

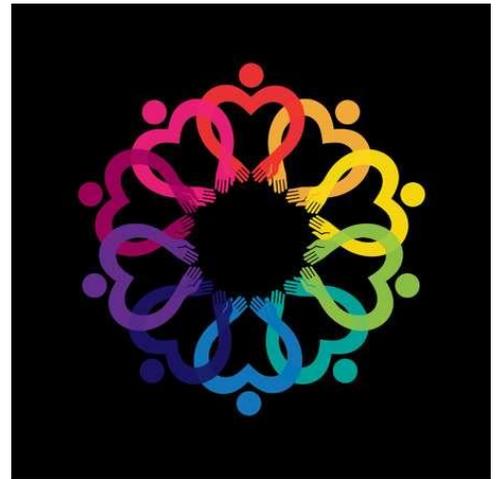
Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
18th Sunday after Trinity 11th October 2020

Unity and Peace

Welcome everyone.

This is our final week of readings from Philippians, with reflections by Sheila. Our intercessions are from Helen. For Night Prayer we stay in Matthew's Gospel.



We begin our service this morning with 'Christ is our Cornerstone' – words by Samuel Wesley, and sung here by the choir of Wells cathedral. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPM9U0jqfzw>

Call to worship

We are a Resurrection people
called by God to live a Resurrection life.

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed!

We live our lives each day
knowing that Christ has opened the way to new life
to be lived in fullness and forgiveness each and every day.
Even when our lives take us through the dark valleys,
we know we are never alone;
Our Risen Lord is always with us.
In our interactions with our brothers and sisters in this world. Amen

Prayer of Confession

One of the psalms appointed for today is Psalm 23. For our time of confession we are using a version by Revd Emily Larsen, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I have slightly adapted it at the end.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
But, O Lord, we are consumed with wanting more.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
But, O Lord, other pastures seem greener.
The waters aren't always still.
Our souls still thirst.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
O Lord, we long to be led by you,
though we may complain along the path.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
And yet, O God, we do sometimes fear.
May we feel your presence, your comfort and your forgiveness anew.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
O God, sometimes we refuse to sit down at your table.
Forgive us and help us to see your overflowing mercy.

Words of Assurance/Forgiveness

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.
Amen. Thanks be to God!

Collect

God, our light and our salvation: illuminate our lives,
that we may see your goodness in the land of the living,
and looking on your beauty
may be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Worship Song

'The Servant King', words and music by Graham Kendrick. Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0FSZ_iSYO8



Prayer of illumination

Spirit of God,
who danced at Creation's birth,
dance with us now
as we read your Word,
that we may be changed,
renewed
and empowered for mission, Amen

Reading Philippians 4:1-9

¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Reflection

For my first 5 years at Worcester Girl's Grammar School in the 1970s our headmistress had Philippians 4:4-9 read regularly in assembly. I am sure she wanted us to consider what we would think about not only in school but in life. The Good News translation of v8 is less repetitive and clear 'fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable.' I don't think we heard the first few verses of this chapter where Paul names two women, Euodia and Syntyche, urging them to be 'of the same mind in the Lord'. Earlier in the letter (2v2) he had urged the whole community to 'be of the same mind'. He recognises the effort these two have given in ministry and so encourages the community to help them to be reconciled.

I am now going to turn to the daily bible reading notes I use, BRF Guidelines, as two commentators, 5 years apart, have written notes on this passage. In August 2015 under the heading 'Joy and Peace, Peace and Joy' the writer begins "The 19th-century preacher F.B.

Meyer observed, 'Peace is joy resting; joy is peace dancing.' Facing a future in which trials and persecution will threaten the church at Philippi, and fear and anxiety will be natural reactions, Paul encourages his 'crown and joy' to rejoice, for their names are written in the 'book of life' (v3; see Luke 10:20). The double encouragement to 'rejoice in the Lord' (v4) grows from Paul's assurance of their hope in Christ, knowing 'the peace of God' and serving the 'God of peace'."

