

Parish of Central Exeter
Sixth Sunday of Easter
14 May 2023



Rainbow Covenant

Welcome everyone.

Opening Prayer

We worship the God who inhabits our world
and indwells our lives.

We need not look up to find God,
we need only to look around:

within ourselves,
beyond ourselves,
into the eyes of another.

We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God,
we need only listen to the music of life,

the words of children,
the questions of the curious,
the rhythm of a heartbeat.

We worship the God who inhabits our world
and who indwells our lives.

(posted on the Presbyterian Church USA website.)

Gathering Hymn

Great is your faithfulness. Sung by the Celebration Choir with the Sheffield Citadel Salvation Army Band. Words on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ox4es1jo8>

Prayer of Confession

Loving God,
in Jesus you offer life to the world
and love to its people.
When we see life only for ourselves,

forgive us.

Help us to hear your transforming love
speaking to us of respect, dignity and worth,
telling us that we are loved
and that we are to love one another.

In the knowledge of this love
work through us to bring your justice to the world,
in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website.)

Silence is kept

Assurance of Pardon

Praise God, who listens when we pray,
and who responds with unfailing love!

Collect

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

From the Coronation Service – The King's Prayer

The King's Prayer

God of compassion and mercy whose Son was sent not to be served but to serve, give grace that I may find in thy service perfect freedom and in that freedom knowledge of thy truth. Grant that I may be a blessing to all thy children, of every faith and conviction, that together we may discover the ways of gentleness and be led into the paths of peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

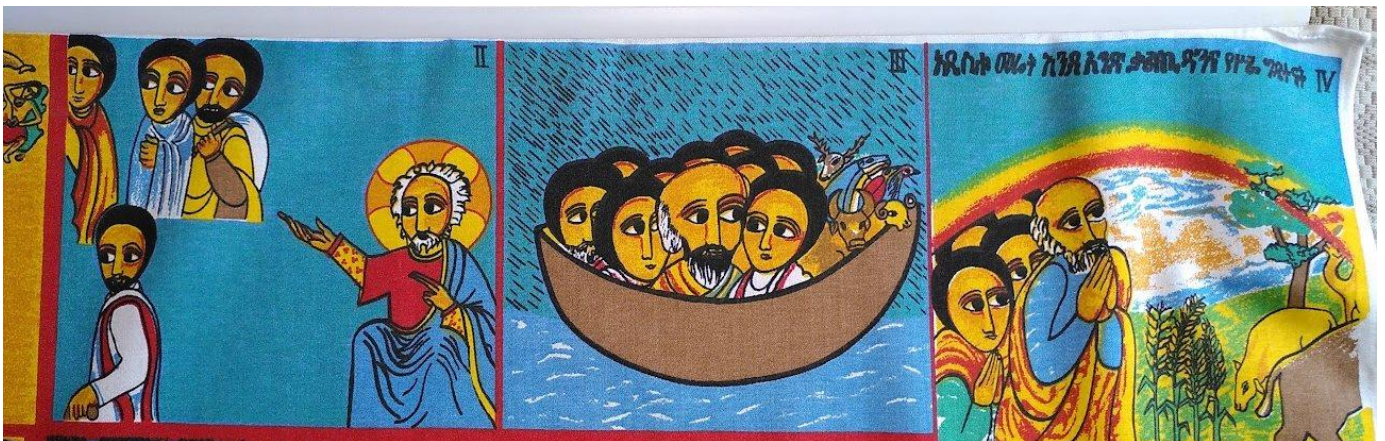
Comment

Having fulfilled his legal and constitutional obligations to the nation and the realms, The King offers this, and the vows he has made to God, in a prayer

specially composed for His Majesty to pray alone in response to the promises made. The prayer continues to reflect the theme of loving service. It is inspired by biblical language (Galatians 5) and also the language of the much-loved hymn 'I vow to thee my country', itself inspired by words from the Bible (Proverbs 3.17). This is possibly the first time in our history that such a personal prayer has been voiced so publicly by the Sovereign.

Reading

Today we are following the appointed Old Testament reading.



Genesis 8:20-9:17 The Covenant of the Rainbow

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the Lord smelt the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its

blood. ⁵ For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image
God made humankind.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.'

