

A Month of Sundays

August 2024



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Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Sunday 4th August 2024

Call to worship

God sees our hearts and loves us more than we will ever know.
Let us come to him trusting in his mercy and his care.

Amen.

Bible reading: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

Nathan Rebukes David

12 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴ "Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your

own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹ "This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"

¹³ Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

A prayer of confession

Lord, we like to live in denial of our sins and shortcomings;
we paper over the cracks of our misdemeanours,
refusing to accept what we are and what we have done.
But you confront us and hold a mirror to our souls;
our self-image cracks beneath the truth of your gaze.
Forgive us, we pray; help us to examine ourselves
and know our hearts, as you do.

Amen.

Hymn Stf 489: All I Once Held Dear

1 All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.
*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

2 Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

3 Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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Prayers of intercession

Lord, we come to you, the Great Provider, with all our cares and our needs, trusting that you will provide for us. So often we tell you what we *want* rather than asking for what we really need. Teach us to listen to your voice so that our wills join with yours and so that our asking becomes harmonious with what you want for us. As we lay our petitions before you, remind us that what you give us is what we truly need even if we don't always recognise it.

Jesus, bread of life,
help us to trust in your provision for us.

We commend our athletes to you, Lord, as they compete in the Olympic Games. We thank you for the joy that sport brings to so many, whether watching or participating. We pray that all the athletes will be able to bring their best to their competitions. We pray for the witness of those

who are Christians, that their love for you will have an impact for good on those around them.

Jesus, bread of life,

help us to trust in your provision for us.

We pray for our school children during this summer holiday season. We ask your peace for those awaiting exam results. We pray for those saddened by not being able to say a proper goodbye as they left school. We pray that families will have opportunities to have rest and relaxation and recharge their batteries in the sunshine. We pray for safety for all those on holiday and for your comfort for the families of those who have lost their lives in the recent heatwave. Lord, we particularly bring to you those children for whom the long summer holidays means going hungry and maybe living in fear of someone at home. We ask that you will provide nourishment and safe spaces for them.

Jesus, bread of life,

help us to trust in your provision for us.

We thank you, Lord, for this church community and the nourishment we find by spending time here with you. Fill us with your Spirit as we praise you so that we may go out from here enriched and ready to serve you in the wider world. Help us to encourage one another and build each other up, that this may be a place of affirmation, acceptance and love. We pray for our leaders, both locally and nationally, asking that you will provide them with wisdom, patience and grace.

Jesus, bread of life,

help us to trust in your provision for us.

Lord, we offer ourselves to you as we prepare to go forward into the coming week. We pause in the stillness now to think of the places we will go to and name some of the people we will meet. We offer any potentially difficult situations up to you, asking for your courage to face them. Teach us not to take your gifts for granted, but instead to keep our eyes fixed on you. Draw us constantly back to you to find the energy, strength and refreshment that we need for our daily living.

Jesus, bread of life,

help us to trust in your provision for us,

**to feed on you and draw our strength from you,
and help us to be truly blessed by the nourishment you give us.
Amen.**

Reflection

‘Was that me?’ If you have photos of yourself from a long time ago (preferably more than 10 years but the longer the better) project or hold them up/pass them round. Often when we see old photos of ourselves, our reaction may be, ‘Did I really look like that?’ Whether it’s about hairstyle (or amount of hair for some of us) or fashion sense, it can be instructive to reflect on how much has changed. Some changes are unavoidable, some are positive. Others can be more challenging to think about. Have we given up on dreams that we had? Resigned ourselves to the world being less like we’d hoped? Are we less passionate about things that had seemed so important when we were younger?

King David was ruling over Israel because God had chosen someone who seemed insignificant but who worshipped with a pure heart. He had seen numerous battles won because God was with him. Now, as king, he had stopped leading his people in battle and had acted in a way that, in the past, would have been unthinkable. He had not only committed adultery but then had someone murdered to cover up his crimes.

Nathan’s story of a poor man looking after a lone lamb would have cut to the heart of the shepherd boy David once was. He hears how the rich man who has a whole flock chooses to take the poor man’s lamb rather than feed visitors with one of his own sheep. David is incensed. He is quick to judge and pronounces sentence on the rich man in Nathan’s story. Nathan’s words ‘You are the man’ are the equivalent of showing David a photo of when he was a boy, a time when nothing mattered but protecting the sheep in his care and singing psalms to God. David is confronted by how much he has changed; how far he has moved from the boy God called so many years before, ‘A man after his own heart’ (1 Samuel 13:14).

If David can fall so far, we should be careful to reflect on whether our love for God and the standards by which we live have changed since we first began that journey. It is better for us to look back today, allow God

to show us any areas where our passion for him has slipped, than to need God to confront us as Nathan confronted David. Nathan's final words to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die' show that God is not looking to condemn us, but to release us from guilt and the fear of being found out. God knows all that we have done and stands ready to forgive us and lead us into a life filled with the first love we had for Jesus all over again.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Holy Lord, you are just and true. We receive your forgiveness and carry it with us this week. Give us courage to confront those in power who have forgotten to act with your love and care. Inspire us to speak in a way that will help them to hear your voice and live according to your love.

Amen.

Sunday 11th August 2024

Call to worship

In a world where so many people are driven by revenge, pain and hurt, we gather today to reflect on our own actions, to receive forgiveness, and to pray for peace.

Amen.

Bible reading: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

⁵The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

⁶David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷There Israel’s troops were routed by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. ⁸The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

⁹Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

¹⁵And ten of Joab’s armour-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

³¹Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

³²The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

³³ The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Reflection

As a child, I was desperate to own a Rubik’s Cube and was thrilled to receive one as a Christmas gift. I spent a day making small changes to the cube and then ‘solving’ it back to its original state, where every side of the cube is a different colour. It didn’t take long, however, before I changed too much! I was over-confident and spun it through too many twists and turns. However hard I tried, I couldn’t get it back to its original state. I had no one to blame but myself and I was devastated. I would love to say I persevered, learned how the cube works and returned it to its ‘perfect’ state, but the truth is it went into a cupboard where I wouldn’t see it or be shamed by it anymore. I even considered unpeeling the coloured stickers and gluing them back on in the ‘right’ way or taking the cube apart, but ultimately I just gave up on it.

David is reaping the consequences of his earlier mistakes as his children fight to succeed him. He wants things to go back to how they were – to restore his relationship with Absalom – but he can’t. He asks his generals to spare Absalom but this is a fight for the kingdom, where the losing side are rarely treated mercifully. So Joab’s armour bearers make certain of Absalom’s defeat when they get the chance.

Some things are beyond our power but that doesn’t mean hiding away from them. David’s grief at his son’s death is natural and without it he would not be human, but he clearly wishes he could do things over again. He can’t – and now he will need to live with what has happened. We have all made mistakes in life, some of which have consequences that we are still bearing today. We can’t undo what has been done. God is not punishing us. The consequence of God giving us free will is that he can’t protect us from the results of our own decisions. God is, however, right there with us, in the midst of all our grief and anger and regret. As we turn back to God we receive forgiveness, wisdom from the

experience and the certain hope that God will be with us in the future, helping us as we try to follow him more closely.

Hymn StF 355: Jesus, lover of my soul

- 1 Jesus, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the nearer waters roll,
while the tempest still is high ;
hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
till the storm of life is past ;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last !

- 2 Other refuge have I none,
hangs my helpless soul on thee ;
leave, ah, leave me not alone,
still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed,
all my help from thee I bring ;
cover my defenceless head
with the shadow of thy wing.

- 3 Thou, O Christ, art all I want ;
more than all in thee I find ;
raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy name,
I am all unrighteousness ;
false and full of sin I am,
thou art full of truth and grace.

- 4 Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cover all my sin ;
let the healing streams abound,
make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art ;
freely let me take of thee ;
spring thou up within my heart,
rise to all eternity.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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Prayers of intercession

This week, as we pray for other people, let us ask God to help us see them from his perspective, rather than making assumptions.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,

help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.

Lord, we lift to you our world leaders. It is so easy to be critical of them, to believe what we read in the papers or on social media rather than seeing them as people just like us with needs like ours. In an increasingly unstable world we ask you to give them wisdom and integrity. Help them to put the needs of their country before their own desires. We pause for a moment of silence now, as we try to imagine what it must be like to walk in their shoes.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,

help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.

We pray for countries at war or suffering long periods of unrest, particularly Afghanistan and the Middle East. It's so easy for people to take sides and fight rather than try and see the world from the perspective of others. We pray that a new desire to love and treasure others may sweep this planet, bringing in a new reign of peace.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,

help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.

We come before you, Lord, in sorrow that so many people in our world are abused or neglected because of their race, colour or gender. We ask your forgiveness for any part we have played in preventing your world from being a place of harmony and stability. We lift up the millions of refugees fleeing unsafe homes. We pray for the migrants trying to cross the channel and we pray too for those who exploit them. We ask you to give strength and courage to all those fighting for justice in our world. We ask you to give us all the eyes to see everyone as made in your image with equal worth.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,

help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.

Finally, Lord, we commit to you those who live around us. We picture them in our minds now as we bring them to you for blessing: our friends, our neighbours, the people who walk their dogs past our house, those we say 'hi' to in the street or at the station or on the bus but don't know their names. We pray for those who live behind closed doors that we never see, those we used to spend time with who, for whatever reason, we don't see anymore. And we pray for those whom we avoid... Lord, you know them all by name and we thank you for each of them and for the way they touch our lives. Give us the grace to be good neighbours, willing to go the extra mile for all these people who are, underneath it all, just the same as us.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,
help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.

Help us to serve one another
because we are all made in your image.

Help us to bring your love to everyone we meet this week.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the freedom you give us. Guide us in the week to come. Through our actions, may we share your love and kindness and draw people closer to you. When we make mistakes, help us to make amends quickly so your grace is still seen. We give this week to you and ask that your will would be done. **Amen.**

Sunday 18th August 2024

A gathering prayer

Lord of all, you know our hearts, our hopes and our fears.
Please give us your wisdom to know what is best and to serve you and those around us as best we can.

Amen.

Hymn Stf 545: Be thou my vision

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art ;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be ;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight ;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might ;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower :
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise :
be thou mine inheritance now and always ;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart :
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won ;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century

translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)
versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (*alt.*)

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A prayer of adoration

God, who is wise:

we worship and adore you!

God, whose ways are so far above ours:

we worship and adore you!

God, whose Spirit flows through all things:

we worship and adore you!

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Bible reading: 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

¹⁰ Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. ¹¹ He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

³ Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

⁴ The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

⁶ Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷ “Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for

yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honour—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”

Reflection

From childhood, I have played the game of ‘What would you do if you found a magic lamp?’ I remember when everyone realised you could wish for more wishes (until the genie in Aladdin told us that was out of bounds), but we would usually talk about the things we would ask for: grand houses, expensive cars or helicopters, larger muscles, a lemonade fountain or a McDonalds restaurant in our kitchen!

Now that most of us have moved beyond childhood, what would we ask for? Guaranteed health? Protection for our family? Enough money to be comfortable and secure? Solomon effectively gets that question from God, ‘Ask what I should give you.’ He is already king; he already has the wealth that David accumulated – but a king in those days was never totally secure. There were always enemies gathering at the borders or your own tribes grumbling over perceived injustices. There was also illness and disease and, in an age many centuries before our NHS, it would have been understandable for Solomon to ask for health and long life. Instead, he asks for wisdom. It’s worth noting that this isn’t wisdom for his benefit – it isn’t so that he can launch the next killer app or become a business tycoon, or so that he can out-scheme his rivals in the Near East. Solomon asks for wisdom not for his own benefit but to help him serve others better. He simply wants to govern the people of Israel well. It is this selflessness that God rewards.

