**Sunday 19th April 2020 - Act of Worship**

**Welcome and opening words**

Welcome to worship today. Wherever you are and from whatever Church you are from you are welcome with us as we join together in worship on this post Easter Sunday.

Some words from John’s Gospel. Please join with me in saying these words:

**“16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16&17)**

*(Let us pause for a moment to reflect on those powerful words full of promise)*

On this first Sunday after Easter let us sing together the powerful hymn “Thine be the glory”

**Opening Hymn: Thine be the glory**

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| 1..Thine be the glory,  risen, conquering Son,  endless is the victory  Thou o'er death hast won;  angels in bright raiment  rolled the stone away,  kept the folded grave-clothes  where Thy body lay. | 2..Lo! Jesus meets us,  risen from the tomb;  lovingly He greets us,  scatters fear and gloom;  let the Church with gladness  hymns of triumph sing,  for her Lord now liveth;  death has lost its sting. | 3..No more we doubt Thee,  glorious Prince of life;  life is nought without Thee:  aid us in our strife;  make us more than conquerers,  through Thy deathless love:  bring us safe through Jordan  to Thy home above. |
| *Thine be the glory,*  *risen, conquering Son,*  *endless is the victory*  *Thou o'er death hast won.* | *Thine be the glory,*  *risen, conquering Son,*  *endless is the victory*  *Thou o'er death hast won.* | *Thine be the glory,*  *risen, conquering Son,*  *endless is the victory*  *Thou o'er death hast won.* |
| Edmond Budry 1854-1932 tr. R Birch Hoyle (1875-1939) ccli 275793 | | |

**Prayers**

Risen, conquering Jesus, we come before you in prayer. We come and rejoice and celebrate for the cross and tomb are empty – for you, Lord, have risen! May we live as Easter people.

We come today as your people scattered in community to offer our praise and worship to you.

We might be alone or with our family, but we are united by the Holy Spirit in worship today.

We come reflecting on those powerful words from John’s Gospel that God so loved the world that He gave sacrificially of His own Son so that we in centuries passed, today, and in the future might be assured of the hope of resurrection to eternal life.

We give thanks, Lord, that you are always with us and nothing we can say or do will ever separate us from your love that we can know in Jesus Christ.

Lord as we come into the light of your presence we are conscious of the darkness in our own lives and in the world. We pray that your light would dispel all darkness in us and in the world today.

We come acknowledging that we are weak and frail and sometimes fail in what you call us to do and to be. Forgive us, Lord, and cleanse us with the power of the Holy Spirit.

In these times of isolation, we come to pray the prayer that unites us with Christians all across the world, as we say together:

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed by thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
for Thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.

Amen.

**Introduction to Colossians**

When I was thinking and praying about the services from now until Pentecost Sunday my thoughts were led to Paul’s letters. I thought about how we might explore together one of the “prison letters”. Paul is believed to have written Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon from prison in Rome. When I say ‘prison’ it was more like house arrest. Some commentators suggest he could have been chained to a jailer but had some freedoms to see people and to write his letters. However, there were limitations and restrictions to what he could do and certainly where he could go. In many ways his house arrest is similar to our ‘self isolation’. We, too, are currently limited in our movements and for some of us we are unable to get out at all.

For the next 6 Sundays we will explore the letter of Colossians in the Sunday services. My hope is that in the Missional Partnership newsletter that follows each Sunday there will be questions or points for further reflection based on the Bible reading and the messages I share with you.

I hope that together we might all learn more about God’s love for us in Jesus and His expectations for us as followers of Jesus. I hope that over the next 6 weeks we might reflect on how we continue our faith journeys whilst not able to meet together as Church.

May God bless us as we journey through Colossians together and may God continues to lead us on our faith journeys.

Let’s pray….

Loving God, as we come together now to hear Your Word to us in Colossians and as we reflect on it together, may we grow in our faith and trust in you. May our ears and hearts be open to Your Word. Amen.

**Bible Reading: Colossians 1: 1-14**

**1**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

**2**To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

**Thanksgiving and prayer**

**3**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4**because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people – **5**the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6**that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. **7**You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, **8**and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

**9**For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, **10**so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, **11**being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, **12**and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. **13**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, **14**in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**Reflecting together**

Facebook, What’s App, Twitter, Facetime, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, phones, texts and emails are but several ways we can communicate with other another in the world today. I am sure you can add other ways of communicating to that list as well.

