

**Prayer**

Holy Spirit come upon us now in gentleness and in power. Come to change our lives and renew our hearts. Come to inspire our worship and bring us closer to each other and to you. Come Holy Spirit.

We ask it in Christ's name  
Amen

**Hymn When Morning gilds the sky**

When morning gilds the skies,  
my heart awaking cries:

'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

Alike at work and prayer to Jesus I repair;  
may Jesus Christ be praised!

2 Does sadness fill my mind?

a solace here I find –  
may Jesus Christ be praised!  
when evil thoughts molest,  
with this I shield my breast –  
may Jesus Christ be praised!

3 Be this, when day is past,  
of all my thoughts the last:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!  
The night becomes as day,  
when from the heart we say:  
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'

4 To God, the Word, on high  
the hosts of angels cry:  
'May Jesus Christ be praised!'  
Let mortals, too, upraise  
their voice in hymns of praise:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!

5 Let earth's wide circle round  
in joyful notes resound:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!  
Let air, and sea, and sky,  
from depth to height, reply:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!

6 Be this while life is mine,  
my canticle divine: May Jesus Christ be praised!  
Be this the eternal song  
through all the ages long:  
May Jesus Christ be praised!

**Reading****1 Peter 3 v 13 – 22**

Can anyone really harm you for being eager to do good deeds? <sup>14</sup> Even if you have to suffer for doing good things, God will bless you. So stop being afraid and don't worry about what people might do. <sup>15</sup> Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life.

Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. <sup>16</sup> Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear. This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ. <sup>17</sup> You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong.

<sup>18</sup> Christ died once for our sins.

An innocent person died  
for those who are guilty.

Christ did this to bring you to God,  
when his body was put to death  
and his spirit was made alive.

<sup>19</sup> Christ then preached to the spirits that were being kept in prison. <sup>20</sup> They had disobeyed God while Noah was building the boat, but God had been patient with them. Eight people went into that boat and were brought safely through the flood.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

Mighty God, transcending your world yet dwelling within it, we worship you.

Caring Father, showing us in Jesus your face of love, we worship you.

We have no words with which to praise your great and glorious Name, only silence.

Yet silence is not enough.

Lift us, hearts, minds and wills, into the joy of your divine presence, that seeing you as you are, we may worship you as we ought.

Loving Father, we confess how much we have failed you and each other.

You have given us tasks to do but we have not done them.

You have taught us to love one another but our love has been cold. You have bidden us hope but we have despaired. You have shown us the humility of Christ but we have been proud. You have given to those in need - but we have ignored them. You have called us to trust but we have not listened. And yet we still have hope, and our hope is in Jesus.

By his incarnation and sharing of our lot, forgive us our sins. By his death on Calvary's Cross, which was for us, forgive us our sins. By his rising again and his pleading for us in heaven, forgive us our sins. Make us anew, in the image of the living Christ, to your praise and glory. *Amen.*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name.  
Your will be done on earth as in Heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom,  
the power and the glory are Yours  
now and forever. *Amen.*

### **Reading Psalm 66 v 8 – 20**

All of you people,  
come praise our God!  
Let his praises be heard.  
<sup>9</sup> God protects us from death  
and keeps us steady.  
<sup>10</sup> Our God, you tested us,  
just as silver is tested.  
<sup>11</sup> You trapped us in a net  
and gave us heavy burdens.  
<sup>12</sup> You sent war chariots  
to crush our skulls.  
We traveled through fire  
and through floods,  
but you brought us  
to a land of plenty.  
<sup>13</sup> I will bring sacrifices  
into your house, my God,  
and I will do what I promised  
<sup>14</sup> when I was in trouble.

<sup>15</sup> I will sacrifice my best sheep  
and offer bulls and goats  
on your altar.

<sup>16</sup> All who worship God,  
come here and listen;  
I will tell you everything  
God has done for me.

<sup>17</sup> I prayed to the Lord,  
and I praised him.

<sup>18</sup> If my thoughts had been sinful,  
he would have refused  
to hear me.

<sup>19</sup> But God did listen  
and answered my prayer.

<sup>20</sup> Let's praise God!  
He listened when I prayed,  
and he is always kind.

