

17th May 2020 10am The Importance of the Presence of God

Service led by Karen Mills, talk by Andrew Attwood,

Bible reading by Lindsey Attwood

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[Karen Mills:]

Well, welcome everybody to our morning service for St. John's. And we're really thankful that we're able to meet even though it's a slightly unusual my of meeting. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Karen, and I'm one of the church wardens at St. John's. So just a little bit of a catch-up before we start. We're going to have a little activity in a minute for which you will need a piece of square paper, a pen, a pair of scissors, and two paper clips or a stapler, if you can manage those. so have those ready. Denise has sent out from the office loads of activities which are linked to this morning's theme. So you might like to have a little look at those if you haven't already got one or two prepared, and there's loads of stuff there, so really stuff that you could use right the way through the week, if you wanted to. Just draw your attention to our six o'clock service this evening. So same place, but at six o'clock. And we've just started on a Wednesday lunchtime, we're doing some sort of informal Bible studies, which are at twelve o'clock, so lunchtime, so why not link into those and bring your sandwiches and ...

[Andrew Attwood:]

Yes, they're going well, I think. I mean, I'm the only one who brings sandwiches so far. So it would be good if you bring some sandwiches.

[Karen:]

Yes, well, perhaps the rest of us don't like eating on the screen, but they're going really well. And we're looking at the Beatitudes [and the rest of the sermon on the Mount]. So we'll be just working our way through those.

24x7 prayer announcement

So yesterday, actually, it was Andrew's little article. And there was a little phrase in it that just caught my attention. And it said, "See what I can do in answer to a praying people." And this was talking about the big revival in Wales. So God really responded in a powerful way to praying people. So Andrew, I think you've got some news about an exciting and prayer initiative that's starting, I think on Thursday.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely. Thank you, Karen. It's going to be something that's originated from a little network of six churches of which we are part of, called Kairos

Connexion. We're going to play a three-minute video in a moment and it's just to get us all praying together. So just watch the video.

[Music]

[Hannah from St. Stephen's Canley:]

Hi! My name is Hannah from St. Stephen's church in Canley and we're really excited to tell you about 24/7 prayer event "Light Up" that you can join in with. This is from the 21st of May to 31st of May, from the period of Ascension to Pentecost.

[Andrew Attwood:]

I am Andrew from St. John's Church in Kenilworth. We're going to be six churches coming together across Coventry and Warwickshire. We're part of the Kairos Connexion that's been on a shared journey together.

[Jen from St. John's Westwood:]

Hi! I'm Jen. I'm from St. John's Westwood church and it's really easy to sign up: all you need to do is go to kairosconnexion.org/midlands

[Gareth from St. Lawrence Foleshill:]

Hi! I'm Gareth from St. Lawrence Foleshill. When you get to the website that Jen's just said, look for the green button - click on that - it will take you through to the booking page where you'll see all the hours when you can pray that you can sign up to. Just choose your slots: you can pray for an hour, two hours, five hours, pray overnight if you want to, and you can pray on your own or for households, it's a missional community tool online. Just put your email address and your name, sign up and you'll sign up to pray.

[Karen from Heartbeat church:]

Thanks Gareth. I'm Karen from Heartbeat church. There's also a Facebook page which you can join, called "Light Up - Kairos Connexion Midlands" where you can share what you've been receiving from the Lord while you've been praying. There's also an opportunity to take part in shared rhythms of prayer on Facebook Live or Zoom.

[David from St. Michael's Budbrooke:]

That's great Karen! I'm David from St. Michael's Budbrooke. Just to say: as you pray, do be led by the Spirit. As you use Scripture and other insights and prompts that God has given you and there will also be resources available on the website for you to download and there'll be stuff that's suitable for you to use individually or as a household together. But do continue to use the patterns and resources that your own churches have begun and they'll be shared more widely together through the week.

[Caroline from St. John's Westwood:]

Hi! I'm Caroline from St. John's and we're really excited to be bringing this 24/7 to you, so do get signed up. We really believe that as this event is called "Light up", that God is going to be using this to bring the light into our own hearts, to bring light into the situations, maybe the situations that you're struggling with around you, but we also want him to be bringing light to all the people that we are reaching in mission to as well. So please do get an hour slot or get more: you could sign up for a whole night if you want to do something radical, but let's just give this time over to God because as we do, we really

believe he's going to do something really powerful through this. So do sign up now. Thank you.

[Music - end of video]

[Andrew:]

Great. It's really stirring me every time I see that little video now because it gives me the opportunity to get into step of prayer with not just those in our local church but wider afield as well. I don't know about you, I mean, there'll be things I say more in today's talk, but that will be something that hopefully chimes in with where many of us are already at. So there'll be information at the very end of the service to remind you where to go to sign up. OK, that's my notice. Thanks.

