

Call to Worship

We come together to praise God,
how good it is to sing praises to our God.
God heals the broken-hearted
and binds up their wounds,
God created heaven and earth
and calls us each by name,
God sustains the humble,
and we put our hope in God's unfailing love.
We come together to worship.

Hymn Come and Find the Quiet Centre

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV_ytdItJ5U

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, who made the world come into being
who brought light into the darkness,
who walked with people thousands of years ago,
and still walks with us now, thank you for loving us,
no matter who we are or where we are.
Gracious Lord, we ask for guidance in a troubled world,
where pain and disease are commonplace,
help us to love our neighbour, to care for the widows and the sick,
help us to live out our faith, and show the compassion of Jesus.
We pray today for your help to make us better friends, better family members, to make us more
loving,
more caring, and more generous, help us as we try
to follow you and live like Jesus,
help us to make a better world and a better life for everyone.
Breath of God, we come before you, to give thanks for your grace,
for surrounding us with your eternal love.
setting the example so that we may follow you.
Though we may not always succeed, we pray that you will guide us ever onwards towards your
company, your life, and your kingdom, for we pray all of these things in the name of Jesus, who
taught us to pray together saying...

Lord's Prayer

Reflection

By way of reflection, I want to share with you a tale of two forty something year old men in Georgia, one of the many places where many of those who are suffering from Covid are the same ones who have refused to abide by the restrictions we have been asked to adhere to. The first is my old friend from high school who often argued with me almost daily on Facebook about the restrictions, and is one of those who refuses to wear a mask, despite being a teacher in a high school and a youth minister in a church, until he went very quiet about a month ago. And now I know that he sadly lost his mother to Covid this week, but is certain she's where she wanted to be, with her Heavenly Father even if it means he's seriously struggling with losing her. He's comforted by his faith but I can't help but thinking that she didn't have to die. At the same time, my brother is a nurse in an ICU unit just a hundred miles away, where after a much needed week of rest, he lost three patients to Covid in one shift on his first day back, and continues to try and drive home the point that people should not be out and about, or if they are they should be wearing a face covering, to limit the spread of this indiscriminate virus. It pains me to think that the carelessness of so many,

including those making the decisions about restrictions has caused this to spread much further and wider than it might have, and taken a massive toll on our healthcare staff's mental and physical health, some of which could surely have been avoided if some folk would just make a few sacrifices. It will be some time before we know the real affect of all of this but many of those in the caring professions I know are certainly feeling the full burden already, working night and day, and struggling to see an end in sight.

So as you might have gathered from that story, One of the real worries I have at the moment is for our healthcare staff, who have been at the cold face of care facing an unpredictable virus with the same commitment for each patient that comes into their surgery, their ward, their care home, and for the exhaustion I know many of them are feeling and the lack of support many of them are getting, and the knowledge that long after the vaccine programme has been carried out (also by them), and many of us begin to feel a bit less stressed and less restricted there will still be a huge waiting list of people who need their special care, their unwavering commitment and their full attention. I worry about when they will get a proper rest, when they will have a chance to process their grief, when the public (and indeed the government) will begin to understand the toll this pandemic has taken on those who have made every effort they can possibly muster day in and day out, to mitigate the effects of this aggressive virus and its relentless effects. And so I would share with you this poem about Jesus healing Peter's mother, but ask you to think about those who are facing these same kind of challenges day in and day out, shift after shift, who are the heroes Sir Tom Moore would want all of the attention on, rather than himself.

The fevered woman was well.
Was that what brought them all to the door as darkness fell?
Was he ready for a sleepless night?
Sitting with them; moving among them.
Hope and desperation staring back.
Some sick; some injured.
Some impaired from birth; some broken by trauma.
Listening to them; crying with them.
Holding hands with diseased skin;
hugging tightly paralysed limbs.
Giving time; paying attention.
Never pleading to be left alone.
Long hours of being with their pain.
Kissing grief-stricken widows;
stroking the heads of sad children.
Staying awake with them; hearing their stories.
Rocking a baby in his arms.
Letting them come to him; letting them go.
Giving himself to them as the stars give their light.
Moved by sudden sobbing; touched by whispered gratitude.
Being there for as long as they lingered.
An exhausting night. An important night.
Along before dawn. Had he slept at all?
Getting up; walking away; finding solitude.
A quiet place, where he prayed. (silence)
What did he pray, after such a night?
Sought out again soon. Everyone wanted him.
Everyone wanted more of him. How did he decide?

No to returning.
Going onward.
Opening himself to another day.

Hymn We cannot measure how you heal <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exr0oxZwZKA>

Isaiah 40:21-31

Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?
²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.
²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.
²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.
²⁵ "To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.
²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.
²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord;
my cause is disregarded by my God"?
²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
³¹ but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,

Mark 1:29-39

Jesus Heals Many

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her.³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.³³ The whole town gathered at the door,³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him,³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Prayer before Sermon

Sermon

In the United Kingdom we take for granted the availability of Healthcare professionals.

The National Health Service is one of the success stories of our nation and society, a venerable institution to be proud of and to seek to secure for future generations.

Accessing 'The Doctor' has involved subtle changes over the last 50 years. In the last decades, our personal doctor doesn't always cover the evening and night-time hours through a local 'On-Call' Service—though some do, instead, our calls go through to NHS 24/NHS Direct.

Other than that, accessing medical help has remained pretty much steady. That is until Covid-19 burst onto the scene! The understandable big change was necessitated by the need for protecting the NHS and for physical distancing. Now most of our interaction with the local GP is by phone or video call.

Whilst for many this is working out fine (in some circumstances far better than we could have imagined), many lament the reduction in availability of face-to-face interaction with the GP or local nurse, or having to go a bit farther afield for a vaccine.

So, we can perhaps imagine the situation that would result if it were announced that such and such a doctor was hosting a drop-in face-to-face clinic at a certain location— if you saw the crowds turning up for their jabs all at once when a refrigerator holding vaccines broke down in England, and they phoned everyone who had appointments and said come now.

Something like news of Jesus the healer,
being tracked to a certain location after sunset.
Think of the hordes who would make their way hoping for
personal encounter with a medically trained person.
There is a great deal of potential and value in the 'personal touch'
when it comes to making a person feel better.
Jesus physically touched people and they were healed
according to such stories as this weeks.
Yet, personal encounter with others
went far beyond the physical touch;
the spiritual, emotional, and social healing
we see taking place was far more important in many ways.
That encounter with Jesus, and the divine,
is still experienced today, and many can talk of the transformational power of such encounter in
their lives,
whether in big ways or in many small and repeating ways.
We might also add that in our society,
which in this last twelve months has endured many challenges
and changes and where many have felt
isolated and bereft of physical and social contact with others,
we understand more than we did before how important personal encounter is for us and the whole
of humanity.
Being in the presence of others is something
not to be taken for granted anymore.
We recognise in that real and intentional 'presence'
care and people who just naturally exude 'care'.
The first part of the Gospel lesson today reminds us
about the positive contribution we can make on others.
Making other people feel valued, by meeting them wherever they
are in life can make a huge positive impact on welfare and health.
The crowds who hunted down Jesus
were finding a particular type of healing in his presence.
Jesus just did what he did, and folks gathered around.
He did not have to go out of his way to find a crowd,
they found him.
Of course, that put Jesus in high demand,
and we can understand the need he had to take himself away,
find solitude for himself, and then move on,
in order to cast his healing presence
as far and as wide as possible.
But that need for personal care is one for another day.
Today we recognise the benefit of making ourselves available
to others as Jesus did.
God will work through us when we care for others
with person-to-person intent,
and the impact will always be a positive one
as our personal touch brings a lift to those we encounter.

Hymn We lay our broken world <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvmXNG6VXJU>

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Eternally loving God, we thank you for all that we are,
and all that you have given us.

As we come before you in worship today,
We give thanks for your work in the world,
for all those who have dedicated their
lives to caring for others,
for those who work tirelessly and thanklessly,
we ask for your blessing on them
and that we too may care for
those around us, and all who cross our path.

We pray today for all your people,
online, at home, and all around the world,
that they will seek to follow you,
to love and to care for each other,
that they will know that they are
loved for who they are, just as you have made them.

We pray for those who are struggling with ill health
in whatever form it takes, who worry about themselves,
their families, their finances, their jobs.

Hold them close to you, O God,
guide them through their difficult times,
bring healing and peace to your children who suffer.

We pray for your church, in Scotland and across the world,
in these difficult times when it seems ever harder
to carry out your mission, grant us the wisdom
to see your vision to know what is needed
and what is to be discarded,
that we might more fully serve you and each other.
Amen.

Sending

As we go from here,
may we seek ways by which
to look to and care for one another
as well as those who need to know love and care at this time.

And as we do, may God lead us, Jesus teach us
and the Holy Spirit guide us, now and forever.

Blessing