### **Hymn Let everything that has breath**

*Let everything that, everything that,  
everything that has breath praise the Lord,  
let everything that, everything that,  
everything that has breath praise the Lord.*

1 Praise You in the morning,  
praise You in the evening,  
praise You when I'm young and when I'm old.  
Praise You when I'm laughing,  
praise You when I'm grieving,  
praise You every season of the soul.

If we could see how much You're worth,  
Your power, Your might, Your endless love,  
then surely we would never cease to praise.  
*Let everything that . . .*

2 Praise You in the heavens,  
joining with the angels,  
praising You for ever and a day.  
Praise You on the earth now,  
joining with creation,  
calling all the nations to Your praise.

If they could see how much You're worth,  
Your power, Your might, Your endless love,  
then surely they would never cease to praise.  
*Let everything that . . .*

**Sermon**

Psalm 66 v 10

“Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested.”

We are living through testing times – both literally and metaphorically.

Some of us have been tested for the Coronavirus and all of us have been tested by it. This time of lockdown has been a real challenge – for children unable to play with their friends - for adults having to live and work whilst social distancing - for older folk in isolation from their families and indeed for all of us as our horizons close in and we avoid coming close to anyone – stranger or friend.

These are testing times – but we are not the first of God’s people to be tested.

Psalm 66 speaks powerfully and expressively of a time of testing and that shouldn’t surprise us because the Psalms are written out of the everyday, experience of real people – God’s people.

The Psalms encompass every condition of human life which is why they are such a source of comfort to us and like it or not, testing is a part of the experience of God’s people – past, present and future.

So in the midst of this Coronavirus crisis, Psalm 66 speaks to us and for us - “God protects us from death and keeps us steady.” and v10 “Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested.”

But we need to be careful here.

The Psalmist seems to be saying that God is deliberately testing his people and perhaps that doesn’t sit comfortably with us.

God tests his people – so did God send the Coronavirus?

For the Psalmist the answer is yes and no.

Yes because God is never without agency – he is never impotent in the face of events. He is all powerful, omnipotent, over all.

And equally no because testing is not sent by God in anger or punishment – it is not in response to something we have done. When people suffer a misfortune, the stoics amongst us will say – “it is what it is. Stuff happens”

Well that is that attitude of the Psalmist – “Stuff happens – God sends stuff”. We are not to be angry or resentful in the face of our troubles or testing – stuff happens.

So is that how are we to see this current time? Well again the Psalmist holds the key “Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested.” Because these current times are a test – a test of our faith.

Not a test from God to see whether we will be good enough but a challenge for ourselves to test the limits of our faith.

In better times, we would be coming into the athletics season and an athlete will challenge themselves – will push themselves ever further to run faster or to jump higher. They will test themselves – not to fail but to come out stronger.

These current times test our faith – they give us something to push against – to strengthen us.

And that is true of all the testing times we face be it unemployment, ill health, family breakdown, bereavement or other disaster. These things challenge, test and ultimately strengthen our faith – just as Coronavirus will.

“Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested.”

And testing is not just about the dark times, you see all life tests us – the good and the bad.

Bishop Willimon once stunned his clergy by telling them that when they heard some good news from a member of the congregation, their

response should be 'Oh dear - I'll be praying for you'.

Not I'll be praying with you.

Not I'll be giving thanks to God for you but I'll be praying FOR you out of love and concern. Because the good things that happen to us are just as much a test of faith as the bad.

We can hold onto faith when the going gets rough, but can we stay faithful when the path is smooth and everything is hunky-dory.

"Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested."  
– in good times and in bad.

And when we want to talk about our faith that's where we should begin.

The question isn't have things happened to you? because that is just the way it is. Stuff happens. God sends stuff. The question to ask yourself is "Where have I seen God at work in my life."

And the Psalms are a great model here. Whatever troubles God's people experience, the Psalmist always returns to praise – well almost always.

In v 8 the Psalmist says "Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested." By v 19 he saying "God did listen and answered my prayer. and in v20 Let's praise God! He listened when I prayed, and he is always kind."

