

Prayers of Intercession, Petition and Dedication

Heavenly Father, we bring our concerns to you in our prayers. We pray for your church, both worldwide and in relation to the churches which each of us loves most. We ask for your blessing on congregation members as they cope with the isolation in which so many are living at present. We give thanks for all those who have worked out and continue to enhance new ways of worshipping you whilst we are unable to meet physically.

We pray for your world. We pray especially for the United States of America, as President Biden takes up his duties. We bring him and his family before you at this time. We pray too for places in the world where difficulties exist that are being reported less widely than usual because of the concentration on pandemic issues. We pray, too, for those who govern our own country and also for those who lead the main opposition parties. May they work together as ways to come out of lockdown are considered.

We pray for our families, friends and neighbours and ask that, even as we have to remain socially distanced from so many, we can find ways to support one another and help those who are in need. May we support all those in public life as they try to keep essential services going. We pray too for all whose working life has been so adversely affected. And we bring before you all those experiencing suffering at this time, especially those who are mourning the deaths of family members and friends from Covid-19.

And we pray for ourselves, as we commit to your service and look to do your will as the days move on. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: **Dear Lord and Father of mankind**, StF 495, H&P 673

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

This worship sheet was created by Ian Warburton, Local Preacher

Darlington District Worship

Sunday 31st January 2021



Call to Worship

From the east to the west, praise the name of the Lord! The Lord rules over all the nations; his glory is above the heavens.

(Psalm 113, vv 3 and 4, Good News Bible)

Hymn: **Be still and know that I am God**, StF 18

Prayers of Adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

O God our Father, we give you all our thanks and praise for creating our wonderful world in all its glory and for everything that you've done for us since. You have loved and nurtured us through the generations and we are so thankful. You sent your Son Jesus Christ to live amongst us as one both wholly human and wholly divine and to show us your love and how you would want us to treat one another. He suffered and died for us but rose again and is seated at your right hand on high, yet is with all of us every day of our lives. May we show something of that wonderful love both back to you and to those whom we meet on earth.

But we are only too well aware of the number of times and the ways in which we so often fall short. You gave us a wonderful world but we haven't cherished our planet as we should have done. We have disregarded your will, preferring to do what is short-term pleasing to us. We have not loved or served our families, friends and neighbours with the unselfishness which has been needed. Forgive us, Lord, for the ways in which we've let you down. Help us to look at ourselves honestly and work out how truly to be your servants. We ask it in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading: Mark 1 vv 21-28

Reflection: A Man with an Evil Spirit

We're not quite sure exactly what the man in the story is suffering from. Many scholars say that evil spirits do exist and find their way into people. Mark himself presents this incident in this way. The spirit needs to be exorcised to make its victims whole again. But others believe that it isn't a case of a spirit entering someone from outside. It could just be a way of saying that someone is ill. But it doesn't really matter which of the two we believe. Either way the story tells of Jesus overcoming evil because of the power invested in him by God. It seems likely also that the man may have been cured of a mental illness in some form.

I remember thinking right at the start of the first lockdown that insufficient regard was being paid to the possible mental health consequences of separating people from one another and I fear that the continuation of restrictions could be building up a worrying harvest of mental health issues to be tackled once some form of normality resumes. That said, there does seem to be much more awareness of the potential issues now than there was earlier on, which is all to the good. I'm no clinician but maybe the difficulties in the field of mental health were unavoidable in whole or in part if we were ever to regain control over this terrible virus.

But we are where we are and the question has to be how, as Christians, we can continue to show God's love to the world in these continuing rough times. First, don't let us give way to despair over the fact that many churches have closed their doors again as the third lockdown has taken effect. Though churches in England were given exemption from the general close-down of activities when the latest lockdown was announced, many congregations were uncomfortable about continuing to meet and were also keen to set an example to the rest of the world. In any case, the church isn't defined solely by its buildings. We've found and continue to find many other ways of worshipping God, via online and telephone services or the production

of written resources. The local parish church where I live is currently holding an early evening online service of Compline on most days of the week and invites the other churches in the locality and beyond to join with this. Of course it will be good to meet again physically, when the present restrictions have been lifted, to engage in normal congregational singing, have tea or coffee after the service and enjoy handshakes and the like as we did before. But in the meantime we are still spiritually open for business and the world needs to know this.

Maybe we can also show our support to the many individuals and agencies working hard to assist the most vulnerable in society. Groups like the Samaritans and others which support those who are struggling with life have continued to work within Covid-19 secure protocols during the pandemic and need our support in prayer. Groups may need support in more tangible form, too. My eldest son isn't a regular church attender any more but I was so pleased when he marked his recent birthday by asking for donations to MIND. He exceeded his target sum, too. I myself did a sponsored walk for CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) last autumn and was blown away by the generosity of those who donated. There will be countless other examples up and down the country. And don't let's forget to hold politicians to account as events continue to unfold. Of course we need to remember that in our time no peacetime government has ever had to deal with such a big crisis as this one but we must play our part in ensuring that everything that can be done is being done. And don't let's forget to continue to love one another, perhaps an even more important aspect than usual in these challenging times. And may God be with us as ever as we work slowly towards some happier times.

Hymn: O Christ the healer, we have come, StF 653, H&P 395