Paul writing this letter in about AD60 clearly didn’t have any of the above. He really had only one way of communicating his message from Rome (where he was under house arrest) to the church in Colossae and that was by writing a letter that someone would deliver and possibly read out to people there.

*I wonder in these times of isolation have you received or sent more letters/cards than you do normally?*

I certainly have. Not only the envelopes some of you may have received from me with copies of the services and newsletters in them but also some pastoral cards that I have sent out too.

I don’t know about you but there is something special about receiving a letter (especially handwritten) or a card from someone. It means they have taken the time to sit and write and walk to a post box and post the envelope to you. It is because they care and love you that they have take the time to do it. Likewise, it was Paul’s concern and love for the Colossians people that he writes this letter to them.

The Colossian church was a church Paul hadn’t actually established. Paul’s friend Epaphras had established this church and he had received word that the Colossian believers were being influenced by a belief called “Gnosticism” which was a belief system that based a lot on “gaining special knowledge” and that this knowledge drew you closer to God.

On hearing this news Paul writes to this group of believers to instruct them, teach them and to correct their beliefs.

He sets out by telling them that he thanks God for them because of their love for God and for all the believers in Colossae. He stresses to this small church that they, along with many other people, are coming to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and how others, like them, are having their lives changed and renewed.

And Paul goes on to tell them that **“we have not stopped praying for you…”** (Colossians 1:9)   
I don’t know about you but I like receiving messages from people saying they are praying for me! We all need prayer! And whilst Paul has sent encouraging words to the Colossians about what he had heard about them and their faith he wants them to excel in their faith and trust in Jesus.

He seems to offer the following 7 prayers for the Colossian Christians…and I think these prayers as pertinent and important for the church (you and I) today as they were in AD60! I want you to imagine that you are the recipient of this letter today…Paul writes to you and prays that you would:

1. **understand God’s will (v9)**
2. **gain spiritual wisdom (v9)**
3. **please and honour God (v10)**
4. **bear good fruit (v10)**
5. **grow in the knowledge of God (v10)**
6. **be filled with God’s strength (v11)**
7. **have great endurance and patience (v11)**
8. **stay full of Christ’s joy (v11)**
9. **give thanks always (v12)**

You might be wondering how we might fulfil even some of these things that Paul prays for. These are quite big things really! I believe we can do them in three ways:

1. **Reading, reflecting and studying the Bible** (both corporately as church and individually as believers.) This might be done by using daily Bible reading notes and/or buying a Bible Commentary which helps us to learn and ‘gain spiritual wisdom’ and ‘grow in the knowledge of God’  
     
   Allowing God’s Word in the Bible to challenge and comfort us. To change us and transform us and make us more like Jesus.
2. **Praying.** Taking time out of the busyness of our daily lives to spend time *listening* and *speaking* to God – often the latter is more difficult than the former! I confess there are times in my spiritual life when my daily quiet times are squeezed into a small amount of time. And often I can tell when I squeeze God into what small amount of time, I give Him. The mountains in life seem higher and harder to climb when God is squeezed into a small amount of time.

Allowing God to speak into our lives as followers of Jesus. Allowing His words to enter us and bringing comfort, challenge and direction to our lives.

1. **Fellowship together.** This is the hard one at the moment with lockdown and self-isolation. And yet, some of the people I have spoken to from churches are saying as appreciative as they are for the weekly services that I am providing they are missing the “fellowship” together. Whether that is in small home groups or the fellowship of the church.

Walking the path of faith I think is easier when we walk the path in fellowship together. When we can support and encourage one another to walk with Jesus.   
Yes, at present, that is not possible in the same way as it was 6 weeks ago when we could meet as Church. But friends the time will come when the restrictions are lifted and we can once again gather as Church in our respective buildings.

I want to set us all some homework for the coming week. Praying for one another is vital at anytime but at present we need it all the more. I want to invite you to pray each day of the coming week for your fellow sisters and brothers in Christ. I want to invite you to pray for (if you are watching this on the video then please note the script of the service is on the website too. You might want to pause the video and get your mobile phone and take a picture of the following screen/s):

**Sunday (today)**: Be thankful for their faith and changed lives (Colossians 1:3)

**Monday**: Ask God to help them know what he wants them to do (Colossians 1:9)

**Tuesday:** Ask God to give them deep spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9)

**Wednesday:** Ask God to help them live for him (Colossians 1:10)

**Thursday:** Ask God to give them more knowledge of himself (Colossians 1:10)

**Friday:** Ask God to give them strength for endurance (Colossians 1:11)

**Saturday:** Ask God to fill them with joy, strength, and thankfulness (Colossians 1:11)

[suggestions for prayer from *“The Life Application Study Bible – New International Version”*, Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, page 2149]

And know that as you pray for others, many, many more are praying for you.