This August the writer used the heading I have given for today and concluded her comment with this summary. 'Running through the passage is the idea of peace:

- Being at peace with one another and standing firm and united.
- Knowing peace in the everyday challenges of life and the specific challenges in terms of opposition to Christian faith in Philippi, because the Philippians can entrust their concerns and situation to the Lord, who is near.
- Seeing peace by focusing on what is true, good and lovely, rather than focusing on the challenges, concerns and opposition, which he has just encouraged them to entrust to the Lord.'

As one who enjoys dancing, I like the Meyer quote and as a priest I frequently give the blessing based on the words in v7. Yet I sometimes wonder whether in the face of big challenges (to my health, economic stability, or home) would I still really trust God? Am I showing that peace in my life or am I wound up with worry? This leads to my final point from the BRF notes. Each week there are 6 reflections on a passage followed by a concluding 'Guidelines' section. Sometimes these are general reflections and sometimes questions to ponder and challenge. Here is one from this August on 4v6.

- 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God'. How do you pray about your daily life? How might Paul's words encourage you in your prayer?

With that to consider I conclude with one of the recent alternative collects (plus 3 words)-

God, our judge and saviour,
teach us to be open to your truth
and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day
with **joy, peace** and confidence in the salvation
which is given through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Song

We now have the song: 'Lord for the Years' sung for us here by the Choral Scholars of St Martin's in the Fields, London. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aluwWcqw4I>

Affirmation of faith

We believe The Word is not bound by ink and paper
but is set free in us
to dream new dreams and unfold new adventures.

We believe the life God gives
is not celebrated in rules
but is celebrated in our diversity.

We believe that as the sun sets in one land
it rises in another
handing over the prayers of the world
from one to another.

We believe the story of faith comes alive
in the communities we grow
but is hurt by the barriers we build.

We believe transformation is a gift from God
which is never complete
and longs to be set free in us.

We believe resurrection is heaven's conspiracy
to redeem all that is evil
and bring to life all that is good.

We believe justice is God's unravelling
of all that hurts, oppresses and dulls life in each other.

We believe that a spark lights a flame
which kindles an idea
that ignites a moment.
We all have a spark within us.

Is this what you believe?

Yes this is what we believe



(Developed from material written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on Mucky Paws. <http://www.nkchurch.org.uk/index.php/mucky-paws>)

Intercessions

Today's intercessions are adapted from the *Iona Abbey Worship Book* and feel suited to this pandemic autumn. Where an underlined gap _____ is left, please feel free to hold in God's love any person who – or any situation that – comes to your mind. You might want to

pray all of these intercessions, or alternatively to skim-read them until something captures your attention, and stay with that one/those few before ending with the final prayer.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those suffering pain and ill health, and those who care for or about them, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those suffering in mind and spirit, and those who care for or about them, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those struggling to overcome addiction or abuse and those who care for or about them, as well as for all those whose suffering has distanced them from others, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those facing death and those facing bereavement, and we pray for those who have died, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence the suffering people of our world, and places where people are experiencing division, injustice and violence, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.

Loving God, we give you thanks for health restored and prayers answered. May your wisdom, Lord, guide nurses, doctors and those who work in every part of our health service, community services and charities, and in the coastguard, rescue and emergency services.

We pray also for their counterparts throughout the world, and all those who seek to serve their fellow humans, *including* _____

May they know the deep peace of Christ.



God of compassion and of love,
we offer you all our suffering and pain.
Give us strength to bear our weakness,
healing even when there is no cure,
peace in the middle of turmoil
and love to fill the spaces in our lives.

Glory to God, from whom all love flows.
Glory to Jesus, who showed his love through suffering.
And glory to the Holy Spirit,
who brings light to the darkest places.

Amen

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to access the Taizé chant 'Nada te Turbe'. It's sung in both Spanish and English.

