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ORDINARY 23A

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A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

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Call to worship

The living God waits here for you
Waits for the encounter
Whether its on paper, through video or on Facebook
Whether its in small group conversation or deep thinking
God is here.

So come with worship-filled expectancy
Ready to be prompted to learn, to care, to serve
Ready for that encounter with the living God who is waiting to meet you

Amen.¹

Hymn: 28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Lord of all things we come to you knowing you are here.

We come recognising that you know us and care for us and we give you thanks

We come noticing all you have given to humanity – our wonderful world, the diversity of its peoples, vast knowledge and skill, an all-encompassing love and we give you thanks.

We come too knowing what you require of us and all too aware that we often fall short

We come to ask for forgiveness, through grace already knowing that you will forgive and we give you thanks

We pray that we might live like thankful people this day and every day

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Matthew 18:15 - [Click for Reading](#)

Romans 13:8-14 - [Click for Reading](#)

¹ Additional prayers by Jane Bingham

² Opening prayers written by Jane Bingham

Reflections on the readings

Today we hear from Jane Bingham. A student local preacher from Yorkshire.

The passages of scripture we read today have probably got some of the most famous and well known phrases of faith we hear as church goes within them. “Again truly I tell you, if two or three of you agree about anything you ask it will be done for you by my father in heaven. For where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there among them” and “Love your neighbour as yourself” (or as the Passion Translation reads Love and value others the same way as you love and value yourself)

The fact that we know these phrases and feel like we understand them offers great comfort to us and although we recognise them as challenging we have them as quotes on the tip of our tongues and its as if we have known them all our lives. But as I was preparing and reflecting I asked myself did I really know what they were about and in particular what God might be saying to us right now. You know I’m not sure that I find either of them easy and when we read them in context – like we just have – they come with all sorts of associated questions. What about if I’m praying on my own does God hear me then? What if I’m not living the way God wants? What about the fact that elsewhere in the gospels God calls us to offer forgiveness rather than pick fault (you remember specks in our own eyes etc) What if two or three people agree on one thing and two or three others agree on another – how does God choose? What about the fact that God made me to be a complicated human being and I’m bound to fall into some of these habits- God says he loves me anyway? I could go on I guess so I think we’d best pause and wonder.....

During this pandemic we have heard the phrase “unprecedented” many a time. In fact its become in some ways a bit of a joke statement. The disruption, the scale, the spread, the nature of the novel corona virus, the impact of the disruption - all unprecedented and yet we probably know that the same can be said of the plague, the so called “Spanish flu”. Maybe not so unprecedented.

What is certain though is it is uncomfortable. The impact on who we are as people and in particular on who we are as people of God has been truly disrupting. The way we live our lives has changed. The way we go about our daily business while we’re living with it. Even the way we worship together and I’m guessing we don’t like it one bit.

So imagine then living when Jesus was around. Living when the early church was forming and growing and ask yourself if that was a place of disruption. Imagine how the God we know and love was shaking up the world by sending his son to model a new way of living, by suggesting that God is willing to listen directly to you if you gather together to state your case, by saying that the way you live had to change and no longer was it all about you but was more about your fellow human, by saying that you had to change entirely how you lived, put aside all sense of getting just what you wanted, to fulfil all that God requires of you. By asking you to seek out reconciliation and work hard at it. By seeking out the eternal quest to only love others and find a way forward. I’m guessing that the people who encountered Jesus and the early disciples felt and saw only disruption. Gods disruption as a means to a better and preferred future.

If I was the kind of person to set you church homework, I'd be saying look how God works through the unusual and the different. The disruptive. The birth of a great nation through an elderly barren couple. The work of a small child to defeat the most giant of enemies. The words of a prophet advocating peace and ploughshares not war and weapons. The challenging words of an itinerant preacher full of humility as a mark of greatness. The spirit-filled exuberance of sharing the good news to anyone who was around in the street as opposed to the ritual of prayer and fasting that was commonplace. What can you think of in the stories Gods people placed before us as truly important in our scriptures? Where do you see disruption of the status quo.

You see for me this is the God we adore. Faithful, unchangeable but not static or bland. A God seeking always to love us and encourage us to do the same for others. A God whose love knows neither measure or end and will do anything to make it known. Even if it means showing us something fresh.

Don't mishear me. I'm not saying God sent this virus to teach us something or to test us. No. I am saying though that we can see God clearly in the midst of great disruption if we look - and we must look and notice right now what God is saying about the way we live as individuals, as community and as church. What must we shake up to live like God requires rather than the way we'd like to? How do we need to change and morph ourselves into the people we are called to be? Or as the Methodist Way of Life might put it "How and what are you learning now?"

Listen to the urgency of the letter writer again

Love and value others the same way as you value yourself.....

To live like this is all the more urgent for time is running out and you know it is a strategic hour for human history. It is time for us to wake up..... Instead fully immerse yourselves into the Lord Jesus, the anointed one, and don't waste even a moments thought on your former identity to waken your selfish desires.

This is a truly challenging call to action. To live up to the disruption of God's love for all. To put what God prefers for us first. To live as community in a way that is a disruption to society. Advocating love and forgiveness, care and concern, not selfishness and personal gain. To once and for all clothing ourselves in the radiance of light offered by knowing Christ. For now is the time for us to wake up. For us to start again today living as if these 2 phrases we hold dear really mattered. Praying and being - with God. Asking for his help and living for others. Amen³

Take a moment to think about the words of this song by John Bell and ask yourself what will you start to do today that brings about the kind of world God inspires.

Behold Behold I make all things new beginning with you and starting from today
Behold Behold I make all things new, my promise is true for I am Christ the way.⁴

³ Reflection written by Jane Bingham

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Prayers of intercession

Loving and everlasting God we bring to you our concerns for others

We bring before you the complexity of our world at this time. The horrors of conflict and war. The political landscape and all its arguments. The poverty and famine that affects people all over the world. The changing environment that is causing many challenges. The impact of living with a devastating virus.

Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring before you our local community and those known to us who are struggling with life. Particularly we think of those affected by loss of income & independence and all of the upheaval in their lives.

We think of those who are ill or grieving and in the silence we name them before you.

Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring before you ourselves. All we are facing. All we are rejoicing in. All that we are wondering about. All that we are worrying about. All that we are considering.

Help us to be still and ready to notice you - So that we might know how to do your will.

Lord in your mercyhear our prayer

We bring all these things to you in the name of Christ who gave so much that we might know you better.

Amen.⁵

Hymn: 67 STF – This this is the God we adore - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Whether you be one, two, three or more

Go

Knowing that God hears you and loves you

That God delights in your love for one another

That God requires of you this - to Love and value others whoever and wherever they are;

Go ready to be a beacon of God's love in the world

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers written by Jane Bingham

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker