**26th January 2024**

**Call to worship**

Jesus, you came to bring good news to all,
**help us to listen to you.**
Jesus, you came to release the captives,
**help us to follow your example.**
Jesus, you came to release the oppressed,
**help us to walk in your ways.**
**Amen.**

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God,
thank you that all are welcome in your presence
and all have a part to play.
Speak to us today and show us how to live
as the body of Christ in this community,
bringing good news to all.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Lord, as your Church, we gather together to worship you,
in person and online.
You are the source of all being,
the one who gives love and unites us,
the one who gives all for our sake.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Almighty God, we are a mixed-up bunch of people,
but all unique and special and with a common purpose
– to worship you.
You are the bringer of good news,
and the example of what true love is, giving yourself for our sakes.
You are the meaning and motivation for how we choose to live.
You are light in the darkness that draws us on.
You are the whisper in the wind and the shout in the thunder.
You are the Spirit that warms our hearts.
We worship and adore you.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

All too easily we stray from doing what is good
and right in your sight.
God, f**orgive us.**
All too easily we find prejudice creeping into our lives.
God, **forgive us.**
All too easily we become greedy and unwilling
to share with those who have less.
God, **forgive us.**
All too easily we neglect the needs of the earth,
animals and humans.
God, **forgive us.**
All too easily we forget the path you set before us.
God,**forgive us.**
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God forgives all who confess.
Let us know we are forgiven,
and go and live the Good News.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

We give thanks, O God, for the magnificence of your creation,
its vibrant diversity, its provision for us.
We give thanks for the rich cultures of the world
and all they add to the mix of life.
We give thanks for each other,
with all our differences and quirky ways.
We give thanks for your recorded Word through the ages.
We give thanks for the life of Jesus, supreme example to us
of the outworking of your love.
We give thanks for the outpouring of your Holy Spirit
to comfort, warm and guide us.
We give thanks for all this good news,
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
**Amen.**

**Luke 4:14–21; 1 Cor 12.12-31a**

After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness he returns to Galilee to his home turf, in the power of the Spirit, so Luke writes in his gospel. He turns up in the synagogue and stands up to read from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus unrolled the scroll and says

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
    because he has anointed me
    to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
    and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
**19**    to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

Anointed… Announce, release, recovery, set free.

This is Jesus setting out on his ministry priorities. Its his Vision statement., it’s his mission, It is the inauguration speech of Jesus.

Compare that with the inauguration speech of Donald Trump as he became the 47th President of the United States.

This going to be the golden era of the America

We are going to put America first

We are going to send back the illegal immigrants and seal the border. We are going to drill baby drill and get more oil and gas from places like Alaska and rip up any agreements on climate crisis. We don’t do diversity, nor do we do equity – none of that woke stuff here. I’ve got all my billionaire pals around me because what Americans want is wealth and success – look at us.

Franklin Graham and some other Christian leaders have been sucking up to him and proclaiming that God had saved him from the assassins bullet to make America Great again. Trump has bought into that.

I did say back when it happened ‘did God do tricks with bullets and save his life?’ If God did, then that sign could go one of two ways. It could make him humble and reflect on his close shave with mortality and make him change his ways -often people do when they have a close shave with death – what have I been doing with my life – how do I change my life, what is the purpose to it anyway – often they become more loving and generous and sacrificial – they realise you can’t take your wealth with you, they realise that people matter, that above all else love matters and God is love , the source of all love.

But then I said the other direction this could go is that Trump thinks he’s invincible and the Messiah and he can do what he likes because God has got his back.

More humble, loving and generous – or more arrogant and dangerous? Sadly and predictably, it seems to have gone down the latter path.

The Lord brings down rulers from their throne and lifts up the humble, so sang Mary in her Magnificat. We leave it with God to deal with Trump. God save America.

The Bishop of Washington certainly had a go at the National prayer service on Tuesday. Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's simply asked him to show mercy and "compassion" for marginalized communities.

"I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared. There are gay, lesbian, transgender children, Democratic, Republican, independent families — some who fear for their lives," the reverend said.

"The people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings, who labour in poultry farms and meatpacking plants, who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shifts in hospitals — they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals," she added.

She also pointed out that migrants are workers who "pay taxes" and are "faithful members" of American churches, mosques, synagogues, and mosques.

The fact that these incredibly reasonable and empathetic words caused Trump to fly off the handle in the middle of the night says far more about him than it does the Bishop. Her words were chewing at him all day, eating away at his insecurities about himself, until finally he couldn't take it anymore

He called her "not compelling or smart" and "nasty" before really digging in.

"She brought her church into the World of politics in a very ungracious way. "She failed to mention the large number of illegal migrants that came into our Country and killed people. Many were deposited from jails and mental institutions," Trump went on.

"It is a giant crime wave that is taking place in the USA. Apart from her inappropriate statements, the service was a very boring and uninspiring one. She is not very good at her job! She and her church owe the public an apology!" he wrote. This is the supposed "Christian" president that Evangelicals flocked to support...

Boris Johnson writing in the Daily Mail said that  Never mind whether or not he actually touched that Bible as he said his promises. At 12.01pm EST, the invisible pulse of power surged from the battered volume into his hand and I realised how the wokerati had tried to stop the event from happening,...

The war on woke has begun.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines wokery as

**a way of referring to the**[**acts**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/act)**and**[**opinions**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/opinion)**of**[**people**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/people)**who are**[**especially**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/especially)[**aware**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/aware)**of**[**social**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social)[**problems**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/problem)**such as**[**racism**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/racism)**and**[**inequality**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/inequality)**, used by**[**people**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/people)**who**[**think**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/think)**these**[**acts**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/act)**and**[**opinions**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/opinion)**have gone too**[**far**](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/far)**:**

Was Jesus woke? There’s a good discussion starter.

    to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
    and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
**19**    to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

MMM. Sounds like it you know. He was dangerously inclusive and challenged the privileges and attitudes of his day. He went out of his way to help the poor and marginalised. Yet he didn’t do it in any self-righteous way which can be a shadow side of today’s wokery – who is more righteous /virtue signalling and who is cancelled because they don’t have the right attitude: if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. But the priorities of Jesus were to announce good news to the poor, to release, recovery, set free….

And when the church starts getting involved in these issues – what do people say? You’re going too far. You are bringing the church into the world of politics!

But if you have been filled with the Spirit of Jesus – you can’t help it. The Spirit compels me.

It is vital that our lives speak of the good news we have received in Jesus Christ. St Francis of Assisi once said, ‘we should preach the good news of the gospel all day long – and if necessary, use words!

As important as it is to live a holy life as a witness to Christ, it is also essential that we do our best to proclaim the word of God in words, because people need to hear the story of salvation.

Martin Niemoller, a German Lutheran bishop, was called upon to negotiate with Hitler during World War II, in the attempt to save the Church of Germany from being closed down by the Nazi dictator.

Toward the end of his life, Niemoller told of a recurring dream that he had in which he saw Hitler standing before Jesus on Judgement day. Jesus got off his throne, put his arm around Hitler, and asked, Adolph! Why did you do the ugly, evil things you did? Why were you so cruel?’

Hitler, with his head bent low, simply answered, ‘because nobody ever told me how much You loved me.’

The bishop reported that at this point in the dream he would wake up in a cold sweat, remembering that during the many, many meetings he had with Hitler, he had never once said, ‘by the way Fuhrer, Jesus loves you! He loves you more than you’ll ever know. He loved you so much that He died for you. Do you know that?’

So often we fail to bear witness, and hence lose precious opportunities to alter the course of history.

Jesus preached a short sermon. But what a sermon! He clearly denotes the kind of ministry he came to pursue. It is to be a ministry to the poor and outcast, the blind and unaffirmed.

Jesus brings the good news of God – announce, release, recovery, setting free. How might Isaiah’s words shape our understanding and practice of mission? In what ways do our words and lives proclaim the good news of God’s ways?

* Announce, release, recovery, set free.

It is every now and again good to consider what we are about as a church. Church mission statements like company and business mission statements can often be treated with a dose of cynicism – they get put up on walls and at the top of headed notepaper and then completely ignored. Which is why they do need looking at every now and again to get your organisation thinking through once more, ‘what are you about?’

Before the pandemic hit we put together a Vision document for the next ten years: Vision 2030 and we revised our mission statement

To what it is now:

Inspired by Jesus, walking his way of radical love, to make a difference in this world.

Perhaps we need to compare both of them to **Luke 4:18–19**. Where are the points of connection between the two?

Can we identify the programs in which our church is actively engaged which would fit into the works identified in these verses and Jesus’ teaching of God’s ways?

Announce, release, recovery, set free.

The “year of God’s favour” at the end of these words from Isaiah refers to Israel’s tradition of Jubilee. Leviticus 25 describes the elements of Jubilee. It was to be observed every fifty years. Jubilee called for the return of all lands to their original owners. It provided for the freedom of indentured servants.

There is no evidence that Israel ever fully kept a year of Jubilee. You can imagine getting to year 49 and the wealthy owners thinking mmm, next year we lose all this and go back to being equals with everyone else – must come up with a plan to scupper this idea. Yet it remained a promise and hope and a scripture – counted as God’s will.

Now, in Luke’s account, Jesus begins his public ministry by announcing after this reading from Isaiah: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Was Jubilee to come at last?

Well of course such a claim would upset those who owned the land at present and who were comfortable in the status quo. You can start to see that the manifesto of Jesus is not going to be universally welcomed. Next week we’ll see the reaction to Jesus and why this reading and his claim to fulfil it caused unrest in Nazareth and nearly cost Jesus his life.

Announce, release, recovery, set free.

Jesus was moving in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is called the empowerer, the guide, the comforter. In this week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Spirit is also the one who unites us – we are one in the Spirit.

When you read of the Spirit’s work in scripture the Spirit of God prompts us into mission – places on our hearts burdens and passions for certain things – promptings to get involved in certain actions. Is the Spirit of God upon you? Where is the Spirit of God prompting you? Try not to resist – because actually that is where you will probably find your deepest fulfilment. Much better to be doing stuff that deep down is where your gifts and your passion and drive lies – where you are a round peg in a round hole. Often we end up in jobs that are not really us and sometimes we get stuck there.

Sometimes we exercise our Godly anointing in our work – that is where God has called us and uses us.

In the passage from 1 Corinthians 12 Paul continues his teaching on how the Spirit of God gives gifts to all the members of the church and specifically he addresses what it means for this community to function with mutual care and respect. Not seeing certain gifts as being inferior or superior but all needed for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church – all the gifts needed for the common good.

There is a beautiful, profound simplicity in Paul’s use of the body as an image of what it means to be part of the body of Christ. We are all equally important.

Some of us may already know that we’re important. Maybe we have had a childhood and education that helped us to be confident of our own worth. Perhaps we have recognised status in our communities, as a leader, an influencer, a minister, or whatever it is.

But not everyone feels like that. Many of us may feel unimportant and not particularly valuable. Perhaps we are young, queer, black, poor, disabled, female, mentally distressed. Maybe we are homeless, or refugees. Perhaps we struggle with addiction, or have been abused or imprisoned.

How extraordinary and powerful it is, then, to hear Paul’s confident assertion that we are actually indispensable, and will be treated with greater honour and respect! How affirming and strengthening does that feel?

Where is the Spirit on you? Where are you being prompted to be part of the agenda of Jesus? In our daily life, in your work or vocation, in the church.

Announce, release, recovery, set free.

May God fill us with the Spirit and help us in worship and service to use the many gifts we have been given.

**Prayers of intercession**

*Thuma mina, thuma mina (Send me Jesus, send me Jesus) could be sung at the end of the intercessions as a reflective act of commitment. Find it at*[*Voices Together #834*](https://hymnary.org/hymn/VT2020/834)*or at*[*https://hymnary.org/text/thuma\_mina\_thuma\_mina*](https://hymnary.org/text/thuma_mina_thuma_mina)

***Also suitable:***[***Sent by the Lord***](https://hymnary.org/text/sent_by_the_lord_am_i_my_hands_are)*Sent by the Lord am I*
*my hands are ready now;*
*To make this world a place*
*in which the kingdom comes.*

Let us pray to the Lord,
asking for the help we need to live the good news in a broken world.

Even though answering the call to justice and to peace asks for all we have;
even though life and its demands consume much of our energy;
even though we are anxious about the future:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though living for you at home, at school and at work is often challenging;
even though standing up for what we believe in a sceptical world is tough;
even though we fall short of what you ask of us and we let people down:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though the world is troubled and building the kingdom relies on our small offering of faith;
even though peace is so fragile and hope is hard to come by - remembering especially the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the West Bank where fresh violence has broken out;
even though we often lose our way and fail to listen, we can begin again:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though the pendulum of popular opinion is swinging, politics seems volatile and wise and empathetic leadership seems in short supply;
even when society’s problems are deep-seated and complex, taking all available reserves of courage and commitment to resolve;
even though the failure to provide answers to social and economic woes hurts people and places some of the burden of need on our church communities;
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though the world is so often full of suffering;
even though our hearts are troubled by our own pain and by the suffering of others - remembering today those we know who are going through illness, redundancy or life changing events;
even though in our distress we do not see the signs of God’s presence with us:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though in the UK the threats of extremism and radicalisation are rising and the surge of online violence seems unstoppable;
even though we are far from the inclusive and equal society
that enables everyone to flourish;
even though good news for the poor and freedom and healing for all will require our time, love, persistence and practical compassion:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though, as Trump begins his presidency, we are alarmed by the flurry of hardline policies including deportation threats against immigrants; withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement and from the World Health Organisation;
even though there is much more to do to make our church communities places of welcome and safety;
even though we often feel powerless against choices that shape all our lives:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though living memory of the holocaust is fading;
even though the lessons of history are ignored and lives are still scarred by genocide and persecution and we are called to tell the story of this pain
to change hearts and minds;
even though the light we can offer in the midst of the darkness of prejudice
seems so small:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Even though we feel small and insignificant, the good news is for us to share;
even though the need around us is great; our hands are empty and our courage fails;
even though the gifts we offer seem inadequate:
the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So, with confidence we pray:
**All: send us, lead us, and fill us with your Spirit.**

Thuma mina, thuma mina…

Send me Jesus, send me Jesus…

**A prayer for all ages together**

Dear Jesus, thank you that you came
to make a difference in the world.
Thank you that you have chosen to make us your body,
the way you work in the world around us.
Show us the gifts and abilities that we could use this week
to be good news in this community.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Lord Jesus, you were anointed to bring new sight,
freedom and good news to all people.
Help us to share this good news of your love and care
with everyone we meet in the week ahead.
**Amen.**