

Prayer

Lord God, whose ways are mysterious
and yet whose love is deep and tender;
you provide for all our needs.

Make yourself known to us as we worship
you now: give us words to praise you,
hearts to love you and minds to know you.
Help us to offer all to you, and to know your
presence with us as we gather in your name.
Amen

Hymn Love Divine

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down:
fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
all Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;
let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all Thy grace receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.

4 Finish then Thy new creation:
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in Thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Reading Luke 24 v 45 – 53

Jesus said to them, “While I was still with
you, I told you that everything written about
me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the
Prophets, and in the Psalms^[d] had to
happen.”

⁴⁵ Then he helped them understand the
Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them:
The Scriptures say that the Messiah must
suffer, then three days later he will rise from
death. ⁴⁷ They also say that all people of
every nation must be told in my name to
turn to God, in order to be forgiven. So
beginning in Jerusalem, ⁴⁸ you must tell
everything that has happened. ⁴⁹ I will send
you the one my Father has promised,^[e] but
you must stay in the city until you are given
power from heaven.

⁵⁰ Jesus led his disciples out to Bethany,
where he raised his hands and blessed
them. ⁵¹ As he was doing this, he left and
was taken up to heaven.^[f] ⁵² After his
disciples had worshiped him,^[g] they
returned to Jerusalem and were very
happy. ⁵³ They spent their time in the
temple, praising God.

Sketch

*Person A is on stage with paper, scissors,
and other art supplies and is drawing,
cutting, etc. Person B walks on stage.*

B What are you doing ?

A Oh, I'm making some disciples.

B What do you mean you're making some
disciples?

A Well, I heard that Jesus wants me to go out
and make more disciples, so that's what I'm
doing. See, here's a picture I drew of Andrew
and James and John. I started one with Peter
and Philip, but it's not done yet. I'm thinking
that there needs to be more colour. What
do you think?

B I think your drawings are really great, but
I'm not sure that's exactly what Jesus meant
when he said we should go out and make
disciples.

A Oh! Maybe I shouldn't draw them! Maybe I should make them ... out of clay!

B Uh, well, that could also be really nice, but when Jesus said we should make more disciples, I don't think he meant that you should make them using art supplies.

A (*Looking shocked*) But what else could it mean?

B I think he meant that we should show people God's love and tell them about Jesus so that more people might follow him, too.

A Oh, I don't know about that. I mean, loving people is all well and good, even though it's not always easy. But telling people about Jesus ... that's scary. What if they laugh? What if they make fun of me or think I'm crazy?

B You're right; it can seem scary, and it's okay to be a little scared. God works through scared people all the time. You know, there's a part of the Bible that we call the Gospels, and 'gospel' means 'good news'. And the story of Jesus is good news! All you have to do is show people and tell people about how that good news has changed your life. If people can see and hear that, they may want to follow Jesus too!

A But what if they don't want to follow Jesus just because I told them about him?

B That part's between that person and God. Our job is just to show people and tell people the good news.

A Well, I guess that's not too complicated or scary.

B It might even be easier than that art project you started!

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Lord God, the wonders of your creation, the splendour of the heavens, the beauty of the earth, the order and richness of nature, all speak to us of your glory.

The coming of your Son, the presence of your Spirit, the fellowship of your Church, show us the marvel of your love.

We worship and adore you, God of grace and glory.

God of mercy, God of love, in humbleness of heart we confess our sins.

We forget to love and serve you, and wander from your ways. We are careless of your world, and put its life in danger. We talk of our concern for others, but fail to match our words with action. Father forgive us for these things and for all the things we have said or thought or done, which we now regret and which we name in silence before you now.

(Silence)

Merciful God, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life. Heavenly Father, be with us in every experience of life. When we neglect you, remind us of your presence; when we are frightened, give us courage; when we are tempted, give us power to resist; when we are anxious and worried, give us peace; when we are weary in service, give us energy and zeal; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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 Ephesians 1 v 15 – 23

I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. ¹⁶ So I never stop being grateful for you, as I mention you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I ask the glorious Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you his Spirit. The Spirit will make you wise and let you understand what it means to know God. ¹⁸ My prayer is that light will flood your hearts and that you will understand the hope that was given to you when God chose you. Then you will discover the glorious blessings that will be yours together with all of God's people. ¹⁹ I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers.

It is the same wonderful power he used ²⁰ when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side^[c] in heaven. ²¹ There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well. ²² God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything. ²³ The church is Christ's body and is filled with Christ who completely fills everything.^[d]

Hymn I want to walk with Jesus Christ

I want to walk with Jesus Christ,
all the days I live of this life on earth;
to give to Him complete control
of body and of soul.