Activity – building a house

[Karen:]

Thanks. Thanks, Andrew. I think that's a really great initiative and I really encourage you to get involved in that and be a praying people for God, and who knows how God will answer those prayers?

So today's service is all about the presence of God. And earlier in the week, my granddaughter sent me a WhatsApp and it said, "Mum, I really want to come to your house right now, but I can't." And so I replied, "Well, I'd really like to give you a big hug, but I can't." And there must be people that you are thinking about, that you could really like to be with, but can't, and would like to give a really big hug to but can't. If you've got your square of paper, what I would like you to do is to write in the centre of that piece of paper, the names of some people that you would really like to be with at the moment. I'm going to think about my grandchildren. So I've just written the initials of my grandchildren in the square of the paper. Now the first thing that we're going to do is fold this paper in half. I'm drawing these lines on the paper, just so that you can see more clearly what I'm doing. So we're just going to fold this piece of paper in half, like that. okay?

And when you've done that, just open it up again because we've got some more folds to go. So what we're going to do now is just fold the top down to the middle, like that. And then fold the bottom up like that.



Now when we're talking about God's presence on Earth, the first time that we really see him is walking in the garden of Eden, and the Garden of Eden is a really beautiful place. And I imagine it's somewhere that God really enjoyed walking in. So we'll just kind of make something beautiful, that perhaps will put the presence of God around the people that we are thinking about.

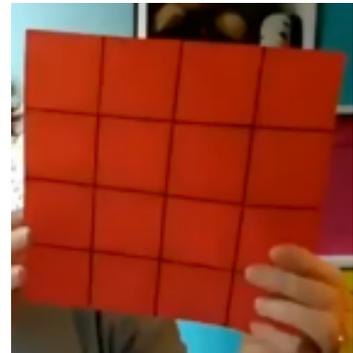
So, so far, we've got three folds in our paper, like that. OK, so now what I want you to do is turn the paper around, and we're going to do exactly the same with this piece of paper. So fold it in half and then fold it in half. And then fold the other two, like that.



So of course, and in the Old Testament, the places that we've seen God present with this people are first in the tabernacle, which is like a sort of tent, and which the people could take with them when they moved, and that was the place where God dwelt with his people.

And that's what we're sort of making - a house or a tent that is going to enclose the people that we love.

So now we should have something that was like that I've just drawn in where all the folds should be. So you should have three folds one way and three folds the other way.



And now here comes the exciting bit: you need your scissors, and we're going to make some cuts. So if you can see where the dotted lines are, and if you could just cut where those dotted lines are. I don't know whether I'd be able to do this back to front and inside out, but we're just going to cut up those lines like that.



And of course, when we get to the new Testament and Jesus comes, Jesus is called Emmanuel, God with us. So now we have wherever we are, God is with us.

So if you've got your piece of paper, and you've made all your cuts, you should have a piece of paper which has two frilly edges like this, OK? With the names of your loved ones in the middle. So now this is the tricky bit. This is where you're going to need your paperclips. So if you just hold your paper and just start to fold it in half, so you're sort of making the ridge of the tent or the house.



And if you take these two middle squares and put them together. OK? So one square goes on top of the other square, can you see that? We'll just put them so that they go neatly together. OK.



And then these two other little squares cone across, but they don't go right up to the top. So you can see just making that triangle the ridge of the house and bring that one there. Just line it all up. If you can you see how I've done that? We'll do it again on the other side, and then use your paperclip, you probably want the long end of your paperclip on the inside because you've got to catch that little triangle, the roof that comes down, OK? And then turn it around and do the other side. So if we put the two squares together, make that triangle, with the two squares. And then fold the other ones across but not right up to the across. So it's making the roof of the house, the tent.



top, just straight

And hopefully what we've done is made a little place where God is. And we've wrapped around the people that we love with the presence of God.



So if you're a younger member this morning, you might like to decorate your house. So you'll find it much easier if you unstaple that and unwrap your house so that you can paint a little roof, put some doors and windows on, and I spent a lovely half hour painting a little house, put some doors and windows on and drew on the roof. So perhaps you could do that this morning or later on today.



So Father God, we just lift up those people that we would really love to give a really big hug to, those people that we would love to be with. we lift them up to you and ask for your blessing today.

Psalm 51:1-17 [NKJV]

OK, so as we come into a place of worship, I know that if I'm inviting people around my house, which unfortunately I can't do at the moment, I do a bit of cleaning and baking. And so as we come into God's presence this morning, this is a real opportunity for us just to take a little time to prepare ourselves to worship God. And I am going to read for you part of psalm 51. And there'll be some pictures that come on the screen during the psalm and I'll be leaving some pauses, there'll be some words on the pictures. Just take a moment to reflect on those words and think about them. So, if we're ready, we'll start psalm 51.

