

Worship at Home - Sunday, 20th March 2022 (3rd Sunday in Lent)

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people across the Methodist Connexion are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Sentence

Sing praise to God, who is merciful and just.
Sing praise to God, whose love endures forever.

Hymn: StF638 Through all the changing scenes of life
Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://youtu.be/OVJxhpcj6o>

Nahum Tate (1652-1715) and Nicholas Brady (1659-1726) Based on Psalm 34

Let us pray together:

God, you welcome us as, with all your people, we come to worship.

You welcome us each day, calling us out of darkness into your marvellous light. You rejoice in our vitality and excitement, and you delight to see us reaching out to you, responding to your love. Our hearts are full of praise as we consider the work of your hands. And we are moved to silence when we consider the work of Jesus. We praise you for all you have given through Jesus. He has shepherded us and guided us. He is our prophet, opening our eyes to the truth about ourselves - and about the hope we have in you. He is our King, leading us as we battle it out with life, as we seek to be faithful despite temptations, and the times when we do not know what the right thing to do is.

We confess that we do not always live in the light of Christ. We should be generous and welcoming, but we shut the doors of our homes or our church to keep the cries of the world away. Jesus calls us to live for others, but sometimes we find that too costly. Yet, Jesus has the last word - and Jesus says, your sins are forgiven. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Today's Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 55:1-9

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

Time to Reflect:

Why do we suffer? People used to call life 'this vale of tears', and you can understand why. Life in was often hard and short. And for many people, in this country and elsewhere, it still is.

Why do we suffer? Part of the Biblical answer seems to be - because we do. We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here.

Some people came to Jesus with a question - were the Galileans Pilate murdered in the temple worse sinners than all the other

Galileans? Jesus reminds them of another incident as well - a tower that collapsed in Siloam, in Jerusalem, killing 18 people. Were those victims worse sinners than everybody else? Did they deserve it? Or the women in Haiti at a prayer meeting in a church which collapsed during the earthquake of January 2010? They were all killed. Were they worse sinners than everyone else who survived? Humans have always looked for patterns. We look for the pattern of a face, and we see it in the moon. Or we see the pattern of an England batting collapse after Joe Root is out. We look to a pattern of rewards and punishments. We expect justice. We expect the world to be fair. But it's not.

In the book of Job, Job suffers terribly. Job's three friends keep telling him that he must have done something to deserve his suffering. But Job declares his innocence. It's an idea that continues into the present day - that bad things are God's punishment. It's almost as if we want a world where you can look at suffering and say, 'they deserve it'. Though, if that were the case, would we have the courage to say, 'we deserve it'? But Jesus is clear - do not look at things in that way. Suffering happens - it's the way of the world. Sometimes suffering is inflicted by others - by Pilate killing pilgrims, or someone attacking worshippers at a mosque with assault weapons. Sometimes by accident - a tower collapsing, or a cyclone wreaking devastation, or cancer cutting short a life. Jesus says very clearly, not their sin. Not your sin. There may well be blame, we've all done stupid things that have brought down a pile of brick on our heads. But it still isn't God's judgement. And there are plenty of examples of people 'getting away with it'. But (there's always a 'but'). But what Jesus does say, very clearly, is, turn to God. Turn to God - repent, in other words.

If the idea of turning to God makes us uneasy - and it should - remember the second part of the gospel reading. The landowner wants to rip out the fig tree, but Jesus has the gardener give the fig tree one more go - and he's going to give it every chance, by digging around it and giving it some proper manure. The tree will bear fruit. We will bear fruit. And what fruit will

we bear? The fruits of the spirit - love, joy peace patience kindness goodness, faithfulness and self-control. So:

- 1) Don't judge. Things happen in life - and to assume they are God's judgement is wrong.
- 2) Give people a break, including yourself. The gardener does so in Luke, giving the tree another chance and taking responsibility for it.
- 3) Remember that we bear fruit - the fruits of the spirit. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

Take a time to sit quietly.

A time of prayer

Jesus, our friend, hear our prayers for the church and the world. Today, the prayer handbook asks us to pray for Christians in China and Hong Kong. Within this country, we pray for churches and people of the Newcastle upon Tyne district. As we walk together through Lent, may we all grow in grace and love for you and our neighbours. Jesus, our shepherd, we pray for those who suffer. However suffering comes, we pray that people will find the care and support they need to stand firm and come through. We pray for ourselves, that we may be a light to those who are in the dark and a comfort to those who need strength.

Jesus, our prophet, we pray for those who give us hope. We pray especially for those who, like the gardener, give us a second chance. We pray for social worker and probation officers. We thank you for their graciousness and vision. We pray that we may be slow to condemn and quick to see the image of God within everyone. Jesus, our life, we pray that you will fill us with hope, strengthen us by faith and direct us by love, so that we may play our part in your Kingdom of justice, love, life and hope. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father

Hymn: Listen to Tender Saviour, by Nick and Anita Haigh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhGi3npNlYY>
or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing
May the Jesus who suffered bless you with strength. May the Jesus who rose from the dead bless you with hope. May the Jesus who endured the cross bless you with joy. Amen.

Original Materials by Richard Parkes
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Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have

contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team.

For more worship resources see
[The Bible \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://TheBible.methodist.org.uk)
[Singing the Faith Plus \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://SingingtheFaithPlus.methodist.org.uk)

Readings:

Isaiah 55:1-9

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'
Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'