

# **Sunday Worship At Home: 22-03-2020**

## **Opening Prayer**

Blessed are you, God of Compassion and mercy, to you be praise and glory for ever. In the darkness of our sin, your light breaks forth like the dawn and your healing springs up for deliverance. As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help, sustain us with your bountiful Spirit and open our lips to sing your praise. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Blessed be God forever.**

## **Confession**

**Lord God, we have sinned against you;  
we have done evil in your sight.**

**We are sorry and repent.**

**Have mercy on us according to your love.**

**Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.**

**Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen.**

## **Reading**

1 Thessalonians 2:17 & 3:1-3

## **Reflection: Torn but together – Dan Wells**

It is a very unusual situation we find ourselves in on this Sunday. For the first time in most, if not all, of our memories we are unable to meet together as a church on Sunday. It's perhaps even more strange that this should fall on Mothering Sunday, where we might gather for family meals and various celebrations. Now we are likely separated from our families and our church family alike.

In the midst of all this uncertainty and confusion it's perhaps helpful to remember that this is not a new experience for Christians. Followers of Jesus in various countries around the world are forbidden to meet in public. Many Christians in other nations are in prison for their faith and cut off from their churches. It is good for us to remember them and stand in partnership with them as we experience a little of what they live everyday.

The apostle Paul also experienced separation from the churches he was concerned for and the churches he had planted. In his first letter to the Thessalonians he talks about his reaction to being unable to meet with them. He says "we were torn away from you for a short time..." and perhaps that connects with how you are feeling today. It feels like our church family has been torn. If you think of the church as a body, as the Bible does, then tearing something like a muscle or ligament is a painful thing. So it is with us.

Paul says he has an 'intense longing' for his fellow believers in Jesus. That is how it should be. We may not be able to meet in person but we ought to have an intense longing to do so. If we are indifferent to meeting together that is a bit of a worrying sign. Meeting together is good and important and something vital is missing while we cannot do so. It is going to be odd and difficult for a time, and we should not be surprised about that.

But here's the thing: we don't cease being church when we cannot meet together. We are still bound together in the body of Christ even when we are stuck in our homes. Paul did not cease to be connected with the Thessalonians when he was physically separated from them. They were, and continued to be, his brothers and sisters in Christ. And so it is with us.

Paul says he has been torn away, but adds: "in person, not in thought." We too are separated in person, but we are not separated in thought. We should never be disconnected in our thought, prayers and concern for one another. We are Holy Trinity Richmond as we are scattered across the

local area, just as much as when we are gathered in a certain building in Sheen Park. A lot has changed, but in another sense, nothing has changed.

So what does this look like for us? For Paul, he chose to 'self-isolate' in Athens. "We thought it best to be left by ourselves," he says, but he doesn't stop there. He couldn't stand not being in connected with his fellow Christians, so he says, "when we could stand it no longer... we sent Timothy... to strengthen and encourage you in your faith."

Paul didn't want anyone to be unsettled by what they were going through, and that should be our concern too. His answer was to send Timothy, his co-worker, to travel to Thessalonica and to give encouragement to the Christians there. Paul was stuck in Athens, and he could not go himself, so he sent Timothy.

The situation we find ourselves in means we can't quite follow Paul's example and send a Timothy in person to go and visit each person in the church. That would almost certainly break the rules of 'social distancing' that we are supposed to be following! But perhaps there are other ways in which we can 'send a Timothy' to others?

Paul's aim was to strengthen and encourage people's faith. There are plenty of ways in which we can keep in contact as a church and 'send a Timothy' to one another to help them keep going. Phone calls and emails at this time are a vital lifeline for all of us. Let's check in with one another and build one another. Could you share an encouraging verse, something that the Lord has spoken to you, with someone else today? And tomorrow? And each day?

Prayer is vital at this time and we all find prayer difficult at times. Some of us will thrive on quiet, personal prayer; others will struggle without someone else to pray with. Can we 'send a Timothy' by praying with someone over the phone, or via Skype or FaceTime or something similar. It will probably feel weird the first time we try something like this, but it will soon become easy and straightforward and normal.

We will be looking into other ways that we can build one another up and keep in contact as a church over the coming days. We hope to provide a number of different channels by which we can 'send a Timothy' to one another. You may have other creative ways to 'send a Timothy' so make sure you share those with others too.

In all of this, remember that we are still the church. We are still HTR when we cannot enter the building. We are still a church with an open door when we cannot open our doors! As we open our doors of communication and help and support, we continue to be the church God has called us to be. Who knows, there may be new opportunities for God's love to be shown that come from this that we had never thought about.

We are still the church. God is still God, full of mercy and compassion. We are torn, but we are still together. Amen.

Dan Wells

## **Affirmation of faith**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## **Intercessions**

- Pray for those who are unwell and anxious.
- Pray for those in the health and emergency services.

## **Lord's Prayer**

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.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.

Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

Eternal God, our beginning and our end,  
accompany us in this day's journey.

Dawn on our darkness, open our eyes to praise you for your creation  
and to see the work you set before us today.

Take us and use us to bring to others the new life you give in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.