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' ¹² God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' ¹⁷ God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

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Reflection

During the Easter season the Old Testament readings each year include part of the Noah story. In our current year A this covers 3 Sundays beginning in chapter 7 and ending with today's passage. In the other two years a selection of verses from chapter 7 to 9:13 are given for Easter 4. The image of recreation and new life after the destruction of the flood link with the message of resurrection. Since the 19th century biblical scholars have noted the two different sources within the text and the similarities with other flood narratives

from the same historical period. More recent commentaries study the whole text while noting that there is an earlier and later theological viewpoint but that the focus for both is the same, namely the action of the Lord (YHWH), also called God. Using comments from Walter Bruggemann and David Atkinson I will now summarise the whole Noah account from Genesis 6:5.

The opening section begins with the description that the world is full of wickedness and evil so that 'the Lord was very sorry that he had made humans...it grieved him to his heart' (6:6). God is moved to act and plans to destroy what he has created. This is an act of judgement but 'Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord' (6:8). Favour or grace has one scholar noted found Noah. God is intimately involved with his creation and acts – grace comes first as only in verse 9 with the later account we read that Noah is righteous in a corrupt society. This first section which shows society hostile to God's ways ends in 6:13.

The long middle section has the instruction to build the ark, to find the animals, the ensuing flood with the death and destruction before the floods subside and Noah, his family and all the creatures can leave to begin a new life. I will return to this middle section after commenting on the final section which is the reading for today.

This starts with Noah building an altar – a new beginning to worship God and to give thanks. The intimate concern God has for humanity is shown again with the phrase 'in his heart'. Yet God is realistic and understands that though humanity will incline to evil he is not giving up on them or his creation. He will ensure the regularity of the seasons and agricultural cycle. (*We may note how it is the exploitative use of resources by humanity which has led to the disruption of these cycles in recent years.*) Chapter 9 begins with God blessing Noah and his family, reminding them of their responsibility over creation and the sanctity of human life. The final section introduces the concept of covenant which will become a key biblical theme between God and here the whole of creation, while later it is between God and the Israelites. Now we come to the rainbow. The Hebrew word for bow that is used here is a weapon. So, when God says 'I have set my bow in the clouds' (9:13) he is hanging up his weapon. God is taking a rest – no more destruction – instead recreation and new life. Bruggemann describes the opening and closing sections to show that there is a change in the way God acts towards humanity from the opening scene of 'judgement, destructive anger, law-suit speech' to one of 'assurance, promissory vow, salvation oracle'. How does this change happen? The key is

the centre of the whole account – 8v1 ‘But God remembered Noah’. This is the good news for Noah and all faithful people after Noah. God has not forgotten you. In the midst of chaos and despair God remembers. It is this that changes the waters of destruction, the hostility and judgement of the flood, to a renewed creation and commitment by God to the world.

During the period of the exile the Israelites experienced destruction of all their familiar ways of worship and thinking about God as they were taken to a foreign land. But in that place of judgement there was a new theological understanding which is seen in the later text of the Noah account (6:11-13, 9:1-17) and in second Isaiah. Here in Isaiah 54:9-10 when the people feel that God has abandoned them, the prophet refers to the Noah story and declares that God is more reliable than any part of creation, that his steadfast love will never leave them nor his covenant of peace be removed for he is the Lord who has compassion for them.

This is God’s promise to us today as well.

Yoruba Poem, West Africa

Enjoy the earth gently
Enjoy the earth gently
For if the earth is spoiled
It cannot be repaired
Enjoy the earth gently

Worship Song

Morning has broken. Words are on screen. (*how Noah and family felt on leaving the ark?*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5D3LEjGF8A>

Lord’s Prayer

Creator God –
maker and shaper of all that is, seen and unseen;
You are in the expanse and depth of Creation,
and in the processes that make life possible.

Yet we are distracted by the gods we make ourselves
and our lives become fractured and fragmented.
In our brokenness we disturb the
Earth's capacity to hold us.
Instead we find climate uncertainty and global injustice.
Call us back from the brink.
Help us to choose love not fear,
to change ourselves and not the planet;
to act justly for the sake of the vulnerable;
and to make a difference today for life tomorrow.
In your name - Maker, Son and Spirit. Amen

(Version by Martin Goss)

Intercessions

O God, who made the world and everything in it,
we pray with one voice, proclaiming your presence to all the earth.

For sceptics and believers, for clergy high and low;
For those who seek God at home, at work, in the streets, and in the pews,
For all who search for life, come and listen:

For we are all God's offspring.

