**PRINTED WORSHIP MATERIAL FOR SUNDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

**Compiled by Mr Colin Webber**

*There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it.*
*If only we are brave enough to* ***be*** *it*
*(Amanda Gorman, The Hill We Climb)*

**HYMN**
For the beauty of the earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVQFEgT7E6c>

**PRAYERS OF APPROACH & ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**
Lord God, you call us to live our best lives – for you, with you, in you. We may sometimes pause to smell the coffee or the roses, but we are often too busy to take time to be aware of you – that you are with us, in us, and in those around us. Quieten our hearts now to recognise you today. Help us to reach out to one another with love, care and compassion, so that we can all live our best life for you.

*Now take some time to be honest with God about when you have fallen short of your best …*

Loving Lord God, you care so much for each one of us. You are there for us whenever we turn to you. When we are truly sorry, and intend to move forward, to live our best life, you graciously forgive us all our sins. We gratefully and humbly accept your forgiveness and peace. **Amen.**

‘We thought we were doing the right thing, telling Jesus that we saw someone casting out demons in his name. We thought he’d be a bit annoyed and have words with him because he wasn’t one of us. But what happened? It was me that got it wrong, that’s what. Jesus let me know in no uncertain terms that people doing things in his name shouldn’t be turned away. I don’t think it was the first time he had said something like that to us, either. But I was a bit confused when he started going on about stumbling blocks. More than that, I thought he’d lost the plot. Yes, I get it (now!) that I shouldn’t get in the way of those who want to do the things they saw Jesus do, even if they are not part of our group. But surely, it’s going a bit far to suggest putting a millstone round my neck and jumping in the sea? Or cutting off bits of my body. Just how important is this kingdom living? I got the bit about the salt, I think. Something that looks like salt but isn’t salty is no good to anyone. Anyway, see what you think.’

**READINGS:** Numbers 11.4-6,10-16,24-29; Psalm 19.7-14; **James 5.13-20**; **Mark 9.38-50**

**HYMN(S)**
I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74kyfROS4q8>

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

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

**REFLECTION**
If someone had suggested 18 months ago that we were about to enter a world of ‘social distancing’, ‘lockdown’, ‘furlough’ and ‘self-isolation’, we probably would have thought it was the plot of a new dystopian novel or TV drama. The disciples hearing Jesus say the words we heard in this week’s Gospel reading may have had the equivalent first-century reaction. Better to throw yourself in the sea or cut off your limbs…what was Jesus talking about? Surely this cannot be real?

Just as, in hindsight, those pandemic words and phrases – and the rules and way of life associated with them – now make sense, Jesus’ very graphic language begins to make sense as we look at the example of kingdom living given in the passage from James’ letter. Here we see people being encouraged to pray with those who suffer, sing with those who are cheerful, and anoint those who are sick. Live as Jesus lived –sharing and caring, treating and valuing everyone equally, and all the time trusting and having faith in God. Jesus’ graphic imagery emphasises the importance of these kingdom values, which are so important that life without them is not really life at all – or not life as God intends it to be. Life is where the things that are not part of kingdom living are eliminated – greed, self-centredness, exclusion, bullying and many other things that hurt, belittle or damage people.

Is this possible for us today? James refers to the story of Elijah. Elijah prayed for something that seemed impossible – specifically for the rain to stop and then start again; you can read the full story in 1 Kings 17 – and it happened. It may seem impossible to us that, given the way the world and society is now, God’s kingdom will come to fruition anytime soon. The task is surely overwhelming. Elijah thought the same. But that didn’t stop him or put him off.

And we should not be put off. Let’s pray for the impossible. Let’s look for God at work in what we are doing, of course, but also in what others are doing – especially those of whom we might be tempted to say ‘They are not with us.’ Let us be open to hearing Jesus’ words speak into our experience:

‘Whoever is not against us is with us.’ Let us encourage and welcome everyone and anyone who is living and promoting God’s kingdom values – or, if you prefer, way of living. Let us encourage each to be the best people we can be – and never to be a stumbling block to one of God’s beloved children.

**PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

Creator God, your world is full of beauty – but also full of pain. Today we pray for all those suffering – in body, in mind and in spirit. We ask for strength and for healing, relief from pain, and the support of others.

We pray for all those who are ill, whether suffering from a nasty short-term bug,

or a chronic long-term illness that drains not just energy but hope. May we not forget them but continue to lift them before you, and value them in how we respect and care for them.

We pray for those who are facing terminal illness – either in themselves or in those they love.

We ask for your tender care to surround them, for a knowledge of your presence with them

to sustain and strengthen them.

We pray in hope and faith, knowing your compassion is so much greater than our own,

and that we cannot even begin to measure the depths of your love for all those who suffer.

May your mercy rain down upon them, your love be born afresh in their hearts, and your healing be evident in their lives.

In the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

**HYMN**
Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-D_aT8CXyc>

Take time each day to ask God to show you examples of kingdom living (especially, perhaps, in other people where you have not previously recognised it) – and keep your eyes open to see this in action. Make a note of what you find, and use it as a prompt to prayer.

Lord God, bless us and keep us. May we be a blessing to others in all we think and say and do.

*Selected material from Roots resources*