



Opening Prayer

Jesus Christ, presence of peace in the storms and conflicts of life, source of calm amidst our troubles and anxieties;
in your liberating power
the fearful find courage,
the oppressed find release,
the indebted find forgiveness,
the lowly are lifted up,
the mighty are levelled down.
Come to us now in your power
and in your peace. **Amen.**

Hymn: STF 20

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found –
we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight –
our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him –
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b. 1957)

Let us pray together:

Creator God, we offer you our praise and worship. In love and grace you have brought all things into being and into relationship with you. All that we have and all that we are is gift freely given by you, and we pray that your loving generosity may now fill our lives and direct our ways.

God our Saviour, we offer you our praise and worship. You break down the barriers between earth and heaven, between sinful humanity and God's loving presence. You come to us in our need and weakness, you share in our suffering, you lift us from despair. In Christ we are made new.

God the Holy Spirit, we offer you our praise and worship. You come to us to build us up into the living house of God, you come to us to liberate us from captivity, from fear from oppression and injustice. You come to bind us together in love, to open our eyes to the truth, to empower us in God's work of peace-making and reconciliation.

Creator, Saviour and Sustainer we offer you our praise and worship, this day and always. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession:

Merciful God, when lashed by life's windstorms we often lash out in return.

Forgive us when we blame you or others for our troubles...

(silence)

Teach us to find you in the eye of the storm. Show us the calm centre that comes from your word of peace. Hear the witness of scripture: God listens; God helps. Now is the day of salvation. Open wide your hearts and receive God's forgiveness. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading from Mark 4:34-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, as the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Reflection on the reading

Our gospel reading today begins with Jesus saying to the disciples: "let's go across to the other side".

It is likely that Jesus and the disciples were somewhere in the Capernaum area, on the north west side of the sea of Galilee, and Jesus is suggesting that they travel across the waters to the south east side of the lake.

And, at the beginning of Chapter 5, we have some more information about where they have landed, once they completed their journey across the lake. It says: "they came to the other side, to the country of the Gerasenes".

We don't know the exact spot where Jesus and the disciples landed but we do know that this whole region would have felt very alien to them, even threatening. This was the region of the Decapolis, where Greek, rather than Jewish culture predominated. It was the land of gentiles, and it was also where the Romans based the legion of soldiers that stood ready to intervene if there was any trouble across the Jordan in Judea and Galilee. It was

where the occupying forces of the Roman empire were most concentrated. The "demoniac" whom Jesus and the disciples encounter "on the other side" embodies this turmoil of Roman occupation experienced by the local people. In contemporary literature the word "legion" is only ever used to describe a body of Roman soldiers – and here it is the name for the demonic spirits which occupy the man Jesus encounters "on the other side".

So for the disciples and Jesus this region on the other side of the lake was unfamiliar, alien, threatening - and full of Roman soldiers.

How might the disciples have reacted to Jesus' suggestion that they travel to the other side? Most probably with fear, anxiety, and maybe even hostility and anger. It seems that Jesus is wanting the disciples to confront, to travel towards their fears and anxieties, to face them, rather than keep them at a safe distance.

If, for the disciples, going "to the other side" meant an encounter with the forces of Roman occupation, with a gentile world that was alien, disturbing, threatening, what does it mean for us to travel "to the other side"? What does it mean for us to turn towards, to face head on those things we find difficult, disturbing, frightening or troubling?

For different people it will mean different things. Perhaps it will mean facing up to a bullying or abusive relationship. Perhaps it will mean turning towards hidden fears, anxieties which dominate, control or limit our present existence. Perhaps it will mean confronting damaging experiences of our past. Perhaps it will mean challenging the powers of oppression and domination in our world today - vested interests, powerful elites, structures of exploitation and inequality.

Whatever “the other side” might be for us, going towards it can create real feelings of turmoil, panic, anxiety and fear within us.

And this sense of fearful distress is replicated dramatically in the response of the disciples as a violent storm rises up on the sea of Galilee. The storm is so powerful that the disciples think they are going to die – they wake Jesus up saying: “do you not care that we are perishing?”.

The winds and the waves of the storm correspond to the violent inner turmoil in the hearts and minds of the disciples as they travel to “the other side”, as they are directed by Jesus towards a reality they would prefer not to think about, a reality they would like to avoid. They are drowning in their fear and distress.

And in the midst of all their anxiety and panic they initially forget that travelling with them through the storm there is a hidden presence of peace, of assurance, of strength. Travelling with them is **the Presence of Peace** – Jesus.

Finally, they turn to Jesus for help, for their salvation. Jesus commands the winds to cease and there is peace and stillness on the lake, and in the hearts of the disciples. And then the boat does not turn back, but continues on towards “the other side”.

This story calls us to travel with Jesus to “the other side”, to face up to the powers and forces of fear, anxiety, oppression that damage and limit our lives – personal, psychological, political, social. We are called to name and turn towards the reality we would rather ignore and avoid, bringing Christ’s transformative love and power into that reality.

But the story also reminds us that, in the power and peace of Jesus, we need not be afraid, or cowed, or crushed by those oppressive forces or past experiences. We are reminded that, in Christ, the peace and the wholeness and the security of the

kingdom of God can and will become a reality for us.

As St Paul affirms in his letter to the Philippians - through the power of Jesus, revealed in his life, death and resurrection, “every power in heaven, on earth and under the earth, will come to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

(Time to reflect...)

H&P 649

God! When human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.

Through that stillness, with your Spirit
come into our world of stress,
for the sake of Christ forgiving
all the failures we confess.

You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.

Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life.
Use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.

Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God! Encourage and renew!

(Fred Kaan 1929-2009)

A time of prayer

We pray for our world, remembering especially those places where there is poverty and hunger, where there is violence and warfare, where individuals and communities struggle to thrive and survive because of a lack of access to proper housing, to healthy food, to education and healthcare, to work that brings dignity and purpose. We pray for those who seek to challenge and transform structures and relationships that exploit and oppress. We

pray for your peace and your justice.

The Lord's hears our prayer:

Thanks be to God.

We pray for our communities, thinking especially of those who continue to suffer because of the Covid pandemic – those who are ill, those who are caring for others, those who have lost loved ones, those seeking to bring hope and help in difficult situations. We remember those poor countries where there is insufficient access to vaccines and oxygen. Fill us with compassion for all who are suffering, recognizing our common need and our common humanity.

The Lord's hears our prayer:

Thanks be to God.

We pray for your creation, God of life. We mourn the tragic loss of habitat, of wildlife, of biodiversity. We recognize the devastating impact of human greed and over-consumption upon the natural world around us. We pray for a change of heart and a change of practice, here and now, in order to protect the world for those who follow us.

The Lord's hears our prayer:

Thanks be to God.

We prayer for our particular concerns and needs. We remember those known to us who are unwell, at home or in hospital, those who are living with disability and pain, those who struggle with their mental health, those who are anxious about what the future might hold. We pray for your peace and your power in our lives. We pray that we may recognize your presence at our side even in the midst of the storms of life. We pray that we may trust in your victory of love beyond all our suffering and present sadness.

The Lord's hears our prayer:

Thanks be to God. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our father who art in heaven,
hallowed be 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,
forever and ever.

Amen.

H&P 496

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of our Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and
fire,
O still small voice of calm!

(John Greenleaf Whittier 1807-1892)

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.

Amen.

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