

The Vine at Home
January 3rd 2021
Second Sunday of Christmas – Year B

Call to worship

We are here to meet with God at the dawning of a new year.

In this moment,

We are connected to people of faith – those around us and those at home,
We are part of a community of saints that have worshipped for generations,
We are joined with others across the world choosing to do the same,
We are here in this special space where God has been for all time.

Let us worship together in the knowledge of Gods eternal presence with us wherever we are.

Amen.¹

Hymn: 156 STF – From the breaking of the dawn

Opening Prayers

Father God, as we prepare for worship today, let us be filled with joy to praise your name.

We do not ask you to be with us for we know you are with us always.

Neither do we ask for your blessing, for you are more ready to bless than we are to receive.

[Pause]

We pray you open our ears so we may hear your voice and open our minds to receive your word.

We pray that you would give us courage and strength to fulfil your will and purpose in the communities in which you place us.

[Pause]

Amen.²

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." ⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." ¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

Ephesians 1:3-14 - Spiritual Blessings in Christ

¹ Call to Worship written by Jane Bingham

² Opening prayers written by Ruth Hall

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

John 1:10-18

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection comes to us from James Morley, co-superintendent of the Sheffield Methodist Circuit.

Good news for God's people

Our readings this week, which happens to be the day designated Covenant Sunday in the Methodist calendar, tell us about God's faithful promise to God's creation. Our Old Testament readings from the prophet Jeremiah and Psalm 147 joyfully proclaim that God's dispersed people of Israel will be gathered back together and that this will be done in such an abundantly generous and inclusive way – for those living with conditions that made them outcast or vulnerable, for all genders and all ages. So much so that mourning will turn to joy and life will be a like a well-watered garden. A promise for God's people of life – and life in all its fullness.

I wonder if we have experienced a sense of that life after a time of suffering? Or does it sound like something we'll only experience the other side of heaven?

Good news for all people and all creation

The New Testament reading from Paul's letter to the followers of Jesus' Way in Ephesus makes the inclusive image from the Old Testament even more far reaching by highlighting that Gentiles (non-Jews) are also heirs to God's promises. Through the dying and rising of Jesus, all humanity can become children of God. That includes you and me. We can choose Christ because the love of God in Christ first chose us (Ephesians 1:11) In fact, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, makes clear that God's ultimate plan is to bring all of heaven and earth together (vv. 9-10).

How does it feel to know you are chosen and sealed by God (Ephesians 1:11; 13)?

What does God's ultimate plan to bring heaven and earth together mean for you in terms of how you seek to care for God's creation?

Good news through us?

John's gospel helps us in continuing to remember the message of Christmas – Immanuel, God is with each and every one of us (the Logos or self-revealed Word of God, v. 14) and, like Ephesians, reminds us that all

humanity can be children of God (v. 12). Today's readings have shown us that, in the Old Testament, 'The law was given through Moses'; in the New Testament, 'Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (v. 17). But, if the message of Christmas really is to be 'joy to (*all*) the world' – in the bringing together of heaven and earth – then we have a challenge because, 'No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known' (v18).

2,000+ years on, people are unable to physically see Jesus. So, God call us – through our words and deeds – to reveal the Christ we know and have experienced so that others might come to see him too. Amen.

A spoken word piece (Poem) by James Morley

So, before I finish...

I'd like a word with you.

A word in your ear.

Grease, is the word.

The word is - he said, that she said, that they said, that you said...

The word is - I'm right and you're wrong...

The word is - no. Don't. Won't. Shan't. Can't. Daren't...

The word is - why? Why?...

The words will never hurt me - you're so gay; that's mental; peado.

The words will never hurt me.

The word is - whispered; in fear - scrounger; gyppo; Muslim; go home.

Ssshhhh - don't tell; scared.

The word is - on my lips.

The word is - on the tip of my tongue; but fading; with age.

I've got a word for you - a word on your heart.

The Word is - grace, is the Word.

The Word is - misheard; misunderstood; lost in translation; deliberately distorted.

The Word is - what you want to hear; need to hear; don't want to hear.

The Word is - in the line from that song; that poem; that feeling when you heard that song, that poem; when you saw that view.

The Word was - there; in the beginning; brooding over the water.

The Word is - life ; or is just an echo?

The Word is - justice; joy; love; peace.

The Word is - clothes; shelter; food and drink; freedom; wholeness...

The Word was - here.

The Word is - coming.

The Word is here.

The Word is - among us; whispering; shouting; laughing; crying.

The Word is - within us; breathing; yearning to be spoken; needing to be heard.

You can hear the Word; see the Word; Feel the Word; taste the Word; know the Word.

The Word is - one of us.

The Word is - all of us.³

Prayers of intercession

Father God, who created a world of welcome and plenty we pray for those in our world who are in need, held in love in your name.

God of compassion, we pray for the homeless and those with no permanent address. As we thank you for your continual provision in our lives, may we be generous to those in need.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of hope, we pray for refugees and migrants. We hold those who are escaping persecution and exploitation up to you. We remember especially those fleeing Syria and all those driven from their homes by civil war. Help us to be a compassionate people for their plight and lead us to seek justice for those affected.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of justice, we pray for those in society that have fallen through the welfare safety net. May those in authority be driven to address state benefits and the housing crisis within this country.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of wisdom, we ask you to bless our elected leaders. Help them to be wise, strengthening them to lead with integrity and compassion for the benefit of all, rejecting the voices of those who seek only personal gain.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We ask these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.⁴

Hymn: 547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Blessing

Go from this place, and bring good news to those who need it.

Rise from this moment, and take with you the hope of a new year dawning.

Awake from this worship, head out into this New Year, challenged and inspired to change the world, in Jesus' name.

Amen.⁵

³ Reflection written by James Morley

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⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Ruth Hall

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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