



Western Fells Methodist Circuit

16 May 2021

**by
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A call to worship followed by some words of Jesus from today's Gospel reading to reassure us at the start of this service:

You who are passing through hard times: come!
You who need strength to support those who are suffering: come!
You who are full of happiness: come!
You who are burdened and busy: come!
Come; let us unite in worship of the one who offers us protection,
comfort and joy. (Taken from Roots)

I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. John 17:9

Jesus' disciples were moving into a time of change and uncertainty when He prayed for them. We are emerging from lockdown into a similar time when we don't know exactly what the future holds, and Jesus prays for us too as we continue to pray for one another. Our time of prayer begins with a traditional hymn of prayer, Father, hear the prayer we offer:

Hymn: StF 518

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would strike the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.

Love Maria Willis (1824–1908)

Prayer:

Gracious God,
set apart as your people yet together in your world,
we worship you as one.
Emboldened by your power,
protected by your promises and filled with your peace,
we worship you as one.

Upheld by your word,
inspired by your truth and named as your friends,
we worship you as one.
Keep us safe in the world.
Keep us praying for the world.
Keep us serving the world.
As one, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Pause and say the Lord's prayer at this point in whatever version you are comfortable with.

If you have a Bible to hand read John 17:6-19. A few verses pertinent to this service follow.

John 17 - Jesus Prays for His Disciples

9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Thoughts:

John is writing his Gospel at a time when the church was suffering severe hardship and persecution, and he is concerned that Jesus' followers remain united. The words themselves are from John's account of Jesus' prayer for His disciples just before his arrest. Jesus speaks to his Father of His deep concern for His disciples, and His desire to protect them. He asks that they may be one as He is one with the Father and that they may be protected in the uncertain times they face and made holy, set apart from the world's unbelief, by the truth about who Jesus is.

In these thoughts I am taking just one simple fact from the passage which I hope will encourage us: Jesus prayed for His disciples. If Jesus prayed for His disciples in uncertain times then surely He is praying for us at this time, after all how much more uncertain can our times become?

We are faced with uncertainty on many levels. As we emerge from lockdown again, for what we desperately hope is the last time, we are questioning so much. On a practical level - how will the reopening of our churches proceed? How many people will return? What will we do if, given social distancing, numbers are too great for the space available? When will we be able to sing? When and how can coffee mornings restart? What about face to face childrens' work? How do we balance physical church and online church?

Then on a spiritual and emotional, level how do we help our members, either exhausted after all their efforts during lockdown or on the verge of breaking after so much enforced isolation and loneliness, desperate for social interaction? How do we engage with those in our communities searching for meaning behind all that has gone on, perhaps doubting more than ever the existence of God? How do we reach out to the lost, the seeking and spiritually hungry around us? After all that has happened, as we emerge perhaps the biggest question is how do we now do church? And I am sure you can add your own questions to that list, it is far from exhaustive.

Emerging from lockdown throws up so many questions for us as churches and there are even more questions for our communities, our country and our world. Questions about the sharing of vaccines, vaccine passports, global travel and trade, economic recovery and support for the less advanced economies. That is without even beginning to think about the uncertainties that existed pre pandemic. Remember our concerns about Brexit, climate change, justice for the world's poor, asylum seekers, racial inequality, the LGBTQ+ community and so many others. How we need Jesus' prayers for us at this time and the prayers of each other, and that is without even beginning to consider the personal uncertainties which we are having to grapple with.

During this third lockdown at Egremont we have been sharing a thought, prayer, quotation or story for the day each morning. In the beginning during the dark days of January and February we looked for "Light in Lockdown", then as the days lengthened and the trials of the restrictions seemed harder

to contend with we thought about “Peace in Lockdown”, finally as churches prepare to open we have thought about “Journey through Lockdown”. This third series seems to have been the most challenging of all as we face our fears, concerns and uncertainties and more of the messages, of necessity, have been prayer or scripture based.

As many of us take a deep breath and move back into our churches for worship next Sunday the excitement and anticipation will be tinged with apprehension and differing concerns. Whether we eagerly return to worship in the building, decide we are not yet ready for such contact or are unable to attend, know that Jesus prays for us, that we pray for each other, that God watches over us and that the Holy Spirit is there to strengthen and empower us.

In the words of Corrie ten Boom Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.

Amen.

Prayer:

All-powerful God, who understands our needs before we think and speak, we bring our prayers before you:

for the hurting and the hurt;

for the loved and the loveless;

for the young and old;

for believers and non-believers;

for those certain of their faith and those who waver;

for the ill and those in pain and distress;

For the fearful and apprehensive;

for the dying;

for the grieving whose minds are bewildered and burdened by grief.

For ourselves and our churches as we move forward.

For the mission done in your name;

All-powerful God, surround each and every one with the circle of your protection and love.

Amen.

Hymn:

**We end the service with some of the words of a Stuart Townend hymn,
“With a Prayer”.**

**With a prayer You fed the hungry,
With a cry You stilled the storm;
With a look You had compassion
On the desperate and forlorn.
With a touch You healed the leper,
With a shout You raised the dead;
With a word expelled the demons,
With a blessing broke the bread.
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Captivate this heart of mine,
Till all I do
Speaks of You.**

A Celtic blessing as we move on into the future with all its uncertainties:

May the peace of God encircle you,
May the peace of Christ enfold you,
May the peace of the Spirit encompass you
This day and for evermore.

Amen

**(The prayers in this service have been adapted from those in Roots for
today.) CCLI 42627**