

**Sunday 10th May: Acts 7 v55-end and John 14 v1-14**

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

How to use these prayers

Please work through the prayers at your own pace. It may take you thirty minutes it may only take five.

Gathering Before God

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Risen Christ, your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage to risk ourselves for those we serve, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Reflection

Make sure you are sitting comfortably.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

Bible Readings:

Acts 7 v55-end

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he (Stephen) gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he died.

John 14 v1-14

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Reflection

I don’t know about you but when reading this part of John’s Gospel right now in the midst of this pandemic I feel a bit of a fraud. There is much that is troubling, and my heart is unsettled. There is the illness itself, the fear of catching it or passing it on to loved ones. There is the frustration at life in lockdown and concern for my neighbours and the most vulnerable in our communities. The concern over food, economic hardship and increase in domestic abuse. I am troubled and I cannot pretend otherwise. So where does this leave me (and you if you share my thoughts) today? Does it leave us with guilt that we are troubled? Well, no, I am not a fan of guilt and am not convinced God is either.

So how do we settle our souls and find peace? Let us look again at the passage; it comes just after Jesus has shared the last supper with the disciples and washed their feet as a profound and humble gesture of his service to them and his love for them. Judas has slipped out into the night to betray Jesus and Jesus has predicted Peter’s betrayal of him – three times before the cock crows. It is perhaps the most dark and broken moment Jesus shared with the disciples. Betrayal, death and darkness are all around. Friendships shattered and tension and trouble in the room; love proclaimed and demonstrated with dusty feet and linen towels. And love not understood and turned away from. Judas and Peter.

And yet Love continues to proclaim love. ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places.’ Jesus invites us to trust – and not blind trust, but trust that comes from truth. Truth that comes from divine love. And we can trust because there is a place for us; we will not be forgotten. We will not be without a place to be ourselves. In the Gospels when Jesus talks about God’ house he usually means the temple in Jerusalem, the great place of worship and sacrifice. The heart of the city and the heart of Jewish life. The place where heaven meets earth. The place where God dwells.

The disciples know Jesus is going away and he is reassuring them that there will be a place for them in God’s house; not the temple in Jerusalem but a new place, a place with room for all. A place not yet built for Jesus has to prepare it – it’s all sounding quite mysterious to the disciples. And Thomas sums it up – we don’t know the way; we don’t know where you are going! Thomas perhaps says what the rest were thinking - this isn’t straightforward! I do not understand!

So, Jesus tells them; I am the way, and the truth and the life.

Jesus is the way to the Father’s house. Jesus builds the house as a new place where heaven and earth meet, where there is room for all. Where all are welcomed and where all have a place. Jesus does all this by entering a new life, beyond the grave, beyond hopelessness, beyond darkness. In this new house, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have prepared a place for each one of us; God can build when all looks lost. God in his love for us is waiting to welcome us home. God has not abandoned us, he rises up in love for us, to settle our troubles hearts, to tend to our deepest need and to protect us under the shadow of his wings.

That is the house that Jesus prepares for us; that is the vision Stephen saw before his martyrdom. That is the Gospel that brings us comfort – even when we are uncomfortable. There is room for all because Jesus built it, the Father commanded it and the Spirit shows us the way. We can find our way home even when our hearts are troubled, and our world seems broken. Even through our deep concern and compassion for God’s world and his people right now, we can allow our hearts to settle in the knowledge and faith that in him we are home and held safe for eternity. Ley us offer our rightful concern to God and allow him to settle our souls in his unending love.

Creative Prayer activity

We pray for all who are searching for a way home. For all who are seeking God, for all who are watching worship online. For all who have googled ‘prayer’.

Take a moment and offer to God the name of someone you know who is feeling lost or lonely right now. Write their name/s here:

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Loving God, help us shine to light so all can find their way home to you. Help your church to lead people to your Gospel of love. Help us all as we miss and mourn our beautiful places of worship. Amen.

Loving God, may we know you as the way, the truth and the life. Help us to grow in faith and love for you and one another. And help us to build your Kingdom in our communities: o feed the hungry, to comfort the lonely and distraught, to protect the vulnerable. Amen.

Loving God, we pray for the unwell and those in hospital or hospice. We pray for those who are near to death and for those who tend to them. We pray for the new life you bring and for peace to be with them. Amen.

Here is an active prayer on the theme of the many rooms in the Father's house - pray around your own home:

Bedrooms: Visit each bedroom in the house and say a prayer for the people who sleep in that room.

Kitchen: Pray a thank you prayer to God for providing physical and spiritual food for us each day. Pray for the foodbank and all those charities helping people to access food and supplies.

Bathroom: While you are in the bathroom… wash your hands and then take a moment to pray for all working for the NHS and emergency services and those working to find a cure for the Coronavirus.

Living Room: Take a moment to pray for all those who appear on our screens – world leaders making difficult decisions, church leaders finding new ways to be church during lockdown and teachers connecting with their classes online.

Garden/Outside: Pray for all those in your street and community that they would come to know God more and that He would provide all that they need.

A prayer concerning the Coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.Amen*From the Church of England website*

An act of spiritual Communion

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidance%20on%20Spiritual%20Communion%20and%20Coronavirus.pdf>

The Lord’s Prayer

**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 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.**