

**W@H Service for Sunday, 27
September 2020**

Introduction

Call to worship

We meet in the name of God,
whose speech began the story of life,
whose words brought form into being
and who ordered creation harmony
and goodness.

We meet in the purpose of Jesus
whose life was speech of God,
whose words show the shape of his
kingdom,
and who draws those who hear into
its unfolding story.

We meet in the power of the Spirit
whose breath tamed the primordial
chaos,
whose tongue shapes the words of
change,
and who energises the ones who
give them voice.

We meet in the name of the Triune
God,
the source, the sharer, and the
shaper,
Who was, and is, and will be,
as long as the story of love is told.

Amen.

**Hymn STF 28 Jesus
calls us here to meet him**

Jesus calls us here to meet him
as, through word and song and
prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his
promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory

came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

*John L. Bell (b. 1949) and Graham
Maule (b. 1958)*

Prayers of adoration

Lord, you are an awesome God.
You are a holy and to be honoured
above all.
You make the world and all in it.
We can only wonder at the vast glory
and the minute intricacies that we see
in your world.
Your love is boundless. Your wisdom
and knows no ends.
You are bountiful and your grace
inspires us to worship you.
You are our light and life, our support
in all we do.
You are our Lord and God.
In you we place our faith.

As we think of the approach of winter,
and as we feel the days and nights
getting colder;
as we watch the changing colours of
the leaves on the trees
as leaves begin to fall;
as we put on heavier and warmer
clothing
and find the heating has to be set a bit
higher and for a bit longer –
Lord as we see so many signs of
change around us,
the weather getting colder, the
movement from season to season,
we give you our worship and praise.

Lord remind us that we should be
always ready for change
as we grow and learn –
moving forward and learning to let go,

we pray that we will never fail to recognise the glory of your creation and hope that our journey will continually allow us to grow closer to you.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

O God, you intended the world to be a place of provision and plenty for all.

We confess that sometimes in our attitudes or actions, we have taken more than we need the expense of others.

Forgive us, and by your Spirit help us as we try to live differently in the week ahead

O God, you intended the world to be a place of fairness and flourishing for all.

We confess that sometimes in our attitudes and actions we have lived as though we alone mattered.

Forgive us, and by your Spirit help us as we try to live differently in the week ahead

O God, you intended the world to be a place in which all play their part in the health and wholeness of creation.

We confess that sometimes in our attitudes and actions, we have avoided our responsibilities of prevented others from fulfilling theirs.

Forgive us, and by your Spirit help us as we try to live differently in the week ahead

silence

the life and words of Jesus even as he was dying assure us of the generous depths of God's forgiveness and of its restorative power.

Through the energy of the spirit may God help us now to love and live differently, that we and this world might become all that God intended.

Amen.

Readings Philipians 2:1-13

Have the Attitude of Christ

2 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? **2** Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. **4** Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave

and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

8 he humbled himself in obedience to God

and died a criminal's death on a cross.

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour

and gave him the name above all other names,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue declare that

Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shine Brightly for Christ

¹² Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

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Matthew 21:23-32

The Authority of Jesus Challenged

²³ When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"

²⁴ "I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. ²⁵ "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"

They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn't believe John. ²⁶ But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet." ²⁷ So they finally replied, "We don't know."

And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things.

Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. ³⁰ Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

³¹ "Which of the two obeyed his father?"

They replied, "The first."

Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. ³² For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.

*New Living Translation © 2008
Tyndale House Publishers*

Hymn STF 727 God in his love for us lent us this planet

Sermon

Today we read one part of the significant body of stories about Jesus. You also need to realise that in the verses prior to this reading Jesus had told his disciples that, with faith and no doubting, you can do much more than you think you are able. Faith has the ability to move mountains – through prayer and asking, you will receive.

With our passage we return to what seems the mundane. We are back in the temple when the priests and elders challenged Jesus asking him "by what authority do you do all these things". Jesus answers by asking a question of them about John the Baptist's authority – was it of God or simply human? The priests and elders realise that to answer either way would lead to problems for themselves so they reply that they do not know. Jesus, therefore, refuses to answer their question.