As we pray for our own futures, are we thinking about other people? Are we praying prayers that will see others blessed and not just ourselves? Today’s passage would suggest that this is the path of wisdom.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, we come to you asking for you to fill us and feed us today. There are so many ways in which we are empty and need your nourishment.

Jesus, bread of life:

feed us and nourish us with yourself.

We bring to mind those who are spiritually hungry. Those who are searching for something more beyond themselves but who have not yet found you. Give us the wisdom and the sensitivity to guide people to you. We pray for the young people of our land, so many of whom have never had the opportunity to meet with Jesus or anyone who loves him. We pray for all those who received exam results this week. We pray for your guidance as they seek where to go next with either their education or into the workplace. Give courage to Christians in schools, colleges, universities and workplaces that they may be a shining witness to their friends and colleagues. We pray for those Christians who are persecuted for their faith yet still remain constant, trusting that you will supply their needs.

Jesus, bread of life:

feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Lord, we thank you for this church community. We thank you for the opportunities we have to come here each week and be fed by your word and our worship. We pray for our leaders by name. In the quiet, we pray for those sitting near us, whether we know their names or not. We remember any of our community who are not currently able to come to church in person asking that they will still feel that they belong and we will do all we can to keep them involved. We pray that we will always make visitors to our church feel welcome, our priority being to help everyone who comes here to meet with you.

Jesus, bread of life:

feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Finally, Lord, in the stillness, we bring our own personal needs to you. Help us to rejoice that you care about every detail of our lives, even the ones we think you don't notice. We ask that you will give us food for our

journeys this week. And we name in the silence, places or situations that might be hard for us. Nourish us with your presence in every situation we find ourselves, particularly those unexpected moments where we need extra help. Help us to go out from here knowing that we have met with you and have been fed by you this morning.

Jesus, bread of life:

feed us and nourish us with yourself.

Breathe your life into our lives.

Fill us with your Spirit that we may overflow with you.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

Sunday 25th August 2024

Call to worship

Come, let us keep a time of quiet together. (*finger on lips*)

In the quiet, let us listen to our breathing. (*hand on chest, breathe in and out three times*)

Often, we take for granted the air that keeps us alive, but now it reminds us (*hands to the head*) that every day God's Spirit strengthens us (*raise arms in 'strongman' pose*) and brings us new life (*move hands in and place across heart*).

Bible reading: 1 Kings 8: 1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

The Ark Brought to the Temple

8 Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

⁶ The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

¹⁰ When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. ¹¹ And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³ and said:

"LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴ You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.

²⁵ “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’ ²⁶ And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.

²⁷ “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! ²⁸ Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. ²⁹ May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. ³⁰ Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

⁴¹ “As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name— ⁴² for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm— when they come and pray toward this temple, ⁴³ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

Reflection

God can surprise us and meet us in unexpected places and times. Here’s a story someone shared with me recently:

‘I had never wanted to go to Lourdes, a place of pilgrimage and centre of healing in France. However, I was invited to represent an organisation, so I went. What first surprised me was the quietness in the town. An atmosphere of godly care and compassion embraced us. Despite the crowds of thousands and the narrow streets, life slowed to the pace of the sick being wheeled to the places of worship or to their hotel or ward. On Sunday, all the groups were invited to celebrate communion together in the Chapel of the Nations. I could not conceive of a place large

enough to hold these thousands of international groups of pilgrims. I followed the crowds streaming towards a very unassuming door and entered. A staircase spiralled around an immense underground space – I wondered how I would find my group of 200 among so many. The sick people were being given priority spaces – some were brought on beds, others in wheelchairs with their carers.

