

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual
Communion

3rd Sunday before Advent, 1st in second
lockdown, and Remembrance Sunday.
8th November 2020



Welcome everyone.

Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and the Intercessions provided by Caroline. Many thanks to you both.

Preparation

In a world filled with violence and war,
we take this time to celebrate the promise of peace.
In a world filled with tyranny and oppression,
we take this time to celebrate the promise of justice for all.
In a world filled with hunger and greed,
we take this time to celebrate the promise of plenty for all.
Our hope is in the name of the Almighty God,
the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of heaven and earth.
(from On Earth as in Heaven: Praying for Peace, MCC Peace Sunday Packet 2008.)

Gathering Hymn

‘O God our help in ages past’ a well-loved hymn especially at Remembrance time, and based on Psalm 46. Words are on the screen.

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

Prayer of Saint Boniface

Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children,
we praise you for all you have given us,
for all you have done for us,
for all that you are to us.
In our weakness, you are strength,
in our darkness, you are light,
in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.
We cannot number your blessings,
we cannot declare your love:
For all your blessings we bless you.

May we live as in your presence,
and love the things that you love,
and serve you in our daily lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(written by St. Boniface (ca. 672-754))

Confession and Absolution

If only we had been more aware
how often we meet the Lord in life!
Let us ask him to forgive us.

(pause)

Lord Jesus, you seem absent
when we struggle with suffering,
but you are there with your strength:
Lord, have mercy.

Jesus Christ, often we forget you
in the cares of everyday life,
but you are there with us:
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, we neglect to care for you
in our sick and neglected brothers and sisters,
but you want us to serve you in them:
Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us all our sins, Lord,
and make us look for your presence.
Walk with us and lead us
to the feast of everlasting life. Amen.

(from Liturgies Alive, Models of Celebration.)

Assurance of Pardon

Nothing will deter God from sharing this good news with us: we are heard, we are forgiven,
we are offered new lives of service and faith.

Thanks be to God, who offers justice not judgment; who shares grace with us, and holds no
grudges against us. We are forgiven. Amen.

A collect for this Sunday

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things
in your beloved Son, the King of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Worship song

'Inspired by Love and Anger,' sung for us at St Cuthbert's Church, Wells and Wookey Hole, Somerset. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMH1-Bu-7U>

Prayer of Illumination

(inspired by Amos 5)

O God, you alone are our Judge.
Send your Spirit of truth
to expose our self-deception
and challenge our complacency
so that we may surrender to your mercy
and follow your will
through Jesus Christ our Liberator. Amen.

*(from a collection of prayers posted on the Worship@North website.
<https://northchurchindy.wordpress.com/>)*

Reading Amos 5 18-24

The Day of the Lord

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!
Why do you want the day of the Lord?
It is darkness, not light;
as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.

Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Reflection

When I chose a few weeks ago to write a reflection on this passage from Amos for our morning service this Sunday I knew that it would be Remembrance Sunday with a difference, but not that we would be entering a second lockdown in England. As I write this on Monday afternoon, a day of sunshine and showers – I glimpsed a bright rainbow for a moment – I am aware that life is going to be (or will continue to be) tough for many people. Yet through the uncertainty, stress, and sadness we have faith in God; we can be people of prayer and, depending on our circumstances, cooperate with others to help and support those in need.

I will return to this theme later but first a few thoughts on this passage from Amos. He lived in the eighth century BC when both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah had a period of relative peace and prosperity. He came from near Jerusalem, but his prophetic words were against the people of Israel. He condemned the rising social inequality, the oppression of the poor, the corruption of judges, and the immoral behaviour which was going on while the people offered all the sacrifices and enthusiastically sang their songs. The language is vivid and strong. Yet something is missing. The regular, elaborate worship is not accompanied by lives dedicated to following God's commandments. Amos proclaims that God wants people whose thinking and decisions are based on what is honourable, true, and just and whose actions are those reflecting God's character – his righteousness.

