

**Worship 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

A warm welcome to this short act of worship for the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter and at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> week of our Lockdown and isolation. It may seem that we have nothing much to look forward to in our current situation, but we move forward in expectation as we approach Pentecost in a few short days' time. I pray that you will find comfort and a sense of togetherness as we come to God today.

**Let us pray:**

Mighty God, we can't gather physically in one place but let us feel gathered in humility to worship you.

Caring God, we bring to you our concerns.

Glorious God, we exalt your holy name.

Unite us – make us one in you,

that your love may strengthen and empower us.

**Amen.**

**Hymn:** At the name of Jesus

**Let us pray....**

Praise you, God of the powerful presence! Praise you, God of the transforming touch! Praise you, God of the wonderful word! For you will not be silent or distant. You will not hide yourself from us as if it did not matter or as if history unfolding around us was of no consequence to you. Instead you interfere. Scripture unfolds your fingerprints upon people and nations. Now it's our turn. Give us the courage to give ourselves completely to you. Make us your own today, so that we obey as Jesus did. Make us eager to speak of you amongst those with whom we share our days. Make us willing to care for those we encounter. Make us attentive to your promptings in the mighty issues of the world today and in the minute details of daily choices. Make us your own in the power of your Spirit **Amen**

**Readings:** John 17: 1-11

1 Peter 5: 6-11



**Reflection:**

These are unprecedented times – we know they are and we keep being told that they are, every time we listen to the news.

None of us have ever experienced anything like this before, not being able to see people, to get close to even be in the same room as them. We are, by nature, sociable people and this time of isolation is hard, it makes us feel helpless in many ways, there is so much we can't do.

But today I want us to think about what we CAN do, not what we can't do. In the gospel reading Jesus knew there was nothing the disciples could do to change what was going to happen, it was God's will and his fate was sealed. He knew also that the disciples would struggle with it, they may feel betrayed and hurt, they placed so much faith in him and now he was going to leave them.

So, what did Jesus do? He prayed for them. In verse 6 he reminds us that he has revealed God's love to them and how they now know that everything comes from Him but despite that he still feels the need to pray for them. Jesus prayed for the disciples.

He knew there was little else he could do at this point, things were going to happen, and nothing would change that but the one thing he could do was pray for his friends, the people who meant so much to him.

In Peter's letter we're told to "Humble ourselves, then, under God's mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in his own good time"

I think that sometimes we get a little het up about prayer, thinking we don't how to do it, or what to say. It is true that we hear a lot of very good, well structured prayers in church when we come together to pray, we are lucky to have so many leaders, both in our preachers but also in those people who

often lead our prayers of intercession for us, but “there is no right way to pray. Sometimes words are appropriate, sometimes not. Sometimes a degree of formality seems fitting, at other times quite the opposite” These are the words of Nick Fawcett a prolific prayer writer whose words I use often when leading worship.

There is no right way to pray.

Prayer is a time for us to strengthen our relationship with God. We are all suffering at the moment because we can't always spend time with those people we want to and we worry that this will weaken our relationships; that is after all how we get to know people and deepen our understanding of them and our love for them.

We may not be able to do many of the things we normally do but one thing we CAN do is to pray to God with all our hearts. We don't always have to speak – in conversation with our friends we need to stop and listen too – and so it is in our conversations with God.

Basil Hume says:

I am quite sure that there will always be moments of inner peace and joy as a result of spending time in prayer for those of us who do not regard ourselves as greatly advanced in the spiritual life. Nevertheless, the experience of many of us is that prayer can be very hard work indeed. Quite often prayer is unrewarding and there is not much joy in the doing of it. It is at moments like these that we can be tempted to give it up. That would be the fatal mistake. We have to keep going.

If we can just spend time with God he will “himself perfect us and give us firmness, strength, and a sure foundation”

**Hymn:** Father hear the prayer we offer

Susan Durber says:

“Prayers are not best when they are clever or even technically and theologically correct, but when they can be said with integrity by the people of God” and so now we come together to pray:

Loving God we're tired now, we're finding this situation harder and harder as time goes on. Some of us are feeling incredibly lonely, some of us are worried about loved ones, some of us just don't know what to think. We feel alone at times now, but we know we are not, we know that you are there with us and we thank you for that. We are lifted by the words of Peter who tells us that if we bring it all to you, you will lift us up.

We pray continually for those who are working exceptionally hard at the moment, those who are putting their own lives at risk to care for others. We pray continually for those who have lost loved ones, we pray continually for those who have to make the decisions about what we should and shouldn't do to protect ourselves and those around us.

In a moment of silence, we offer our own prayers, however imperfect, for the things that lay heavy on our hearts now.

Lord, we know you will hear us, we have your assurance that when we meet with you in his name you will listen to us and so now we bring all our prayers together in his words. **Our Father.....**

**Hymn:** What a friend we have in Jesus

**Blessing:**

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself; may the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen us in his service; may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be with us and abide with us always. **Amen**

Opening Prayer – Neil Thorogood in “Still Praying” (URC 2011)

Blessing – William Temple

Thanks to Jacob and Esther for the readings.