



TETHERED
TO GOD:
I CHOOSE LOVE...

Worship in Times of Isolation
The Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts

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Preparing for worship

You may wish to find a comfortable space and light a candle to remember the presence of Christ this day. If you are worshipping with others you are encouraged to share the various parts of worship and read them aloud.

This week, in unusual circumstances, we are the church, the Body of Christ, gathered together in faith, despite not being physically present with one another. We are still deeply connected with each other and with the church through time and space. God is present with us and through us, to one another.

In the Old Testament sometimes the word translated as “hope” is also the word “cord”. Hope connects us with God, in the same way that a cord connects one to another. With time and intention the cord or connection is strengthened. Interestingly, this form of hope is most common in the book of Job; perhaps, a reminder of the hope that Job has in God and the strength that this offers.

Perhaps now, our tethering to God and the interconnectedness with one another is more important than ever. We are deeply woven together and held by the love of God. It is this tethering that enables us to choose love, even in times of fear. It calls us to love our neighbour, to find ways to connect with one another, in times of social distancing. This day as we worship, may we remember that we connected to God, to one another and may we hear God’s call to love always.

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 23)

God is our protector and provider,
We have all that we need.

We are enveloped in grace and goodness;
We are given the serenity of the Spirit
to calm and renew our hearts;

In Christ we are made whole
and led in justice and righteousness.

Even when life seems dark and threatening, we need not fear;
God's Spirit is with us protecting and comforting us.

In the midst of hostility, we can feast and be filled.
God declares that we are the beloved and anointed children of the most
high. Life overflows in abundance.

All the days of our lives we will live by the values of God's eternal presence,
and dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we come to worship uncertain of all that lies before us.

We come with concerns for our neighbours, praying for all people.

Grant us the certainty of faith this day,
that we might turn from anxiety to hope;

from bitterness to peace,
and from hubris to humility

as we rely on your strength and goodness.

In the name of the Christ, who make all things new. Amen.

Scripture Reading: *Psalm 23*

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.*

The Lord is My Shepherd: [Click here](#) to listen to a Bobby McFerrin's version.

Prayer of Confession and Hope

God who is always present in our midst,
in troubling times such as we face today,
it is easy to lose sight of the things that make us who we are.

When we lose our way
remind us that we are your children, that you declare us your beloved ones.
(hold silence)

When we are tempted to just give up,
renew our faith, we pray.
(hold silence)

When we think there is no hope for the future,
remind us that you hold eternity in your gracious heart.
(hold silence)

Loving God, draw us back from our despair to hope
to dwell in the presence of your Spirit,
that we might use the faith you have planted in our hearts
and live our lives as your faithful people. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.

We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes,

saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"

Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know

who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen.

Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

The gospel of Christ, light of the world.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection on Scripture

This week one of my colleagues in the United States shared a message of hope. On December 12th, 2015, Jim's son Sam, was hit by a car while riding his bike and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Jim, Ann and the family spent years as Sam's life hung in the balance, as he then learned to walk again, as step by step the family found a new normal. The BPUC prayer community prayed for Sam and the Loeffler family at that time. Today, this week Jim's words offer wisdom to us all. Jim writes:

"Some morning thoughts that might help...

So.... I'm an optimist. Ann says it gets me into trouble and leaves me disappointed and depressed more often than not. She's right. (Of course, she's right.) Her pessimism keeps her grounded in reality and only occasionally is she surprised by life's providence, but not often. That being said, I'll cling to optimism, however pollyanna-ish. Sometimes it's all I have.

This virus situation that we're in now harkens me back to the time immediately following Sam's accident. So many of you know the difficulties we went through, because you journeyed with us. For weeks, every day brought more bad news: excessive brain pressure, soaring and tanking body temperatures, failing kidneys, tracheostoma suction, etc., etc., etc. All of this we bore within the context of the unconscious, nearly-dead boy lying in the room with us. In addition, we had jobs, financial obligations, and two other dear, sweet children, all of which had to take a back seat to the nightmare unfolding in front of us. As you might imagine, it was a dark time fraught with uncertainty. (Just recalling it now darkens my atmosphere a little.) But eventually I reached a crossroads.

I can't speak for Ann. Her coping journey was different from mine. For me, I reached a point where I could no longer handle all the bad news. Call it what you will... faith in a higher power, rock bottom, a daily dose of paroxetine, but at some point I just got tired of worrying and in the popular cliché... gave it all up. I just stopped

worrying. At that point, it was easy to let it all go. I had been carrying it for what seemed like forever.

After nearly a month, Sam had started to awaken. It was painstakingly slow -- a little more movement / awareness everyday. And as it always does, the sun slowly began to shine again. My optimism, dormant for weeks, started to flow again, slowly. He and I took a stroll around Our Children's House in Dallas on a cold bright afternoon. He was in a wheelchair and still non-verbal, but it was the first, best day in a long time. If you'd like to know the rest of the story, just ask. Here's my point.

