

Sunday 12th September 2021

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
though separate let us worship together in God.

Suggested hymn (Listen to tune [here](#))

Let all God's people join as one
Let all God's people join in one
to lift the heart and voice,
the Lord hath done great things for us,
and therefore we rejoice,
and therefore we rejoice;
*For the harvest of bygone ages,
in the hope of the coming days,
go into his gates with thankfulness
and into his courts with praise.*

We with our ears have heard the tale,
the tale apostles told,
what wonders God for them and us
did in the time of old , did in the time of old:
For the harvest of bygone ages,

They sowed the seed and watered it
in sorrow and in care;
but God alone the increase gave
and made it blossom fair ,
and made it blossom fair:
For the harvest of bygone ages,

All praise to him whose bounty crowns
with flowers and fruit the year;
God is our hope and strength today,
therefore we will not fear ,
therefore we will not fear:
For the harvest of bygone ages,

A. C. AINGER (1841-1919)

Prayer

Eternal God, we meet together in awe and wonder. Gathering to worship together we bring you are week with all its ups and downs, its challenges and frustrations, its celebrations and thanksgivings. You are always with us and you know everything that has happened to each human being, but we offer you our experiences, and we offer you our thanksgiving and praise.

We thank you for each new day that dawns with all its potential and praise you that each day is an opportunity to explore your creation and share with others the wonders we find. As the season turns and we look to shorter days we give thanks for the summer, in all its strangeness; we are here, we have journeyed, and you have been with us. We have feasted on the fruits of the summer harvest and now look to the fruits of the autumn and a thanksgiving for the wonder of your generous provision in creation. We thank you for all those who work to farm the land and enable us to enjoy the harvest, for those who work in shops and distribution centres so that we can access the food we need. We thank you for family and friends and our life together in fellowship and faith, and we thank you for the discoveries and inventions that have enabled our gathering together in these extraordinary times.

Eternal God, when we stop to praise and thank you, we are staggered by all that you provide. As we worship together, we are reminded of your call to tell our story and the experiences that have drawn us together in faith. United in faith we share together the words Jesus taught the disciples:
The Lord's prayer

Taking action

Last Sunday a group of Christians from across the Local Area Group met together to worship at the Tree Cathedral in Whipsnade. The service was led by the St Albans Cluster of churches and focussed on the environment. We were very conscious that at the same time there was a Churches together in Britain and Ireland Service taking place in Glasgow as part of the 'Time is Now' initiative, in preparation for the Cop26 meeting in Glasgow in November. Surrounded by trees and stillness it was wonderful to concentrate on creation, but the fact that the service was happening in Glasgow was a reminder that we are in a perilous position in the life of the planet. All three clusters in the Group have held special Environment Sunday worship over the summer, and they have all been registered with the campaign to be a witness to the concerns of the churches in the United Kingdom.

Surrounded by trees we thought about the importance of trees and forests within the eco system and how deforestation is dangerous to the balance of all life. Between now and Cop26 it is my hope that every service will include something to remind us to pray for that meeting, to make changes in our own lives, and to be witnesses to the need to make changes locally and globally. We are stewards of the planet, and it is part of our response to God's love to make a difference. It might be a specific prayer, a poem, a video or a song but please, as you worship in churches, will you accept the challenge to have a special focus on the environment within your worship, as we will do within our zoom worship. Today we will hear Proverbs 1:20 – 33 and listen with an environmental ear to the words of wisdom.

Readings Proverbs 1:20-33

Response

In Mark 8, verses 34-36 we read Jesus' challenging words, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

Perhaps if Jesus were saying these words today, he might end, "What will it profit humanity to gain all the gadgets and an easy life if the planet is destroyed." We have become consumers and used advances in technology for personal gain rather than to create a better future for all.

Reading Psalm 19 (Psalms for a quantum world)

All creation sings of the glory of God,
the source of all being.
The earth proclaims the infinity of God
in silent wonder and visual magnificence.
The moon, stars and sun
speak of the care of creation,
days and seasons
witness to the creative energy
that is the source of all being.
All this revives the soul
and makes known the oneness of creation to all people.
We are called to acknowledge our oneness,
to rejoice in our place within creation,
to fill our hearts with the love of God
and open our eyes to see God in all things.
In oneness is truth and love,
in oneness is justice and honour.
Such things are greater than passing treasures.
Let oneness be my guide,
let love overcome my fear
and be the measure of my actions.
In oneness I need not fear,
my life is not threatened
for life is eternal.
May my whole life speak
of the oneness of humanity
and of the love and peace found
in oneness with the eternal, the source of all being. © Heather Whyte

Reading James 3:1-12

Suggested hymnListen [here](#)

Lord speak to me that I may speak
 in living echoes of thy tone;
 as thou hast sought, so let me seek
 thy straying children, lost and lone.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
 the wandering and the wavering feet;
 O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
 thy hungering ones with manna sweet.

O strengthen me, that while I stand
 firm on the rock and strong in thee
 I may stretch out a loving hand
 to wrestlers with the troubled sea.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
 the precious things thou dost impart;
 and wing my words that they may reach
 the hidden depths of many a heart.

O use me, Lord, use even me,
 just as thou wilt, and when, and where,
 until thy blessed face I see,
 thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL (1836-79)*

Reflection

If you send emails you will probably have experienced that sinking feeling when you have pressed send only to realise you have made a mistake. Perhaps you have forgotten to include something or worse you suddenly realise you have expressed something badly. Some systems are now sophisticated enough that they give you one or two seconds to unsend an email, and they also question you if you have mentioned attachment and not actually attached anything. If only there were similar mechanism attached to our tongue. The phrase opening the mouth without engaging the brain is all too familiar, how often do we speak without thinking? This was the context of James' letter.

The letter is a circular letter to churches and offers insight into a number of issues, and in this particular passage a word of warning to those who would be teachers. I know many of you have given your life to teaching and will be aware of the responsibility that comes with the position, but this passage goes further than that, it reminds us all that words are powerful. Here is a video which illustrates the message of this passage.

Watch [here](#).

We live in a society where we are encouraged to share our opinion, on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram, and we have all seen the damaging effects of social media. Even words that were not intended to hurt can have a devastating effect when on mass they create an illusion that many people live perfect lives and leave vulnerable people comparing themselves negatively. Worse though are the words intended to do harm, cyber bullying, playground bullying and workplace bullying which undermine someone's confidence and leave them feeling desperate, isolated, and 'unloved'. There are many campaigns against such bullying, but it still happens. We must recognise the power of our words and take responsibility; we must also challenge those we discover who are less responsible and less careful. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me is simply not true.

Story - Sieving words with care

One day a young girl rushed into her grandmother's house bursting with some news to tell, but before she could speak her grandmother made her sit down. Then holding her hand out in a halting gesture she asked the girl to think before she said anymore, had she checked what she wanted to share by passing it through the three sieves of wisdom. Her granddaughter looked puzzled, so her grandmother explained.

"Before we share your story we need to check it is true, do you know if your story is true?" Her granddaughter thought a little, squirmed a little and then admitted she had heard the story from someone else and was not sure it was true. Her grandmother praised her for her honesty and then asked her if what she wanted to share was good, even if it wasn't necessarily true. Her granddaughter again paused and thought then lowered her gaze as she mumbled that it was not good, in fact it was almost the opposite. Her grandmother smiled at her and said, "Well perhaps it is necessary?" Her granddaughter shook her head.

Hugging her granddaughter, the grandmother said gently if this news is not true, good or necessary perhaps we should simply forget it and enjoy time together sharing some lemonade. Her granddaughter smiled.

The grandmother halted the progress of rumour and gossip, at least from one direction. Stories are words and words can hurt. When we recognise the wisdom of these words from James, as applicable today as in the second century when they were probably penned, we also recognise that we may need to seek forgiveness. In some ways this is as big a challenge as taming our tongue as it means openly accepting and admitting that we have done something wrong and been less than careful with our words. Jesus encouraged people to do this, seeing it as part of the process of metanoia, that is acknowledging our oneness and changing our mindset to love. Sharing information that does not pass through the three sieves of wisdom is not loving.

On the other side of forgiveness is that when we accept an apology, we need to find the strength to let go of the hurt we have felt, or we cannot move forward. Forgiveness is a vital part of our journey for none of us are perfect and although we are walking the way of Jesus, we know there are times when we are forgetful of what it means, or when life in its messiness gets in the way of our good intentions. Whilst seeking forgiveness is important in building and restoring relationships, we also need to forgive ourselves or guilt will consume us and prevent us growing. There are many ways we hurt one another but careless words are perhaps the most common. Forgiveness is a gift. We accept the gracious forgiveness of God, and we need to be ready to accept the forgiveness of others. Equally important is the need to let go of the hurt. There have been two huge musical hits in the past ten years which people have had on the tips of their tongues – ‘Let it Go’ from the Disney animation Frozen and ‘This is me’ from the film The Greatest Showman. Both tap into the need to acknowledge who we are, to acknowledge the hurt caused by the words and actions of others, and to move beyond that hurt. This is a part of the forgiveness cycle, it is an essential part of healing ourselves and the world. The kingdom grows where people acknowledge hurt, share the experience of hurt and learn the art of forgiveness. As we reflect on this, I invite you to watch a powerful video from the Humanity Healing Network.

Video – [The gift of forgiveness](#)

James encourages us to take our tongues and take responsibility, the way of Jesus encourages us to grow in love and be one with each other, knowing God means accepting who we are and learning to fly.

Suggested Hymn Forgiveness, performed by Matthew West
Listen [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God, as we worship together and reflect on the words of scripture we bring our prayer response. We see the power of words on our screen each day and witness the effects of unloving words and actions in the lives of those around us and people around the world. We are saddened to think that our words could add to the hurt but acknowledge the times we have been less than careful in our speech and acknowledge our need to seek forgiveness. May we find the courage and strength to be open with others and honest with ourselves.

Eternal God your love and forgiveness hold us in our brokenness, may we reach out and hold others in their brokenness.

We pray for all who are trapped in the web of bullying, in whatever form it takes. We think of the children who feel isolated and alone, believing cruel words that rob them of self. We pray for the organisations who seek to help victims of bullying. We pray for the courage to challenge those who seek power through unloving words and to help them find ways to understand themselves and why they act the way they do. We think of the way social media is used and how it can undermine confidence and belief in self, and we pray that we may find ways to support those whose mental health is jeopardised by engaging with social media.

Eternal God your love and forgiveness hold us in our brokenness, may we reach out and hold others in their brokenness.

We pray for the people who live in countries where dictators bully and trap their people in injustice and we remember today the people of Afghanistan, Belarus, Myanmar, and Sudan. We pray for all those who seek refuge and for the organisations who seek to assist refugees. Locally we pay for Luton Council, the work of All Saints in Bury Park in supporting refugees with clothing, kitchen essentials, suitcases and bedding and the Luton foodbank as they seek to provide Kettle Packs to help feed those with nothing but a kettle. May we be generous in our support and in our giving as we recognise the needs of those escaping the hurt of bullying at a government level.

Eternal God your love and forgiveness hold us in our brokenness, may we reach out and hold others in their brokenness.

Loving God we pray for our complex and struggling world. As we explore forgiveness, we acknowledge our failure to care for creation. May we be advocates of sustainable living and in response to your gracious forgiveness seek to change our mindset and our ways and speak out to support those who campaign for a global response to the threat of climate change. In our prayers we think of the people whose lives and homes are most at risk, people who are often already living on the margins.

Eternal God your love and forgiveness hold us in our brokenness, may we reach out and hold others in their brokenness.

We pray for our families in this time of change and uncertainty. May we support one another, encouraging a sharing and an honesty which will build relationships and love in our families and our communities. As we walk the way of Jesus may our lives be compassionate, our words be loving and our actions generous. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Offertory

As we worship together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

Suggested song Let us build a house
Listen [here](#)

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.