May we all know God’s presence and empowering today and in the weeks to come as we explore together Paul’s letter to the Colossian Church.

Let us pray….

Lord we thank you for your Word to us written many centuries ago and yet as relevant today as they were when they were first written. That is the power of Your Word contained in the Bible.

May it continue to change and transform our lives for our hope is in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone. Amen.

**Hymn: In Christ Alone**

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| 1.. In Christ alone my hope is found,  He is my light, my strength, my song;  this cornerstone, this solid ground,  firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  What heights of love, what depths of peace,  when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  My comforter, my all in all,  here in the love of Christ I stand. | 2.. In Christ alone - who took on flesh,  fullness of God in helpless Babe!  This gift of love and righteousness,  scorned by the ones he came to save  till on that cross as Jesus died,  the wrath of God was satisfied,  for every sin on Him was laid;  here in the death of Christ I live. |
| 3.. There in the ground his body lay,  light of the world by darkness slain,  then, bursting forth in glorious day,  up from the grave He rose again!  And as he stands in victory  sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  for I am His and He is mine -  bought with the precious blood of Christ. | 4.. No guilt in life, no fear in death,  this is the power of Christ in me;  from life's first cry to final breath,  Jesus commands my destiny.  No power of hell, no scheme of man  can ever pluck me from His hand;  till he returns or calls me home,  here in the power of Christ I'll stand! |
| Stuart Townend ©2001 ThankYou Music ccli 275793 | |

**Time of prayer:**

Loving God, we come with prayers of thanks. Thanks for your love for all that you have created. We thank you for the cross and for the empty tomb and for the truth of the resurrection.

We thank you for answered prayer…for the fact that you have heard all our prayers spoken and offered in the silence of our hearts. May we never tire of spending time offering to you our prayers but also listening for your still small voice.

We thank you for the NHS which in normal times is often stretched but at present is stretched even further. We thank you for the dedication of all who work in the NHS whatever their role – medical and non-medical. All working hard to alleviate the suffering of others.

*We keep a moment of silence….*

We thank you for family and friends. We thank you for the support that they are in normal times but more so in these exceptional times. We lift to you those for whom we are worried at this time in our family or in our group of friends. We ask that you would be with them in whatever their needs are. We pray for those we know who are sick or dying. We pray for those who are grieving and for those who are planning funerals that are so very different at this time of isolation and lockdown.

We pray for our sisters and brothers in Christ we thank you for their faith and changed lives. May their faith in you be strengthened and deepened.

*We keep a moment of silence….*

We pray for Your world, Lord, and seek your blessing and healing. We pray for countries that do not have the infrastructure to deal with Coronavirus. We pray for protection and a fair sharing of the world’s resources in those places.

We pray for countries where there is insufficient food…sanitation…clean water…

We pray for countries where people are used…abused…trafficked…for people who don’t know their next meal is coming from

*We keep a moment of silence….*

And we pray for ourselves…for the things that worry and scare us. For our hopes and dreams.

We pray for our faith, that we might trust you more and more in our daily lives not just today, but always.

*We keep a moment of silence….*  
We bring all our prayers to you now in the name of the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.

**Hymn: Tell out my soul**

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| 1.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  tender to me the promise of His word;  in God my Saviour  shall my heart rejoice. | 2.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!  Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done,  His mercy sure, from age to age the same;  His holy name-the Lord,  the mighty One. |
| 3.. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!  Powers and dominions lay their glory by  Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  the hungry fed, the humble lifted high. | 4.. Tell out, my soul, the glories of His word!  Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.  Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  to children's children and forever more! |
| Timothy Dudley-Smith ©Timothy Dudley-Smith ccli 275793 | |

**Blessing:**

Loving God, may we in our daily lives grow ever closer to Jesus.

May we know the blessing of God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Please note in the 5th Missional Partnership Newsletter (22nd April) there will be some questions for you to think about in the week ahead.