

Praying for the Persecuted Church

Care

Solidarity

Change

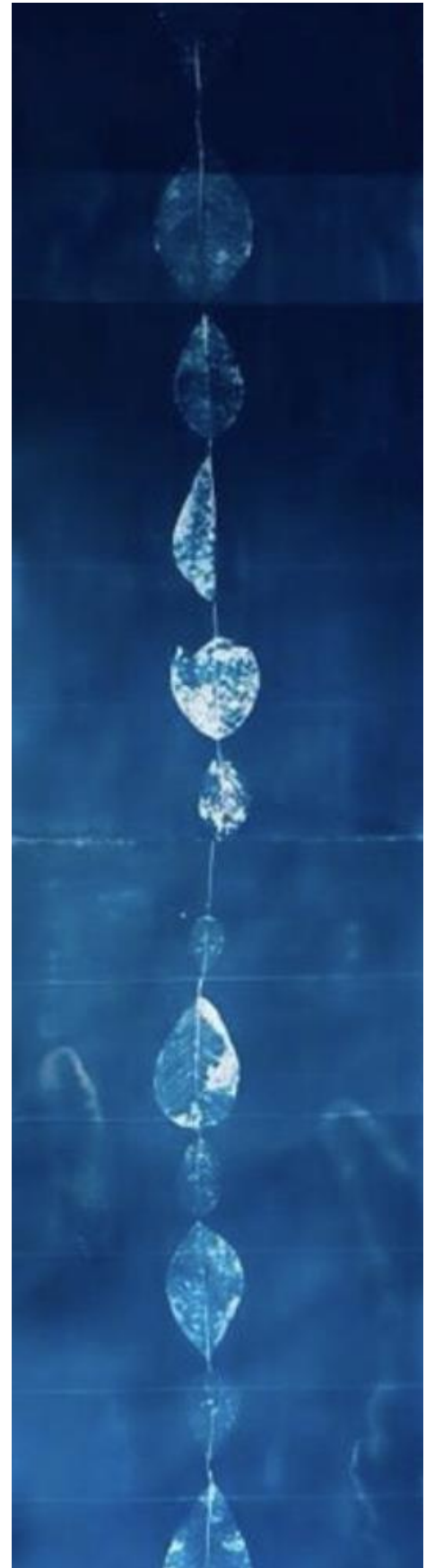


Image: Connected by a Thread
by Jake Lever

Gathering Music

De Profundis (Out of the Depths) Arvo Pärt

Welcome and Introduction

We gather to remember our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith. We come to pray, to listen and to stand in solidarity with all who live in fear. We come to affirm the freedom that is God's gift to each human being, and the fullness of life that God intends for us. We light a candle of hope as we hold in our hearts all those who are suffering today.

A candle is lit

Hymn/Song

Suggestions

Christ be our light Bernadette Farrell

This day God gives me James Quinn

Yet not I but through Christ in me CityAlight



Opening Responses

O Most High, when I am afraid,

I put my trust in you.

In God, whose word I praise,

in God I trust; I am not afraid;

what can flesh do to me?

I put my trust in you

(Psalm 56 3-4)

Prayers of Penitence

We recognise that intolerance and persecution can sometimes begin with us, so we bring to God our own prejudices, our own fears and resentments.

Unimaginable God, we have made you too small,
we have tried to contain you in our own traditions,
we have made you in our own image,
when you long for us to grow in yours.

Help us to recognise our own prejudices, and to let them go.

Silence

Lord have mercy upon us

Lord have mercy upon us

Unfamiliar God, we have made you too familiar,
mistaking our own values and preferences for yours,
You come to us in strangers,
with different cultures, different histories, different experiences,
but we are often uncomfortable and fearful of difference.

Help us to recognise our fears, and to let them go.

Silence

Christ have mercy upon us.

Christ have mercy upon us.

Unexpected God, we have made you too predictable,
expecting the world to stay the same.
We so easily become tribal, clinging to our own,
suspicious of change and challenge.
Help us to see our own blind spots, and to let them go.
Silence

Lord have mercy upon us
Lord have mercy upon us

Gracious God,
who loves the whole human family as one,
hear our prayers of sorrow for your hurting and divided world.
As we let go of prejudice, fear and our own blindness,
open our hearts to your gift of freedom,
to live and to love, to believe and to question,
to respect and honour you in one another,
in Jesus name.
Amen.

Psalm 118 1-9

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
2 **Let Israel say,**
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
3 Let the house of Aaron say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
4 **Let those who fear the Lord say,**
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
5 Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.
6 **With the Lord on my side I do not fear.**
What can mortals do to me?
7 The Lord is on my side to help me;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
8 **It is better to take refuge in the Lord**
than to put confidence in mortals.
9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to put confidence in princes.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Bible Reading

The experience of persecution has marked the true church since the earliest times. Authentic Christian witness often provokes those in power to try to suppress or eradicate our voice. St Paul himself was opposed, driven out, arrested, imprisoned and eventually gave his life for his faith.

2 Corinthians 4 8-12

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us but life in you.

Living Word of God

Live in our hearts today.

Hymn/Song

Suggestions

We turn to you O God of every nation Fred Kahn

When God almighty came to earth John Bell

Amazing Grace – my chains are gone Chris Tomlin

Bible Reading

In the face of persecution by the Temple authorities Jesus chose to speak of freedom, the freedom that comes from knowing and speaking the truth.

John 8 31-38

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father."

Living Word of God

Live in our hearts today.

Reflection

Jake Lever's image, created during the first Covid lockdown, is called "Connected by a Thread." Made from leaves from a Magnolia tree that had fallen and begun to break down, they form a delicate, fragile thread joining earth and heaven. To some they evoke tears, perhaps tears of divine compassion, reminding us of Jesus weeping for Lazarus, or for the people of Jerusalem, "sheep without a shepherd." Or today for all those who are persecuted for their faith, driven out of their homes, beaten, arrested, or "disappeared." They could be tears for prisoners of conscience, exiles, or those practicing their faith in secret.

Others will see hope in this image, a connecting thread of solidarity, as our prayers are joined with those of the persecuted church, or as we write letters of support, or to question the authorities about their treatment. Others will see the glory of God in the light of the leaves, penetrating the darkest night. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it! The light that shines through our brokenness and vulnerability, that power that is made perfect in our human weakness.

We take some time now to be silent and to reflect on how the image speaks to each one of us.

Music for Reflection

De Profundis (Out of the Depths) Arvo Pärt

Conversation

Sharing with a neighbour or in small groups

How do you respond to the image?

Have you ever experienced persecution for your faith?

Are there churches or peoples you are aware of as needing care, solidarity and change?

Act of Dedication

We commit ourselves to care about persecution for people of faith.

We commit ourselves to pray for persecuted people.

We commit ourselves to work for change, that all might be free.

In the words of St Paul, a prisoner in the Lord, we affirm

**We will strive to walk in a manner worthy of the calling
to which we have been called,
with all humility and gentleness,
with patience, bearing with one another in love,
making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit
in the bond of peace:
as one body, in one Spirit,
just as we were called to the one hope of our calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.**

Amen. Amen.

(adapted from Ephesians 4 1-6)

Hymn/Song

Suggestions

We have a dream Michael Forster

Be thou my vision Mary Byrne

Break our hearts Vicky Beeching

Prayers of Intercession

God of compassion,

we hold in the stream of your grace,

all those who are being persecuted for their faith.

We pray for those who have been discriminated against, bullied, threatened and hurt;

those who have lost homes, businesses, and opportunities,

or prevented from practicing their faith.

Silence

Out of the depths we call to you

O Lord, hear our prayer.

God of freedom,

we hold in the stream of your grace,

all those who have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured or exiled for their faith.

We pray that all may be granted the simple human right

to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Silence

Out of the depths we call to you
O Lord, hear our prayer.

God of justice,
we hold in the stream of your grace,
all those who have been denied justice, or representation, or a fair trial.
We pray for the work of journalists, lawyers and advocacy groups,
all who risk persecution themselves for the sake of others.

Silence

Out of the depths we call to you
O Lord, hear our prayer.

God of all people,
we hold in the stream of your grace,
all those of other faiths, or of no faith, who also experience persecution.
We pray particularly for minority groups who suffer discrimination and exclusion
on the grounds of gender, sexuality, culture, or the colour of their skin.

Silence

Out of the depths we call to you
O Lord, hear our prayer.

God of new life,
we hold in the stream of your grace,
all who have died as a result of persecution.
May they come to know your healing light and love,
in company with that great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us,
and now abide in the glorious liberty of your Kingdom.

Silence

Out of the depths we call to you
O Lord, hear our prayer.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who 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.**

Blessing

God the Father,
you create us to be one family,

you intend us to be free.
Bless us now to care for our brothers and sisters
and to work for that freedom.

Amen

Jesus our Saviour,
you show us how to live in harmony,
to be kind, tender-hearted, to forgive.
Bless us now to stand in solidarity with all who suffer,
and to pray for one another.

Amen.

Holy Spirit our advocate,
you give us gifts and call us to be fruitful.
Bless us now to work for change,
that all may know your justice, and be free.

Amen.

Hymn/Song

Suggestion

I heard the voice of Jesus say Horatius Bonar

Make Way, Make Way Graham Kendrick

Jesus, we celebrate your victory John Gibson

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an organisation he runs with his partner Gillian Lever

Bible Passages are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible