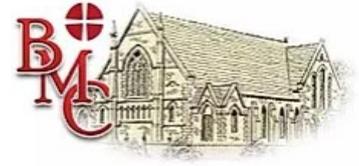




**BALLYMENA
METHODIST
CHURCH**



**SUNDAY 10 MAY 2020
CHRISTIAN AID SUNDAY**



WORSHIP & REFLECTION

Welcome to worship.

Today marks the beginning of Christian Aid Week.

Like many church activities at the moment, Christian Aid Week is being done differently and digitally this year.

During this time together this morning we'll have space to read and listen, sing and pray, and remember and acknowledge that we are part of a global community.

We are neighbours near and far who are going through this coronavirus pandemic together. May our shared experience unite us in praise and prayer as one human family, separate but together, in the home that is God's world.

Let us pray...

God of all the Earth, be present with us now
in each of our homes, as we connect together.

Build us into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood,
offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you
through Jesus Christ, our risen redeemer and healer. Amen.

Song: Father I place into your hands

1. Father, I place into Your hands,
The things I cannot do.
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that I've been through.
Father, I place into Your hands
The way that I should go,
For I know I always can trust You.

3. Father, we love to see Your face,
We love to hear Your voice.
Father, we love to sing Your praise
And in Your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with You
And in Your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust You.

2. Father, I place into Your hands
My friends and family.
Father, I place into Your hands
The things that trouble me.
Father, I place into Your hands
The person I would be,
For I know I always can trust You.

4. Father, I want to be with You
And do the things You do.
Father, I want to speak the words
That You are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
That You will draw to You,
For I know that I am one with You.

Prayer of confession

We approach our prayer of confession mindful of the significance of hand washing as we are called to do in these days. Hand washing in the Bible is closely associated with innocence and cleansing from sin.

As we turn on the tap we turn our hearts towards you, O God.

As we wet our hands renew our thoughts, so we might be transformed.

As we lather soap between fingers and over all our hands,
purge from us all that brings us harm and might harm others.

Remove the invisible guilt and shame that so often keeps us from you.

As we rinse our hands, we trust in your overflowing grace, making all things new.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 31 v 1-5; 14-16

REFLECTION

The psalms have taken on even greater meaning in these exceptional days of the coronavirus global pandemic. While the context in which the psalm is written may not be the same as our circumstances, it expresses many of the honest emotions of grief and lament that many of us are currently experiencing. Verse 24 alone is one that many may find helpful to meditate on in these days when we wait on the Lord for the strength and courage that we otherwise find difficult to summon.

The psalmist prays, as we do now, for the refuge and fortress of God to protect us and for deliverance from that which is hidden and invisible to us but would threaten our very lives (verses 3 and 4). While written as an individual's prayer, the psalmist inspires our collective prayer for the global community:

God, incline your ear to us; rescue us speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for us,
a strong fortress to save us.

In your mercy, hear our prayer.

In these days of isolation, when we have had to retreat to the fortress of our own homes, may we gain anew understanding of God as our fortress, the place of security and safety we turn to in this time of trial. God is not a fortress that barricades but strengthens and reinforces, enabling us to look out for our most vulnerable neighbours, near and far – albeit virtually or from a safe distance.

There is something refreshingly honest about these prayers of lament which tell God how things really are, and this shows that God is interested in our physical suffering and our bodily wellbeing. That's important to remember these days. The description of the psalmist's symptoms is very resonant with our contemporary experience.

Jesus also turned to the psalms for strength and courage when enduring suffering. It is verse 5 of this psalm that Jesus quotes on the cross: 'into your hand I commit my spirit'. This verse takes on particular poignancy as we face the reality that coronavirus has and will lead to the end of life for many of our neighbours, near and far. It is into the hands of God that we entrust them to his eternal keeping.

And how we view our neighbours in these threatening times is brought into sharp focus in verse 11. Some have found it easy to 'other' distant neighbours who were thought to be carriers of the virus, holding them in contempt rather than compassion. Or we can find ourselves judging our closer neighbours who are panic buying important goods, while failing to understand the fear that motivated them. When the virus reached the UK, some of us became an 'object of dread' for even our closest friends – maybe even an object of dread for ourselves as we feared meeting others and infecting them.

Yet, Christian Aid Week has always been about how we can be good global neighbours. Asking ourselves how we can extend the love that never fails to our neighbours near and far has never been more important than it is this year.

When our own hands and the hands of others have become something of a threat, and when many are no longer experiencing the reassuring touch of a hand on a shoulder, or no longer being comforted by the embrace of a hug, the references to hands in verses 5, 8 and 15 are also particularly poignant.

It feels particularly apt to pray, with the trust of the psalmist, that our times are in God's hands and also for deliverance from hands that might harm us, including our own. This absence of touch was also a great challenge for communities in Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak of 2014. The cultural practice of washing the bodies of the deceased was banned and made the process of saying goodbye to loved ones even more heart-wrenching and painful. And like how we see many of our clergy providing vital support and connection through online streaming of services, ministers and pastors in Sierra Leone had to take to the streets to get these essential public health messages out that in the end saved thousands of lives.

As we wash our hands more carefully and more often, we can pray to God to hold in his care all those we have held hands with, carried and hugged. We can also pray for those who we have never had the opportunity to physically embrace, but who we have reached out to with generous hands, giving what we could through our envelopes during many previous Christian Aid Weeks. We at Christian Aid are incredibly grateful to all who have delivered and collected Christian Aid Week envelopes by hand over these past 60+ years. And for all the hands that have made soup for church lunches, poured cups of tea and coffee, made toast for Big Brekkies, put up posters and bunting advertising events, sorted books and art for sale, and of course counted and returned the money collected. Thank God for the hands that have put love into action.

The world's poorest people are the most vulnerable to this crisis. They are less resilient, have less access to healthcare and will be less able to weather the economic impact. Thanks to your support, we have been standing alongside them for the past 75 years. We'll continue to stand with them through this crisis and will be with them afterwards. Now more than ever, please share your love for your vulnerable neighbours by giving to Christian Aid.

Thank God and pray for the hands of all those working on the medical frontline now to help save lives, in Britain and Ireland and around the world. May their times be in God's hands, may God's face shine upon them. May the unfailing, steadfast love of God be their constant strength (verse 16).

Prayer of intercession

Let us pray together with open hands.

God our refuge, we come to you with open hands, some of us with hearts full of questions, some of us bruised by bereavement, some of us fearful of what the future holds, all of us stunned by the events of this year.

Draw close to us now in each of our homes as we place our honest questions and hopes into your open, resurrected, yet scarred hands.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Hear the cry of our hearts, Lord, silent and aloud, for bereaved neighbours, near and far. Comfort those pained by being absent, and hold close those who are hurting alone.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In this season of Easter, renew us with resurrection hope that while weeping lingers in this night, joy will come with the morning.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

On this Christian Aid Week Sunday, we pray for and with communities across the world who are most vulnerable to coronavirus.

We pray for people living in refugee camps and city slums, with limited sanitation facilities, who are unable to wash their hands regularly, and have little opportunity to isolate from others.

We pray for Christian Aid partners working to provide soap and buckets, communicating clear, accurate information, raising the voices of the most vulnerable and ensuring they are kept as safe as possible.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those of us who are self-isolating, which can sometimes feel like we aren't doing anything, remind us that we are all doing our part, and saving lives by staying at home.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for wisdom and resources for those in local and national authority for all frontline and key workers.

We pray for the many frontline workers and volunteers and for Christian Aid partners working to help others across the world.

God in your mercy, hear all our prayers .

Amen

Lords 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 and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing blessing

May the presence of the Creator refresh you,
may the comfort of the Son renew you,
may the inspiration of the Spirit restore you
to be love in action, even from a distance,
in our neighbourhoods, near and far,
this day and for evermore.

Amen
