

Parish of Central Exeter  
Trinty 18  
8 October 2023

## Prison Sunday

Welcome everyone.



Reflection from Sheila, Intercessions from Caroline. Many thanks.

For nearly 50 years, Prisons Week has encouraged Christians everywhere to pray for prisoners and their families, victims of crime, their communities and those working or volunteering in the criminal justice system. Prisons Week is a truly ecumenical venture, both CTBI and CTE are sponsoring bodies as are a number of CTE's member churches including the Free Churches Group, The Salvation Army, Assemblies of God and Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

This year Prison's Week runs between the 8 and 14 October and everyone is encouraged to join together in prayer. The theme this year is "Look Up", taken from Psalm 19 v 1, which encourages us by saying "The heavens declare the glory of God, so look up", inspiring hope when all seems lost.

## Opening Prayer

No prison cell is so isolated that it can keep the Lord out. He is there with you. He cries with you, works with you, hopes with you. His paternal and maternal love is everywhere.

*Pope Francis*

Here, in this place,  
God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters:  
here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.  
Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us:  
here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!  
Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown:  
here, in this faith space, we will find the courage to cry out, 'God, save us!'  
in every situation.     *(Thomas Schuman, Lectionary Liturgies)*

## **Gathering Hymn**

Come let us sing of a wonderful love.

Sung by Cornerstone Methodist Church – a group of church communities in Cumbria. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCSx7ZZ3-2I>

## **Prayer of Confession**

Some facts about prisons today in England and Wales.

The prison population in mid-September was 87,685, an increase of 7.5% on the same period last year.

This is partly due to:

An increasing number of people on remand or awaiting a sentence – some 15,500 in all.

More than 32,000 are in jail for sentences of four years or longer, and longer sentences are increasing.

The numbers of prison staff are 10% fewer than in 2010, when the prison population was much smaller.

Suicide rates are significantly higher in custody than amongst the general population. In 2014, the rate of self-inflicted deaths amongst the prison population was 100 per 100,000 people. Amongst the general population it was 11.9 per 100,000 people.

47% of prisoners report having no qualifications, compared with 15% of the general population. One in five prisoners report needing help with reading, writing or numeracy. 42% of prisoners have been expelled or permanently excluded from school.

About 50% of all inmates are reconvicted for new offences within 12 months of being discharged.

Two thirds of our prisons are overcrowded by Ministry of Justice standards, and almost half our prisons need urgent significant repairs, including Exeter.

The UK prison population is the highest in W. Europe with 149 prisoners per 100,000 of population – a figure which has doubled in the last 20 years.

*Silence is kept*

Father forgive us.

Dear Lord, we lift up to you all of those caught up within the prison system. We ask that as the confusion, mess, violence and addiction is all around they might know that their refuge is in you.

We know that we can find rest in you, we know that we can be still and know that you are God. We pray for peace in the heart of each of those behind locked doors and we pray that they would know you close.

### **Collect**

God, our judge and saviour,  
teach us to be open to your truth and to trust in your love,  
that we may live each day with confidence in the salvation which is given.

**Amen.**

### **Psalm 19**

The heavens are telling the glory of God  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

2 One day pours out its song to another  
and one night unfolds knowledge to another.

3 They have neither speech nor language  
and their voices are not heard,

4 Yet their sound has gone out into all lands  
and their words to the ends of the world.

5 In them has he set a tabernacle for the sun,  
that comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber

and rejoices as a champion to run his course.

6 It goes forth from the end of the heavens  
and runs to the very end again,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure  
and gives wisdom to the simple.

8 The statutes of the Lord are right and rejoice the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure  
and gives light to the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;  
the judgements of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold,  
more than much fine gold,  
sweeter also than honey,  
dripping from the honeycomb.

11 By them also is your servant taught  
and in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can tell how often they offend  
O cleanse me from my secret faults!

13 Keep your servant also from presumptuous sins  
lest they get dominion over me;  
so shall I be undefiled,  
and innocent of great offence.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

### **Reflection**

This is a familiar and well-loved psalm from the opening verse declaring the 'glory of God' to a favourite preacher's prayer adapting the final verse before a sermon. The regularity of the sun providing energy for all life and the wonder of the night skies tell without words of the glory of God to the person of faith. From delighting in the beauty of creation the psalmist turns to delight in the beauty of God's word revealed in scripture. These words are true and reliable.

They will provide wisdom and are to be valued above all else. The final three verses turn to prayer as the psalmist recognises that his (or her) own words 'often lack the beauty, purity and integrity celebrated in the previous verses.'

So, the final verse is a prayer 'a longing to produce good words that come from good thoughts. The way forward is to look to Yhwh, the strong protector, who is also redeemer.'

This Psalm has been chosen as the main focus for our thinking during Prison's Week. It is easy to feel bowed down by the far too many problems affecting our prisons, those who are locked up in them and those who staff them. But by starting with the statement that the Heaven's reflect the glory of God, we are invited to look up, to see God's presence in the wonder of creation and the living world.

Whenever and wherever we call or cry out in prayer, "look up child" is the response from a loving God who is always ready to hear, whose faithful love reaches out to us through Jesus and offers us forgiveness and hope, all of our days.

**You may like to watch a video created for this week entitled 'Look up, child.'**

<https://vimeo.com/861171140>

### **Prayers of encouragement**

Everyone needs a few words of encouragement. We grow stronger, we see things more clearly, and we achieve more. Justice surely hopes that there will be a sense of healing, a chance to see things differently, and a new future for all those affected by crime and imprisonment. To achieve this we need each other, and in particular we need each other's words of encouragement.

This Prisons Week let us pray for all those affected by prison, that we may build a sense of hope in each other that life will in some measure be restored. Restored, accepted, free. No one left behind. "So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind." *1 Thessalonians 5 v11*

## Intercessions

Some of these prayers are by Dr Phil Wall

Living God, we pray for justice and healing; for grace and transformation; for compassion and understanding. As we think of those who reside in prisons; who have been victims of crime; or who work within the criminal justice system, we pray the prison week prayer:

Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer

Lord you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in his strength and in his spirit, now and every day.

Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer

- Lord we would also remember those who are living a captive life as refugees and asylum seekers, those who await decisions which will be life-changing.
- We remember too those who are imprisoned in their own homes by illness, disease or physical handicap which isolation may prevent them of the freedom to go outdoors.
- And we pray also for those whose lives are compromised by addiction or mental distress which excludes them from common society.

Lord in your mercy ..... hear our prayer

Dear God there are many kinds of imprisonment. Help us constantly to experience that freedom in a faith which encompasses the hope that darkness can be overcome by the light of living with the teaching of your only son Jesus Christ. Amen

Merciful Father, accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **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.*



*You might like to listen to 'Let us see, O  
Lord thy mercy ' - Psalm 85 from St David's. Many thanks, Nigel.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kwg-1jaqc8>

*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**

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us,  
and make us continually to be given to all good works;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



*'...I was naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me ... as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'*

(Matthew 25:36-40)

### **Commission and Benediction**

God calls us to step out in faith,  
to follow where He leads  
even if what He calls us to do seems impossible.

So let's go from here with courage,  
trusting in God's presence and power,  
and eager to do God's will.

And may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and within you  
wherever you find yourself this week.

## Closing Music

Christ – a touching place. Sung on a BBC Songs of Praise from Northumbria. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTlwZ3XNyEY>

If you would like to read or use the prayers from the Prisons Week website - please click on

[www.prisonsworld.org/wp-content/uploads/PW2023-TEXT-ONLY-ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.prisonsworld.org/wp-content/uploads/PW2023-TEXT-ONLY-ENGLISH.pdf)