For presidents and prime ministers, for bosses and wardens;
For those who set the course at home, at work, in the streets, and in the pews,
For all who wield power, come and listen:

We do not fear what others fear.
We proclaim the hope that is in us.
Because Christ lives, we also live.

For we are all God's offspring.

For friends and lovers, for neighbours and strangers,
For those who eat bread at home, at work, in the streets,
and in the pews,
For all who live in the world, come and listen:

In God, we live and move and have our being.
From God, we have life and breath and all things.
Because Christ lives, we also live.

For we are all God's offspring.

For the sick and troubled, for the fearful and alone,
For those in pain at home, at work, in the streets, and in the pews,
For all who suffer, come and listen:

Our prayers are not rejected.
Our souls are held in life.
In truth, our God has heard us,
and love is not withheld.
Because Christ lives, we also live.

For we are all God's offspring.

For those kept in memory, for those long forgotten,
For all who ever took the breath of life at home, at work, in the streets, and in
the pews,
For the dead and those who mourn them, come and listen:

We are blessed by your presence.
We are filled with the Spirit.
Because Christ lives, we also live.

For we are all God's offspring.

God of heaven and earth, Companion in life, Spirit of truth,
to you alone we turn our eyes and lift our hearts.

Amen.

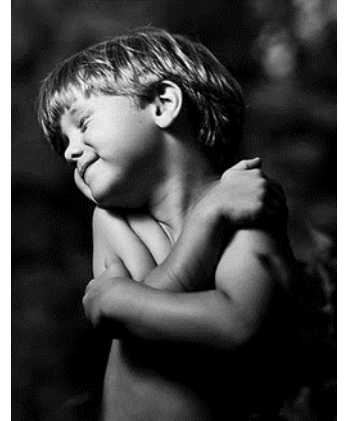
(written by Margaret D. McGee, and posted on In the Courtyard.)

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 St Davids's choir singing the Easter anthem: Christ is risen, Many thanks Nigel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS8wcYMHOSo>

*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

The image you have shaped within us,
mysteriously,
incredibly,
a reflection of your own Being,

Is best seen in the multiple refractions,
of our variegated humanity;
in the prismatic kaleidoscopes,
of our shared life,
our interconnectedness,
our being with each other.

We seek you, God, we long for you
and, thankfully, you are not far off
not hidden;

We need only remember
that you are most easily found

when we find you together,
and when we are humble enough to look
even in the faces we find most strange and unfamiliar.

(Sacredise: John van der Laar)

Noah looks back

I often hear others tell stories of my ark,
and before the Lord God brings my years to a close
I feel I should set the record straight.

I knew something about the sea
and what a boat looks like,
but it did feel stupid building one inland.

Others said so too; most others in fact.
'It may come in useful,' I said.
I didn't dare say: 'God told me to.'

I made it large enough to take the whole family,
and the animals were our food supply,
as God had said we would be on the boat for some time.

We waited for something to happen.
I would watch the sky for rain clouds
but none came.

Then I heard a distant roaring noise,
coming from the west – from the sea.
And getting louder.

Suddenly over the crest of some low hills
a huge wave appeared,
moving relentlessly forward.

'Into the boat.' I screamed,
'and bring the animals too!
Don't watch it, get inside now!'

I can still remember how frightening it was,
as water cascaded all around us,
the waves sweeping the boat along.

This seemed to go on for ever,
but gradually the water lost its power
and we drifted.

We drifted for days.
We must be on a huge lake
but where is its shore?

‘Look! isn’t that land over there?
...If we can get to it.
We need some sort of sail.’

Well, we got there,
and splashed our way to dry land
and wondered where we were

and whether there were any others
and how many people had perished
and why such things happen.

Keith Walton November 2021

Commission and Benediction

Go now into the world.
Search for the God who is not far from each one of us.
Offer to all who ask an account of the hope that is in you.
Keep your conscience clear
as you live the commandments in love.

And may God greet your prayers with constant love;
may Christ Jesus give you life through his own life;
and may the Spirit of truth abide with you and within you, always.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

Nathan Nettleton
(posted on *Laughing Bird Liturgical Resources*)

Closing Music

There's a wideness in God's Mercy, sung at St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich

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



A rainbow (often called a moonbow) created by moonlight and forming a complete circle.

