

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 10/10/21 – Freedom Sunday
A service prepared by Mary Armstrong for use at home

Today has been designated by some of the major world religions including many Christian denominations as 'Freedom Sunday'. The theme of the service today is the issue of so-called 'modern slavery', which takes many forms, including human trafficking, and affects millions of people across the world including many in the UK.

Opening prayers

Let us pray...

For action - Dear Lord, just as you helped Moses and Aaron as they spoke boldly to Pharaoh on behalf of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, help me to speak up for modern slaves around the world.

For protection - Dear Lord, you are a strong tower and a mighty fortress. Help your rescued children feel safe and begin to heal. Protect them from those who seek to harm them.

For prevention - Dear Lord, most of us saying this prayer will never experience the kind of extreme poverty and oppression that millions of people live with every day. Help me to be understanding and compassionate toward their needs. Help me to love them in the way that you love them. Give me the will and courage to do what I can to make things better for them.

For restoration - Dear Lord, your Word shows that you bring new joy and hope where previously there was only shame and fear. I ask this for my brothers and sisters, who will need reassurance and support as they begin a new life of freedom.

For justice - Dear Lord, you demand justice for those who have been wronged. Give strength to those who investigate and prosecute the perpetrators. Encourage them when they are weary. Give courage to survivors when they are asked to testify against their former captors.

Dear Lord, I ask all of this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 696 ¹

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| <p>1. For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.</p> <p>2. Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.</p> | <p>3. All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.</p> <p>4. You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.</p> |
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Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

Old Testament reading: Exodus 3:1-12 ²

¹ Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey - the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Prayer

God of pilgrimage, who led the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, go with the enslaved and trafficked today.

Be their protecting presence, and provide what they need for each day.

Take away their sorrow and wipe away every tear from their eyes, proclaim love and justice from the mountains and lead them, I pray, to opportunities to cross over into places of peace and plenty, which they can call home. I ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

Gospel reading: Luke 4: 16-21 ²

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.

¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Hymn: Singing the Faith 404 ³

1. God's spirit is in my heart;
he has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do:
2. Just as the Father sent me,
so I'm sending you out to be
my witness throughout the world —
the whole of the world:
3. Don't carry a load in your pack;
you don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep —
can earn their own keep:
4. Don't worry what you have to say;
don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart —
will speak in your heart:

*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down-trodden free,
and go tell everyone
the news that the kingdom of God has come;
and go tell everyone
the news that God's kingdom has come.*

Talk

'Modern slavery' is an umbrella term, mainly used in the UK, to describe all forms of slavery, trafficking, and exploitation. Examples are sexual and labour exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, forced criminality, child soldiers and organ harvesting. The Modern Slavery Act of 2015 outlines all forms of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour that are illegal under UK law.

In a globalised world in which international travel is commonplace, modern slavery is a worldwide problem. However, accurate statistics are hard to come by as so many enslaved people are hidden or invisible, which means that the true scale of the problem remains unknown. Long supply chains in today's globalised economy create spaces of opportunity for traffickers to exploit the most vulnerable. This is compounded by what Pope Francis has called the "globalisation of indifference", a spiritual problem where we are all so focussed on our own lives that we don't notice what is happening to the vulnerable people in our communities.

So why should Christians speak and Act?

Whilst to most of us this question may seem unnecessary, and the answer equally obvious, it may be helpful to briefly examine the biblical background. A strong response against the abuse of others is an essential part of mission. All Christians are called by God to discern and to respond to God's mission of love to the world. That activity of God, reconciling the world to Himself, generates in Jesus Christ, and through the Spirit, the vision of a world in which human beings live in harmony and love, respecting each other and supporting one another. Christians are called to work towards the realisation of such a vision, to make the Kingdom of God a reality for everybody. This means that human behaviour which values some people more than others, or which exploits or injures others, is not only contrary to God's will for human beings, but actively damages his mission. The presence of evil behaviour in the world, and the presence of human and institutional sin, is therefore to be resisted and redressed by all Christians.

Genesis tells us that human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-27). We can use this powerful idea to understand that all human beings come into being in the same way and that God values, desires and loves each person equally. Further, every human being is called by God and cherished by God.

It follows that all of us should value, cherish, and respect the dignity of every other person, irrespective of their beliefs, ethnic background, economic status, gender, or sexual orientation. To refuse to respect others or to treat them as less than fully human is an offence against the image of God, and hence against God. In the same way, any action which deliberately prevents people becoming who God created them to be is against God. That means that we should not exploit other human beings as property or treat them as commodities. Jesus tells us: love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12: 31). However, while it is easy to say that we would never treat people that way, in fact we often do not live up to what Jesus asks of us. We may not be involved in modern slavery, but we also may contribute to a culture which sees human beings as goods. Modern slavery does not happen in a vacuum but is part of an exploitative culture in which poverty, inequality, oppression, and fear all play their part.

Thinking about today's Gospel reading, Jesus' sermon in the Synagogue at Nazareth is a plan for his mission. He says that proclaiming release to the captives and freedom for the oppressed is a sign of the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus is drawing on the Prophet Isaiah and, through Isaiah, on God leading the people of Israel out of slavery into freedom in the Promised Land. As Christians, we need to hear again Jesus' call to bring freedom and an end to captivity, and there are several things we can do to help achieve this in our daily lives. We can pray for those trapped in slavery, for those exploiting them, and for the authorities who deal with these issues. We can support charities working in this area. We can learn about the way slavery is included in the supply chains for our food and clothing. We can look out for the signs of those who are trapped in forced labour and report it to the Police. In all of this we can try to live out the message of Jesus that freedom is a sign of God's kingdom. This is part of what we mean when we pray the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come'. Amen

A Prayer for Freedom Sunday

On this holy ground of worship in this sacred place of prayer I have heard the voice of freedom crying 'Let my people go.' God of freedom, who leads us into life, deliver me from every evil and make of me a deliverer of others.

Where chains restrain God's chosen children, where humans trade in kin and skin, may my words pass on your promise, of a land where liberty is sweet.

God of freedom, who leads us into life, deliver me from every evil and make of me a deliverer of others.

Give me faith to face the Pharaohs, who line their pockets from this plague. Send me as a sponsor of salvation, a willing servant: a slave to love.

God of freedom, who leads us into life, deliver me from every evil and make of me a deliverer of others. Amen

Now say **The Lord's Prayer** out loud in whichever version you prefer.

Prayers of intercession

I pray for people who are trafficked. May they find freedom from fear and harm and courage to live in hope.

Silence

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

I pray for people who traffic others. May they find freedom from greed and violence and courage to live with justice.

Silence

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

I pray for people who work to prevent trafficking. May they find freedom from threats and webs of untruths and courage to live in peace

Silence

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

God of compassion and mercy, who heard the cry of your people and sent your servant Moses to lead them out of slavery to freedom in the promised land: free us from the tyranny of sin and death and, by the leading of your Spirit, bring me to your promised land. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 440

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|---|---|
| 1. Amazing grace — how sweet the sound —
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see. | 4. The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures. |
| 2. God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
his grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed! | 5. And, when this heart and flesh shall fail
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
a life of joy and peace. |
| 3. Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home. | 6. When we've been there ten thousand years
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun. |

John Newton (1725-1807)

A sending out prayer

Go out in peace and bring freedom to all we find and affect.

Be anointed to bring good news to the poor,

proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Go out with the peace of the Father, the purpose of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

To love and serve the world. In the name of Christ. Amen

Acknowledgements

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