

This short act of worship has been produced for you
by the Revd Tim Swindell.

If you are well enough and able,
why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time
when you would normally be sharing with others in church
and pray for them as they pray for you.

Prayer of approach

Father God,
we approach you today,
to praise you, to learn from you.
Your wisdom, shown to us through Jesus,
your most precious Son,
is far greater than that of the world.
It has the power to go beyond all our expectations.

Sovereign Lord,
we approach you today as your children,
sitting at your feet,
bathed in your love,
asking to be refreshed,
freed of our burdens,
and seeking rest for our souls.
Speak to us, Lord.

Amen.

StF 455 All my hope on God is founded

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

Prayer of Confession:

Let us pray together.

**Dear Lord, it is difficult for me to grasp
just who I am talking to when I come before you.
I can't fully understand,
that I'm in the presence of such a mighty God.
And so, please Lord, forgive me for the times
when my vision and understanding of you are far too small;
when I try to limit you to that small thing I think I can cope
with;**

when I'm frightened to let your power loose in my life.

**Forgive me, Lord, and make me whole.
Forgive me for the times that I ignore you,
when I act selfishly, overlooking those around me,
acting only in my own interest.
Forgive me too when I try to act in my own strength,
forgetting all that I have comes from you.
Remind me that I can rely on you always.**

Let's spend a moment in quiet, reflecting on our lives.

We hear Christ's words of grace:

Your sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

**Today's reading Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 English Standard
Version Anglicised (ESVUK)**

¹⁶ "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to them playmates,
¹⁷ "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Time to reflect

Have you ever felt that, whatever you do, it won't be the right thing! It can feel like that, whether we are talking about a situation at home, at work, with a partner, a child, a friend, or colleague. It has felt a bit like that sometimes while we have been obliged to stay at home over the last few weeks. We were told “don't go out – unless you have to go out” and “don't go to work – unless you have to go to work”. We have been told to do one thing, while those who made up the rules did something else. Our reading starts in a similar vein – Jesus says “We played you lively music, but you didn't want to dance. So, we sang you a sad song, but that wasn't right either.”

In case it wasn't clear what he was talking about he goes on, “John came – he came with a tendency to eat locusts, wear

shirts that made him itch on purpose, and he generally stuck to the edges of the wilderness – and you didn't like that.” So Jesus says, “I came, enjoy a good meal, and can even be persuaded to change water into wine to keep the party going – although perhaps I don't always stick to the nicest people – and you don't like that either.” “Do you know what you want?”, Jesus asks.

Well, I guess the truth is that sometimes we don't know what we want. Jesus even goes on to say that truth has been hidden even from the wise and learned. But if we learn the ways of Jesus, then we can see the ways of God revealed to us (“No one knows the Father except the Son”). However, even here is a contradiction which we are left to try to grasp for ourselves, because we are told that “No one knows the Son except the Father.” It seems that they both know each other, but nobody else does. Oh, dear! And then the word of hope – the Son can choose to reveal God to us. It's his choice.

I know that as I have studied theology, God, Jesus, over the years, the more I discover, the more questions arise in my mind. The more I know, the more I find that I don't know. The people I come in to contact with who concern me most are those who think they know the absolute truth of God, and that their way is the only way. Jesus says a prayer of praise to his Father that things are hidden from the wise and revealed to little children. I think that returns me to my starting point – whatever I do, it isn't the right thing! I study my bible to know more about Jesus,

more about God, only to find that the truth is only revealed to little children. But that won't stop me thinking!

So finally in our reading, we come to those familiar words with another oh-so-familiar contradiction, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Whenever I hear those words, I find myself wanting to say, "Oh no, it isn't!" The yoke is that collar that is put onto an animal when it is about to be put to work – the collar around an ox's neck when it is hitched to a plough. This is like saying, "You need a rest – here is a shovel, go and dig a hole," or "you look tired – here is a mop and bucket, go and wash the floor." That's not rest! The "easy yoke" seems to demand strenuous labour.

I think the only explanation I can give for that contradiction is this. For years I worked as a Chartered Accountant in the Insurance Industry. It was hard work, and demanding; rewarding at times, but largely all it did was to pay me sufficient to enable my family and me to do the things we wanted to do. Since responding to quiet promptings from God and becoming a Methodist Minister I have seldom worked quite as hard, but never have I been so well rewarded – and I don't mean financially I hasten to add! The difference is one word – PURPOSE – and that word gives me satisfaction, joy and rest.

I'm still not sure that my burden is light, but the yoke isn't one I bear by myself – it's a double yoke, if you like. Two oxen pulling together. Sorry if that's not a picture you want to be left with! As we work with a real purpose, God's purpose, still getting it wrong and doing things incorrectly, nevertheless Jesus is there to ease our burden, to reassure us and to give our labour true worth. Of course we don't need to work for the Church to find that purpose, we can work for God providing purpose in many settings, serving others, doing what we feel called to, or serving wherever we happen to be – I'm sure that God needs people to serve him even in the insurance industry!

As each of us struggle, not knowing whether we are doing the right thing, may we feel Jesus alongside us, sharing the yoke, sharing the burden, teaching us, being gentle with us, and giving us rest.

Amen.

A time of prayer

Let us remember that the Methodist Church has been meeting in its Annual Conference, albeit in an electronic format during the last week. It may have been doing that in a very different way to normal times, but the conversations have focused in the same way on how the Methodist Church not only deals with the situation we find ourselves in now, but also how we plan for a future that better reflects God's Kingdom.

Let us pray.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray for all in authority,
that they will be respectfully conscious of the weight on their
shoulders and act responsibly for the people they serve.

We pray for them in their personal lives,
with the worries and cares that only they see.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray for our friends, family, colleagues.

We pray that as we walk alongside them,
you will use us to bring them close to you,
and they will learn of your love.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray that we might be sensitive to the needs of those around
us especially at this time of crisis and change – the people we
see every day, perhaps as fleetingly as at the shops or in the bus
queue.

We have no idea what burdens they are carrying,
or if they need a kind word from you that only we can give.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray that we will see the positive in people, even when it's
hard, and reach out to encourage them.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

StF 248 I heard the voice of Jesus say

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUVCPf8-VuE

I heard the voice of Jesus say,

"Come unto me and rest;

lay down, O weary one, lay down

your head upon my breast."

I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your days be bright."
I looked to Jesus and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)

A sending out prayer

Jesus has called us to come to him
and blessed us with his richness.

Now as we are increasingly, and tentatively,
stepping out into his world once again,
let us help to make sure people see him,
and listen to him, through us.

What a responsibility,
what a joy, what a privilege.

We are yours, Lord.

Use us as you will.

Amen.

A prayer of blessing

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with each one of us, and those that we love,
now and for evermore. Amen.**

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