

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion

**2nd Sunday before Advent,
13 November 2022.**

Keep Calm and Carry on!



Welcome

A lot has happened since the previous on-line service! Prime Ministers and Chancellors have come and gone, solutions to our country's problems have been promoted one day and discarded the next, the COP conference is meeting in Egypt but the main interest of the media is who is and isn't attending it, the war in Ukraine drags on with little sign of any ending, and in addition this Sunday is also Remembrance Sunday.

So it's hard to know where to start, but the readings especially the Gospel appointed for today do seek to offer reassurance – hence the heading for this service of Keep Calm and Carry on.

The service also includes a short Act of Remembrance.

The reflections have been provided by Sheila, and the Intercessions by Helen. Many thanks to you both.

We begin our service with the hymn: Christ is our Cornerstone. This is a 7th century Latin hymn, and sung for us here by Wells Cathedral Choir. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8b3UJBQ9zO0>

Call to worship

Gather us into Your presence, God of peace.
We trust that Your vision for the world –
the great creation of Your imagination,
entrusted to us as a place for our flourishing –
is still there behind all the challenges of our lives.

We come today remembering that even in the darkest of days,
Your flame of hope and new life flickers
drawing us on to find the good
and to illuminate the world with Your Gospel of love.
Help us to find You in the smallest of things
and the most ordinary of our experiences.
For You are the great source of our being
and the power that sustains us through Your Holy Spirit.
When we search hard for You,
we may miss Your presence in the everyday –
so, help us to look out for You –
in the face of friend and stranger,
in the wonder and beauty of our world,
in the complexity of design
in the creativity of artist and scientist.

A Prayer for Forgiveness

O God of peace,
Forgive us when we only have good intentions
and do not commit ourselves to concrete action for peace and justice.
Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

O God of justice,
Forgive us when we allow your image in us to be marred
as we remain passive in face of so much violence and exclusion.
Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.

O God of life,
you have placed us on this earth to tend and watch over it.
Forgive us when we have failed to care for your world,
to protect nature, the home you have given us,
the home of our ancestors and of our descendants.
Help us to promote life and seek peace.
Grant that our actions and our words may always promote peace.
Amen.

(from Prayer for Peace, adapted from materials from the World Council of Churches.)

Declaration of forgiveness

God of all,
Your ways are of mercy,
Your heart is for reconciliation,
so help us to accept the hand of forgiveness that You offer.
Help us to leave behind what has weighed us down,
to seek the ways of friendship and peace,
and to trust that You want the best for us.
Bring us the peace of being part of Your offering of forgiveness,
and to embrace our role of being peacemakers in the course of our ordinary lives.

A short act of Remembrance including an act of Commitment

We remember with thanksgiving and sorrow
those whose lives
have been given and taken away
in world wars and conflicts past and present.

We pray for all
who in bereavement, disability and pain
continue to suffer the consequences of
fighting and terror.

You may wish to keep a time of silence

Collect

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, **Amen.**



Act of Commitment

We commit ourselves
to responsible living
and faithful service.

We commit ourselves
To strive for all that makes for peace

We commit ourselves
To seek to heal the wounds of war.

We commit ourselves
To work for a just future for all humanity.

Worship song

‘For the healing of the Nations’, by Fred Kaan. The music is produced by Cornerstone Methodist Church and uses a tune that is a new one to me – perhaps for you too. Words are on the screen.

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

Readings

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13

An Exhortation to Proper Living

⁶ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers who live idle lives and don't follow the tradition they received from us. ⁷ For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. ⁸ We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. ¹⁰ Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."

¹¹ Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. ¹² We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. ¹³ As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

Luke 21 5-19

Jesus Speaks about the Future

⁵ Some of his disciples began talking about the majestic stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls. But Jesus said, ⁶ "The time is coming when all these things will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!"

⁷ "Teacher," they asked, "when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?"

⁸ He replied, "Don't let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and saying, 'The time has come!' But don't believe them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and insurrections, don't panic. Yes, these things must take place first, but the end won't follow immediately."

¹⁰ Then he added, "Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven.

¹² "But before all this occurs, there will be a time of great persecution. You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand trial before kings and governors because you are my followers. ¹³ But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. ¹⁴ So don't worry in advance about how to answer the charges against you, ¹⁵ for I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you! ¹⁶ Even those closest to you—your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends—will betray you. They will even kill some of you. ¹⁷ And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish! ¹⁹ By standing firm, you will win your souls.

Reflection

A year ago, did any of us think there would be war in Europe again? Thirty-one years ago, did we think war would erupt in Europe before the Serb- Bosnia conflict began in April 1992? Sadly, our news is dominated by conflict, some of which is competition over scarce resources. We also have all the stories about the environmental damage and changes to climate that humanity is causing. Some will say we are living in the 'end-times' but Jesus' words and Paul's admonition to those first believers in Thessalonica are not to speculate about the future, follow false Messiahs or with the Thessalonians stop working and sponge off other people. Instead, Jesus calls for endurance while Paul wants the believers to work and keep on doing what is right.

Jane Williams, published in 2003, wrote this reflection on these readings.

'What Jesus is asking for is an almost impossible doggedness and level-headedness, a willingness to set our hands to the task in front of us and forgo the heady excitement of speculation. And in this, of course, he himself is the pattern. What you see in the Gospels – and particularly at this stage, where tension is visibly mounting and where the terrible climax in Jerusalem is in sight – is Jesus carrying on exactly as before. He still preaches, teaches, heals and urges people towards God and his kingdom. All around him are people trying to work out what will happen, what they should do about it, how they can force events into a pattern. Only Jesus, the cause of it all, carries on, unchanging.

