

Worship at Home 18 July 2021

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mary Armstrong.

Call to worship

We gather in many different ways this day, to worship the living God.

We gather together with the body of Christ, around the world and across history.

We gather to pray, to share in the singing, to reflect and to be transformed,
By your Spirit, Lord God.

Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 566¹ – *Take my life and let it be.* [Click here to listen](#)

- 1 Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee ;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2 Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love ;
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.
- 3 Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King ;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.
- 4 Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold ;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.
- 5 Take my will, and make it thine ;
it shall be no longer mine ;
take my heart — it is thine own ;
it shall be thy royal throne.
- 6 Take my love ; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store ;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Opening Prayers

Let us just be still for a moment.

Think of a place that you love to be in, a place that brings you peace – perhaps it reminds you of God or reveals something of God's nature to us. It might be

by the sea, in your precious garden, at home a favourite holiday spot, a mountain or a skyscraper. Perhaps for many of us it will be connected to a beautiful landscape or a special view.

Let us just pause for a moment, imagining ourselves into that place. What can you see? How do you feel?

Firstly, let us pause and give thanks.

Lord of our special places, we give thanks for these special places and all that they mean to us. We give thanks for the memories this place connects us with, and the special people associated with this place, perhaps faces, names and stories we remember when we come here.

Living God, we give you thanks for your creation and all the joy and wonder it brings us. We pause to give you thanks.

Secondly, still imagining ourselves in this special place, we pause to say sorry, sorry to you Lord God.

As we look out on our own special places, we feel a sense of connection with all the other special places which people who are sharing in worship with us today are thinking about, and everywhere else in your precious creation, which we value so much. We say sorry.

We say sorry for the damage we have done to these places, and the ways we have been part of systems that have damaged your world, or the people who live there.

We are sorry for the pollution, destruction, and pain which we inflict on each other, and your world.

For the sake of these special places, the people of your world, and all that we love we ask that you move, inspire, and transform us. Accept us as we are, and use us for your work to create a better, safer, fairer world.

In Jesus' name

Amen

Gospel reading: Mark 6: 14 – 29

John the Baptist Beheaded

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying,^[b] "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled^[c]; yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² When the daughter of^[d] Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."

²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Old Testament reading: Amos 7: 7 – 15

Locusts, fire, and a plumb line

⁷ This is what he showed me: He was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb,^[a] with a plumb line^[b] in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look,

I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.
⁹ “The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.”

Amos and Amaziah

¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹ For this is what Amos is saying: ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.’”

¹² Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³ Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵ But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

Reflection on the readings

And now some thoughts to share with you on today’s readings.

We often hear the phrase, ‘speaking truth to power’. In reality, not many of us – not many people anywhere – get a genuine opportunity to speak truth to power close up.

These readings – from Amos and Mark – show what, at least in some circumstances, the true cost can be for those who do challenge the powerful ‘face to face’. Amos was critical of international and domestic policies and was viewed as a traitor.

Herod’s relationship with John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, is intriguing and the reading from Mark offers some interesting insights. In many ways, Herod behaved like a modern-day populist leader – he was rash, whimsical and keen to please: which undoubtedly resulted in John’s beheading. Where was the wise counsel to Herod to steer him from such folly? His wife and her daughter clearly did not have his best interests at heart when it came to advice. While we do not hold the power of life and death in our hands, we all make decisions from time to time. To whom do we turn for guidance? If to friends or

colleagues, how do we know whether or not they are advising us wisely? Do we ask God to give us the wisdom to do the right thing? How do we know what is right?

In essence, John criticised the personal morality of those in power, and was killed for doing so. And, of course, there are regimes in the world today where similar challenges would lead to similar results – prison, exile, even death. In our part of the world, the response is more likely to be a scathing criticism and censure by whichever ‘flavour’ of politicians have been upset. And also, inevitably, the suggestion – almost the demand – that religion should keep out of politics.

How should we respond to that? Perhaps, as footballer Marcus Rashford did last year, during his campaign for free school meals during holiday periods, saying: ‘This is not politics, this is humanity.’ It is the duty of those who follow Christ to speak out, as Christ did himself, on issues of truth and justice and the values of the kingdom of God – they are issues of humanity.

There is always a cost to speaking out, even today – but that doesn’t mean we should avoid it. On the flipside, there is a danger, a risk, of self-righteousness – of assuming that we have got it right, that we have the answers, of comparing our supposed ‘innate goodness’ over and against those we might challenge.

But that’s not right either! Which is why Jesus taught humility and love – so that our words and actions might always be proportionate, and our motives sincere and true. And the key really is: who or what rules our motives and actions?

Let us say **The Lord’s Prayer** together, in whichever version you prefer.

Prayers of intercession

Today, instead of using lots of words for our prayers of intercession, our prayers for the world, we are going to hold a couple of times of quiet, and I simply invite you to bring your own prayers into those spaces.

Firstly, I invite you to spend a moment praying for those close to you: people in your family, your friends, perhaps members of your church family, who are in your thoughts. It might be the people you are worried about, or just someone who you know needs to feel God’s presence today.

In the stillness, hold that person, and their situation, in the light of God's love.

Come Lord God. Answer our prayers, in Jesus name.

And now, in this space, I invite you to bring a situation or person further afield. Perhaps a story from the news, or a situation or story that has found its way to you. It is probably about people or a person you will never meet, but in this moment, you want to hold those people in prayer.

In the stillness, we pray for a better world.

Come Lord God. You know the names, the faces, the situations that we've held in our hearts and minds over these past few minutes.

Answer our prayers, in Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 346² – *Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other.* [Click here to listen](#)

- 1 Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other ;
born in our darkness, he became our brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father :
glory to God on high.
- 2 Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other ;
no one can serve him and despise another ;
who else unites us, one in God the Father ?
Glory to God on high.
- 3 Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other ;
sold once for silver, murdered here, our brother —
he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father :
glory to God on high.
- 4 Give God the glory, God and none other ;
give God the glory, Spirit, Son, and Father ;
give God the glory, God with us, my brother :
glory to God on high.

Blessing

I have enjoyed worship with you today and I hope you will find many moments of peace in the week ahead.

God of grace, Spirit of hope, Christ who transforms us – send us into this new week with your courage, your love, your peace to bring into our communities and a world in need.

Go in peace and serve the Lord.

Amen

1. Francis Ridley Havergal (1836-1879).
2. Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000). ©1969 Stainer & Bell Limited
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