This is the challenge to us. Indeed, at this time when our normal acts of communal worship are suspended again, we can reassess how our lives individually and corporately measure up to this standard. The pandemic has shown even more clearly the inequalities in our society and so the words of Amos continue to critique our own situation. However, we cannot say that this is God's judgement on the sinful world. In April Tom Wright published a short book called 'God and the Pandemic' in which he shows that though Christian teaching now does not regard disaster as judgement on personal sin, there is much to repent of in the way our society and economy now operate. He discusses Romans 8v26-28 in detail showing that our calling now is to lament and pray and the Spirit will take our inarticulate groans. Yet this is not the full story: God also wants to work with believers 'as part of his saving purpose for his suffering world. They may not have the words to speak their lament. But they may still have work to do, in healing, teaching, poor relief, campaigning and comforting.' (page 50) He concludes this section with these words.

‘Such God-lovers are therefore shaped according to the pattern of the Son: the cruciform pattern in which God’s justice and mercy, his faithfulness to the covenant and to creation, are displayed before the world in tears and toil, lament and labour. This is our vocation in the present time.’ (page 51)

Each Remembrance Sunday the hymn ‘O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come’ is sung, based on Psalm 46. This is a psalm which describes God as ‘our refuge and strength’, someone who will help in times of trouble, so there is no need to be afraid even through earthquakes or tsunamis, chaos or conflicts because ‘The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold’ (v7, 11). These words express great trust in God. The psalm also includes the well-known verse 10a ‘Be still and know that I am God’. Last week I read the psalm in the Revised English Bible and was struck by the translation ‘Let be then; learn that I am God’. This suggested a more active approach – let be then – stop worrying about things you have no control over and then learn – and go on learning and finding out more about God. This is not meant in a bookish, academic way but in a trusting, relationship way.

So, to conclude this morning’s mixture of thoughts we turn to the alternative collect for this Sunday and pray -

God, our refuge and strength,
bring near the day when wars shall cease
and poverty and pain shall end,
that earth may know the peace of heaven
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



The Prophet Amos

From part of a fresco by Melozzo da Forlì, 15th century in the Holy House of the Virgin, Loreto, Italy.

Prayer of Commitment

God of Love, God of Peace
This fractured world
Cries out in pain
Burns deep into my soul
And challenges me
To make a difference.

God of Love, God of Peace
God of this world,
Scarred by grief and tears
Ignorance and fear,
Soften hearts of stone
And begin with mine.

God of Love, God of Peace
Create within me
A heart for people
A desire for change,
For new beginnings
To start this day.

(John Birch, posted on Faith and Worship—Prayers and Resources.)

Time of Remembrance and Intercessions

Almighty God, let us in our prayers today not only honour all those who laid down their lives for their country in time of war but also those whose lives have been taken during the pandemic, both innocent victim of the virus and the doctors, nurses and health workers lost in the line of duty.



You may wish to observe a time of silence either now or at the end of the intercessions.

Merciful God, your love embraces all of creation.
Your realm knows nothing of the borders we draw between nations.
You have taught us that every woman, man and child is our neighbour.
You have commanded us to love, love, love,
Without thought of our own security, or glory, or gain.
Remind us that you have pronounced your blessing,
Not upon nations and armies,
But upon the poor, and the meek, and the peacemakers.
Lord graciously hear us.

We remember those who have lost their lives as a result of war;
Young soldiers, dispatched to faraway places, never to return
And civilians, young and old, caught in the crossfire of conflict.
Loving God, bring healing to families torn apart by war.
Comfort those who mourn for their loved ones.
Lord, graciously hear us.

We remember those who have been psychologically wounded by the horrors of war,
Who find themselves unable to live with the burden of having taken away human life,
Those who dehumanise 'the enemy' in order to carry out acts of violence
And find their own humanity diminished as a result.
Loving God, bring healing to hearts and minds that are broken
Reveal to us your image deep within us and within every other human life.
Lord, graciously hear us.