Sometimes life overwhelms us, not the little everyday stuff of late bills or broken garbage disposals, but genuine helplessness ("muddy waves of pain" as Amy Grant calls it). We reach a place where there are no more options. We are flung around at the whim of nature, sitting at the precipice of the first fall of a roller coaster. We have two options...

We can fight it, constrict our abdominal muscles, grip the handlebar to the point of white knuckles, and groan all the way down wondering if we'll come out alive on the other end;

OR

we can close our eyes, take a deep breath, feel the tickle of our ascending diaphragm, enjoy the laughter and squeals of others, and smile knowing that this journey occurs over and over, day after day for hundreds, thousands, millions of people.

And they're all just fine.

It's the not-knowing that destroys our optimism, but it doesn't have to. Look around. You have friends, community, hope, and myriad comforts to accompany you on this journey. I promise it will end. We'll smile on the other side and we'll be changed, a little, for the better.

Take care, everyone. Oh look, the sun's coming out.

This is a time of uncertainty. It's also an opportunity to know that we are not alone. The church community is an interconnected community of love and care. Church is not a building but a community of faithful disciples seeking to share the love of God – everyday. It just looks a little different right now. God's presence is not confined to stained glass windows, beautiful though they are. God's presence is in the sky, trees, our living rooms and one another. "Let everything that has breath praise God!", writes the Psalmist (Psalm 150). Oddly enough, part of loving one another

right now is not gathering. It looks different and feels different. Part of loving God is protecting the well-being of each other. Part of growing in faith is to praise God in our backyard and sing heartily from our living room (it doesn't even matter if it is in tune). Seeds are planted in the darkness of fertile soil. This time of solitude may bring forth surprising beauty.

Some questions for reflection:

- Jesus actively goes looking for the man who had been healed (Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him...). God comes to us. Jesus seeks us out and offers relationship. In what ways do you feel God's presence reaching out to you?
- In the 23rd Psalm we are given two images of God. The well explored image of the shepherd and then the host at the table extending hospitality and warmth. Which of these images resonates with you? In what way is God our Shepherd and host at this time? In what ways might we be shepherds and hosts at a time such as this?
- Jim invites us to consider the blessings that are easily pushed aside. What blessings might be fertile ground for you? In what ways can you recall the promises of the steadfast love of God, "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow"*, how can you keep watch for the sun coming out?

** from the hymn "Great is Your Faithfulness" by Thomas Chisholm.*

Be Thou My Vision

TiS 547

[Click here](#) to listen to *Be Thou My Vision*. Alternatively, if this song is familiar to you, you may wish to sing the following verses.

1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me, save that thou art
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
3. High King of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Gaelic c. 8th cent. tr Mary Elizabeth Byrne 1880-1931, Public Domain.

Offering

All that we are, and all that we have is first a gift from God. Our offering to God is from the fullness of all we have received. You may wish to consider how you can use the gifts God has given to you at this time. For some, the Coronavirus has resulted in huge amounts of work and stress, and God-given gifts may be called upon. For others, life is significantly quieter. Are there ways you want to offer your gifts to God in a new way: offering a listening ear for someone feeling lonely, making a video message, helping someone navigate technology over the phone? Spend some time thinking about how we can use our resources – financial, physical, emotional and spiritual in these unusual circumstances.

Prayers of the People

You may wish to spend time thinking about what prayers you share for the world, the community, the church and people you know and love.

Merciful God,
we come with our prayers for your world;
for your Church;
for this community;
and for those known personally to us
who seek your healing presence this day.

As our world reels with the shock of the corona virus,
we pray for wisdom to do what is necessary to care for others.
Added to the hostility and misery of so many places, it feels that we are
powerless to be bearers of peace.
So we pray that your healing Spirit will bring the everlasting peace of your
reign in every nation.

Lord of the Church,
we would truly be the living Body of Christ bringing justice,
hope and care in every land.
Keep us strong in the face of adversity.
Empower us to serve your mission of renewal and reconciliation.
Make us a holy people – your people – wherever we are.

God of every age, we pray for our community.
We especially bring before all who may need your blessing this day in a
particular way.
Pour out your Spirit upon us we pray, that we may be kept firm in our
faith. Strengthen us to fulfil the calling you have placed upon us, to be a
light on the hill and a beacon of truth and justice.

And now, gracious God, we name before you those we are especially
carrying in our hearts, praying for healing, sustaining hope and deepening
faith.

(hold silence)

... and now with the confidence of the children of God we pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin
against us.

Save us in the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

Christ Be Our Light

ATOK 313

[Click here](#) to listen to *Christ Be Our Light*. Alternatively, if this song is familiar to you, you may wish to sing the following verses.

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain

3. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

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Blessing and Benediction

May God strengthen us in times of uncertainty,
grant us peace when we are afraid,
empower us to love, as we have first been loved,
and grow within us eternal hope for the future.

In the name of God, the source of all life,
Christ, the sustainer of all being,
and the Spirit, who connects us all together.
Amen.