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

Refrain – Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten,
Those who seek God shall never go wanting.
Nothing can trouble, Nothing can frighten.
God alone fill us.

Verse – Stay awake, keep watch.
There is no peace on earth.
Nothing can frighten those who make the journey
and seek God.





Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostle's teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission & Benediction

If the God who raised Jesus from the dead is for us, who dare be against us?
We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Step out into the world in humble confidence:
there is nothing about to happen that God has not foreseen,
and no situation where Christ will not be there ahead of you,
preparing a place and an opportunity for you.

Thanks be to God.

The peace of God, which goes beyond all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ, God's Son.
And the blessing of God all-loving,
the Creator, Redeemer and Counsellor,
will be with you now and always. **Amen!**

(posted on Bruce Prewer's Homepage.)

Our final hymn: *is Baba Yetu, the Lord's prayer in Swahili, sung at the Llangollen Eisteddfod by the choir of Stellenbosch University, South Africa. It is a joyful version to say the least!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8>

Scroll down for Coffee Break and my thanks to Charles Edwards for providing it.

Coffee Break

Four candles slowly burned.
The ambiance was so soft, one could almost hear them talking.

The first candle said:
'I am Peace
The world is full of anger and fighting.
Nobody can keep me lit.'
Then the flame of peace went out completely.

The second candle said:
'I am Faith.
I am no longer indispensable. It doesn't make sense that I stay lit a moment longer.'
A breeze blew out faith's flame.

Sadly, the third candle began to speak:
'I am Love!
People don't understand my importance, so they simply put me aside.
They even forget to love those who are nearest to them.'
And waiting no longer, love's flame went out.

Suddenly...

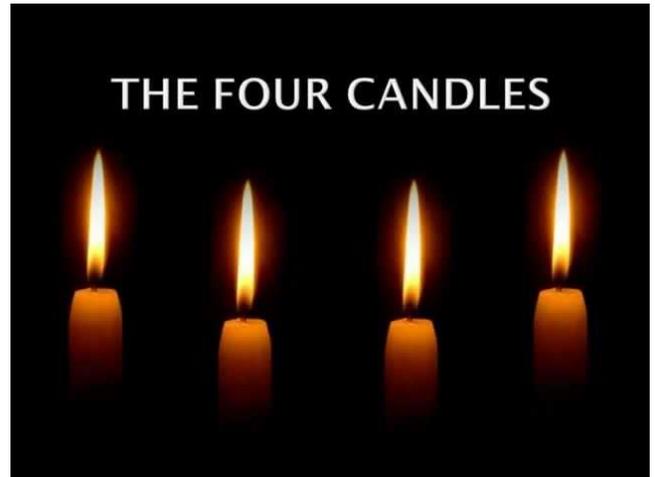
A child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles.
'Why aren't you burning? You're supposed to stay lit until the end.'
Saying this, the child began to cry.

Then the fourth candle answered:
'Don't be afraid. I am Hope. While I am still burning we can light the other candles.'
With shining eyes the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles.

The greatest of these is love...
but the flame of hope should never go out of your life!

Dear God. You are my light and my salvation,
You are my Hope.
Help me to be an instrument of your love,
And cause your light to shine on others through me. Amen

By the Revd Rita Bulworthy and contributed by Charles.



Scroll down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

Invitations

Our reading is the parable of the Wedding Banquet.

We prepare for worship

Sometimes in the solitude of the darkness
our fears and concerns, our hopes and visions
rise to the surface.

We come face to face with ourselves
and with the road that lies ahead of us.
And in that same darkness
we find companionship for the journey.

Our help is in the name of the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

The unexpected invitation

Just now, with so much anxiety and uncertainty
An invitation to a feast seems rather bizarre.
With everything else going on, who has time for this?
How will it work?
Who else has been asked?
Who else will be coming?
How will social distancing be maintained?
Should we be masked?

