

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 26)

Here we gather,

O Lord, test my heart and mind, try me and prove me.

Here we gather,

O Lord, trusting you without wavering, walking with integrity.

Here we gather,

O Lord, singing in our souls with thanksgiving, telling of your wondrous deeds.

Here we gather,

O Lord, in the house which we love, and in which you dwell.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God, you are solid and sure and reliable,

while at the same time being creative, adaptable and free.

We change too, but not always in a good way.

We catch sight of something new and life-changing in the teaching of Jesus and we vow to be different, to follow him for ever.

Then the tides turn, and a new picture emerges:

one that involves cost, and letting go,

one where people do not come flocking to hear what we have to say,

but are hostile, or, worse still, indifferent;

a future that holds the real possibility of dying, and we are not ready for that.

Gentle God, help us to take things a bit more slowly;

to get our balance and find a way of following

that is sustainable for us and honouring to you.

May we neither shame ourselves by dwelling

on all the mistakes we have made in the past,

nor frighten ourselves by looking too far into the future.

Help us rather to take one day at a time,

to keep going by putting one foot in front of the other,

lifting our eyes now and then and surprising ourselves

to see just how far we have come.

And if the way for a while is easy, let us enjoy it;

and if suffering comes, give us strength to bear it.

And in both remind us that you have been there before,

and have promised to stay with us to the end,

which may, if the impossible promises of our faith turn out to be true,

not be the end at all, but a glorious new beginning.

Keep us faithful, keep us hopeful; above all,

O God, keep us going. In Jesus' name.

As we pray together the words Jesus taught us,

Lord's Prayer

Romans 12:9-21

Love in Action

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your

spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. ^[c] Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," ^[d] says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ^[e] ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Address

One of Lorna's favourite movies right now is Inside Out, About the inner workings of the mind of an eleven year old girl called Riley, As her family moves from one side of the country to the other, The story shows how her emotions (personified by different coloured animated characters) led by Joy – try to help her deal with all the changes. However, the stress of the move brings Sadness to the forefront. When Joy and Sadness are inadvertently swept into the far reaches of Riley's mind, the only emotions left in Headquarters are Anger, Fear and Disgust. We often do photos with happy faces, sad faces, scared faces, funny faces... And we have a well-used book with a mirror on the back and the different Thomas engines showing various emotions. They talk about how important it is to express their feelings, And to be resilient almost daily at school. Our Bible passage this morning tells us: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." Rejoice is another word for happy. Mourn is another word for sad. I happened to have also read this passage at a small garden wedding yesterday, And it made me think about how we can rejoice in the midst of sadness. So what else we be happy about:

-birth of baby	-birthday	- baptism
-Christmas	-food	- Jesus forgiveness

What can we be sad about:

-sickness and viruses	-war	-violence
-death	-hunger	- sin

As the older kids mature, talking about these feelings "in real life" has become a daily thing at home too. And helping them to learn to deal with them, and how to help others deal with them is very important in these strange times.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

When you know someone is sad, be sad with them.

When someone is happy, be happy with them.

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus Predicts His Death

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[1] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Get Behind Me, Satan!

The sequence of events sometimes varies from one gospel to another, but the three synoptic writers—Mark, Luke and Matthew—are agreed in this instance that Peter's declaration about Jesus, his profound insight into the essence of Jesus' being, is followed immediately by a complete misunderstanding of what this implies. Of the three, Matthew is the one who brings out the contrast most dramatically. Peter, who has been lauded as the 'rock', the foundation' of the Church, keeper of the keys of the kingdom (vv. 18-19) is told that he is blocking Jesus' mission, and pushed aside, in the most extreme language possible, when Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan!"

The Rock, a symbol of strength and security, has become a Stumbling Block, a source of risk and potential injury.

This is a valuable reminder that the world is not neatly divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies', 'saints' and 'sinners'; we all have within us the capacity for both.

Arguably, the greater our gifts, the greater also the danger that they will be used for harm.

As the often-quoted Spider man quote says, with great power comes great responsibility.