We remember the ecological cost of war; the landscapes that bear the scars of bombing
The soil and water poisoned by the chemical residue of weapons,
The scorched earth churned to dust by heavy vehicles,
The destroyed forest-habitats of birds and creatures
And the innocent animal lives lost amongst the 'collateral damage'
Loving God, bring healing to the earth
Make a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
Lord, graciously hear us.

We remember those living now, under oppressive regimes
Or in the midst of violence and conflict.
The millions displaced from their homes in refugee camps
The communities struggling on with their daily lives under the shadow of war
Fearing for their lives and the lives of their children.
Loving God, bring healing to nations where there is unrest
Inspire in us hope for the world where all can live in dignity and safety.
Lord, graciously hear us.

We remember those who campaign for peace,
Who seek and encourage reconciliation, and non-violent resolutions to conflict,

Those bold prophets who raise their voices to declare that there can be another way
And those who, in their lives, model the radical forgiveness that
Christ himself taught and demonstrated.

Loving God bring healing to communities;
Forgiveness where there is hurt, compassion where there is hatred
And love where there is fear.

Lord, graciously hear us

AMEN

(Prayers by Cara Heavy)

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.

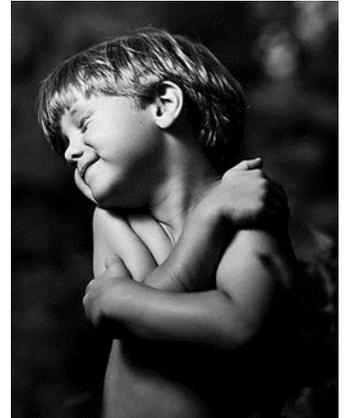
Lord, have mercy.

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 listen to 'Dona nobis pacem, Domine', a Taizé chant. Grant us peace, Lord.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so8s-pQkW2c>



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

God of peace,
whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom
and restored the broken to wholeness of life:
look with compassion on the anguish of the world,
and by your healing power
make whole both people and nations;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Blessing

May the blessing of the God of peace and justice
be with us;

May the blessing of the Son
who weeps the tears of the world's suffering
be with us;

And may the blessing of the Spirit
who inspires us to reconciliation and hope
be with us
from now into eternity.
Amen.

(Posted on the World Council of Churches website.)

Closing Music

'For the healing of the nations '. The words are by Fred Kaan. This recording was made at a choir festival in Germany. Words are on the screen.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMkS9LuCikc>

Scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

Thanks to Caroline for this contribution

Joshua Dyer (aged 14) was tasked at school with writing a poem for Remembrance Day.

An hour later, without any help, he produced this

One thousand men are walking

One thousand men are walking
Walking side by side
Singing songs from home
The spirit as their guide.

They walk toward the light milord
They walk toward the sun
They smoke and laugh and smile together
No foes to outrun.

These men live on forever
In the hearts of those they saved
A nation truly grateful
For the path of peace they paved.

They march as friends and comrades
But they do not march for war
Step closer to salvation
A tranquil steady corps.

The meadows lit with golden beams
A beacon for the brave
The emerald grass untrampled
A reward for what they gave.

They dream of those they left behind
And know they dream of them
Forever in those poppy fields
There walks one thousand men.



This picture called 'Into the Light' accompanied the poem. It is not known whether it was used to inspire the poem or added afterwards. It is by Salisbury artist Dan Woollard and is available for purchase from his website; danwoollardart.co.uk

Scroll down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

3rd Sunday before Advent

8th November 2020

The wise and foolish
virgins...waiting..

Preparation

Father God,
We rest in you.

Jesus the Son,
We rest in you.

Holy Spirit,
We rest in you.

Silence

Waiting and Watching

You call me to wait on You, Lord,
but I get tired of waiting.
Your answers to my prayers,
Your call for me to serve You,
the promise of Your coming Kingdom,
they all seem to take so long.

You tell me to watch for Your coming, Lord,
but I'm not sure how to prepare for...
 a thief in the night,
 an undisclosed time,
 and Your disconcerting habit of secrecy and mystery.

Yet, something inside whispers
that You're not all that hard to find;
That You're *always* coming to me,
and that both the waiting and the watching,
are more about being open to You now,
than about trying not to be surprised in the future.

And so I will keep waiting,
and I'll try to stay alert,



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

so that I can catch the glimpses of Your glory
that fill my day, every day. Amen.

(written by John van de Laar, on Sacredise.com.)

Opening hymn

'Ye servants of the Lord' sung for us here by the choir of Marlborough College Chapel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rfvFVInrs8>

1 Ye servants of the Lord,
each in his office wait,
observant of his heavenly word,
and watchful at his gate.

2 Let all your lamps be bright,
and trim the golden flame;
gird up your loins as in his sight,
for awful is his name.

3 Watch! 'tis your Lord's command,
and while we speak, he's near;
mark the first signal of his hand,
and ready all appear.

4 O happy servant he
in such a posture found!
he shall his Lord with rapture see,
and be with honour crowned.

5 Christ shall the banquet spread
with his own royal hand,
and raise that faithful servant's head
amid the angelic band.

Prayer for Forgiveness

God of Presence and Light,
We like to imagine that we are bold and strong,
that there is nothing that can frighten us
But, we are not strangers to trembling,

Our doubt leaves us feeling alone and afraid,
and our hiding brings much rejection to You and to others.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us.

Our self-centredness leaves us feeling deprived and poor,
and our grabbing results in great need.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us.

Our sort-sightedness leaves us uncertain and insecure
and our lack of listening divides and separates.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us.

Assurance of Pardon

Somewhere inside of us we do believe,
we do trust and we do love;
The simple gifts of worship and love that we offer now are tokens of this faith;
signs of our thanksgiving
and of our longing to be more bold in following You.
May our gifts and our lives be Your instruments
of healing and comfort;
For the sake of all in our world who grieve, all who despair,
and all who live in want and hatred.

In Jesus' Name.
Amen.

(written by John van de Laar, on Sacredise.com.)

The Lord's Prayer

We hear the Lord's Prayer sung by Nigel and the St David's virtual choir. Music by Rimsky-Korsakov.

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

New Testament Reading Matthew 25: 1-13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins New International Version

25 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

⁷ "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

⁹ "No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. (*‘Hi girls,’ Matthew did not go on to say, ‘sorry we’re so late. Oh I thought there would be more of you. What? – the others have gone to get oil. Well we shouldn’t keep the guests waiting any longer, so we’ll go with what we’ve got.’*) The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.



The parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

*Watercolour by William Blake
c1799-1800*

The wise virgins are characterised by their elegance and luminosity depicted in one plane rather like a bas-relief sculpture. The foolish virgins are darker, and clearly agitated. Overhead a flying angel with a trumpet announces the Day of Judgement has arrived.

Reflection

Let’s start by calling these people young women, which is what they are. Looking at the Blake picture above, the somewhat smug virtuous five are clearly having nothing to do with their colleagues. So much for team spirit! It feels more like a scene from ‘The Apprentice’: Not up to scratch: you’re fired! Nor is there any hint of a boy with loaves and fishes or whatever turning up to offer his support. This is not about sharing then. Nor is it about watchful waiting. All the young women have fallen asleep when the arrival of the Bridegroom is announced.

So what is it about? One of our difficulties is that Jesus often told a parable to make one specific point, but because it is Jesus talking we tend to search for much wider and deeper meanings.

If you recall many of these parables about the kingdom in Matthew are aimed at Jewish people to help them realise where the kingdom might be found. If you go back to the reading from Amos this morning, he has a message for the people of his time: you've got it wrong! You might be the chosen people, but there's more to it than that. Our young women in the parable were chosen too. They had what was necessary – pretty dress, oil lamp lit and working. The people of Israel, says Amos, have got all the right resources, but have failed to understand that possession of them alone is not enough. For Amos what is needed is the practice of Justice, the realisation that to be chosen means to look beyond the superficial (however important it might seem) and discover the full implications. Only some of the young women in the parable had made this leap.

It was just bad luck for the 'foolish' group for the bridegroom to arrive when he did. But as Jesus says at the end you do not know the day or the hour. It's a bit like the story from Viv included in the previous coffee break two weeks ago. Starting to-morrow may seem a good option, and probably would be on most occasions too. But as the unexpected second lockdown is reminding us, events arrive and we too find ourselves scrabbling for more oil.



The picture is of a typical oil lamp of the time, plus a lamp filler for extra oil. The lamp is plain, as pious Jews would be against decoration.

Experiments with recreated lamps show that filled with olive oil, they would burn for around 4-5 hours, which means they would run out about midnight as in the parable.

Prayer

Your reign is always coming, Jesus,
slipping into our lives quietly like a thief,
and subverting our comfortable self-interest;
and, even though we know we should be watching
we miss it too easily and too often.

But, then when we remember,
when we set our hearts to see,
and our eyes to search,
we begin to recognise the signs,
the unexpected evidence of your glory
in our ordinary, everyday normality.

And so we praise you for the Reign of God
that constantly breaks into the world of women and men,
that always opens us to the new,
the possible,
the eternal,
the yes.
And we praise you for the capacity to watch,
to see it coming,
to recognise it's advent,
even though sometimes watching is the last thing we do.
Amen.

We listen to a song

'Come thou long expected Jesus – words by Charles Wesley. Sung for us here by the Choir of St John's College Chapel, Cambridge. *(Not exactly an equal opportunities group?!)*
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEd0uWnDGs>

Meditation

These are verses from Malcolm Guite's 'Quarantine Quatrains.' You can read the whole poem at <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2020/05/02/the-quarantine-quatrain-the-complete-poem/>

39

The sun sets and I find myself in prayer
Lifting aloft the sorrow that we share
Feeling for words of hope amidst despair
I voice my vespers through the quiet air:
40

O Christ who suffers with us, hold us close,
Deep in the secret garden of the rose,
Raise over us the banner of your love
And raise us up beyond our last repose.



Prayer for Others

As we have just started our second lockdown this year, the Archbishops' of Canterbury and York have called us to a month of prayer for our nation and our communities.

This prayer has been written by Tim Vickers, rector of Bushey as part of that parish's contribution. I have adapted it to fit our parish.

Gracious and loving Father, Creator and Lord of all
in this second lockdown we pray 'Your kingdom come' in this parish of Central Exeter.
May we be united, strengthened and guided by you.
May we become communities of forgiveness, of love and of mission.
May we become strong in prayer, the sacraments and the word.
May we be known for Generosity, Joy, Imagination and courage.
We ask these things in the power of the Holy Spirit
and for the sake of you Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Take time now to pray for others especially those who are uncertain or fearful at this time.

If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in that same precious love.

(Julian of Norwich)

Blessing

In the presence of the Lord
we have reflected on his words
about the wisdom of vigilance.
What are we, foolish or wise?
Probably a bit of the two:
foolish when we sin,
wise when we are vigilant
and try to live a bit like Jesus
and to put his words into practice.

May almighty God keep you vigilant and wise
and bless you: the Father, and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Go in the peace of the Lord,
and may he keep you always faithful.

Thanks be to God!

from Liturgies Alive, Models of Celebration.

Closing music

'May it Be.' This is a prayer and a blessing. The non-English words are Elvish as this song was written by Enya for use in the Film 'Lord of the Rings'. Sung here by Voces 8. A gentle way to end our service.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7M5ZqFSynQ>

[Verse 1]

*May it be, an evening star
Shines down upon you
May it be, when darkness falls
Your heart will be true
You walk a lonely road
Oh, how far you are from home*

[Chorus]

*Mornië utúlië
Believe and you will find your way
Mornië alantië
A promise lives within you now*

[Verse 2]

*May it be, the shadow's call
Will fly away
May it be, you journey on
To light the day
When the night is overcome
You may rise to find the sun*

