

Call to worship

Loving and Almighty God,
Present with us throughout our lives
in times of joy and in times of sorrow, in times of fulfilment and in times of struggle
Make us aware of your presence now as we worship you.
Draw us together as one family as we worship in our separate places
for, although we worship in different places, we are gathered together as we worship.
Give us strength and inspiration
as we walk through this strange land and strange times
May we still sing you praises, voice our questions, cry our grief
and know that you hold us in our fear.
We ask this in your name
Amen

**Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found — we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.**

**Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight — our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.**

**Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him — in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.,**

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We read Psalm 23 together:

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long**

Prayer of Praise and adoration

Holy God, holy and true, faithful and loving, we praise and adore you.
Your presence is beyond our understanding, Your nature too great for us to grasp
And yet you are with us, yearning for our good, grieving our hurts.
Lord Jesus Christ, God made one of us, we praise and adore you.
You lived our life, knew its struggles and limitations, its possibilities and abundance.
You laughed and wept with those you loved
Through your life death and resurrection you bring healing, hope and life in all its fullness.
Breath of God, Holy Spirit, we praise and adore you.
Present before time began, brooding and midwifing life
your life flows within us and beyond us now, drawing us into worship, forming us into one people.
Holy God, faithful and true, three in one, we praise and adore you now and forever.
Amen

A Prayer of Confession

For the things we have done or said that would have been better not said or done
Lord have mercy
For those things left undone or unsaid that we should have said or done
Lord have mercy
Almighty God, for whom nothing is impossible
you continually work for the abundance of your creation.
Take all that we are and all that we have been
the times when we have walked in your steps and the times we have turned away
transform and recycle them in your love and for your kingdom.
Amen

In Christ God makes all things new. Our sins are forgiven
Thanks be to God

**The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.**

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

**He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil;
and my cup — it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.**

**And though I walk the darkest path —
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.**

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John 9 :1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So

they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

Meditation

Who sinned?

Why is this happening?

How can God let this happen?

The disciples' question at the beginning of this story from John's Gospel is one we often echo, at different times and in different words, when we are confronted with pain, suffering, illness or disaster.

Who sinned?

Why is this happening?

How can God let this happen?

We look for a cause, someone to blame. The disciples seek to blame the man or his parents. Later the pharisees echo their words and join them telling the man that he was 'born entirely in sins'.

Who sinned?

Why is this happening?

How can God let this happen?

We do it too -

"It's the government's fault - they acted too slowly"

our need to blame, to find an enemy

echoes in our heads, calls from newspapers and news broadcasts, shouts from social media growing to a cacophony that can stop us from seeing God's presence and hearing God's voice, as it did for the pharisees:

a miracle had happened in front of them,

- a once blind man, was declaring the beauty of a world he could now see
and shouting of the glory of God within it.

Yet all they could see and hear were rules broken,

all they were listening for was evidence of a crime and proof of whom to blame.

Who sinned?

Why is this happening?

How can God let this happen?

Into the questioning of the disciples, the accusations of the pharisees and the wondering worship of the healed man Jesus speaks.

He speaks of God's presence, action and transformation

He tells of God's intention that the world become a kingdom of abundance full of light and colour.

He changes the question from 'who's to blame' to 'where is God?'

and then answers with a declaration of God's presence..

We need to be careful how we read the answer to the disciple's first question

"he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

If we're not careful we fall into the trap of thinking that God causes bad things to happen to people so that God can be seen to perform miracles. I don't believe that.

I believe in a God whose life and love echoes in and through all that is,

who is constantly using everything that is for good,

constantly teaching us more of who we are and God is in each situation,

who takes our damage and hurt, our brokenness and pain

and transforms them and heals them,

and uses them and us as the building blocks of his kingdom

I believe in a God, who in Jesus, saw not just a man born blind, but a man condemned by others

and sought to bring healing

and to allow others to see him as God's glorious creation, a true child of God.

In all these long conversations in John's Gospel Jesus hears the questions and the laments of those before him,

listens to the indignation, the fear and the accusations

and he will do so all the way to death on the cross.

As he does so he seeks to transform them

to bring light into darkness

to show the possible where we see the impossible

to bring hope to the hopeless

to use the voices of those seen as sinners to teach those who see themselves as sinless

to allow the voiceless to teach new songs to those who think they know it all.

In the weeks to come,

may we allow God to hear our fear, our grief our closed questions and our seeking blame

may we allow God to open our eyes to the suffering in this world and to grieve and lament

may we allow God to give us the generosity to look beyond our needs and grief to the needs of others

and may we allow God to open our souls, minds and bodies and all that we are to the wonders that still surround us and God's love that still holds us fast

So that with the man who found his sight we can shout

'Lord, I believe'

Just as I am, without one plea

but that you died to set me free,

and at your bidding, 'Come to me!'

O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about

with many a conflict, many a doubt,

fightings within and fears without,

O Lamb of God, I come!

**Just as I am, you will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!**

**Just as I am — your love unknown
has broken every barrier down —
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!**

**Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God, I come!**

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Prayers of Intercession

God of love,
you blessed us with your servant son, Jesus, so that we might know how to serve your people with justice and with mercy. We gather the needs of others, and ourselves and offer them to you in faith and love, seeking to be strengthened to meet them.

God of healing,
as your son healed the sick and diseased bringing comfort to the communities he visited, come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the corona virus, so we may experience your healing love.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

God of justice, we are troubled not only for our own families and friends. We worry about the vulnerable and unprotected throughout the world. We know there are many people who live in countries where health systems are poor, governments are corrupt and many citizens have few resources to help themselves.

This is the time for world leaders to set aside their quarrels and self-aggrandisement. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well being of the people they are meant to serve. Lord let their eyes see the desperation of their peoples and their ears hear the cries for help. Show them how to cooperate with other nations so that a world response to this frightening pandemic can bring relief to the neediest and the oppressed.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

We pray for your Church the world over. Encourage all Christians to be compassionate, ready to stand alongside those who suffer. We pray for those individuals who have little or no work because of this crisis, for the homeless and the weak and elderly. Give us strength to do our part and support people in need wherever we can.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. Strengthen them for the difficult days ahead. Give them your guidance and protection.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

Calm our fears and quell our panic, God of peace. Help us to be aware of your loving presence. Help us to listen to the advice of the medical experts and take practical steps to delay the spread of the virus. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they quickly regain their strength and health.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

Faithful God, stay by our sides in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. We know that many people will not survive this illness. Be with those who die from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace. Stay close to the families of those who are very sick or suffering bereavement. Calm their anxieties and be with them in their grief.

In our hour of need, Lord, hear our cries.

Father God, we pray for everyone in our circuit. Give our staff - Rachel, Shirlyn, Yemi, Sue and Lemia – your wisdom and stamina to help them through the weeks to come as they support their congregations. Defend them from anxiety and illness.

Lord God, we lift up ourselves to you, our church family and circuit . Give us your love and comfort as we support each other from day to day. We pray especially for ...

Let them feel your presence even in their darkest moments. Lay your healing hand upon them and relieve their suffering. Keep our hearts tender and compassionate and help us to bring your light into their lives.

May we be patient when change comes slowly. May we be kind when life seems harsh.

May we be gentle when others feel bruised. May we be humble when things go well.

May we be peaceful when anger rises within. May we forgive when wronged.

May we persevere when the way is hard.

Lord, we thank you for your love so strong,

May that love ever flow through us to others.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.**

**Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.**

**When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.**

William Williams (1717–1791) translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)

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