

Worship at Home 29 August 2021

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

Call to worship

Today, in this service, may we bring to God
not only the words on our lips,
but the praise in our hearts.
May we bring our honesty and bravery,
our anxiety and fears,
all that we carry in our hearts.
May we meet with Jesus,
who accepts us – flaws and all –with forgiveness and grace.

A gathering prayer

Open our eyes, Lord, our ears, and our hearts.
May we be quick to see where you are at work;
quick to listen for your word;
quick to offer love and hope,
and slow to judge. Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 51¹ – *Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.*

[Click here to listen](#)

- 1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.
- 2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

A prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

Unblemished God, forgive us
when we adhere to laws that are not of you,
when we criticise others because their ways are not our ways.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have not supported one another in love,
or protected those that are vulnerable.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

When we have corrupted your laws and gone our own way,
or when we have not nurtured those in our families
and communities and let them go astray.

Cleanse our hearts and make us pure.

Help us to live as one community,
bound together in love and grace.

Help us to live alongside each other and be there for one another.

Amen.

Gospel reading: Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Clean and unclean

¹The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean”, that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.)

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with “unclean” hands?”

⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.’

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him “unclean” by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him “unclean”.

²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean”.”

Epistle reading: James 1:17-27

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

Listening and Doing

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Reflection on the readings

This encounter with the Pharisees comes in the wake of the feeding of the five thousand. The crowd is still buzzing with the fall-out from that, the disciples are still trying to get their heads round what happened on the hillside and in the boat in the storm – and the Pharisees nit-pick over handwashing. Jesus is having none of it. He explodes at them with a citation of Isaiah 29.13 and an assault (in vv.9-13) on their practice of allowing people to join their group, commit some loose change to the cause, and declare everything they own belongs to God (though they still control it) as a way of getting out of their obligation to look after their parents.

Inevitably what began as a dispute with the Pharisees draws an audience and Jesus talks to the crowd. It seems that his agenda is to challenge the authority of the Pharisees to interpret the Law; so, this is high stakes stuff. What he says is pretty obvious: what you eat doesn't defile you, it's what you say and do that does that, how you treat people (vv.9-13 being a good example). In both Greek and Hebrew thinking, the heart is the seat of thought and action; so, what you put in the heart will determine what you will think is right, and how you live in the light of it.

What do you see when you look in a mirror? Is the reflection an honest one, or is there more to see than the outward appearance? In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is defending his disciples against the Pharisees. He counters their attack with his own accusation that they are hypocrites who find fault in others but ignore the inconsistencies of their own rituals. Jesus holds a mirror up to the way they observe their faith. Being called 'religious' – or doing something 'religiously' – often has negative connotations, reminding us of those for whom religious practice is more important than authentic faith. For the Pharisees in today's reading, outward observance of the law is more important than inner defilement by the evil in our hearts, minds, and imagination.

Washing our hands has become an important part of our lives since the pandemic. We have been encouraged to sing a song or a verse of a hymn to make sure we wash for a full 20 seconds.

But are we sometimes more dedicated to the idea of the ritual than to its practice, just as the Pharisees were to their rituals? Things become rituals quickly, and we cease to notice what we are doing.

When we make a cup of tea, most of us have got used to teabags. Many of us dispense with a teapot and go straight to a mug. But sometimes, in a café or teahouse, we will be brought a pot with loose tea, a cup and saucer and milk in a jug. Somehow the slow pace of waiting for a brew and using a tea strainer feels decadent – a generous and hospitable waste of time, but one that results in a different experience. Knowing Jesus and learning to live as his disciples should change us and inform the way we live with one another. We need to take time to learn from one another, to shape and support one another in our Christian values.

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

Prayers of intercession

God of justice,
we live in an unjust world.

We are all too aware that shame stalks the corridors of power
and that hypocrisy is second nature to many.

God, in your mercy,
remove the dinginess of disgrace and discrimination,
revealing truth, promoting light, and calling the world
to see the witness of your beloved Son.
Grant us all wisdom in how we conduct our lives
and in how we interact with others.
Make us doers of your word and bringers of peace.
Where there is nothing but cruelty,
may we plant the seeds of kindness.
Where life is full of the fake and the false,
make us advocates of truth.
May those in power not be trigger-happy with their retorts,
but thoughtful and wise.
Give us discernment in how we respond
to the myriad voices and the plethora of opinions
that surround us in today's world.
May we seek what is genuine.
May we choose what is real.
For Jesus' sake.
Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 545² – *Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.*

[Click here to listen](#) NB this Youtube version does not include Verse 4

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

A sending out prayer

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives,
to honour you in all that we do and say.

May our being and doing
reflect your love and your grace.

And when we next meet,
may we recognise with thanks
the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

1. Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960) © 1923 renewed 1951 Hope Publishing Company
2. Irish 8th century tr. Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931) versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860-1935)
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