

# Worship at Home for the 4th October 2020

Greetings, one and all, and welcome to worship, wherever you happen to be, and whether you are alone or with family and friends. God is with us right where we are, physically, mentally and spiritually, so you are never alone, as we seek to worship him now in song, scripture, meditation and prayer.

We open with words from **Psalm 80: 7-15**, reflecting on how some of these words could resonate with us today.

**Hymn 72:** Father God, I wonder

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist  
Without the knowledge of Your parenthood and Your loving Care  
But now I am Your son, I am adopted in Your family  
And I can never be alone  
'Cause Father God, You're there beside me  
I will sing Your praises  
I will sing Your praises  
I will sing Your praises  
Forever more  
I will sing Your praises  
I will sing Your praises  
I will sing Your praises  
Forever more

**Let us pray**

Father God, maker of heaven and earth, we come to offer you our praises. From nothing, you created an eternal and infinite universe, so vast that we cannot begin to comprehend it, and so magnificent that it is beyond our description of awesomeness. We picture the galaxies with their countless stars, planets and satellites, so far away from us that their light takes years to reach us.

In this huge expanse, you made our planet earth to rotate around the sun, along with other planets, and perfectly designed to support life.

What a countless array of life you have created to inhabit our planet, plants, insects, reptiles, birds, fish and mammals. You made us in your image and put us in charge of your beautiful creation.

Brother Jesus, you came to earth to live amongst us, to show us how to live and, by your death on the cross, to grant eternal life with you and our Father to all who accept you as their Saviour.

Holy Spirit, you are with us continuously as our guide and helper, showing us the way to live and influencing our thoughts.

We praise and thank you, Holy Trinity, for all that you mean to us, as we reflect in a moment of silence.

As we reflected, we became uncomfortably conscious of how we have let you down. We have not looked after your creation as we should, we have not

treated our fellow human beings, created in your image, as we should, and we have often ignored the promptings of your Spirit, preferring to follow our own instincts and the way of the worldly, rather than the better way that you have mapped out for us. We confess our sins to you in silence.

As we pray, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we ask yet again for your forgiveness, so freely given, but which we so often take for granted, and ask that you will cleanse us now, make us fit to be in your presence, and speak to us during this special time.

Together we say the prayer that Jesus taught us: Our Father...

We continue with the theme of grapevines as we read:

### **Isaiah 5:1-7**

### **Matthew 21: 33-46**

### **Hymn 677** Christ is made the sure foundation,

Verse 1

Christ is made the sure foundation,  
Christ the head and corner-stone,  
chosen of the Lord, and precious,  
binding all the Church in one,  
holy Zion's help for ever,  
and her confidence alone.

Verse 2

To this temple, where we call thee,  
come, O Lord of Hosts, today;  
with thy constant loving-kindness  
hear thy servants as they pray;  
and thy fullest benediction  
shed within its walls away.

7th or 8th century

John Mason Neale (1811–1866) (alt.)

Verse 3

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants  
what they ask of thee to gain,  
what they gain from thee for ever  
with the blessed to retain,  
and hereafter in thy glory  
evermore with thee to reign.

Verse 4

Praise and honour to the Father,  
praise and honour to the Son,  
praise and honour to the Spirit,  
ever Three, and ever One,  
consubstantial, co-eternal,  
while unending ages run.

### **Sermon**

Our readings make much reference to grape vines and walls. Imagine a grape vine with its lush green leaves protected by a wall, which in biblical times would be much like the drystone walling we see in this area. Imagine that the vine hasn't been well tended, however, with small grapes in limited bunches - perhaps a little bitter to taste: these would be what the "wild grapes" would look like. The wall would be designed to protect the vine against human intruders, but also animals like the boar in Isaiah, or the little foxes, described as destructive in the Song of Solomon. We will be looking at the symbolism of vines in Jesus' parables, like the one we read earlier, as well as where he talks about the vine dresser, pruning it to make it more fruitful.

