and the life of the Church, to work with you in your life-giving and renewing work in us and through us in your world. Amen

Let's end with the Benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.

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Service prepared by the Revd Eric Renouf

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