

CHRISTCHURCH MARLBOROUGH

Worship for the Sunday after Epiphany

As you prepare to take part in this service, whether online or using the sheets in your own time, you may wish to light a candle and to spend a short time in quiet reflection.

Call

This the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We are the family of God.

And are called by God's name.

We are heirs of Christ's kingdom.

And born of the Spirit.

Let us, therefore, come together in thanksgiving.

Amen.

Hymn StF113

1 O worship the King, all-glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

2 O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

3 The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
established it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

4 Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

5 Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;

your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,

our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

6 O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
while angels delight to hymn you above,
your ransomed creation, though feeble our praise,
in true adoration our voices we raise.

Robert Grant (1779-1838)

Prayers

We come in confidence to you.

Receive us as your children, Lord.

We come humbly to you.

Cleanse us from our sins, Lord.

We come in faith to you.

Remind us of your grace, Lord.

We come knowing that we are loved by you.

May we know the joy of everlasting life.

Amen.

Lord, we have turned away from you.

In our church:

forgive us Lord. We turn to you again.

In our work:

forgive us Lord. We turn to you again.

In our homes and families:

forgive us Lord. We turn to you again.

In our individual lives:

forgive us Lord. We turn to you again.

Amen.

The Lords Prayer

Hymn Stf338

1 There is a Redeemer,
Jesus, God's own Son,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.

2 Jesus my Redeemer,
name above all names,
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
O for sinners slain.

3 When I stand in glory
I will see his face,
and there I'll serve my King for ever
in that holy place.

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946)

v. 3 Keith Green (1953-1982)

Reading

Psalm 86

1 Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
2 Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you. You are
my God;
3 be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I
cry all day long.
4 Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you,
O Lord, I lift up my soul.
5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on
you.
6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to
my cry of supplication.
7 In the day of my trouble I call on you, for
you will answer me.
8 There is none like you among the gods, O
Lord, nor are there any works like yours.
9 All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall
glorify your name.
10 For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.
11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may
walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart
to revere your name.
12 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with
my whole heart, and I will glorify your name
forever.
13 For great is your steadfast love toward
me; you have delivered my soul from the
depths of Sheol.
14 O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life, and they do
not set you before them.
15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and
gracious, slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love and faithfulness.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me; give
your strength to your servant; save the child
of your serving girl.
17 Show me a sign of your favor, so that
those who hate me may see it and be put to

shame, because you, LORD, have helped me
and comforted me.

Reading

Mark 1 4-11

4 John the baptizer appeared in the
wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And
people from the whole Judean countryside
and all the people of Jerusalem were going
out to him, and were baptized by him in the
river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now
John was clothed with camel's hair, with a
leather belt around his waist, and he ate
locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed,
"The one who is more powerful than I is
coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop
down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I
have baptized you with water; but he will
baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of
Galilee and was baptized by John in the
Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out
of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart
and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.
11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are
my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well
pleased."

Reflection

Disorientation and new life

I wonder if you started something new over
the last week .

Not necessarily a New Year's resolution but
perhaps just started something in January
that you would normally start at that time
For me it was my latest set of Bible reading
notes

The author of the particular group that I am
reading at the moment Helen Paynter wrote
the notes during the first lockdown and the
very first one was about what she calls a
Psalm of disorientation after the categories
used by the theologian Walter Brueggeman
What is disorientation ?

She says these are songs we use when all is
not right with our world ,when the world is not
as it should be when we experience grief or
pain or bewilderment

The particular Psalm 86 was the one I have
used in this worship. It's not the appointed

one for the day but I think it's appropriate given where we are in lockdown again. So let's reflect on this Psalm, our own disorientation and our relationship to God . This Psalm can help us to express our concerns and then through our gospel reading see how the sense of a new life of an ultimate purpose comes as Jesus starts His earthly ministry.

That is something we have even when everything around us seems pretty bleak My thoughts on the Psalm influenced by a commentary by Walter Brueggeman

It is a petition a strong resilient urging to God asking God to help because the psalmist is poor and needy trusting and crying. God is a partner in life and the petitioner has needs that only God can answer

The complaint is in verse 14

O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.

For us today it's not a band of people but this unseen disease that is causing such chaos and destruction but still it's right isn't it to feel that its personal what's happening . Feeling individually even though it's impacting the whole of the world

We feel things personally even though we may emphasise it for with others who also feel the same way

The Psalm is realistic spiritually .Faith isn't just always seeing the good side of life but facing up to the difficult side and knowing that God is with us

God is addressed directly and praised

10 For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

This statement of the uniqueness of God is powerful There's only one God.

