

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mrs Rosie Greenhalgh.

In this special time between Christ's resurrection and ascension we continue to celebrate all that he has done for us at Easter. We join in the traditional Easter greeting:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Psalm 98¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/suchet/nivuk/Ps.98>

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Hymn StF 330 [Joy to the World - Traditional Choir - YouTube](#)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing</p> <p>2. Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy ...</p> | <p>3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found....</p> <p>4. He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness
And wonders of His love...</p> |
|---|--|

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayer of Adoration

God our Father, creator of the universe, we praise you with joy this morning for the glories of your righteousness and the wonder of your love for us. We praise you for the power which raised Jesus from the dead, making all things new in him and giving us the hope of eternal life. We shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Glory be to you, God of Love and Father of all.

Lord Jesus Christ, only begotten Son of the Father, we praise you with joy this morning for the love and faithfulness which brought you into our world to die for us. We have been astounded afresh this Easter by your deep unshakeable trust in your Father's love and care, even unto death, through the agony of Gethsemane and the torture of the cross. We rejoice today that death could not hold you and that you opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in you. We shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Glory be to you, Saviour of the world and Lord of life.

Holy Spirit, we praise you with joy this morning for your presence with us, for transforming our lives and making us more like Christ Jesus our Lord. We praise you for opening the scriptures to us and leading us into all truth. We shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Glory be to you, Advocate, Comforter and Guide.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise you with joy this morning as we give thanks that Jesus rules the world as Lord of all. We shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, you asked for my hands, that you might use them for your purpose.

I gave them for a moment - but then I withdrew them, for the work was hard.

You asked for my mouth to speak out against injustice and to tell others of your love.

I spoke in whispers, that I might not be noticed.

You asked for my eyes to see the pain of poverty and the misery of loneliness.

I closed them, for I did not want to see.

Lord, you asked for my life, that you might work through me.

I gave but a small part, that I might not get too involved.

Father, forgive me, renew me in love, send me out to work in your world,
that I might take seriously the meaning of the cross.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Hear then the word of grace: Your sins are forgiven. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our gospel reading follows on from last Sunday's about the vine and the branches. Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper table the things he most wants them to remember:

John 15 vv 9-17 ¹

<https://www.biblegateway.com/audio/suchet/nivuk/John.15>

The reading is from 1 min 17 to 2 min 28

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.

Hymn SoF 22

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X8m9tVR0_Y

A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.

By this shall all men know that you are my
disciples, if you have love one for another.

Author unknown

Prayer

Lord, as we come to meditate on your word, open our ears to your voice, our hearts to your love and our minds to your truth, that we may understand your message for us today. Amen.

Reflection

According to John's gospel, on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus gave his disciples a long summary of his most important teachings, which is sometimes called the Final Discourse. It spans 5 chapters of the gospel, and it was surely intended to prepare the disciples for Jesus' departure from them and to give them comfort in the difficult times that would come afterwards.

A central theme in this Last Supper discourse is the importance of love, and Jesus keeps coming back to it. He introduces it near the beginning of the discourse, just after Judas Iscariot has left the table to betray him. From John 13 vv 34-35, these are his words:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

These are the verses used for the song we have just heard. But then Jesus is interrupted by no fewer than four of the disciples, one after another, asking questions about other things. Although Jesus speaks again about love, he does not return to telling them about his new command until chapter 15, in the passage we heard today.

For many years, I was puzzled about this new command. How is it new? Surely the disciples had grown up knowing that they should love their neighbour as themselves? What is so different about the command, 'Love one another', that Jesus should call it new? If we look carefully at Jesus' words in John 15, I think we can get an insight into this.

Jesus says in verse 12: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* And how has Jesus loved them? In verse 9 we read: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.* Jesus loves his disciples with the love of God the Father. And he commands them to love one another with the love of God the Father. Suddenly we realise what an incredible command this is!

Jesus takes one of the two most important commandments in the Law of Moses, and reinterprets it. Don't just love your neighbour as yourself, but love one another with the love of God himself. Human love is so much smaller than God's love, so don't be content to love with that. Draw on the enormous love of God. That's how people will know that you are my disciples!

How is it possible for human beings to draw on this love of God? In John 14 v 23 we read:

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

If we obey Christ's teaching we shall have God in our hearts, in the person of the Holy Spirit, and we shall be enabled to live the risen life of Christ and to love as he loves.

