

Hymn: [StF 701](#) **Heaven shall not wait**

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

God of all,
that you speak truth to power,
that you challenge injustice,
that you stand with the poor and exploited,
that you entered the deepest darkness and overcame,
we thank you.

Renew in us the vision of the kingdom you came to bring,
draw our attention to whatever needs changing;
give courage to enable us to speak your truth,
share your love, and follow your way.

Fill all who lead and govern with compassion and mercy;
grant them wisdom and humility for the days ahead.

Draw close to all in need;
that the burden of the indebted be lifted,
that the anxious and fearful know your peace,
that the lonely experience your presence,
that the sick receive your healing and wholeness,
the dying, your grace, and the bereaved, your comfort.

In Jesus name,
and by the power of your Spirit we pray. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: [StF 545 / HP 378](#) **Be thou my vision**

Blessing:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all,
evermore. Amen.**

Worship sheet compiled by Rev Bruce Sawyer, West Durham Circuit

**Darlington District
Worship at Home Sunday 15th November 2020**

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
Psalm 90:1-2 (NRSVA)

Hymn: [StF 132 / HP 358](#) **O God our help in ages past**

You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
Psalm 90: 8 (NRSVA)

Prayer of Confession

God of light, we confess we have preferred darkness.
God who sees, you know we have tried to hide
the thoughts of which we are ashamed...
the selfish desires of our hearts...
our apathy...
our failings...
from ourselves,

Forgive us.

Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Psalm 90: 13-14 (NRSVA)

Through the cross of Christ, God has mercy upon you.
Know that you are forgiven and be at peace. **Amen.**

Reading: [Matthew 25: 14-30](#) (The Parable of the Talents)

At college, in a module entitled *The Prophets in Context*, we were encouraged to sit and read Amos outside one of the large houses nearby. I remember how distinctly uncomfortable this made me feel – reading Amos’ critique of the wealth of Israel’s elite sat beside electronic gates behind which a gravelled drive led to a double garage. It powerfully demonstrated to me the ability of context – where or when we read a text – to inform our understanding of it.

I want to encourage you to read today’s parable alongside the [Reset the Debt Report](#).^{*} The report, by the Methodist Church and others, describes one aspect of the effect of Coronavirus; that an estimated six million people in the UK have been swept into debt as a result of Covid-19. Yet these effects have not been felt equally. The impact has fallen hardest on those with the lowest incomes, pushing them into debt as they borrow to pay rent, keep utilities connected, and buy food, whilst many on higher incomes have actually seen their savings increase, as their expenditure on holidays, social activities or meals out has been curtailed.

Perhaps the report helps us to read the parable not as an encouragement to use the gifts we have been given (as is so often the case), but an accurate description of the economic systems of society and a withering condemnation of them:

“For to all those who have, more will be given... but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

When we read Jesus’ parables we naturally wonder which character might represent God. What if this is the third servant? The one who refuses to join in a system where those with wealth can exploit it for their own ends. The one who dares to speak truth to power (note the master does not deny the servant’s description of him). The one who does not bow to fear, even though he is afraid. The one who is willing to bear himself the

consequences of doing what is right. Who at the end also finds himself vulnerable and among those who weep as a result of injustice and whose teeth gnash because they are hungry. The one whose life is judged by those in power to be worthless and expendable.

This to me seems like good news, like gospel living. Not that we are rewarded for the effort we put in, but that God challenges injustice. This to me seems closer to the God I see and know in Jesus.

How might we follow in this way? Inspired by the Biblical principle of Jubilee, which periodically enabled debts to be cancelled, protecting the poor and re-establishing equitable relationships, *Reset the Debt* calls for the unavoidable debt incurred as a result of Coronavirus by those on low incomes to be cancelled by the government. Are we willing to add our voice to the tradition of the prophets and to that of the third servant? Will you confront unjust economic and political power? Will you call for the cancellation of debt for the poorest?



^{*}You can download the report and find suggestions for contacting your MP via <https://resetthedebt.uk/>.

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