The elders are in a position where they want things to remain the same, because that keeps/gives

them the power to maintain things as they were – as they have always been (to their knowledge). Jesus then uses a short story about 2 sons to show that change is good. An initial no turned to yes is a positive action. What I feel Jesus is saying to those questioning and/or listening, is that spending time arguing about authority simply wastes time. Positive action is what is needed, especially when the truth is staring you in the face. Returning to the way things always were really isn't an option.

Power and privilege, in religion as in politics, can entrench the status quo – look at the priests and temple elders' attitude. They love their position in the hierarchy and are not willing to let go. They will do anything to get rid of this (to them) troublesome preacher/prophet who seems determined to upset and undermine them. Keeping this status quo will hinder the vital responsiveness that goes with the leadership of any sustainable society. "Talking the talk" is often an effective way of avoiding "walking the walk". The church still talks of creation and stewardship as though our fellow creatures are mere property that we are taking care of rather than things that we depend upon and coexist with. If we are to survive this time of crisis, I believe the status quo certainly has to go.

We ought to be able to take a real lesson here in the wake of crises that we have encountered in recent months. We have fires of unprecedented scope and ferocity; a speeding up of the rise in sea levels and glaciation melt and then, of course, the coronavirus wake-up call which has produced unprecedented rates of infection and has required, according to our politicians, unprecedented action and workloads.

Yes, a lot of unprecedenteds. They do not simply remind us, but also reprove us, that the old way of life in living memory is at best unsustainable and at worst destructive, not just of our own life but the lives of many other species too.

I hope that most of you saw the TV programme "Extinction – the facts" led by David Attenborough. If not, I do recommend viewing it – it is still available on iPlayer. I found some of the facts it came out with quite astounding. We are talking about 1 million species of plants and animals facing extinction within a very short time span unless we, the world, start taking positive action. What was really interesting was the fact that they took a worldwide viewpoint and they had information coming in from different corners of the world all showing the devastation that we, in the misuse of our planet, have created. To see what human greed has done was mind-boggling. The fact that we still focus on the garnering of money now through extreme over-fishing rather than taking sustainable quota. Already leaving a good 5% of the world's oceans devoid of any fish. Seeing shots of a large number of ships in one area all dragging huge nets can only make sense to somebody who is trying to make a rapid fortune with no thoughts of the consequences. It is the same with deforestation. We have enough land, if properly managed, to provide all that we need even for those local communities involved. And to see the last 2 northern white rhinos, mother and daughter, is simply seeing extinction coming to fruition.

Somehow, in the near future, we have got to change the mindset of governments all over the world so that real action is taken not just

spoken about. We must “walk the walk”. There is at least one example of how it can be done. When David Attenborough visited the mountain gorillas some 25 years ago in Africa, the group was approximately 250 strong and decreasing. With good cooperation and positive action between the relevant countries providing proper protection things have improved and the group now numbers approximately 1000. That has to be an example we can follow. We have to stop all the illegal trade that is fuelling big game and small animal poachers and killers.

Of course the other emphasis of the program was on the fact that what we are doing to this earth now is creating the problem of climate change which the countries have been looking at and talking about and making policies since 1992, when the Paris accord was signed and yet even with continual meetings since then, action for change worldwide has really been quite minimal.

Jesus tells us that it is the most marginalised of our society (our tax collectors and prostitutes) who may well be the most responsive to the pressure for change. Those whom we most overlook may be the ones to watch when we are seeking directions – those living in poverty and on the sharp end of climate change, who have nothing further to lose.

There is spiritual literature within the Bible that supports us as we face up to crisis! We can find solidarity with some of the Psalms and prophets. Our faith, even more so now, is vital to our survival and it really doesn't matter if we have got it wrong until now. The story Jesus is telling us of the son who changed his mind and

gets it right is a prime example of what can happen.

Alongside this I would like to consider Paul's words in Philippians 2. Verses 6 to 11 are known as the Christ hymn. Whilst many of us love these words, for today I'd like to focus on the verses surrounding description of Christ. In verses 1 to 5, Paul narrows his appeal for unity and, to a certain extent, individual humility. Be of the same mind as Christ, having the same love, working together with one purpose. He's looking for real unity, no cliques, no special categories no one better than the other. What he also wants us to consider alongside this is humility. For Paul this means esteeming others and their interests more highly than your own concerns. He is in essence, echoing Jesus's words of love one another and also his teaching of being as a servant unto one another. In some ways this is Paul's theme through much of his writing, using himself as an example requiring those he teaches to have the same mind as him to love one another, be in fellowship in the Spirit, have compassion and sympathy.

In verses 12 and 13 he sums up his views by requiring the Philippians to show the results of their salvation – continuing to obey God and to put God first in their desire and the power to do what pleases him.

We, this country, the world, are having to deal with more than one crisis at a time. Jesus is saying that sticking to the old ways and arguing about authority are wasting time and he acknowledges that change is necessary and can result in positive action. Paul is concerned with people living out their salvation in the world which for him are matters of obedience and humility because it is

God at work in us who enables us to work as he requires.

All I'll finish off with one last thought for you. Later in our lives, when we talk to Jesus, is he likely to say to us "even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe". I would hope that challenge would not be necessary and that we could say: Lord we saw, believed and worked for positive change so that, on earth, your world could be transformed into your kingdom. **Amen**

Our prayers for others

Let us pray

We pray for those north, west and south of us who are suffering further restrictions upon their movements and connections with families. As numbers of confirmed cases of Covid 19 continue to rise we pray for all those in the NHS who are working to contain the virus and help those who are suffering.

Give the government strength of purpose and create sufficient test facilities for all those who need. We think of many areas in the world where the virus is on the rise and people are speaking of 2nd spikes. Help us to do what is needed and quell our fears where possible. We are all aware of the damage being done to our planet of the moment by wildfires out of control. Especially with think of those on the western coast of the United States and also the fires in Siberia. Help those who are fighting the fires to work out ways to get them under control. We think of all the damage being done to the environment, to animals and insects and the fact that these current events are adding to the effects of global warming around the world. We also fear that the threatened rise in sea levels may happen quicker than expected and

may be greater if we do not act to stop the damage that we cause. Lord, we pray for peace throughout creation.

God with us, hear our fears and needs

Hold our hand as you walk beside us

Advise, encourage and guide us.

Lord we thank you for the churches in this circuit and for the greater Connexion. For its faithful communities and the prayer that goes into supporting all that happens.

We look for further ways of making the best out of the restrictions that Covid 19 brings. Help us to publish your name abroad so that people know that Jesus is Lord and that he is with us in all we do.

We think of all those who are vulnerable at the moment, those who live in fear of the future, those on the margins through lack of work and lack of housing and also all of those elderly and lonely because of the restrictions placed on them.

We remember to all those refugees and asylum seekers who are still fleeing danger, despite the pandemic. Shows how and in what ways we can help to make their lives better.

Lord we thank you for the creation that surrounds us and help us to understand the environment better so that we can live as one with nature.

God with us, hear our fears and needs

Hold our hand as you walk beside us

Advise, encourage and guide us.

Lord, give us support when we struggle and affirm us when we get it right.

Be with those whom we cannot see
because of the restrictions and help
us respect the rules of contact and
living as they are changed to fit the
given situation of our area.
Help us to initiate change where it is
needed and let us not accept the
way things are when they should be
changed.

We pray for your peace in our hearts
so that we may express the full
extent of the joy of Christ in our lives
to all those we meet.

In silence we bring our personal
concerns to God, who knows and
understands our deepest thoughts.
Silence

**God with us, hear our fears and
needs
Hold our hand as you walk
beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.
We bring all in the name of our
Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen**

**Final hymn STF 713 Show me
how to stand for justice**

Show me how to stand for justice:
 how to work for what is right,
 how to challenge false
assumptions,
 how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
 showing your immense
compassion
 by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received --
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,

in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your
presence
 every day in all I do:
 by your Spirit's gracious
prompting
 may I learn to walk with you.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

Blessing

We bless each other with 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.