

Cadbury Pastorate

17th January 2021

Call to worship

Loving God, you have gathered us, welcomed us and made yourself present among us.

We worship you

Giving God, you are our creator, the source, guide and goal of our life. You create a new heart in us. You open us to all that is good and life-giving

We worship you

Saving God, you are our redeemer, offering us forgiveness and new life. We place into your hands all that we leave behind during this time of worship, trusting in your continual loving care as we seek you

We worship you

Abiding God, you are our sustainer. You inspire and refresh us, you renew us as we look to you for guidance and consolation.

We worship you

Enfolding God, trinity of grace, mercy and love, we open ourselves to the abundance of your blessing. We are your children, the heirs of your kingdom in Jesus your son.

We worship you

Hymn: God is love; let heaven adore him: God is love; let earth rejoice
(Rejoice and Sing 95)

Prayer of approach

Let us pray

God of abiding love, present in our beginnings, acquainted with our ways, intricately woven into the depths of all things, you understand our thoughts and know us as we are. Nothing is hidden from your wisdom and truth. Help us to hear your voice in the midst of all our thinking and action. In offering our thanks and praise, we acknowledge that you guide us into your unfolding purposes for us and for the world you bring into being. In our music and our words, help us to find you and, when we

reach the limit of our resources, to know ourselves held in your loving embrace. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen**

Reading

Psalm 139.1-6,13-18

1 You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise; perceive my thoughts from afar.

3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

5 You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

Hymn: O God you search me and you know me (Bernadette Farrell)

Address

Psalm 139 Paraphrase

O God, you know me inside and out, through and through.

Everything I do, every thought that flits through my mind, every step I take, every plan I make, every word I speak, you know, even before these things happen.

You know my past; you know my future. Your enveloping presence covers my every move.

Your knowledge of me sometimes comforts me, sometimes frightens me, but it is always far beyond my comprehension.

You were present at my conception. You guided the moulding of my unformed members within the body of my mother. Nothing about me, from beginning to end, has been hidden from Your eyes.

How frightfully, fantastically wonderful it all is!

May Your all-knowing, everywhere-present Spirit continue to search out my feelings and thoughts.

(From Psalms Now by Leslie Brandt Concordia Publishing House 1973)

In 1984, George Orwell depicts a world in which Big Brother is watching you. In 1983, the rock band the Police and lead singer Sting released the single "Every breath you take". It included the words "every step you take, every move you make, I'll be watching you". That track has echoes of Orwell's 1984 world, and the world we have come to know, this world in which every move may be watched, every detail of our lives may be recorded.

We might hear echoes of that perhaps frightening reality in this morning's Psalm; God knows everything there is to know about us, God is constantly watching over us. We may have an image of God then ready to judge and to condemn. But that is not the tone or the image of God that the Psalm presents. God's knowledge of everything, and presence everywhere reflects of God's all-encompassing love and concern and compassion for those he delights to call his children, the citizens not of Orwell's 1984 surveillance world but of his eternal kingdom.

The Psalmist's affirmation of God's knowledge and presence come not as a warning but as an expression of wonder. The Psalm depicts intricacy and intimacy, love that brings life into being, that shapes and forms each human individual according to the gracious and merciful purposes of God who is love. As one commentator writes, God's "fingerprints are on our every cell".

We are made in the very image of God. In learning and growing and getting to know ourselves we grow to know and love God. God after all is not out there, remote from us and divorced from our human existence. God is involved in the tiniest details of our existence and experience, bringing us into being, with us through “all the changing scenes of life” and with us at life’s end, with all the challenges and questions death brings.

God is boundless in space and time, constantly bringing life, creating but not imposing, not pressurising, not forcing, neither presumptive nor oppressive, but longing to be known. It is in love and life that God reveals himself to us and in us. Following Jesus then, Christian discipleship, is a journey into knowing as we are known, knowing ourselves as God knows us.

Much of this journey we take alone but at the same time we are never alone. God is with us and we grow and learn in relationship with God as well as with one another. There are occasions and perhaps phases of life when we need to take time for ourselves, to pause and to reflect on how God’s Spirit works with our spirit, leading us into truth, enabling us to walk the way of Jesus. God’s Spirit works not only to bring the gift of life but fulness of life. God, all knowing and all present is revealed in our becoming as well as our being.

We are created in God’s image and so each one of us is special and beautiful. God longs for and desires the best for us, for us to flourish. We need to acknowledge God’s handiwork, recognise when and where God is at work, to let God in, allowing the God known in life and love to touch us, to renew and restore us. In busy lives, full of demand and expectation, others and our own, we need to make room for God.

Much of life is of course very ordinary. But it is in the ordinary, everyday experience of our lives that God is present. God all knowing and all present calls us to share his work of giving life, to live out his his purposes for the whole of life and for the whole of creation. In the words of St

Paulinus “ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est”, where charity and love are God is there. Or in the words of the Psalmist “How wonderful it all is!” In times of deep darkness and suffering and unanswered and unanswerable questions, there is still love, there is always love, and God is love.

Prayers

Thanksgiving

Generous God

With hearts, hands and voices, we thank you

...for friends and family, neighbours and colleagues, for conversation and laughter

...for our church and local community, for company and chance encounters, for opportunities to reach out to others

...for the wider church, in this city, across the nation, across the world, for ways of sharing with those different from us

...for the wonder of creation, the beauty, intricacy and power of nature, and for the gift of science to reveal and to explain, for birdsong and frosty mornings, and the gifts of recreation, rest and renewal

...for silence and space, for times of stillness as well as busy-ness, for simple things and special moments, for times of celebration and hope, for encouragement in times of trauma and loss

...for all the ways, known and unknown, mysterious and commonplace in which you touch our lives and the lives of those around us

..for your presence with us in all that life brings, in faith and in doubt, in strength and in weakness, in success and in failure.

...for your love in Christ, our saviour and our friend, in whom you promise life in all its fulness;

With hearts and hand and voices

We thank you

Prayers for others

Reconciling God, we live in a world divided by doctrine, by politics and ideology, by race, colour and creed, by class and nationality, and we pray

for the gift of peace and for peacemakers. We pray for a world in which all children might grow up without fear, where security rests on trust rather than threats, and where nations seek the prosperity of all. We pray for all entrusted with power and authority, that those who lead people and nations may govern with priorities of justice and peace, that through wisdom and vision this world may reflect your kingdom. We pray for all who are ill and suffering, for all who grieve the loss of loved ones, for all impacted by the trauma of the Covid pandemic, for those who care for them and minister to their needs in body, mind and spirit.

You know our deepest fears, our hopes and aspirations, and our longings. Hear our prayers now, spoken and unspoken, and answer us according to your will and purpose in Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Be present with us and among us to bless and to enrich us, whether we are gathered together or dispersed in our homes. Unite us by Your Spirit, as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray...

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Hymn: Now thank we all our God

Blessing

God bless us this day **that we may be a blessing**

God bless us in all our seeing, in all our hearing, in all our speaking.

God bless us tomorrow **that we may be a blessing**

God bless us in all our reaching out, in all our holding in, in all our letting go

God bless us every day **that we may be a blessing**

God bless us in all our thinking, in all our feeling, in all our loving

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Our creator, our redeemer, our sustainer

**God bless us, go with us and remain with us and all those who we love
this day and always**

Amen