We call it monotheism but hearing it in the midst of a petition of crying out for help can speak to our hearts in a special way How often this week have you thought again is this is ever going to end I wanted to cry out Lord why have you done this oh why don't you sort this out We may know that there is one God who created all things but when things are tough

either for individual circumstances or in this general case when it's for everyone it can be a difficulty, a challenge .

It's such a challenge to us to keep the faith when we realise that the psalmists kept their faith recognised there is one God in the depths of despair

Bruggeman notes there's a remarkable usage of Thou or You in this Psalm .A strong direct expression addressed to God structured into the Psalm

There are statements at the beginning and the end

Save your servant ,You are my God in verse 2 and because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me in verse 17

The first one at the start talks about saving the servant who trusts in you a direct appeal to God who is the saviour and at the end in verse 17 recognising that it's God who's helped

Recognising here the very presence of God in the midst of life as a personal presence .

The uniqueness and the power of God is recognised in the life of full of problems

In verses 5 and 15 there is a direct appeal and a creedal statement

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Recognising who God is and how we can trust in His attributes is something to hold on to now and at any difficult time

The psalmist is relentless in their use of the name of God in the midst of the darkness . In this sorrow tainted season it's God who abides who isn't intimidated or alienated by disorientation

The name of God used here is Yahweh before us we could think of the creator God the Father who created all things and its important to keep close to and recognise has those attributes even when there seems around us everything going wrong

We cannot tell over the next few weeks or months how things will be and maybe many people here listening

may have had sadness and other difficulties not necessarily associated with Covid recently

The affirmation of the psalmist gives strength and support and challenge to us to keep close to God

As I started to write these notes what formed in my mind here was that by joining these two readings there is a sense of the Trinity

If the Psalm speaks firstly about creator God then as we come to the gospel reading we can see all three parts of the Trinity in operation

Particularly the son, Jesus coming to John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit with this image of the dove

For many of us today this baptism narrative may be something to interpret as a great spiritual experience in the life of Jesus Morna Hooker in her commentary says that Mark's purpose here it's not to write a spiritual biography but to present a Christological statement

What does that mean? I quote

"Mark is presenting the truth of Jesus as he understands it. The story providing a setting for the revelation of Jesus's identity spelt out in terms of the descent of the spirit and words addressed to Jesus from heaven"

So just as there were creedal statements in the Psalm it might be said that this is a creedal statement

Jesus identity to us is what we believe about the nature of God.

The Trinity in action God the father with the voice from heaven God the son in action coming to his baptism and the spirit the dove descending on him

What's going on here?

John was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins

Why does Jesus need to be baptised when he was born sinless at the start?

Hooker again "There is good reason to link the scene of His baptism with His death...the rite of baptism a symbol for death and resurrection.

Here in Jesus is the meaning and purpose of life the one who came initially to save Israel but is now the saviour of us all

That is something which is very much still the case even when times are dark we can listen to that voice proclaim Jesus as the beloved with whom the Father is well pleased know that Jesus is one person of the Trinity fully and truly God as well as fully and truly human In his humanity by identifying himself with us and being part of the human race as well as being God the baptism is symbolic of how he can empathise with us

We can know that the Jesus in front of us in this incident is the same Jesus who will go on to die on the cross to be resurrected and is alive with us now

Jesus knows heartache, he knows the dark side of life His presence in our lives is a blessing if we are willing to be open to him in prayer and scripture and all the other means of grace to give us that sense that there's something more to life

Then as Jesus is coming out of the water we are told of what appears like some vision or a description of an internal experience

It's not entirely clear whether or how much of that experience was shared by those around Jesus

This isn't like having a webcam and watching an experience of someone and seeing all the details including the special effects but it has meanings

With the words you are my Son there is a significance that Jesus is addressed in terms used in the Old Testament of relationship which should exist between Israel and God The Baptist is calling the people through repentance and baptism

This way is revealed to be Jesus the one who whom the role of Israel is realised Hooker again says that the term beloved normally refers to an only child so this points to the uniqueness of Jesus again something that we have mentioned related to the Psalm

The baptism of Jesus is a moment of new beginning. Though there is nothing for Jesus to repent this is a new stage in his life too, as he moves away from the hidden years in Nazareth and begins his active ministry.

At his baptism, God does something amazing. People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing

earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (v.10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.