The disciples had seen the way Jesus lived; his patience day in, day out, with all who came his way; his compassion and healing for those in need. They knew he drew on the love of God when he spent hours alone on the hillsides at night, praying. They had seen the hand of God in the miracles he worked and in his teachings.

Jesus showed us by example that if we live in the love of God, we are able to love others with God's love. He was fully human as well as fully divine; he interacted with his Father as we can, through prayer and Bible reading; he was filled with the Holy Spirit, as we are when we believe what he taught. And it showed in the life he lived. As his followers, we too can live that kind of life if we remain in his love. How do we remain in the love of Jesus? By obeying his command: *Love each other as I have loved you.* Jesus told his disciples:

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. (John 15 vv 9b-10a)

Jesus continues: *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.* How amazing that even as he faced the cross, Jesus could speak of the joy he felt in obeying his Father and laying down his life for his friends. This joy is something much deeper and more enduring than the earthly sorrows we all experience. The last year has been a terrible time for many of us, and I don't want to diminish that, but the bad times will pass. If we remain in Christ's love, the joy that comes from keeping his commands will never leave us.

We cannot read the New Testament without feeling the joy of those first disciples, a joy which first came to them through the wonder of the resurrection, and then remained with them through the Holy Spirit in all their trials and tribulations. If you have time this week, you might like to read Paul's letter to the Philippians, written whilst he was in prison under threat of execution, but bursting with the joy of knowing Christ. Wouldn't we all love to have his fortitude?

We can, if we resolve today to obey Christ's new command to love each other with the love of God. Joy comes through loving obedience to Christ's commands. May Christ's joy be in you today, and may your joy be complete. Amen.

Hymn H&P 687 [Trust and Obey \(Hymns with Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

1. When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word, what a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.
3. But we never can prove the delights of his love, until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows, and the joy He bestows,
are for them who will trust and obey.

Refrain

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Trust and obey...

2. Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
but our toil he doth richly repay;
Not a grief nor a loss, not a frown nor a cross,
but is blest if we trust and obey.
4. Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at his feet, or we'll walk by his side in the way;
What he says we will do; where he sends, we will go,
never fear, only trust and obey.

Trust and obey...

Trust and obey...

Samuel Medley (1738-1799)

Prayer of Intercession

Loving God, even as we rejoice in your love and in the life of the risen Lord, we remember that people are suffering in our world today. We pray particularly for India, where hospitals do not have the resources to cope with their many Covid patients, asking that richer nations may respond generously to their need.

At the start of Christian Aid Week we remember those in the Third World who do not have the basic things we take for granted: clean water; toilets; enough to eat; education; health care; and where the Covid pandemic therefore hits so much harder than in Europe.

We pray your blessing on all who will be helping to raise funds for Christian Aid this week, asking that our people may be compassionate and generous in their response.

We pray for those struggling in the aftermath of natural disasters, particularly remembering the volcanic eruption in St Vincent. We pray for nations where there is war and unrest; for the millions living in refugee camps who despair for their future. Be with the leaders of the nations, inspiring them to seek justice and peace for all....

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for the church throughout the world, asking that you will strengthen its witness and make us all one in Christ, that the world might believe. Help us to love each other with the love of God as Christ commands, and keep us in your love, that our joy may be complete.

We pray for the Methodist Church and for all the churches of our Kennet & Test Valley circuit, its ministers and local preachers, and all its members. We ask a special blessing on Revd Peter Bennett, our own minister; may his sabbatical be a time of refreshment where he can put aside for a while the burdens of leadership and draw closer to you. ...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones. For those who are sick in body or in mind. And for those known to us who are in special need today....

Give us Christ's compassion for all who suffer, and help us to carry one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ. Open our eyes to see where a phone call or letter from us might fill a brother or sister with your joy...

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Almighty God, fill us with your life, love and joy as we seek to be your resurrection people day by day. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 76

[Give me joy in my heart - YouTube](#)

1. Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising.
Give me joy in my heart, I pray.
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising.
Keep me praising till the break of day.
2. Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving.
Give me peace in my heart, I pray.
Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving.
Keep me loving till the break of day.

Sing hosanna...

Refrain

*Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna,
sing hosanna to the King!*

3. Give me love in my heart, keep me serving.
Give me love in my heart, I pray.
Give me love in my heart, keep me serving.
Keep me serving till the break of day.

Sing hosanna...

Author unknown

Blessing

May the risen Lord be with you as you serve him in the world. May his peace be with you; his joy fill you; and his love inspire you to live and love as he did.

And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and all those you love, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Acknowledgements

1 Bible Verses from New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®