The organ stopped and, in the name of God, every group was welcomed in their own language. As the worship leaders entered, they were preceded by flags representing the many groups, and these were placed beside the altar. During this procession, the choir sang a hymn with a repeating chorus, each time in a different language; words on screens enabled us to join in as one. If we could not sing, we were invited to hum or clap or participate in whatever way we could. It was truly a joyful noise to welcome and celebrate the God who is creator of all peoples.

As I wandered round and through the vast crowds, I was reminded of people's frequent question, "How will I find my loved ones in heaven?" Already I was discovering the answer: we find them in worshipping God and his Son Jesus Christ in the powerful work of the Spirit. I did find my group, but I knew it would not have mattered if I hadn't. I learnt later we numbered 22,000 people and represented 28 nations.

Some very gifted people created the "Chapel of the Nations": it is womb-shaped within God's earth, and truly a place where God could invite his people for a glimpse of heaven.'

What is your experience of a special space created to bring God close to you? How do you make a space for God in your prayer life and in corporate church life, both today and in the weeks to come? You may like to share these experiences and questions with one another later over coffee.

Prayer of praise

Father, we praise you for giving us this special place in which to gather. But, most of all, we praise you for your presence and that of other people.

Thank you for bringing us together within these hallowed walls.

We bow in gratitude for the grace that nurtures our fellowship,
as in community with one another and communion with you,
we hear your Word, and learn more about your love.
All praise and thanks be to the One whose dearest wish is to find a place
in our hearts for himself.

Amen.

Hymn StF

Prayers of intercession

Lord, who shall we turn to but you:
for you have the words of eternal life.

Lord God, Joshua called us to choose this day who we would serve.
Give us the courage and the faith to keep serving you and not be
swayed by the things in the world around that might call us away from
you: our desire to be the most important, how easily led we can be by
unhealthy influences, friends who might challenge us to behave in ways
that don't honour you.

We pray that the choices we make each day will reflect who you are. We
know when we are likely to be most tested and we bring those situations
before you now, asking for your grace to keep us focussed on you.

As we commit the week ahead to you, go before us Lord and illuminate
our path that we can see clearly the way we should go.

Lord, who shall we turn to but you:
for you have the words of eternal life.

We pray for Christians under severe pressure to turn away from you:
whether that be through persecution, resistance, undermining of
authority, tough workplaces or for any other reasons known only to you.
Lord, we ask you to uphold all those who will really struggle to serve you
today. Help them to know your strength and power to keep their eyes
firmly fixed on you.

Lord, who shall we turn to but you:
for you have the words of eternal life.

Father, we pray for those who are in any form of pain or distress today. Some will be calling out to you for help, others may not even know you are there, but all need our prayers and your comfort. Be especially close to those who are fearful, we pray.

We name aloud or in our hearts any we know who may be facing operations, difficult diagnoses, anxiety and depression, loneliness or death. We pray for all those who care for them, asking that you will bring a healing touch, a listening ear, a timely word, or just a friendly silence.

We pray for the recently bereaved that your comfort will be very close to them. Lord, we know that sometimes when we are suffering we feel you very close and, at other times, for no explicable reason, you seem so far away. Give us the assurance that, whatever our circumstances, you are there and you do care.

Lord, who shall we turn to but you:
for you have the words of eternal life.

We thank you, Lord, for our local community. We pray for our church leaders and any decisions that have to be made as Covid restrictions continue to ease. We pray for our local shops and offices and all who work there, especially for those who are still very anxious about Covid, whether because it is affecting their business or because they would rather work from home but no longer have the option.

We pray for our neighbours and our friends and for all who are enjoying holidays at this time, that they might find true rest and restoration in you. And we commit ourselves to you in all that we do this week. Help us to trust you in the hard times and not to forget you in the good times. Give us the joy of your presence in everything we do so that we remember to choose each and every day that we will serve you.

Lord, who shall we turn to but you:
for you have the words of eternal life.
Thank you for never leaving us or forsaking us.
Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you. Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Go out in peace:

may the presence of the God you have experienced here
travel with you into the world and bring peace to others.

Amen