Anyone making a living out of anything would be careful to ensure protection against loss. Jesus talks about money, sheep, grain and grapes, all of which would resonate with his hearers, many of whom would be farmers, who clearly understood the necessity to make a great effort to protect their livelihoods. Any gardener knows that to produce worthwhile crops takes care and effort: the soil has to be prepared by digging over, removing stones and weeds, and enriching it with manure or fertiliser if the soil lacks certain elements. Climbing plants have to be supported, and ideally some form of wall or fence will ensure some degree of security against thieves, whether human or animal. With all this effort, the gardener or farmer rightly expects a good, worthwhile harvest to justify his or her investment in time, money and physical labour.

Our readings show how God as gardener, in this case the owner of a vineyard, has gone to great efforts for his people. The Psalm describes the exodus from Egypt and subsequent occupation of the Promised Land with all that God did to assist the Israelites to rid the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan of other tribes and nations. Isaiah describes this nation as a carefully tended and beloved vineyard, with God pouring out his love on his people, while Jesus' parable refers to the way the prophets were treated by the inhabitants of the land God gave to the people of Israel, with reference to how his son, Jesus himself would be treated by those in charge. It is easy to understand how the religious leaders of the day identified themselves as the tenants, even with the warning that their place as God's chosen people would later be taken by foreigners in the form of Gentiles.

It's not too difficult to take the small step from the biblical scenarios to our current situation in a 21st century western world. God has continued to be faithful, loving and caring towards those that he has called; history shows the growth and spread of Christianity throughout the world from Jerusalem to Rome, via present-day Greece and Turkey, across to all of Europe, the British Isles, then the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia.

Regrettably, along the way Christianity has been tainted and in some cases, ruined, by wars and conflicts, the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, witch-hunting, the slave trade and worldly greed. This has had the effect of losing church members through disillusionment or a blatant disregard for anything spiritual. The human race's quest for wealth and prosperity has resulted in the worship of money, the exploitation of fossil fuels, destruction of forests and oceans, wars, a global pandemic, and the subsequent displacement of large numbers of human beings seeking what they perceive to be a better life in other countries. While the powerful grow richer, this is at the expense of those whose livelihoods have been destroyed by global warming, causing absolutely unnecessary poverty among so many people.

Again, God must be asking us why we are behaving and thinking this way when he has done so much good and provided so well for us as a human race. Our worldly thinking excludes thought of preserving God's creation and of eternal life, as it is left to a small number of people - most of whom don't purport to be Christians - to try to stop the further destruction of our planet, our vineyard, our home, while at the same time many are crucifying Christ

again and again by rejecting his offer of love and eternal life because they believe they know better.

What does this mean for us, our families and friends, and what can we do about it? We can start by using the most effective weapon we have, which is prayer: we can pray for the leaders of the countries in the world and for guidance in how we respond in our decisions to buy, travel and treat our fellow human beings. There is no single solution, but if we all turn to God in our own way, he will speak to us and enable each one of us to respond in our own way, however large or small that may be.

### **Let us turn to him now in prayer.**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, assist us now as we respond to what we have just read and heard. In this time of silent reflection, prompt us to think of what we can do, and to pray for what is right and just.

We think of the destruction of our planet through global warming caused by emissions from coal-powered installations, from the exhaust pipes of our aeroplanes and road vehicles, and by our injudicious use of plastic.....

We think of the destruction of human life caused by a pandemic apparently originating from unhygienic and cruel wild animal markets, by the supply and use of weapons such as rifles, bombs, mines and heavy artillery....

We think of the destruction of our wildlife throughout the world through hunting, poaching and endless greed....

We think of the suffering of fellow human beings because of their skin colour, language, religious beliefs, or where they happen to have been born and where their countries are being overwhelmed by drought or floods because of the greed of wealthy nations who refuse to provide for refugees fleeing from these countries....

We think of those we know and love, but who refuse to accept you as their God and Saviour.....

Accept our prayers, loving Trinity.

**Amen**

### **Hymn 563 O Jesus I have promised**

O Jesus I have promised  
To serve you to the end;  
Lord, be forever near me,  
My Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
If you are by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If you will be my Guide.

O let me feel you near me:  
The world is ever near;

I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, now draw nearer,  
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will;

O speak to reassure me,  
To hasten, or control;  
O speak, and make me listen,  
O Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised  
To all who follow you,  
That where you are in glory  
Your servant shall be too;  
And, Jesus, I have promised  
To serve you to the end;  
O give me grace to follow  
My Master and my Friend.

**Blessing**

And now may the Blessing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and  
forevermore. Amen

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