Following the pattern is what is recommended by 2 Thessalonians, too. In this case, the pattern is the apostle Paul, but behind him is the larger template on which Paul modelled himself, Jesus. The letters to the Thessalonians suggest that they, like the disciples in Luke, are tempted to waste their energies in excited looking to the future. What they get is like a glass of cold water in the face. It is all about getting on with their daily work. How annoying for the people who had given up everything to prepare themselves for the end, to wait in stillness for the rapture of Jesus' return, and who are called idle busybodies for their pains. They are trying to second-guess God, or even persuade him to do what they want, instead of just patiently getting on with their lives.'

Though our global and national news are bleak yet a footnote in James Edwards commentary on Luke from a Roman historian describing the situation in the Roman empire around the time of Nero's final years and the civil wars that came after his suicide in AD 68 was also dire. It was a reminder to me of the difficulties those first believers faced in becoming a Christian. Difficulties which are still true for many in our world today, yes for those living in conflict zones or where famine or floods dominate but also difficulties for those who choose to follow Jesus from a different world faith. The Autumn CMS magazine included a story from a CMS local partner in Asia whose name and location are not given. She described her Buddhist background in a village and how she met Christians when she went to university in a city. Her mother was angry when she first told her she had become a Christian and told her not to go to church anymore. Though she promised not to while at home when she returned to university, she continued going to church but kept this secret. She tried again to tell her mother the difference Jesus had made to her life, but her mother now was more hurt than angry. She finished university and began work. After a few years she went to a mission conference and wondered where God wanted her to serve. An opportunity came to work with refugees, but she worried how to tell her parents that she would leave her job. I quote 'God is good; my parents actually supported my decision. I now work in a faith-based centre for refugees.' She has stood firm in her faith.

I will close with a little aside about translations for Luke 21:19.

By your endurance you will gain your souls. *NRSV*
with English Standard Version changing souls for lives.

Stand firm, and you will win life. *NIV*
with Good News Translation 'you will save yourselves'

In your patience possess ye your souls. *Authorised KJV*

By your steadfastness *and* patient endurance you shall win the true life of your souls. *Amplified Bible Classic Edition*

And finally, James Edwards literal translation 'By your endurance (or perseverance) you will make your lives secure.' He noted that the word

endurance or perseverance occurs one other time in Luke-Acts in the parable of the Sower (8:15) to describe the one who hears the word and perseveres to produce a crop. Then there is the promise that our life is secure, that Jesus is present with us whatever happens. That is the hope given in Luke and in 2 Thess 3:3-5 prior to our extract today.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, who creates all things,
who embraces all things, who celebrates all things,
who is present in every part of the fabric of creation.
We believe in God as the source of all life,
who baptises this planet with living water.
We believe in Jesus Christ, the suffering one, the poor one,
the malnourished one, the climate refugee,
who loves and cares for this world and who suffers with it.
And we believe in Jesus Christ, the seed of life,
who came to reconcile and renew this world and everything in it.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the breath of God,
who moves with God and who moves among and with us today.
We believe in everlasting life in God.
And we believe in the hope that one day
God will put an end to death and all destructive forces.

(Gurukul Theological college, India / adapted by Keld B. Hansen 2009)

Intercessions

Let us pray for all who suffer as a result of conflict,
and ask that God may give us peace:
for the service men and women
who have died in the violence of war,
each one remembered by and known to God;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

For those who love them in death as in life,
offering the distress of our grief
and the sadness of our loss;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

For all members of the armed forces
who are in danger this day,
remembering family, friends
and all who pray for their safe return;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

For civilian women, children and men
whose lives are disfigured by war or terror,
calling to mind in penitence
the anger and hatreds of humanity;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

For peacemakers and peacekeepers,
who seek to keep this world secure and free;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

For all who bear the burden and privilege of leadership,
political, military and religious;
asking for gifts of wisdom and resolve
in the search for reconciliation and peace;
may God give peace.

God give peace.

O God of truth and justice,
we hold before you those whose memory we cherish,
and those whose names we will never know.
Help us to lift our eyes above the torment of this broken world,
and grant us the grace to pray for those who wish us harm.
As we honour the past,
may we put our faith in your future;
for you are the source of life and hope,
now and for ever.

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.

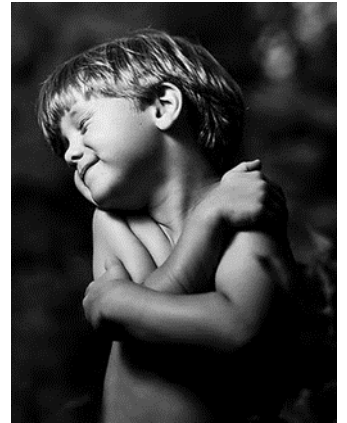
Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

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.



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.



We can now listen to a recording from St David's Church, courtesy of Nigel.
'Alleluia, O give thanks'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE-BIxIkb9c>

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. *(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)*

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 echoes 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 beloved community 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 forever. Amen.

(Adapted from The New Zealand Book of Prayer | He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa. This version of the Lord's prayer was influenced by Maori theologians)

Post-Communion Prayer

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.

Worship Music

'Father, hear the prayer we offer',

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp2EtHJRw5Q>

Closing prayer and benediction

May we always walk gently upon the Earth,
in right relationship,
nurtured by your love,
open to the wind of the Spirit,
taking only what we need,
always open to the needs of others,
making choices that bring wellbeing,
living with generosity,
striving for justice,
honouring all with reverence,
reconciling and peacemaking,
mindful of those who will come after,

recognising our proper place as part of your creation.

Grant us the strength and courage, Lord,
for such a radical transformation into your Kingdom. Amen.
(from *Christian Aid and Christian Ecology Link.*)

Blessing

Reconciling Christ, bless us and bless all who engage
in the sacred work of envisioning new wholeness,
and bringing people and nations together. Amen.

