



Welcome to the West of Cambridge Churches United Service

To worship in your household, choose a specific place - perhaps somewhere you can light a candle, and where you and those joining you can sit together undisturbed. Choose a time when you can be unhurried. Then read slowly through the service sheet, praying the prayers as you go. If you are with others, then one of you can take the lead and say the words in normal type, with the other(s) reading the lines in bold, or you could take it in turns to lead. If it is just you, then read it all yourself. Some people find it helps to read the prayers and responses aloud, even on their own.

The Bible readings and the Reflection are provided here as well. At any point, you could pause to look at the family activities, or do them later instead – whatever age you are! Hymns and songs are not included in the written version of this service.

Find what works for you and, as you worship, pray and learn at home, may God bless you and those others doing the same.

Opening Words written by the Revd Bill Miller of Cambourne Church

Here we are, united in Christ
One Lord, one faith, one truth.
We sing together, pray together,
heed God's word together.
As we gather let's become aware
of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit
Do your work among us today.

**Words of confession from Revd Alison Walker of Toft and Haslingfield
Methodist Church**

Psalm 41^[a]

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;
the LORD delivers them in times of trouble.
- ² The LORD protects and preserves them—
they are counted among the blessed in the land—
he does not give them over to the desire of their foes.
- ³ The LORD sustains them on their sickbed
and restores them from their bed of illness.
- ⁴ I said, "Have mercy on me, LORD;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."
- ⁵ My enemies say of me in malice,
"When will he die and his name perish?"
- ⁶ When one of them comes to see me,
he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander;
then he goes out and spreads it around.
- ⁷ All my enemies whisper together against me;
they imagine the worst for me, saying,
- ⁸ "A vile disease has afflicted him;
he will never get up from the place where he lies."
- ⁹ Even my close friend,
someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread,
has turned^[b] against me.
- ¹⁰ But may you have mercy on me, LORD;
raise me up, that I may repay them.
- ¹¹ I know that you are pleased with me,
for my enemy does not triumph over me.
- ¹² Because of my integrity you uphold me
and set me in your presence forever.

¹³ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

Let us confess our sins to God

For our foolishness and thoughtless use of the gifts of your creation:

Lord have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

For our neglect of you and our failure to care for others:

Christ have mercy

All: Christ has mercy

For our selfishness in prayer and our carelessness in worship:

Lord have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

Here is good news for all who put their trust in God.

Jesus says, your sins are forgiven

Amen, thanks be to God.

Readings

2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry

John 15:9-17

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

Reflection – provided for us by Elaine Storkey

The year 2020 has been a year like no other. And the predominant sense over the last nine months has been that of loss; loss of livelihoods, of jobs, of family, businesses that have taken decades to build up - loss of income. Loss of time spent with those we love celebrating birthdays or anniversaries, loss of services in church, loss of confidence and hope in the future. And of course, for many people, loss of life.

For the carers and family and friends of those 52,000 people who've lost their lives in the United Kingdom to the Coronavirus life will not be the same again. And the emotional trauma of these months will hang over our country for years to come. So how should Christians evaluate what's been going on and how should we be responding for the future as to where we go from here? Well I noticed two very different responses that I want to share with you now.

And the first is a negative response. It's to listen to the deniers, to the people who are indifferent to the suffering of others, to those who say this Coronavirus has been overstated – "it's nothing really and we have the right, the liberty to live our lives. The way we choose and not have authority is telling us how to live. And so, this means we don't have to wear masks. We can go out in public; we can have values. We can associate with those we want to associate with"

And, of course, the result is the pandemic spreads because along with this attitude has been the despising of science, a kind of spiralling set of

pseudoscience that's come in to take its place, showing how the Coronavirus is of no importance at all. And then those cultures where this has been very predominant are often reinforced by government leaders.

We have seen the toll in the death rate. The United States has 4% of the world's population, but 20% of the world's Coronavirus deaths, and 11.3 million recorded cases of the virus infection have been recorded in a country so powerful and rich with access to the best technology, medicine and science in the world. But it's not merely indifference that's fuelled the resistance to understanding the Coronavirus properly. It's also religion, because alongside the despising of science and the rise of pseudoscience has come the multiplication of new cults with very definite ideas - distorted ideas about goals and about power and about the battle between good and evil. And central amongst these cults is the rise of something called Q Anon. It began as an offline activity in the United States. And then with the Coronavirus was imported the world into Europe, especially Germany and into the UK.

