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ORDINARY 16A

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A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

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Opening prayers

Everything God,

We know throughout the ages your people have cried out to you in sadness, grief and despair.

We come to you now to do the same.

Eternal God,

We are here, and you meet us where we are – wherever we find ourselves.

May we feel your love that stretches beyond borders and boundaries, giving hope even in the darkest of times. Unite us and remind us of your constant presence, so that we may face this day and the coming week with positivity, compassion and patience.

In Jesus' name, we pray,

Amen.¹

We say the Lord's Prayer

Hymn: 367 StF – When I was lost you came and rescued me - [YouTube](#)

Readings: Genesis 28:10-19a - [Click for Reading](#)

Romans 8:12-25 - [Click for Reading](#)

Reflection on the reading

Emma Dobson helps us to reflect on our first two readings

This year has been different to anything any of us have lived through, and it feels like it's changing all the time. We've had to get used to so many new routines: different ways of learning, being home more than usual, so many new things.

What's been new for you?

What are you enjoying?

What's been difficult about it?

Lots of people have had their lives completely changed, and this year has been a really sad and scary one for people in lots of ways. Spending time away from family, and having to learn to do jobs differently, amongst so many other things. Some people might have lost their jobs. It's been a tough time, and I'm really glad that so many people have pulled together to help each other.

¹ Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson and Jane Bingham

In our reading from Genesis we hear about a man called Jacob. He's taking a long, hard journey, and there have been very challenging moments along the way. One evening, he's on his way to the next place. He notices it's getting dark, so he stops to rest for the night. He takes a stone to put under his head, and goes to sleep. He has a dream and, in that dream, God says, 'I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are now sleeping. [...] All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. I am with you, and I will protect you everywhere you go. And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

This story is meant to remind us that God keeps promises. Jacob was promised a safe place to live, a long line of children and grandchildren, and God's constant loving presence in his life. Maybe Jacob was scared these things weren't going to happen anymore. Maybe the challenges that Jacob had faced, made him doubt his journey was worth anything. Maybe he wondered if God was still there, or if he'd been forgotten, left behind.

All throughout the Bible, and in so many ways, we're reminded of God keeping God's promises, through stories and other people's experiences. I think the biggest and best promise of all is this one: God makes promises to be with us no matter what. To love us, no matter what.

In Psalm 139, which is the psalm chosen for this week, the author is rejoicing in how well God knows them, and it's a great reminder for us. It says:

Lord, even before I say a word, you already know what I am going to say.
You are all around me—in front and in back. You have put your hand on me.
Your knowledge is amazing to me. It is more than I can understand.

Then, in Romans chapter 8, Paul tells the people in Rome that they should never give up hope. They're going through a tough time, just like Jacob, and just like many of us right now. Paul tells them to be patient and reminds them that Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection is a sign that God loves them more than they can ever truly understand. He tells them that all they need to do is wait, and have a little hope, and all will eventually be well.²

Reading - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 - [Click for Reading](#)

Reflection

In his book *Matthew for Everyone*, Bishop Tom Wright helps us to understand this passage from Matthew.

“The Parable in our reading from Matthew (like so many parables) is all about waiting; and waiting is what we all find difficult. The farmer waits for the harvest-time, watching in frustration as the weeds grow alongside the wheat. Not only the farmer, but also the birds, wait for the tiny mustard seed to grow into a large shrub. The woman baking bread must wait for the leaven to spread its way through the dough until the whole loaf is mysteriously leavened. And that's what God's kingdom is like.

Jesus' followers, of course, didn't want to wait. If the kingdom was really present where Jesus was, coming to birth in what he was doing, then they wanted the whole thing at once.

² Reflection written by Emma Dobson

They weren't interested in God's timetable. They had one of their own, and expected God to conform to it.

Notice, in particular, what the servants say about the weeds. They want to go straight away into the cornfield and root out the weeds. The farmer restrains them, because life is never that simple. In their zeal to rid the field of weeds they are very likely to pull up some wheat as well....

...At the heart of the parable of the weeds and the wheat is the note of patience – not just the patience of the servants who have to wait and watch, but the patience of God himself. God didn't and doesn't enjoy the sight of a cornfield with weeds all over the place. But nor does he relish the thought of declaring harvest-time too soon, and destroying wheat along with weeds....

... We who live after Calvary and Easter know that God did indeed act suddenly and dramatically at that moment. When today we long for God to act, to put the world to rights, we must remind ourselves that he has already done so, and that what we are now awaiting is the full outworking of those events. We wait with patience, not like people in a dark room wondering if anyone will ever come with a lighted candle, but like people in early morning who know that the sun has arisen and are now waiting for the full brightness of midday.³

Our readings today are to encourage us to keep focused on God and to live in hope. Through Jesus, God has shown us the way, even if the path is sometimes unclear.

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you (Jesus said): Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."⁴

Let us pray,

Thank you God, for your promises, which are completely unbreakable. We thank you that you are always there for us, even when times are hard and it's difficult to feel you close. Help us always to hold onto your promises, remembering the hope they bring us.

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁵

³ Taken from Matthew for Everyone – by Tom Wright

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20 – The Message by Eugene H Peterson

⁵ Prayer by Emma Dobson

Prayers of intercession

Let us be still for a moment, and draw to mind all those who are in our thoughts and prayers – perhaps close to home, or further afield...

[Pause]

Gracious God, come by your Spirit.

God sooth our aching groaning souls:

Laden by illness and fear resulting from a virus that we weren't expecting;

Debilitated by our inability to understand and our anxiety about our whole way of life.

God poke our aching groaning souls and prompt us to remember all those who have dealt with illness and fear for decades in places that have almost been forgotten. Let our own distress imprint the need of others and stop our selfishness.

God help our aching groaning souls:

troubled by anxiety and loneliness, facing the absence of touch and love. All the greetings of society absent and the sudden realisation that all we know seems to have been stolen and disrupted

God press our aching groaning souls to action for lives have been disrupted and broken by war and famine and still we see people as other. Let our own discomfort prompt us to be more generous and loving to those facing displacement.

God bless our aching groaning souls and teach us again how to trust in you.

Grant us forgiveness and love in equal measure for we know that you are a God that offers life in all its fullness .

May we be a bridge of that promise to others. Amen.⁶

Hymn – 465 STF – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

We step out into a world, where the weeds of evil will try to choke out our life and light – Lord, step out with us. Amongst the confusion, amongst the fear, amongst the isolation, show us how to build a world in which love reigns.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Jane Bingham

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker