

## *Welcome to worship!*

### **Lighting our candle of hope**

#### **Call to worship**

God walks with us;  
that thought brings comfort.

**God has given us green meadows  
to laugh in,  
clear streams to think beside,  
untrodden paths to explore.**

When we think the world seems to rest on our shoulders,  
God put things into perspective,

**When we lash out at the unfairness of life - God calms us down.**

When we drift into harmful ways, God straightened us out.

**God is with us all the way.**

We do not know what lies ahead, but we are not afraid,  
**for we know God will be with us.**

The Spirit's touch soothes our tensions  
**and our fears fade.**

For we are content; in life, in death, in life beyond death,  
in the safety of our creators love.



*(Adapted, James Taylor, Everyday Psalms)*

### **Hymn 'The King of Love my Shepherd is'**

**(MHB 76)**

The King of love my Shepherd is,  
Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His,  
And He is mine forever.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,  
Thy cross before to guide me.

Where streams of living water flow  
My ransomed soul He leadeth;  
And where the verdant pastures grow,  
With food celestial feedeth.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;  
thy unction grace bestoweth;  
and o what transport of delight  
from thy pure chalice floweth!

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed  
But yet in love He sought me.  
And on His shoulder gently laid,  
And home rejoicing brought me.

And so through all the length of days,  
Thy goodness faileth never.  
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise,  
Within Thy house forever.

## Opening Prayer

Caring God,  
for all whose hearts are troubled at the start of this new day,  
be the voice that they hear, the warmth that they feel,  
the wisdom they seek, the strength they require,  
and the one in whose arms they rest.

Embrace us in a love that knows no end.  
Fill us with a power that overcomes.  
Encourage us with a word that nourishes.  
Inspire us with a hope that sustains.  
Comfort us with a peace that endures  
and at day's end, bring us safely to rest.

(Rev Jill van de Geer, A faith for today...)

## The 'Abba' prayer

*The 'Abba Prayer' is used today in place of the Lord's Prayer*

*You are invited to pray the following words in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer,*

Eternal Spirit

Source of all that is and ever shall be,  
Loving Parent in whom we discern heaven,  
May knowledge of your holiness inspire all peoples.  
And may your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
flourish on earth, until all of humankind  
heed your call to justice and compassion.

May we find the bread that we need for today.  
And for the hurts we cause one another  
may we be forgiven in the same measure  
that we forgive.

In times of trial and temptation,  
help us to be strong;  
When life seems overwhelming,  
Help us to endure;  
And thus from the yoke of sin deliver us.

May you reign in the power of human love,

Now and forever.

*(Tom Hall, "Pray Without Seeking. Toward a Truly Mystical Lord's Prayer")*

## **Readings** Acts 2:41-47

*So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

## John 10:7-10

*So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

## **Reflections "Abundant life"**

*TXT vs. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."*

1. I feel (and I am sure many others feel this way) as if I am just emerging from my bomb shelter. What now? How do we process and proceed with our lives?

The followers of Jesus, beginning to fearfully emerge from the upper room after the events of his execution, already marked as Galileans (and thus foreigners) by the locals, must have felt the same. The all clear has not yet sounded for them.

2. The infant church was very much at the stage of trying to understand Jesus' mission and their place in it. There is a lot of '*remember when he...*' going on as they tried to recall and comprehend what he had taught them about himself and his message and mission. The Gospel of John is largely a product of this; it is unlike the others who seem more

‘factually’ based. John (written very late in the first century) is not meant to be heard in a literal/historical sense but rather as reflection, teaching and narrative on the Churches understanding of what had happened some seventy decades ago.