And if you were in London in September, you might've noticed a big demonstration of thousands of people in the centre of the city, resisting wearing masks, resisting lockdown and carrying multiple Q Anon posters. So, what is Q Anon? Well, it's a massive conspiracy theory and there are lots of things that get added to the mix. It has no factual basis. There's no evidence to support any of its claims. And yet it's growing and multiplying in number, and there are now millions of followers across the globe. It believes that there is a global Satan worshipping paedophilic ring. And the names of people involved in this ring are often bandied around names like Barack Obama and Tom Hanks and Bill Gates and Hillary Clinton and George Soros, and even Oprah Winfrey.

And the fact that there's no evidence doesn't deter the adherents because they believe in the end, there will be a reckoning. And all of these people will be gathered up together. They will be arrested, they will be brought to trial and imprisoned, and we will see that they, the adherents were right. And how is this going to happen? Well, it's going to happen through Donald Trump because Trump is envisaged as the one who is resisting evil and combating the paedophiles. And so, the adherents listen carefully to his speeches in case he's dropping clues to them as to what might happen next or how he himself is contending and combating the deep state that exists beneath the state that we all live in and take for granted. I suppose it's not surprising that we should

be aware of things like this happening at time of crisis and at time of trauma in our country and elsewhere.

We've been warned about it too, in the scriptures. It's not the first time that the church has had to combat even Christians being led astray by cultic ideas and wrong teaching. And in the letter to Timothy, this is spelled out very clearly. The writer says to the church, I give you this charge,

"preach the word, be prepared in season, out of season, correct rebuke and courage. We greet patients and careful instruction, but the time will come when people will not put up with sound teaching instead to suit their own desires, they'll gather around them. They'll amass a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They turn their ears away from the truth. And then aside into myths"

This is a very common aspect that the church has to face through the ages. And we have to face it in our own age today.

And therefore, our responsibility is to come against myths like this, rather than to be swayed by them and to help those who have become obsessed and bought into these ideas in their own lives. I said there were two responses I want to look at. And thankfully, the second response is far more pervasive and far more Christian. It starts by the acknowledgement of the truth - the truth about COVID-19 and the devastating impact it's had on our world and on the lives of millions of people. And that's followed by another acknowledgement and that acknowledgement is of the importance of science. Science isn't the enemy. It's not pseudo or bogus. Science is a way of thinking God's thoughts after God and looking at the creation and getting to know our place in it better. And many scientists are people of faith whose work is dominated by their love of God and their love of other people and their desire to serve them. People like Francis Collins, who used to head up the human genome project and is now heading up all the medical research on COVID-19 in the United States. Collins also quotes from 2 Timothy, but his quotation is a different verse. "For God gave us a spirit, not a fear, but of power and of love and self-control". Many scientists are people of faith with bank of it, your scientists and the Christian in Cambridge reminds us for Christians. Every walk of life is a ministry of love. And that includes the work of the scientist. Ruth Bancewicz, an author and scientist in Cambridge says this,

"...the scientist shows their love for God, for people in the rest of creation, through their work in the lab, they pour themselves into their work wholeheartedly trusting that God will guide and use their efforts to good effect."

Notice how both of them use the word love. Love is that other key word that we've heard a lot of over these last nine months, it's more powerful than hoax, more truthful than myth, more hopeful than loss and love belongs to the God.

It emanates from God. It's what God has breathed into the creation. And then in our lives, as members of the human race, we're made in the image of love. And so we love - it's our birth right. It's the deepest aspect of our human identity. And those of us whose lives are committed to Jesus Christ know something about the deeply spiritual nature of love. Reading from the gospel of John, Jesus uses the word love eight times in about five sentences. It's obviously a very important concept and I want to focus the rest of this talk on the three features that are singled out in those eight times. Each one is so relevant to our lives in the pandemic. The first concept is of the abiding nature of love as a father has loved me. "So, I have loved you" says Jesus "now remain in my love".

