

Sunday 16th May, Seventh Sunday of Easter, Sunday in Ascensiontide

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

May we know the presence of God as we worship.
May we experience unity in Jesus as we worship.
As we worship, may we be blessed. Amen.

Hymn: *Singing the Faith* 303 "I know that my Redeemer lives"

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words, listen to the tune here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFk_kbojDg8

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 I know that my Redeemer lives —
what joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was
dead;
he lives, my everlasting Head! | 3 He lives, and grants me daily
breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives, my mansion to prepare;
he lives, to lead me safely there. |
| 2 He lives, to bless me with his love;
he lives, to plead for me above;
he lives, my hungry soul to feed;
he lives, to help in time of need. | 4 He lives, all glory to his name;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives! |

Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

Let us pray together:

Wonderful, marvellous, mysterious God, known to us in the wonder of life and of creation: praise and glory be given to you. Love and life be given to you.

In Jesus Christ your Son, you have held out to us fullness of life on earth and the promise of life in heaven.

In Him you have shown that you are Lord of Life; that you are Power over Death; that you are Source of Love beyond our imagining.

Sovereign God, hear our prayer.

Psalm 1

- ¹ Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
² but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
³ They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.
⁴ The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

John 17:6-19

⁶ I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Time to Reflect

Someone who had undergone a major surgical procedure spoke, part-way through their lengthy time of recovery and healing, of having felt "held in a cradle of love". That feeling had arisen out of the knowledge that people were very much holding her in their prayers.

In the Gospel passage Jesus prays for his disciples. Presumably one or more disciples heard Jesus praying and was/were able to recall his words, his feelings, and to later set them down in writing. All that we have in the Gospels is, of course, that which is set down from such memory. The memory here is of Jesus praying for them.

The people who prayed for the woman who felt "cradled in love" did not, as far as I can tell, pray for her to be healed and be spared the surgery. If they had done so, then their prayers were not precisely answered or else she wouldn't have had the operation. The prayers were for her well-being and her recovery.

When Jesus prays for his disciples, and asks for them to be protected, the obvious protection they need is against rejection, persecution, hatred, even death. Yet, that doesn't sit easily with what Jesus has been saying to them not so long before. He has told them that they will experience these things. What kind of protection, then, is he praying for? Specifically, Jesus says that he's not asking that they be taken out of the world, but that they should be protected from the evil one.

They are to remain in the world, they are to experience challenge and danger because of their faith. Jesus' prayer is they shall be protected in that they shall not lose their faith. As he

is sanctified, set aside to serve, so they might also continue to be sanctified. That they be set aside, to be different in character from those who follow the ways of the world.

Through Biblical accounts, as well as those transmitted through the centuries, we see that Jesus' prayer is answered as women and men have endured all manner of treatment, but have remained faithful. This extends even to the present age. Consider this - that for everyone whose conduct and character is so noted and remembered, there are countless more whose faithfulness has been constant or continues to be constant in 2021.

It is not too much to believe that just as Jesus prayed for his disciples long ago, his prayers and hopes are that present-day disciples shall also be so protected. That we shall not give up, but that we shall continue in faith and faithful living. That we shall not lose our faith, but that we shall continue to work out our faith in this world. Might it be that as we do so, we feel as if we are "held in a cradle of love". May it be so!

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Listening, loving, all-knowing God, we place before you the challenge we face as we seek to live a life that is truly informed by our faith.

Around us we see selfishness, corruption, and a lack of compassion towards, or concern for, others. Power and control appear to be the aim of many.

Bless us, we pray, forgive our failings, be sovereign over our lives that faith is full within us, that boldness to work to change the world is within us, that love of neighbour, of enemy, of all people, is our goal.

Give peace and healing, we pray, to those who struggle to maintain their lives, and those of their families, in the current of disadvantage that flows from shortsighted decision-making, provision-giving.

Give wisdom and insight, we pray, to those who work in search of medicines and treatments, that fullness of life may be the possession of those who are ill.

Give wisdom of judgment and of decision, we pray, to those who govern locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. May we see a world of peace, of fair-trade and shared resources.

Give wisdom and strength, vision and purpose, expertise and renewed spirit to the people of your church that the future may be faced with confidence and with that hope which is to be found only in you. Bless the compassionate and the just, all those who walk alongside those in need.

Giving God, may we give to you all that we are and all that we might ever be. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Modern Form

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come;
your will be done;
on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins

Traditional Form

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
sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory
are yours, now and for ever.
Amen

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
for ever and ever
Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 351 "In Christ alone my hope is found,"

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsOOQ269I4>

or sing a verse of another hymn that comes to mind.

1 In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my
song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought
and storm.
What heights of love, what depths
of peace,
when fears are stilled, when
strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

2 In Christ alone! — who took on
flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to
save:
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

3 There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine —
bought with the precious blood of
Christ.

4 No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of
man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!
Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

A prayer of blessing

The blessing of God who is of day and of night, of last year, this year and the years to come,
be upon us; that always we may know comfort and healing, hope and strength.
Through Jesus Christ, risen and ascended Lord. Amen.

Please be assured that we are still here if you need anything at all during this time.

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