A quick sandwich and a coffee perhaps,
If needs be, but a whole slap-up meal?

Can't we do something on zoom instead?

Yet God has chosen this time
To invite us to His feast.

How will we respond?



We listen to a Song

'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God'. The words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVTZ9DmnXvM>

We seek reassurance

Lord, we are so preoccupied with the immediate.
The worries and problems of the day
Weigh heavily upon us.
Our concerns for ourselves,
And our concerns for others
Leave us restless
and searching for signs of renewed hope.

Lord you have told us there is more to life
Than ticking off the boxes of another day
Another week endured.

Take a few moments to think of those times in the last few days, however fleeting they may have been, where there was something of beauty, something to treasure, and how you felt at the time.

We hear your invitation to a feast
We also hear another invitation from you
a whisper almost unheard
but persistent and unfailing
"Come," it says.
"Come to me, and I will give you rest."

We long for what you offer, Jesus;
we yearn for the still calm of wholeness
And yet we fear...
What if we are disappointed?
What if we never find what we so desperately desire?
But the call remains – "Come to me..."

But our doubts do not silence your invitation;
in faith that all who answer are filled
– even though your gift may surprise us
And may be other than we expected;
in honest admission of our reticence and uncertainty
We come.

Thank you for your unending love
and your relentless presence. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker,
Pain-bearer,
Life-giver,
Source of all that is
and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today,
feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another,
forgive us.
In times of temptation and test,
strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure,
spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil,
free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever.
Amen



(from the New Zealand Prayer book of the Anglican Church of New Zealand).

Reading Matthew 22: 1-14 NIV

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’”

⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”



Reflection

This parable is the final one in a set of three consecutive stories that we have followed over the last three weeks.

It's yet another parable filled with violence! Why is Matthew so obsessed with servants being attacked and killed, and massive retribution following? This may reflect that traumatic impact on the Jewish people of the Jewish revolt against Roman rule which began in 66 AD and led to the destruction of the Great Temple of Herod and the whole of the city of Jerusalem in AD 70. Resistance to the Roman Emperor whilst initially successful, resulted in a terrible price being paid, in loss of life, or enslavement of the populace, and the end to even a puppet Jewish state.

If the common belief amongst Christians at the time was that this catastrophe was a punishment from God for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, we find such an interpretation much harder to accept. Do we really believe in a vengeful God, who not only burns down the city (v 7) but is quickly offended when one of the new guests has no 'wedding garment'? Do we believe in a God who invites the people of the streets to his feast mainly to spite the wealthy who have refused to come?

Instead let's think about invitations. If we are inviting people to something we are organising and paying for, whom do we include? Should we invite her? Do we have to invite him, and I don't want them... Are we ever disappointed or even angry when people cannot or don't come? When we receive an invitation, we may wonder who else is coming, what sort of a 'do' it is, what should we wear? Should we take something along? Will we enjoy it, or is it going out of duty.

In this way we are experiencing the same issues as Matthew talks about without the ultra-violence. Add to this the daily receipt through the post, email or phone calls of invitations to join this, try that, enjoy these benefits, discover true happiness etc etc then we quickly appreciate the problems invitations create.

In Luke's version of the story (Luke 14: 15-24 and far less violent than Matthew's) the first invitees send excuses why they cannot attend. They are all reasonable excuses too: important social and domestic obligations. Perhaps Jesus's point is that our own concerns with this world and all the obligations and duties we accept in it can actually prevent us from establishing a deeper relationship with those outside our immediate circle, as well as preventing us discerning the importance of hearing and accepting God's invitation to us.