*Follow Him, follow Him,
yield your life to Him –
He has conquered death, He is King of kings;
accept the joy which He gives to those
who yield their lives to Him.*

2 I want to learn to speak to Him,
to pray to Him, confess my sin,
to open my life and let Him in,
for joy will then be mine.

Follow Him, follow Him . . .

3 I want to learn to speak of Him –
my life must show that He lives in me;
my deeds, my thoughts,
my words must speak
all of His love for me.
Follow Him, follow Him . . .

4 I want to learn to read His word,
for this is how I know the way
to live my life as pleases Him,
in holiness and joy.
Follow Him, follow Him . . .

5 O Holy Spirit of the Lord,
enter now into this heart of mine;
take full control of my selfish will
and make me wholly Thine!
Follow Him, follow Him . . .

Sermon

Luke 24 v 48 "You are witnesses of these things."

The word witness conjures up many images.
You witness a crime.
You witness a legal document.
You witness an accident.
And in a Christian context – you witness to
the world in the name of and at the
command of Christ.

Jesus said "**You** are witnesses of these things." Scary?

Maybe a little – but it is part of our calling as Christians and Jesus has equipped us – all of us - for the task.

"You are witnesses of these things."
So how – how can we be witnesses to Christ
in our current time.
Well the first thing to say is that witnessing
begins at home.

We all know the old saying - charity begins
at home - usually an excuse for not giving
anything - be that as it may witnessing
begins at home too.

In Luke Ch 24 v47 it says “all people of every nation must be told in my name to turn to God, in order to be forgiven. So beginning in Jerusalem, ⁴⁸ you must tell everything that has happened.’

God’s plan was for the gospel to reach all the world but Jesus says to the disciples the starting point is here - you must begin where you are - and where you are right now is Jerusalem. Don't go swanning off to India or Africa or Paris or Bolton - begin in Jerusalem.

We are not in Jerusalem - we are in Lancashire, Warwickshire, Essex or wherever - and this is where we are to witness.

Our first calling as Christians is to be witnesses to Jesus in the places we happen to be

and you might think – well that’s easy enough – my family know about my faith – and in the lock down, they are the only people I am meeting.
Job done.

Wrong. That’s **half** the job done.

Lock down has narrowed our physical world but massively expanded our online presence. We are meeting more folk than ever before on the internet – on Facebook, on WhatsApp, via email and Zoom and so on.

Every time you make a posting on Facebook or join a meeting via Zoom, you have an opportunity to witness to Christ, and not only by the things you say but by the way you are.

Because let me tell you authentic witnessing begins not with speaking, but with being.

Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi - “Above all else, you must live in a way that brings honour to the good news about Christ” – you must BE Christians.

And later on in the letter – “ Keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly and proper.”

In other words focus on BEING Christians, focus on being witnesses to Christ in the way you live because that is where the most powerful witness lies.

You see it doesn’t matter what we say, doesn’t matter how eloquent our preaching and teaching, if our words are not backed up by actions, if our lives don’t bear witness to the truths we proclaim, then we will get nowhere.

And that is more true now than ever before.

Before the lock down, you could say something and it would be heard by a few people and maybe shared with a few others – but that would be it. Very soon it would be forgotten.

During the lock down, we are sharing stuff on Facebook and posting on WhatsApp – and those words remain.
They don’t go away. They persist.

This puts a terrific responsibility on us as Christians – a terrific responsibility. And if I wanted you to take away one thing from this service it would be this – more than even before, during this lock down, think before you post. Think before you share.

Think does this post reflect well on me as a Christian?

Is it true or is it old, fake news?

Is it building people up?

Is it reaching out in love?

Or is it critical or destructive or hurtful?

Will people see Christ reflected in me, in my post?

Witnessing begins where we are, by the way we live And by the way we share our story.

You know reading the Bible, explaining what the Bible is about, learning about what God has to say from his Word is great.

But if you are not familiar with it, the Bible can be a very big and difficult book - full of difficult names and incomprehensible phrases.

I mean we Christians love them - redemption, trinity, salvation by grace, transubstantiation, paraclete and of course my all time favourite, one shared by Adrian Plas, emblematic reconstitution of arterially diversified dispensationalism – and I haven't a clue what that means.

The Bible may be great for us but it can be a daunting book to those who have never opened its cover.

To those who have nothing to do with the Church, the witness of our lives are far more eloquent.

Seeing and hearing the difference Jesus has made to your life.

