

Place of Prayer
Sunday 22nd March 2020

Welcome to our **place of prayer**. There is nothing formal about this; we will pray, read the Bible, reflect a little on it, play some music; there will be no tea or coffee; you should respect the guidelines about social distance and handshaking; you should wash your hands when you get home and if you are in any doubt about being here feel free to come and go as you please even during the time we will share together. This will be a one-off event for now, given the latest public health guidelines about groups and gatherings. The material that we use for this time will be shared more widely by e-mail later today and I plan to produce resources for reflection and prayer to go out by e-mail each Sunday morning. Formal church may be cancelled but the faith is not gone!

Read: John 10:11,14

Prayer:

Think of something to say “thank you” to God for this morning!

Father we thank You for these good things in our lives; in a week when we have struggled to come to terms with lots of troubles and difficulties, we thank You for what is good. Open our eyes to see the ways in which You have blessed, helped us, sustained us. We thank You for your love and faithfulness to us and to our world, that You have not left us alone, but have promised to be with us always and everywhere. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Thank You for Jesus the good shepherd, showing us something of Your commitment to us, Your Son coming into the world to lay down His life for us and for our salvation; we thank You that in Jesus we have hope; strengthen that hope in our hearts this morning and love us afresh; in Jesus’ name.

Play – The Lord’s my shepherd <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MGO>

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

There are two prayers in Ephesians; this is the second of them as Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus and encourages them to pray. We have been told that services of worship are to be cancelled but that churches could be open as places to pray; so here we are.

There are three notes in this prayer that I think are important for today:

First, Paul speaks of God as Father and of us as His family; we need to keep a hold of the idea of God as the Father who cares for us and of ourselves as family, family who belong to God, family who belong to each other. At a time when people are becoming more and more isolated, remember that we belong to God and we belong together, so we are not on our own.

The second note is the love that God has for us and the nature and scope of that love. “It’s so high, you can’t get over it, so low you can’t get under it, so wide you can’t get round it, O wonderful love” That’s how the old chorus says the same thing; the extent of God’s love is such that we are never outside its reach, or its scope. The great danger for all of us is that we begin to feel forgotten and unloved; or that there are people in our street who have no-one to speak to all week and that will play havoc with our mental health. By our love and concern for others, even by picking up the phone, we can remind each other that God loves us and that His love has not gone away.

The third note is “He is able”. What can God do? “*He is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.*” We will put that faith into practice in a moment when we pray about the coronavirus situation; we do that because we believe that God listens to us when we pray and that God answers our prayers, even if not always in the way we have asked.

Jesus is King – the prayer tree has had that star on it since the start of the year; the tree will stay on the communion table till we come back here again for worship; if when you pray, you can picture the tree on the table and that helps you pray for other people, for yourself, or for Church, then well and good. “No matter what happens, Jesus is still Lord.” God has not gone away, though this is the first time that I know when Churches are shut. Jesus still brings hope to our hearts and minds and still saves us. The Spirit still lives in us to lead us to Jesus. We will pray for ourselves, for other people, for the nation and the world, family caring for each other, the love of God surrounding us, the power of God sustaining us, for the foreseeable future!

Play – What a friend we have in Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hoog1LA-oA0>

Prayers:

Father, in the quietness, we come to pray; we bring the concerns that are in our hearts and minds; we come full of fears, yet reaching for faith, anxious but searching for hope; renew our faith in Jesus Christ and bring us hope in Him.

We pray for those who mourn because someone they love has died of this virus, of whom there are more and more in the UK and across the world; comfort them and love them.

We remember those who are sick with coronavirus, some who are in hospital, others who are at home; we pray for their safe and speedy recovery. We pray for our families and friends.

Lord, there are many vulnerable people who are scared of catching this virus because of their underlying health; we pray that You will watch over them and keep them safe; for those who are lonely because they are at home with little contact with the world outside and their sense of loneliness will only grow deeper – Lord, befriend them and enable us as community to reach out and meet them in their need in some way or another.

We pray for NHS staff: those working in hospitals, directly caring for people with the virus; for those working in communities trying to bring healthcare to people in need in this way and with other conditions; ambulance staff and paramedics, keep them safe and well; help them to continue to care as best they can; we bless them for their commitment to others. Pray for their families.

Schools are closed: Lord, remember our children and grandchildren, their learning, those who were supposed to be sitting exams and are now anxious and confused about their future; bless our teachers as they try to keep contact with children and support them in school work; and remember family life where perhaps parents are supposed to work from home and children are at home needing to do school work, or just being there. Lord, give peace and calmness amongst these pressures of being together for a long time in the one space!

For those who make decisions that affect us all; give them wisdom and humble hearts to do what is for our good.

We pray for communities where everything has closed down; for businesses on which our community depends, but are closed or are struggling, wanting to help, but not sure they are able. For public transport, our city’s bus drivers; for the other emergency services.

We pray for the Church: when formal church is not possible, help us to reflect Jesus to the world in our street, just by being there and by caring for others.

We will have a quiet time now where you can bring your own concerns to God in prayer....

Today is designated as a *Day of Prayer* for the world; we are invited to light a candle in our window at 7pm this evening as a “visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, the source of hope in this life. Here is the prayer that is written for today:

"For all that is good in life, thank you,
For the love of family and friends, thank you,
For the kindness of good neighbour and Samaritan stranger, thank you.

May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless, experience support,
May those who are sick, know healing,
May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.

Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers, with wisdom,
Bless and guide health workers and key workers, with strength and well-being,
Bless and guide each one of us, as we adapt to a new way of living.

And may the light shining from our windows,
across road and wynd, glen and ben, kyle and isle,
be reflected in our hearts and hands and hopes.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

The Lord's Prayer

Benediction