The Amazing Invitation

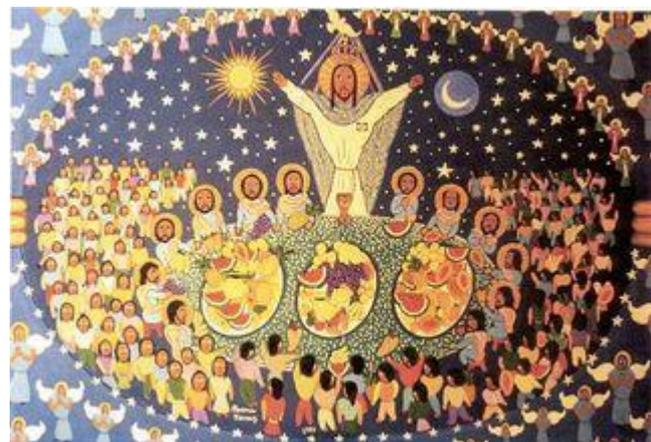
(based on Matthew 22: 1-14)

No special qualifications needed;
No particular connections or exclusive memberships required;
No secret passwords or unique attributes expected;
No campaigning or canvassing,
no examinations or reference checks;

Just an amazing invitation to a feast;
to find our place at Your table,
alongside these other unworthy ones,
these other beloved ones;
these others humble enough to accept the invitation
without asking who else will be there.

Well, Jesus, Lord of the Feast,
with thankful and open hearts,
we accept Your amazing invitation.

(written by John van de Laar, and posted on his website, Sacredise.com)



We listen to a song

'Hevenu Shalom Alehem' (bringing peace to you): a group of Jewish visitors to Israel are welcomed by a flashmob at BenGurion Airport, near Tel Aviv.

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

We pray for others

God our Father, in whose eyes all life is precious,
help us to value the worth of every individual,
whom you have created in your image.

We pray for victims of violence or hatred,
especially people who have suffered innocently.
May they find the healing of body, mind or spirit which they need.

We ask that the causes of division and hatred may be brought down.
Where there is prejudice because of colour, language, religion or culture,
help us to see things through the eyes of others,
and act towards them as we would like to be treated ourselves.

We also pray for people who have been the cause of hurts to others.
Enable them not only to admit their mistakes,
but also to use their time and energy for the benefit of others
and the welfare of society.

We pray for family relationships in our society.
Thank you for those who are our own families,
or who have been like family to us.
Bless them with the love in return which they themselves have shown.

We ask for your healing and reconciling love
in family disputes or misunderstandings.
We especially pray for children and young people
caught up in problems not of their making,
and for the anxiety and tensions this may cause.
Give them good friends and wise counsellors,
and support from their peer group and schools.

Loving God,
as we have promised you our devoted service in words and prayer,
give us the strength of your Holy Spirit
to enable us to keep our promises,
for you are the source of our lives and our strength.

(written by Rev Dr David Graham, and posted on the Church of Scotland's Starters for Sunday website. <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>)

To think about

It is only in the darkness
that we can see the splendour of the universe –
blankets of stars, the solitary glowing of the planets.



Commission and benediction

Go forth,
strengthened to do the work of Christ,
standing in the gap,
extending the invitation to the eternal banquet,
rejoicing in God.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone
and don't worry about anything.
The God who created you,
the Christ who redeems you
and the Spirit who empowers you
is with you today and ever more.
Amen.

(from Standing in the Gap, written by Rev. Dr. Bob Gross, OCC, pastor at Lake Avenue United Church of Christ, Elyria, OH and posted on the United Church of Christ website.)

May the Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

Reflective music

Our closing music is called Nyepi by Olafur Arnalds (an Icelandic multi-instrumentalist and producer). Sung here by Voces 8. I have not been able to track down the lyrics, but I don't think that matters too much. This brings a gentle ending to our service.

Nyepi is a Hindu festival, celebrated mainly on the Indonesian island of Bali. It is a day of silence, fasting and meditation. The whole island effectively closes down for the day. It is one of the oldest religious rituals still practiced.

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

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services: especially Sheila for the morning's reflection, Helen for the morning intercessions, and Charles for Coffee Break

Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in the text.

