



# *Morning Worship*

26 April 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Morning Worship here at the Parish churches of Coxley with Godney, Henton, and Wookey. Although we are currently apart due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) it is hoped that following this liturgy knowing that others in the benefice will be doing so at the same time might help provide a spiritual connection between us.

It is suggested that alongside this liturgy you have a means to listen to the suggested hymns which have links to videos with lyrics within this document. There is a mixture of traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs. If you do not know the tune then why not listen to the hymn/song and worship through reading the words alone.

The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either one can lead with others joining in with the responses in **bold** OR everyone present may join in with all the words.

The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.

Materials in this booklet are drawn from *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* which is copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2006; *New Patterns for Worship* copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2002. All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

# MORNING WORSHIP

## GREETING

Praise God! For even though we are apart the Lord is in our midst!  
**Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.**

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

Though we find ourselves isolated  
in homes, apartments, and residential places,  
**we look out our windows and remember,  
the heavens declare the glory of God,  
all creation rejoices in our creator.**

*Psalm 19:1*

Though we cannot reach out and touch  
our friends and neighbours,  
**we rejoice that Christ is in our midst,  
he is with us always, until the end of the age!**

*Matthew 28:20*

Though we have to stand at a safe distance from others,  
giving space to those who pass us by,  
**we recall we are all made in the image of God,  
connected to one another,  
connected to God.**

*Genesis 1:27*

## HYMN: LORD OF ALL HOPEFULNESS

[Listen here](#)

## CONFESSION AND WORDS OF COMFORT

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world  
and knows our every word and deed.  
Let us then open ourselves to the Lord  
and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you.  
We are not worthy to be called your children.  
We turn to you again.  
Have mercy on us,  
bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead  
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*A period of silent reflection follows*

Hear the words of comfort, our Saviour Christ says to all who truly  
turn to him:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish  
but have eternal life.*

*John 3:16*

## COLLECT

Let us pray.

*A period of silent prayer is kept.*

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
**Amen.**

## HYMN: DAYS OF ELIJAH

[Listen here](#)

## THE WORD OF GOD

Hear what God is saying to his people according to Ezra.

**I**n the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

<sup>2</sup> “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

## THE SERMON

*By Revd Guy Martin-Scott*

There has been a lot of talk about how this worldwide pandemic is like nothing else we have seen in our lifetimes. Some of us have experienced war, some irregular power supply, others restrictions on what food is available to us. For myself, the only time I remember being so isolated was when I was laid up in bed for months on end after an unfortunate lawnmower accident – but that is a story for another day! The restrictions we face because of lockdown are new to everyone and no one has been excluded from the effects of it although it has affected some more than others – as some have commented, we are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat. For us as a church community this storm has disrupted all of our communal activities, we can still pray and worship privately but we cannot join our praises together in the way that we have been accustomed to, to ‘praise God in his sanctuary’ (Ps. 150.1).

But for those of us who are familiar with the story of God's people in the Old Testament you will know that these restrictions on how we worship are nothing new. At the end of the book of 2 Kings Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it, destroyed Jerusalem, and took the Israelites into exile. The people of Israel spent a long time in exile in Babylon away from the temple, away from their regular place of worship, even being forced to worship other gods in some cases (see Daniel 3.1-7) and so there is something in the very history of who we are as God's people that should be able to guide and encourage us through this time and help us to see a future hope for what our gathered worship may look like.

We have been in lockdown now for over a month and have adapted, in one way or another, to new ways of practising our faith, be that through a renewed focus on private prayer, listening to worship music or hymns at home, joining in with a live streamed service online, or reading the reflections that we have been producing here in the benefice. Although there is still more that we could be doing to continue to worship God and be "church" during this lockdown we are finding ways to continue to practise and grow in our faith. What we may not have done too much is to look at what comes next, what will church look like after COVID-19? Or perhaps I should say, what should the church look like after COVID-19? With the restrictions in place unlikely to be lifted for everyone at the same time, it is quite possible that the church will be open for public worship but not everyone be able to attend. This means that for a time how we worship will once again change. But this is not a bad thing, rather we will have a fantastic opportunity to re-shape what our gathered worship looks like and provide a better way for people to grown in their faith.

It is this future that we need to start thinking about now and to guide us as to what this future should like we are going to look at how God led his people out of exile from Babylon and returned

them to Jerusalem and what principles we can take from how they returned once more to worshipping God in their own place. We are going to do this by working our way through the book of Ezra, a minor prophet in the Old Testament, which speaks of Israel's return from exile, the rebuilding of the temple, and the new way of life that was established. At the end of the story of Ezra the people of Israel are more distinctly God's people than they had been for centuries and so it is my hope that by studying this book, as we discover what our worship might look like after lockdown, we too might become more distinctly God's people, that we might look more like our saviour Jesus Christ who saved us from eternal death and brought us the gift of eternal life through his death and resurrection, which, as 1 John 2.6 says, is what we as Christians are all aiming for.

## **GOD & CONTROL**

The book of Ezra begins with the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. They have been there for nearly seventy years and so there would have been at least two, if not three generations of Jews who knew nothing but life in exile – hopefully, lockdown will not last as long! But after these years of exile, in the first year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, Cyrus makes a proclamation. It would have been similar to what we are all familiar with today when there is a new beginning, be it in the form of the Queen's speech at the opening of parliament, or a new football manager bringing in sweeping changes to the style of football his team plays – a statement is made that sets the tone for what is to come. But unlike the Queen or a football manager who choose the direction of change, for Cyrus we read that it is God who influences his proclamation. We read in Ezra 1.1 that 'the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia' so that the prophecy of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, and that God's people would be returned from exile (Jer. 29.10) and the city of Jerusalem and its temple restored.

The practice of restoring sacred cities such as Jerusalem was common practice under the Babylonians as they believed that in restoring other gods those gods in turn would worship the gods of Babylon. But this fact does not take away anything from the role God had in these matters for the prophecy of Isaiah speaks of God's influence over Cyrus in the years leading up to this event (Is. 44.28-45.13). It is this God, who worked through Cyrus to fulfil his purposes for Israel, that is still the God we worship today. God is ultimately in control of the fate of his people, this was true for the Jews in exile and it is true for his Church today as it lives through lock-down. We must take confidence in this fact, that although we might not be able to see the big picture, God can, and he is a God who will never abandon his people.

### **GOD & POLITICS**

God is in control, and part of that control is seen in his appointment of earthly leaders to govern the people here on earth. In these trying times, where our leaders in government and their advisors are under immense pressure to make the right decisions, when every move they make is scrutinised and critiqued, we must trust that God is still working through them as part of his plan to bring all people into his kingdom of love and grace and to give them the gift of eternal life. Jesus Christ himself reminds us that the role of the government must be respected (Mt. 22.21; Mk. 12.17; Lk. 20.25) as well as the apostle Paul speaking about the same issue in his letter to the church in Rome (Rom. 13.1-7). Whatever we might think of the government (or the Queen for that matter) we must trust that God has put them in power for a reason. If we trust in God's true sovereignty over all the rulers of the world then it follows that we should also pray for those rulers. At this time, when being in a position of power is more difficult than ever, it might be closer to our minds to pray for our leaders, but we should pray for our leaders at all times as the author of 1 Timothy says:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

If you are wondering how to pray for our leaders, then look no further than the Book of Common Prayer. In it we have the prayerful petition that under the Queen 'we may be godly and quietly governed,' that is, that our leaders would seek to rule in a way that values those under them as God values them. When we think that God loves all but has a heart for the needy, the oppressed and the downtrodden, then this most certainly is something we need to be praying for our politicians every day! Pray for our leaders – they need all the prayer they can get.

### **GOD & HIS PEOPLE**

Not only does the proclamation of King Cyrus remind us to pray for our leaders it also heralds a new beginning for the people of God. The thing about new beginnings is that whenever they happen there is an opportunity for change. With this chance to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem the Jews had an opportunity to change, to discard the influences of Babylon on their religious practices (the beginning of the book of Daniel gives a good example of the pressures the Jews were under to conform) and worship once more the God of Israel. The rest of the book of Ezra reveals exactly how that happened and what the Jews did, but for the moment let us hold on to the idea that change is a chance for a new beginning. As and when the lockdown we are in ends and we can gather again as a community of faith that too will be a new beginning, a post COVID-19 beginning, and we too will have an opportunity for change. But unlike Cyrus, who did not know God yet was influenced by him, we have the advantage of a living relationship with God thanks to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Instead of blindly going on with our lives hoping that we are going the way God wants us to we must

actively listen to where God is leading us. What change does he want us to make? Who does he want us to be? How can we best share the good news of God's love for all creation in our communities? As we approach a new beginning and a time of change it is more important than ever for us to be praying in preparation for that time. We must be praying for our church leaders, for our bishops, our clergy, our church wardens, our PCCs and the ministry team, all those who in one way or another will be seeking God's guidance for the direction of change that will take place at the end of lock-down. However, this alone is not enough. The Old Testament is full of leaders who failed to follow God, who ignored his ways and did not listen to him. As members of God's Church, we all have a responsibility to make sure that the leaders of God's church are listening to him and acting on what they hear. So, as well as praying for the leaders in our churches, we should also be praying for ourselves. We should be praying for trust and grace to let our leaders take us on this journey of change, but alongside this we should also be praying for confidence to rebuke and challenge our leaders and for boldness to bring new ideas to them ourselves.

We are living through an event that is unprecedented in our lifetimes, but as a Church, we are not living through something new but something that God's people have encountered before. The book of Ezra has much to say in guiding us through this time. It reminds us that God is in control but we have a responsibility to pray for our government and to pray for our Church – particularly at this time.

### **HYMN: 10, 000 REASONS**

[Listen here.](#)

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

## INTERCESSIONS

*Use the silence between each prayer to bring before God your own concerns around that topic.*

Jesus, our exalted Lord, has been given all authority.  
Let us seek his intercession that our prayers may be perfected  
by his prayer.

Jesus Christ, great high priest,  
living for ever to intercede for us,  
pray for the Church and its leaders, your broken body in the world...

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Jesus Christ, King of righteousness,  
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high,  
pray for the world and its leaders, and make it subject to your gentle rule...

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,  
drawing humanity into the life of God,  
pray for your sisters and brothers in need, distress, or sorrow...

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Jesus, pioneer of our salvation,  
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection,  
surround with your saints and angels  
those who have died trusting your promises...

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,  
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe,  
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in your service ...

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, hear us.

**Lord, graciously hear us.**

Jesus Christ,  
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
and in the bond of peace,  
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;  
for you are alive and reign with the Father  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## HYMN: LORD FOR THE YEARS

[Listen here.](#)

## DISMISSAL

*'Remember, I am with you  
to the end of the age,' says the Lord.*

*Matthew 28.20*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

With the risen life of Christ within us,  
we go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!**