So, what is it to abide in Christ's love? Well, it's not to be lured away into distractions, into conspiracy theories or myths or hatred of the other or apathy or indifference. It's to be able to discern the truth, to recognise injustice and inequality in the system and want to address them. But by being in love gives us resilience and courage and fortitude. And the second aspect of love is its mutual nature. "My command is this" says Jesus "love each other as I've loved you." And this challenges the ugliest tendency to always be on the lookout for number one. I bet none of us can forget that critical care nurse in York who, after a 48-hour exhausting shift, went to the supermarket to pick up some goods only to find the shelves stripped bare of everything that she needed and her tearful rebuke from the car. "Just stop it" It was broadcast right through many homes.

Well, a few days later she broadcast again. And not everybody picked this up because she had something very different to say. People had been very generous, she says, there's been an overwhelming response. It's been heart-warming. Why? Because we're made in the image of God. And because we are mutual. We're able to actually be empathetic and caring and stand alongside those who suffer.

And the third aspect of loving this passage is its sacrificial nature. Jesus says "greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends." And we've seen the sacrificial nature of love writ large. During these last few months, doctors, nurses, care workers, family members have given their lives for others. As they've succumbed to the disease. Immigrant people coming to this country for a new life have given their lives up so that others can live.

And why would they do that? Because they believe in God? Because they're motivated by Jesus? Well there has been many Christians amongst those who have died in this pandemic while serving other people. But even more basically it's because they're made in the image of God, who is love. Love is abiding. It's mutual, it's sacrificial. And that's what it is to be human. The second response, that is one that's true to the gospel of Jesus Christ and we need it. We need it to help us against the dangers of untruth and injustice and denial and evil.

And may God bless all of us for the rest of this year and enable us to fight myths and fabrications and hold on to truth and love and bathe ourselves in the warmth of God's compassion.

God bless you all. Amen.

Intercessions – written by the Revd Stephen Day of the Papworth Team

Jesus Christ, our living hope, we pray for the world you came to save
We pray for those who have been bereaved in the Covid pandemic, and for those who are unwell with the virus: bring them light and hope and healing in their suffering.

We pray for those making and enacting policies for controlling the pandemic, for those developing treatments and vaccines, and for those who are caring for others, in hospital or at home: give them wisdom to know what to do, courage to take the necessary steps, and compassion and gentleness in all their dealings.

We pray for everyone whose lives are blighted by violence whether through war or civil disturbance, or in their own homes: raise up peacemakers to bring change, restoration, and the chance to live productive lives.

Lord who breaks every chain

Yours is the victory

Jesus Christ, our living hope, we pray for the church you came to build:
Challenge us to bring your message of hope to our world, and give us the courage, persistence, and humility we need to rise to that challenge.
Challenge us to see beyond the things which divide us, and embrace the great truths which unite us as your body.
Challenge us, as we are set adrift from our buildings and our usual ways, to discover in you our Way, our Truth and our Life.
Challenge us to deeper commitment to proclamation and service, so that by our words and our deeds we might demonstrate your Gospel of hope.
Grow your church in depth, in number, and in love.

Lord who breaks every chain

Yours is the victory

Jesus Christ, our living hope, we pray for the communities in which you have placed us.
We pray for the businesses in our town and villages: at this especially difficult time, may they have the community and government support which they need.
We pray for the schools in our area as they work extra hard to keep our children safe while they learn: protect all staff and students, and make the schools places of happiness as well as education.
We pray for our neighbours, the people we speak to, the people we recognise but whose names and lives we don't know. Help us to see in every one a precious individual for whom you died.
May our congregations be the beating spiritual hearts of our communities, propelling life and hope to all.

Lord who breaks every chain

Yours is the victory

Jesus Christ, our living hope, we pray for ourselves, your redeemed people:
Tear through the shadows of our souls, and challenge us into genuine repentance.
Give us such a hunger for righteousness that we will never stop seeking to be filled with your Holy Spirit.
Give us such hope in your eternal salvation that we will be able to rescue others from despair.
Give us such joy in your presence that others will see straight through us and encounter you.

Give us such peace in the storms of life that we may guide the feet of others onto your rock.

Lord who breaks every chain

Yours is the victory

Closing Words

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace."