

Worship at Home – 23rd March 2025 (3rd Sunday in Lent)

A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Helen Watson.

Introduction

Hello, it's lovely to be with you today on this third week in Lent. My name is Helen Watson and I'm a Methodist Local Preacher in the Berkshire and Hampshire Borders Circuit.

Call to worship (Psalm 66:1-4)

Shout to God with joy, everyone on earth!

Sing about the glory of his name! Give him glorious praise!

Say to God, "What wonderful things you do! Your power is so great that your enemies bow down to you in fear.

Hymn – STF 102 – For the beauty of the earth Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)

1 For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
*Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

2 For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:
Chorus

3 For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:
Chorus

4 For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled:
Chorus

5 For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:
Chorus

Opening prayers

Lord God,

Be with us as we hear again the stories of your limitless love and measureless grace.

Lord God, the Three in One, we give you thanks and praise.

Our deepest longings are satisfied in you.

You allow us second chances, never giving up on us.

Repentance changes our lives and shapes our future,
one that you tend and nurture, day by day.

You help us endure trials and temptations,
ensuring we are never pushed beyond
our boundary of endurance.

Lord God, the Three in One, we give you thanks and praise.

Lord God, we praise and thank you for the world around us.

Just now we thank you for the signs of spring in the beautiful flowers,
for the first new shoots and buds bearing signs of crops to come

and for the young animals and birds just starting their lives.

We praise you and thank you for family and friends and for those we meet.
And we thank you for Jesus, who came to earth from heaven
to live for us and to die upon the cross so that we would have eternal life.

Lord God, the Three in One, we give you thanks and praise.

You give us the gift of abundant life,
looking after our physical and spiritual needs.
We're sorry we take this for granted.
We're sorry: when we lose sight of your loving mercy
and get wrapped up in our own self-indulgent desires;
We're sorry for focusing on the negatives instead of the positives;
for being judgemental and not giving others a second chance.
Help us to turn around and to bear good fruit.

God has mercy on all who turn to him.
He freely pardons and forgives our sins.
We are free to begin anew.
Thanks be to God. **Amen**

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Bible reading – Luke 13:1-9

Jesus Gives a Warning

13 Some people who were there at that time told Jesus about certain Galileans. Pilate had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. ² Jesus said, "These people from Galilee suffered greatly. Do you think they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you turn away from your sins, you will all die too. ⁴ Or what about the 18 people in Siloam? They died when the tower fell on them. Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you turn away from your sins, you will all die too."

⁶ Then Jesus told a story. "A man had a fig tree," he said. "It was growing in his vineyard. When he went to look for fruit on it, he didn't find any. ⁷ So he went to the man who took care of the vineyard. He said, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree. But I haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

⁸ "‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year. I’ll dig around it and feed it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’"

Reflection on the reading

This Gospel passage isn't the only time Jesus warns against judging others. It's good to remind ourselves that we never know the full story behind someone's actions. Think of an iceberg – you only ever see the top 25%; you don't see the 75% that drives it. Human beings are the same. Instead of judging someone's behaviour, perhaps find out why they acted as they did and give them a second chance. That's what you would hope for if it were you.

Remember that fig tree in the Gospel reading? The tree gets a second chance too – it's not too late. Notice, too, that the second chance is not in isolation – it is not left up to the tree to find its own way. There is a gardener – maybe God – prepared to nurture his charge – maybe you. The gardener wants to help, support, feed, encourage – to put in a little bit of effort in the hope that the tree will respond. But he doesn't expect a fast turnaround. He gives the tree a year. We ought to be equally generous in giving people a second chance and giving them the tools to turn things

around. And don't expect them to change overnight – it may take a few years of nurturing, understanding and kindness.

God gives us second chances, too. Sometimes we may lose patience with the process, but God never give up on us. When we, as clay, sit upon his potter's wheel and allow him to mould us, he never looks at our imperfect form and thinks 'Oh, that didn't go right', throwing us into his reject bin. He has another go. And another. All our life he will keep having another go, just so long as we turn to him each time, admit we got it wrong ask him if he can he please give us a second chance. He is faithful and true and will always respond with a resounding 'YES'.

Hymn – STF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960)

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not,
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be.
Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided -
great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
Chorus

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
Chorus

Prayers for the world, others and ourselves

God, the Three in One,
Let us pray for your Church throughout the world: remembering those churches which are growing and those which are in decline.
In particular we pray for our local churches and their leaders.
Give them a sense of your presence with them as they work to do your will and to bring glory to you.

Let us pray for those who have power and influence and for all who govern nations.
In particular we pray for the politicians in Ukraine, Russia and US America as they try to find a way to end the war in Ukraine.
We pray also for Gaza and for the leaders of Israel and the Palestinians.

Give them wisdom and justice and the grace to follow your ways as they lead the people in difficult situations.

Let us pray for the powerless, for all victims of famine and war, for those who are homeless or who have lost families or friends.

Give them your guidance and help to ease their suffering.

Let us pray for those who are afflicted by illness, by injury or by grief.
In particular today we pray for our friends and our families and those we know who need help just now.

Give them your peace in their hearts and may your healing hand be upon them, bringing ease and love to each one.

Eternal God,
Through the self-offering of your Son you have filled our lives with your presence.
Help us in our sufferings and trials and strengthen us in our weakness.
Through Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen**

Hymn – STF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

- 1 Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
 tender and true;
 out of the heart of the Father above,
 streaming to me and to you:
 wonderful love
 dwells in the heart of the Father above.
- 2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
 joyfully came;
 came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
 sharing their sorrow and shame;
 seeking the lost,
 saving, redeeming at measureless cost.
- 3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
 why do they roam?
 Love only waits to forgive and forget;
 Home! weary wanderers, home!
 Wonderful love
 dwells in the heart of the Father above.
- 4 Come to my heart, O Thou wonderful love,
 come and abide,
 lifting my life till it rises above
 envy and falsehood and pride;
 seeking to be
 lowly and humble, a learner of Thee.

Blessing

May the Almighty and merciful God, the Three in One, bless you and keep you now and forever.
Amen

Bible readings from [New International Reader's Version \(NIRV\)](#)

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