In Peter's case, the independence of thought, strength of conviction and willingness to speak his mind with blunt honesty which gave him his rock-like qualities, also made him the one of the Twelve most likely to trip Jesus up and divert him from the way of the Kingdom.

If it sounds uncharacteristically harsh for Jesus to address one of his closest and most loyal friends as 'Satan', that is because Peter, as he so often did, was putting into words what everyone else was thinking,

and what may even have been there at the back of Jesus' mind.
Surely there must be an easier way than this to obey God's will?
How can it possibly help the establishment of the fledgling Kingdom of God
for its leader and all his key followers to die before their time?
Right to the end Jesus hoped that a gentler way might be possible,
but deep down he knew that Peter was appealing to his lesser self,
and his words must not be allowed to take root and grow.
Time and time again Jesus has to remind his followers—and himself—
that the values of the Kingdom are paradoxical and counter-intuitive.
What we intuitively think of as wealth and success are worthless
if the life of the spirit is extinguished in achieving them.
If we try to hold on to life, it will slip through our grasp;
if we willingly let it go, we will find out what living is really all about.
We are so used to hearing these words that it is easy to miss their power
and the seriousness of their implications.
The cross is not a religious symbol or an object of devotion for Jesus,
but an implement of death by torture.
That is what we have to take up if we want to follow him.
As a final thought, what might it mean to apply this teaching not merely to ourselves as
individuals but to the institution of the Church,
struggling desperately as it is in most of the developed world
to hold on to life at any cost?
What does it mean in our situation and our time for the church
to "take up its cross and follow";
to "lose its life" in order to find it?
Are we a rock or a stumbling block for those who are yearning
for depth and meaning in their lives,
for a leader worth following and a cause worth living,
and if necessary, even dying for?
And further more, what does it mean for us "take up our cross and follow"
Even as we see the soul-destroying of others
being held up as the way of Christ by leaders and fellow believers?
How can the things we've lost during lockdown
help us to find our true calling in life?

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Living God, we view you, as Christians,
through the lens of Jesus of Nazareth,
in a uniquely powerful way;
his thinking completely in tune with yours;
his life imbued with your spirit,
so that we can look at him and see you
in a new and different way:
not separate from human brokenness and suffering,
but one with us in our loss and grieving,
as well as in our wonderment and joy.
We pray today for any today who are going through the long,

slow journey of loss, and grief, and recovery,
and that means all of us in one way or another.
The announcement of bad news:
“I must go to Jerusalem and suffer... and die...”
We pray for those who have received recently
the kind of news that all of us dread:
news of serious illness, or redundancy, or the loss of a loved one.
Be with them on the road they must travel from here on in.
And for those who have to break bad news to others:
may they receive the care and support that they need.
There is the immediate, instinctive denial:
“Never, Lord!... This must not happen to you!”
Sometimes, O God, it is just too much to bear.
We pray for those who have been assaulted
with loss on a scale that no-one should have to face,
or whose back has finally broken under one last, tiny straw.
May there be ears to listen, arms to hold,
hearts to understand until they are ready
to face their truth and take the first small step forward,
even if that leads to...
...the anger, the looking for someone to blame:
“Get behind me, Satan!”
Forgive us if we have lashed out in anger
at someone who did nothing to deserve it
because they were voicing our own secret thoughts
or just because they were close by.
Grant us compassion, and broad shoulders,
if someone needs to vent their rage on us.
There is the bargaining, the doing of deals,
the desperate searching for hope:
“If you are willing to lose your life, you will find it”.
May we move quickly from false, futile deals
with the universe, to this real, honest deal with you.
Help us to let go of whatever it is we are most fearful of losing,
then no-one can take it from us.
Help us, as quickly as we can, as slowly as we need to reach acceptance,
of a new and different future:
“The Son of Man will come in his glory... and you will see him”.
God, grant hope to all who are in despair,
or someone to hold a candle of hope on their behalf
until its light reaches through to warm and encourage them.
God, who knows from the inside what it is to be human,
with all the joy and sorrow that entails,
bless us and all for whom our prayers are offered. Amen.

Blessing