3. As we too reflect on the testimony of the Greek scriptures (the New Testament) we see that it was not with political, military, economic or even intellectual power that the early church made such an impact. Something happened! The early church burst upon the Roman world like a bombshell. Spreading strange and ‘heretical’ ideas of unconditional love and equity, inclusive of all ‘classes’ and races – even slaves(!), their values seemed foolish to most who were benefiting from the socially skewed status quo.
4. However, the biggest ‘weapon’ in the early Christian’s arsenal was that of their personal testimony. They had found ‘something’, their lives had been changed in some way and that was (for many) more precious than life. Actually, that is wrong because it was life for them! Professor Jaime Clark-Soles [Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas] says:  
*From start to finish and everywhere in between, this Gospel announces that the sole purpose of God's creative acts and Christ's work on the cross is life (zoe). The noun alone is used thirty-six times and various forms of the verb twenty more.*
  - In him was life, and the life was the light of all people; John 1:4
  - I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly; John 10:10
  - But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31
5. In an age when life was cheap, this ‘new life’ gave rise to a deeper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. For John, the resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit happen together on that first day of the week –for John there is no waiting for the day of Pentecost... Jesus breathed on them in an unmistakable echoing of God’s actions in the book of Genesis. He breathes life, grace and understanding. They went out as people of life – not death!
6. So, the Text that we wrestle with today is very much part and parcel of John’s understanding. What is this ‘life’ and what does ‘abundantly’

mean? Perhaps we could explain it by saying 'the abundance of life'. Certainly, the Greek word for abundant (*Perissos*) has many descriptions and is used frequently in ancient tales, other words used are - surplus, excess, superfluous, extraordinarily, exceedingly... (you get the point).

7. But this is no recent question, the world (and many famous) have often sought the meaning and key to life. If it could be manufactured and bottled it would outvalue any known material. Truly however it is discerned only in the 'liminal' spaces of our lives. So often the world has witnessed charlatans and fraudsters fleecing people of their money and possessions claiming a formulaic solution for happiness. They are what Jesus referred to as 'the (one) who comes to steal, kill and destroy' (usually in the name of some [usually religiously sanctioned] cause).

8. But this takes us no closer to that which Jesus offers. All of us need to find our 'testament', our witness to the meaningfulness of life. We may hear many other voices but are they speaking life and resurrection to us? I would like to share three things that have been meaningful signposts to me, things wherein I find the exciting essence of life. Not that I have succeeded or that it is the same emphasis or wording for everyone but in them I hear 'my masters voice'.



➤ **Growing:** Like a tree planted in the ground that reaches both up into the wide wonder of the sky and the deep fecund (fruitful) depths of the ground, I rejoice to read and wonder about new things. The passage of Acts 2 describes people who had been steeped in the Jewish faith but are enabled to see things (the 'ah ha' moments of life) previously hidden. This growing community has also drawn strength and meaning from realising that they are not just sailing their own boats but are part of a greater 'movement' called the realm of God, i.e. they have a purpose, they are not just drifting in space and time but part of the immanence of God.

➤ **Loving:** One of the greatest causes of unhappiness's in and running through people's lives is a 'love deficit'. Now this is not easy to unearth with accuracy and many programs have tried with degrees of success. There are degrees, medications, organisations and

retreat centres by the millions around the world that seek to answer this very issue. Many people have had various negative narrative scripts written on their psyche during their childhood and young adult lives, that time when we construct the 'boxes' of our life – our values, understandings, assumptions that we use to assess and act in the world. I grew in a distorted world of boarding schools, bullies and battles. Someone once remarked that I had a well-balanced personality because 'I had chips on both of my shoulders!'

I am not ashamed to say that grace is a precious healing word to me.

➤ **Surrendering:** If we're honest we may well recognise something of the fearful nature of our individualistic lifestyles. We often hoard, preserve, exclude, defend, justify, excuse and accuse others. Reading the scriptures through the lens of this paradigm we may be astounded to see how often it forms the subtext of Jesus' teachings. The rich young ruler, the parable of the talents, the parable of the rich fool, Lazarus and 'Dives', the list is endless. The central thought is expressed in this counter cultural aphorism of Jesus: *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* There is freedom and relief in letting things go – the Prayer of Serenity for example is very much part of the success of the AA program.

9. I would like to conclude with some questions. How are you enjoying life as a whole? What is your description of an abundant life – is it equated with 'happiness'? What brings meaning to you? Do you have a chip or two on your shoulder? How does the Holy Spirit speak to you? Do you feel as if you are not appreciated? Have you tried to 'deserve' being loved? How important is grace to you?

## **The prayers of the people**

(Rev Norman Goreham)

Sisters and brothers in Christ,  
God invites us to bring our doubts and fears,  
our joys and concerns, our petitions and praise,  
and offer them for the earth and all its creatures.

Gladly therefore we pray:

Holy God,

you have called us to follow in the ways of your risen Son  
and care for those who are our companions,  
not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.

Seeking to be true friends of all,  
we therefore offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world.

Creator of the universe,  
you made this, our world, in beauty  
and you restore all things in glory  
through the victory of Jesus Christ.

We offer our prayers on behalf of the universe  
in which we are privileged to live  
and our neighbours with whom we share it.

We pray, therefore, that, wherever your image is still disfigured  
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,  
the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love and peace.

Guide us in the path of discipleship,  
so that, as you have blessed us,  
we may be a blessing for others,  
by our words and deeds  
bringing nearer the promise of your holy Realm.

Open our hearts to your power moving  
around us and between us and within us,  
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy,  
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,  
and in the healing of all that is broken.

Holy Shepherd,  
you know your sheep by name  
and lead us to safety through valleys of death.  
Guide us by your voice, through uncertain and anxious times.

We offer prayer for all who, at this time, are distressed or grieving  
as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic,  
for those dying, for the bereaved

and for all who work tirelessly in essential services,  
to keep our communities safe.

Give them courage, strength, endurance  
and the determination never to give up,  
until the shadows of these times have passed  
and we gain renewed confidence, gladness, hope and joy.

May we share in the risen life of your Son  
and, in every sorrow and trial of these times,  
be made anew and restored to that abundant life,  
the life in all its fulness you have promised us,  
forever freed to be your people.

Teach us to keep faith with those who first saw your risen Son and boldly  
proclaimed him. May the church's witness be as bold, our love as deep and  
our faith as certain.

We pray in the name of the same risen Christ, our Lord..

**Amen.**

(Taize Chant by St Thomas Music Group)

**Hymn 'Wisdom be our guide: wisdom as in Jesus'**

**(Hios 156)**

Wisdom be our guide:  
wisdom as in Jesus,  
strong through storm and crisis,  
turning terror's tide.

Wisdom be our wings:  
lift the human spirit,  
banish bomb and bullet,  
warlord posturing's.

*And with God's help,  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people  
will turn the world around,  
and with God's help.  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people  
will turn the world around.*

Wisdom be our ground:  
there new truths are growing,  
streams begin new flowing,

*And with God's help,  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people  
will turn the world around,  
and with God's help.  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people  
will turn the world around.*

Wisdom be our frame:  
common sense with vision,  
heart's own intuition  
giving love a name.

Wisdom be our light:  
lead us and illumine  
all that's fully human,  
simple, sane and right.

*And with God's help,  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people*



seams of gold are found.  
Wisdom be our friend:  
warn us of our danger,  
earth's appalling hunger,  
greed that has no end.

*will turn the world around,  
and with God's help.  
ordinary people,  
we ordinary people  
will turn the world around.*

*(Shirley Murray)*

### **Words of Blessing**

Fall in love with living  
wrestling with the chaos and the pain  
within ourselves and within the world.  
Join the celebration of life,  
dancing with the angels and the clowns.  
And may the God of peace and joy,  
Who is continually making all things new,  
Embrace you as a partner  
In the divine creating.

**Amen! May it be so!**

*(Joyce Boyce-Tillman, A World of Blessing. Benedictions from Every Continent and Many Cultures)*