

THE LINK

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Information – When the government placed the country in lockdown churches were allowed to stay open for communal worship. Sadly, however, with infection rates rising, the Church Council has taken the decision to close our churches for now. Hopefully, a few weeks will see the abating of the current crisis and allow for many more of you to be vaccinated. We will then be able to reopen with greater confidence. In the meantime, as well as this sheet we hope to have a video reflection each week. If you would like this on a DVD please let John know.

Opening Prayer

We gather before you creator God, to bring you our praise and worship, and to experience your love for us. Be with us, unite us with our family of faith, refresh us body, mind and soul and open our hearts to your word. Amen.

Almighty God,

We search for words to truly tell your glory, but there are none. We look for ways to describe your creation, but can't express its beauty and complexity. We long to show you how much we love you, but struggle to achieve our goal.

You, O God are our greatest love, your service our deepest desire, your love for us our most precious gift and more than anything else we want you to know that we adore you.

Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 1:4-11

Time to Reflect

I'd like to invite you to take a few moments to think about water. The gentle way it washes dirt from our skin. The powerful force that carves channels through rock. The refreshing, heaven sent gift that brings life to our world.

A few years ago, I visited Bushmead in Zimbabwe and the school my church has helped to fund there. It was, as you might imagine a life changing experience, I was welcomed into the community and family home as both dear sister and honoured guest. Unlike many homes in Zimbabwe there was running water which meant that while my hosts took turns in the same bath water, I was given the luxury of my own bathroom.

I'd been fundraising for the school for years so I knew what life in Zimbabwe was like or I thought I did. But the shock of turning on the tap to find no water (common place for them) was very real.

I have never been without easy access to clean water, even during essential plumbing works provision has always been made and I have known when water will be restored.

Of course, my hosts were prepared, in my excitement and wonder at all around me and the love I'd been shown I'd failed to notice the most basic, there in the corner was a pack of bottled water, ready for us.

Water is life, life without water cannot exist.

So, what better symbol for baptism could there be, water's ability to cleanse, its power to transform and reshape and our total inability to live without it tells us much about the Spirit of God.

Through Baptism in Christ, we have been washed clean and offered a source of ongoing renewal.

Through Baptism in Christ, we have received the Holy Spirit, God's presence in our lives, helping us to change and reshape ourselves into the people we are called to be.

Through Baptism in Christ, we have been given life, true life, eternal life.

God is with us, flowing through us and out from us into our world. The source of life for all, a force which can never be completely cut off, a blessing that will never leave us.

There may be times when we don't notice God's presence, when we feel he is distant or has abandoned us and the tap gives nothing.

Don't be fooled, God is always with us, waiting for us to discover him, turn to him, rely on him, waiting to wash through us and make us truly alive.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer. Please pause to consider each situation

Father God, we come to you with open hearts and minds to pray for our world,

For all who are working to help others.

For all who are unwell in body, mind or soul.

For all who fear violence, in the streets or their own homes.

For all who struggle to fill their daily needs and fear for their future.

For all who feel alone or isolated.

For Church, family, friends and neighbours.

For ourselves, right here and now, all we are and think and feel.

Father we place our world into your hands, in all things and all places may your will be done

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: 161 Speak O Lord,

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.

Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today

in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

A prayer of blessing

Loving God, be with us this day and always, flow in us and
through us, cleanse, renew and reshape us. Reminding us
always that no matter what, you remain with us. Amen.

Materials by Liz Wood