Seeing and hearing the ways you have known his blessings, day by day, speaks with a power the Bible, straight off the shelf can never possess. I think that is what Jesus meant in v48 where he says – “You are witnesses of these things.”

The most powerful witness, is the witness of a changed life, a life that has experienced trouble, a life that has known difficulties, a life that has been challenged AND has triumphed in Christ.

And every day of lock down is giving us new experiences of the power of Christ in our lives and new opportunities to witness whether that be in person, on the phone or by social distancing.

Let me give you an example – we put out an appeal for face mask ear protectors – you know those funny bits of knitting or sewing

that have proved a life saver (well an ear saver) to our NHS staff.

And you've made loads of them – they've come in from across the country.

Everyone of those face mask ear protectors is a witness to the love and care of a faithful Christian – brilliant.

And we haven't made a fuss about this – as some have – we haven't been on TV or whatever, because this isn't news to us – this is the way we are. It is in our DNA as Christians.

We share Christ's love and know his joy - even in the most difficult of circumstances, even in lock down.

If we are talking of the witness of our lives, the greatest witness may be the witness of our joy.

When Jesus rose again, his disciples and friends were rightly overjoyed v52' Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy'

and that joy spilled out into changed lives. Lives that changed so much others wanted to know what had happened and how they could discover the disciples joy for themselves.

The joy we know is a powerful witness for Christ. Lives that are full of joy and that bring joy to others speak of the change that Jesus resurrection makes to each one of us.
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Witnessing begins where we are, it is expressed through the lives we live and it occurs most powerfully when we share our story.

You may not recognise it. You may not like it. But you are to be witnesses - every single

one of you – witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ - and if not you - then whom.

It may seem a daunting task - how can I be a witness to Christ - well the answer is, it would be a daunting task but for the resources we have been given.

v49 "Jesus says I will send you the one my Father has promised"

The same Holy Spirit that descended upon the disciples has been promised to us too. It is our promise. God's gift to us all.

I believe that the Holy Spirit can do for us, all that was done for the disciples. I believe we can be filled with life and love and joy. I believe that we can receive the power and the strength we need to go out into the world to be witnesses to Jesus. This is something we can experience today - we only need to ask.

Jesus said ""You are witnesses of these things."

Does he mean us?

I think he does.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God,

we pray for all who are ill at this time.

We pray for those at home or in hospital suffering from Covid-19 - ease their pain, calm their restlessness and bring your healing;

give them such trust in you that they may know they are always in your keeping.

Father God, bless all who care for those who are ill or who support the community at this time.

We ask your blessing and protection for Chris, Linda, Marcia, Marina, Melanie, Pete, Rachel, Yvonne, who are part of our wider church family and for the forgotten folk of the health service - those who serve as

porters, cleaners, cooks and in other support roles.

We pray especially for those who have put their lives at risks in the service of others. Grant all who work for healing, in whatever capacity, such trust in you that they may win new strength; and may their love and tireless patience bring your grace and comfort to those who suffer.

Father God, remember your Church on earth.

Enable Christian people to walk with Christ in their daily lives and to work for the coming of his kingdom. Strengthen the witness of the Church in our communities, that the world may learn to live your truth and seek your peace.

Father God, remember the nations of the world.

Bring to an end all war and strife; break down the barriers of race and creed, that all may live as members of one family of God.

Father God, remember our country.

Bless the Queen and her family; Bless our Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and our MP, Sir Lindsay and guide them and us in the influence we have on our community and nation. Preserve us as a people and raise us to the righteousness of serving your will.

Father God, we remember with thanksgiving those who have died in the faith, especially those known and dear to us.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones during this crisis - whether through Covid-19 or not - comfort them in the pain of loss and through the anguish caused by the current restrictions.

Give them peace in their time of mourning,
grant us a living hope, and bring us, when
our days on earth are over, to share the joys
of everlasting life;

We commend ourselves to your keeping.
Grant that our hearts may find their peace
and rest in you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be
glory, for ever and ever.

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

Hymn Lord for the years

Lord, for the years
Your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us,
cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us,
pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

2 Lord, for that word,
the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts
and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains,
rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word,
receive Your people's praise.

3 Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed
by pleasure, wealth and care:
for young and old,
for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land,
be pleased to hear our prayer.

4 Lord, for our world
where men disown and doubt You,
loveless in strength,
and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless,
lost indeed without You:
Lord of the world,
we pray that Christ may reign.

5 Lord, for ourselves;
in living power remake us –
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us,
for the future take us:
Lord of our lives,
to live for Christ alone.

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