AS Christians our response, not just to Coronavirus but to all life, good or bad should be one of praise. And that praise should flow into a renewed devotion to worship, into a profounder connection with God's people and ultimately a reinvigorated commitment to disciple-making. Our God is testing us but it is in the testing and the telling of our story – our faith story – that we build the body of Christ.

"Our God, you tested us, just as silver is tested."

We are being tested – for good or bad.

Let us use these times to hone our faith.

To test our limits.

To find new reasons to praise God and new ways to be his people.

Let us find in these testing time, a renewed commitment to worship and a deeper, firmer bond in the body of Christ.

That we may come out of this crisis strengthened in faith, ready to share our story and prepared for the task of making new disciples.

Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Trusting in God's care for his children, we pray in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for those who are unwell due to the coronavirus: in your compassion, grant them strength and healing.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all who minister to the sick throughout our health service, that they may renew their strength in you and be channels of restoration and renewal for those who suffer.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are anxious about loved ones, friends and neighbours: enable them to trust in you and be steadfast in hope.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who feel isolated or alone, that they may experience your loving presence.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray that you would inspire those who are strong to care for the vulnerable and to serve them in love.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for your Church who longs to praise you throughout this strange and confusing time; through your creative Spirit fire our imaginations to proclaim your unchanging love in new ways.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all in authority who face difficult decisions that affect the lives of many; grant them wisdom and courage.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all engaged in research, who are seeking to develop a vaccine and remedies for coronavirus: grant them wisdom, understanding and effectiveness in their endeavours.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for traders and employees who are fearful of the future, that businesses may be secured, jobs protected and families supported.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all those facing financial hardship that you would support and sustain them. We remember also those who seek to fulfil Christ's command to love one another through the work of foodbanks and charities and through acts of simple kindness.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for all in education at this uncertain time: inspire those who feel bored or directionless, protect the vulnerable and give fresh hope to the dismayed.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

We pray for those who weep and mourn, that they may find comfort and hope in you.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Lord of life, in this time of crisis for our families and communities, our nation and our world, we turn to you in faith, to seek your guidance and receive your blessing, knowing that nothing in all creation can separate us from your love made known to us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ  
Amen

## **Communion**

Although we are a dispersed congregation, spread out across the country, we are united in worship and praise, we are united in love and intercession and most of all we are united as we join together in communion.

Here, perhaps more than anywhere else we proclaim that we are one people, the body of Christ. Though we may be worshipping apart, though we come from different places, different churches, we are united in the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine.

So let us begin by recalling the events of the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday evening where the pattern for our sharing today was set.

This is what St Paul wrote in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Christians at Corinth.

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

So we follow Christ's example and give thanks to God in prayer.

## **Prayer**

Lord God we thank you for all the ordinary things you give us and especially for this bread by which we will remember Jesus. May this bread remind us of his body broken for us.

Lord God we thank you for all the things that give us joy and especially for this wine by which we will remember Jesus. May this wine remind us of his blood shed for us.

Amen

Before he was given up to death, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, and broke it.

*(Break the bread)*

He gave it to his disciples and said:

'This is my body, broken for you.'

Take and eat this bread remembering that Christ suffered and died for you.

*(Eat the bread)*

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to God, and said to his disciples, 'Take this cup, it represents the new relationship between God and mankind, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it remember I am with you.'

*(Pour out the wine)*

Take and drink this wine remembering that Christ suffered and died for you

*(Drink the wine)*

### **Prayer**

God of glory, we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands the bread of heaven. Strengthen us in our life together that we may grow in love for you and for each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord; Amen

### **Hymn Now thank we all our God**

Now thank we all our God,  
with hearts, and hands, and voices;  
who wondrous things hath done,  
in whom His world rejoices;  
Who, from our mothers' arms,  
hath blest us on our way  
with countless gifts of love,  
and still is ours today.

2 O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
with ever-joyful hearts  
and blessed peace to cheer us;  
and keep us in His grace,  
and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills  
in this world and the next.

3 All praise and thanks to God  
the Father now be given,  
the Son, and Him who reigns  
with Them in highest heaven;  
the one eternal God,  
whom heaven and earth adore;  
for thus it was, is now,  
and shall be evermore.

### **Benediction**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
will be with us evermore. Amen