

# Parish of Central Exeter

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany (2<sup>nd</sup> before Lent)  
Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion

12 February 2023

## A Christian Hope



Welcome everyone.

*Our reflections this morning have been written by Sheila with the Intercessions by Keith. Many thanks.*

### Opening Sentences

O Lord, open our lips and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Silence is kept.*

### Opening Prayer

In you alone we put our hope,  
God the Father, Creator and Sustainer,  
who gives all good things  
seen and unseen.

In you alone we put our hope,  
God the Son, Saviour and Redeemer,  
who died for our sins  
and rose again.

In you alone we put our hope,  
God the Spirit, Teacher and Comforter,  
who moves us to sing  
In you alone we put our hope.

*(written by John Birch, and posted on Faith and Worship.)*

### **Gathering Hymn**

‘Thou whose almighty word...’ Sung here by the Scottish Festival Singers,  
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJugdIVH8VY>

### **Collect for the second Sunday before Lent**

Almighty God,  
give us reverence for all creation  
and respect for every person,  
that we may mirror your likeness  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **The Lord’s prayer**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,  
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **New Testament Reading Romans 8 :18-25**

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

## **Gospel: Matthew 6:25-34**

<sup>25</sup> 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.'

*NRSVA, © 1989, 1995 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in USA.*

## Reflection

Each year for the second Sunday before Lent we are reminded of the accounts of creation in Genesis 1 or 2 and Proverbs 8. Different passages from the New Testament are set. This year we read from Paul's writing to the Romans, contrasting present suffering with future glory, and Jesus' teaching on the importance of trusting God and seeking God's justice, peace and love first of all. The providential care by God for his creation is shown in the passage from Matthew while in Romans there is the description of the 'groaning of creation.' One point to remember as we begin this short reflection is that for the people in Biblical times (and for many centuries later) creation meant that which could be seen by the naked eye – what was known on earth and visible in the sky. Our understanding of the diversity and fragility of life on earth and the vastness of all that is beyond this planet has increased dramatically even in recent years.

In summer 2008 I attended a book launch by Christopher Southgate at the university and bought a copy of his 'The Groaning of Creation – God, evolution and the problem of evil'. A year later I was at a course where he summarised the contents as I found the presentation notes in my copy. I remember that I slowly read the book and when preparing this reflection, I have looked at his conclusion where he discussed ethical principles. Fifteen years ago he wrote about the need for a transfer of 'resources from the urban heartlands of human wealth to places of high biodiversity but relative human poverty' (p130) if extinction of species was to be prevented and how this would mean less expenditure on weapons and defence. This has not happened. He argued for scientific advances to discover all the species in existence, to prevent extinction and to learn from nature while aware that such science and technology depends on a capitalist economic basis. At the same time there would need to be a 'profound (and counter-capitalist) restraint to our lives lived alongside these delicate ecosystems and their treasures.'(p130)

This is a Christian calling where humanity's wisdom is used alongside a deep humility towards the created order; in contrast to an emphasis on consumption and meeting all our desires. Serving God and not mammon (wealth) as Jesus said in Matt 6:24 and in seeking first God's ways of justice, peace and love as in verse 33.

When there is so much to worry about with the state of the world and the future of humanity how can we as Christians have hope? By remembering that

God cares for the smallest of creatures, that God suffers alongside the suffering of creation and that God is self-giving love. So I conclude with this prayer.

### **A prayer for our earth by Pope Francis 2015**

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no-one,

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts

of those who look only for gain

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognise that we are profoundly united

with every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle

for justice, love and peace.

### **Worship Song**

‘God in his love for us lent us this planet.’

Sung here by the Isle of Man Methodist Church

Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwBLsS6M4jQ>



*Higher Power Patrick Dougher An American artist who seeks to connect urban African-American culture to its African spiritual roots*

### **Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.  
We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.  
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,

who strengthens us  
with power from on high.  
We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

*(cf Ephesians 3)*

## **Intercessions**

Take the time you need to pray for others as well as yourself.

You may wish to remember:

The Anglican Community as it grapples with the issues of gender and identity,  
and for those who feel they are being failed in some way by the church.

People who are suffering as a result of natural disasters and human conflict,  
especially people in Turkey, Syria and Ukraine, but also in the knowledge that  
there are countless others whose lives are lived against a backdrop of  
insecurity, violence and insufficient or inadequate public services.

All those involved in international and national humanitarian agencies and for  
the safety of their workers.

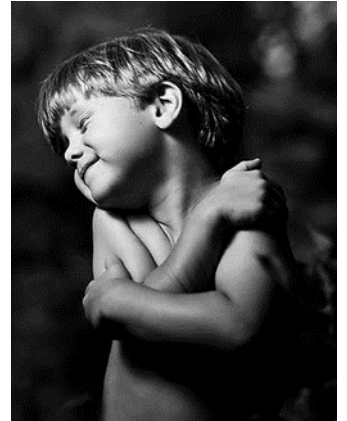
The people of our own country, especially those who are finding it hard to  
cope with financial pressures, those who are unwell and those who are  
healing.

The life of our city and the city churches as they seek to explore new ways of  
working in an ever-changing environment.

Lastly don't forget yourself and those near and dear to you.

## **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 'Arise, shine out' - an Epiphany carol sung by the choir of St David's church. Thanks to Nigel for sending this.*

*Words are on the screen.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Joh\\_liEpU7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Joh_liEpU7c)



*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 our creator,  
by your gift  
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,  
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:  
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth  
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross  
and enjoy the delights of eternity;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **Commission**

They are right,  
those who doubt what we do.  
It is purely the product of over-active imaginations.  
Who but the foolish would look at barren ground and imagine food for all,  
see past desolation and believe it will become an oasis,  
would not be stopped by war, but live for the day it will be peace,  
and reach deep into the world's fear in the prayer it would bring life.

So if faith is the terrain of the deluded  
then may you leave here with the faith of the fools  
who have loved the world since its beginning  
and will live for its redemption until its end.

## **Blessing**

The Lord bless us and watch over us,  
the Lord make his face shine upon us  
and be gracious to us,  
the Lord look kindly on us  
and give us peace;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always.

**Amen.**

## **Closing Music**

Seek ye first the kingdom of God. Sung here by Keswick Live. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFxZeY2D5tc>



*Consider the lilies of the field*