If the thought today is that the universe is just a physical thing of which we are part and that's what most people believed I would point to many sci fi and horror films and TV series where the something "spiritual" and have example of people being possessed by spiritual beings

In what might be thought "popular consciousness" the idea of the spiritual still exists even if to some it seems unscientific. Today, as much as ever we are thankful for the work of scientists but lets also reflect there always be more than human imagination can understand.

In our gospel passage the spirit is symbolised by a dove

A bird that was used by Moses as we read in Genesis 8 to determine if it was safe to get out of the Ark

So here could symbolising this third person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit who shows us the way to safety .

The safe spiritual of experiences to pray to God to be open to God in prayer to know the Holy Spirit in our lives

This spirit which brings healing and cleansing and helps us to understand the teaching of the scriptures is also present with Jesus the start of his earthly ministry

At the baptism of Jesus we have the community of God

in his book about Celtic Christianity and the climate crisis Ray Simpson talks of keys to the future that come from his understanding of the Christian faith and the crisis facing the planet

Recently the climate crisis may have taken something of a second place at the moment but it is still the biggest issue facing us

One of these keys according to Simpson is the communion of loves in the heart of God Thinking of God as a hierarchy which is often the alternative supports the ideas that have often been within our ways of thinking and leads to dominion in the wrong way over nature which we have often gained from. This now needs rethinking and finding ways to live differently are going to be our major challenge. In relationship with nature not ripping it off.

To think of three equal persons of God interacting to each other gives us a different perspective

Yes in our Psalm we can hear the psalmist crying out as an individual to the God that they know but as we move to the baptism where we see all three persons

Simpson talks about the difference between God the clockmaker up there setting things in motion allowing it to tick away and people are either the believing or disbelieving comparing that to a God who continually is birthing the whole cosmos doing it from the inside

Jesus his shown here in the passage is fully human as he is as he goes on his way to the cross but also fully divine and in his resurrection power is present and praying for us now

That resurrection power is birthing new things and as we become aware of that in the new normal transformation will be possible

Over the next few weeks it may seem boring or difficult or there may be a great desire to move on from where we are.

I recommend we all reflect on the fact that we're giving up much of our freedom to enable others to live at this time and is that the most important lesson to learn

Hopefully things will change in a few months although some of the restrictions on life it will carry on but we can learn a lesson

Can we in some way walk the way of Jesus offering to give up to others as Jesus offered himself up to be baptised by John and thereby know the relationship that at the heart of the whole cosmos between father son and spirit

If we've been disturbed by what's happened not just by covid but the things that preceded it the fires and the

floods then it's not just a case of despair but praying reflecting what can be done if we listen to God and discern how He wants the world to change

Maybe it's at the time of greatest danger that there is also the greatest possibilities for change that will make the world a better place

it doesn't seem like this at the moment but that's the hope to hold on to hold onto to because we can cry out to Jesus in our disorientation allow the Holy Spirit to reorientate into our lives and make a better future

let the Holy Spirit renew us this morning and help us to see the despair can be turned to the hope of the future Amen

Hymn StF 394

Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.

1 You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.

2 Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way;
we need your power, we need your
strength,
following Christ each day.

Margaret V. Old (1932-2001)

Intercessions

Called together as one family by the power of the Holy Spirit,
we pray to our Father God through Jesus,

the beloved Son,
for all our needs.

Jesus was confirmed in his mission by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; help us to respond with confidence to the gift of the Spirit in our lives.

In a few minutes of quiet pray for those who you know in need at this time

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

Intercessions

Let us pray for the church,
the people of God,
called through baptism
to share in the royal priesthood of Christ
and to uphold the sanctity of human life.

For those not meeting in buildings but still
worshiping in the spirit and truth of the gospel

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who govern our country
and especially for those who witness
to the value of human life.
May the truth prevail in public policy.

... and today's concerns

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the children in our schools,
the citizens of tomorrow,

and for all who teach them.

May a new generation speak out
for the value of the unborn,
the disabled, the sick and the elderly.

For those who are being home schooled ,
those teaching them and those young people
who have been preparing for exams and are
now uncertain how they will be assessed

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Hymn StF 106

- 1 God, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!
- 2 Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O to all humankind
let there be light!
- 3 Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth your flight;
move on the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!
- 4 Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide
let there be light!

John Marriott (1780-1825)

Blessing

Lord, help us to be open to your prompting
as we seek to discover what you would have
us be and do.

Remind us again and again that you have
promised to be our
guide and companion on our journey.
Help us to look forward with renewed
commitment,
and bless our thinking and speaking and
doing.

Holy wind of God, breathe on us.

Holy fire of God, burn in us.

Holy Spirit of God, rest on us.

Amen.

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