¹ Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.



⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know
wisdom.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

⁹ Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

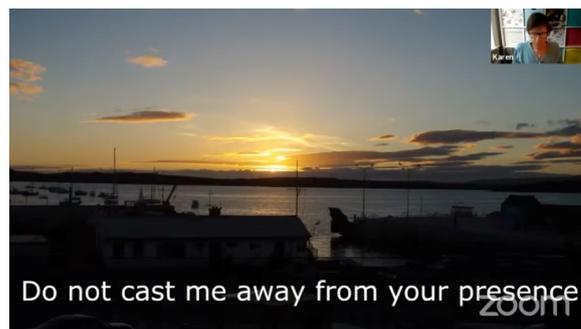
¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

Amen.

OK, so we're going to very shortly hear a reading from Andrew. So if you would like to grab your Bibles, you're going to be in Luke 1, I think starting from verse 26. So, let's pray for Lindsey and then Andrew will come and speak to us, so we'll pray for Andrew as well. Father God, thank you for Lindsey and I pray that as she reads your word, it would speak deeply into our hearts and into our very being. And as Andrew speaks to us, Father God, would you be speaking to us, each one of us personally, through the words that you have given him for today? Amen.



[Lindsey]

Luke 1:26-38 [NIVUK]

Good morning. The reading is taken from Luke one verse 26 to 38.

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

³⁴ 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

³⁵ The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.'

³⁸ 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her.

Talk

[Andrew:]

Thank you, Lindsey.

You may wonder why we're reading a Christmas reading in May? Well, the focus, as Karen's already pointed out, is the subject of the presence of God. And I just wanted to do that as a kind of review with you because I sense this is a topic that seems extremely pertinent at this time of lockdown. You see, I think I've begun to discover that over these last eight weeks, and even trailing back perhaps the last two and a half years, maybe the presence of God is the main thing, the main thing that we should be focusing on. Now obviously, at this time, we're rooting for the scientists and for health workers. And we want things to progress at a national and international level with regards to the COVID crisis.

But during this time, we also need to be reflecting, what might God be saying to his Church? what might God be saying to his people at this time? We appear to be in a time of confinement, maybe a time of confinement where something important is meant to happen. Maybe a time where something specifically is meant to be emerging, an opportunity that God has given us, maybe to remember our identity, maybe an opportunity to rediscover who God is, maybe I would suggest an opportunity to really dwell in and experience and know the presence of God. So time of confinement, maybe not too different to when Mary was pregnant, she had to be confined for a time.

Now, obviously the presence of God is a difficult thing to describe. We're talking about something experiential here. And I don't know how many of you have had significant life experiences that you've wanted to describe to others. Maybe some of you have been to Twickenham when England were playing, or maybe a particular game when England won, or maybe something equivalent at Wembley, or maybe some of you have travelled to important places where it was just wonderful to be. I remember trips with the family to Paris and thinking, "Oh my gosh, I never knew it was like this!" And spending time trying to find words that describe it. Or maybe you've been to see a movie, or a play, maybe you've been to the RSC in Stratford or something like that, where you just think "I just wish I could describe this to someone." Maybe in a more personal way, maybe it's a bit like falling in love or knowing that you're close to someone that's dear to you. Now, all of these things can be described in words. But we all know, at the end of the day, you say to a person, "You just have to be there. You just have to be there to understand."

I wonder how many of us as Christians have perhaps fallen into the habit in the past of simply describing God, or learning about God, as opposed to being there with God. Not completely, but sometimes partially, we can fall into a pattern of living by principles, but not always in the presence of the one from where the principles come. If you just focus on principles, sometimes you might miss the presence.

Let me paint this now as a narrative that stretches all the way through back, the whole story of the Bible. The presence of God is a key feature in the story of Israel. You'll remember, when God rescued the people of Israel out of Egypt, in a very formative sense, like Karen intimated earlier on, the Israelites camped around the presence of God. There was a Tent of Meeting in the middle and above the Tent of Meeting, right in the centre of the gathering of the people, was a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. This was awesome. This was something that was with them for the entire 40 years that they wandered in the wilderness. Imagine that, a formative nation, a formative group, probably jumpy and nervous around this presence that was there, adopting the new codes and practices that Moses had brought down from Sinai with new regulations and some sacrifices they had to learn how to do. And this was something that went on for 40 years. So God got them out of Egypt, and then spent the next 40 years weaning them off Egypt and off themselves. His presence was very, very strong during this phase. I wonder if this is something that is familiar to you, even in this time, where you're a bit more aware that God is closer than he has been for a while. I keep talking to Christians, and they keep nodding when I say how's it going with God and they'll go, "closer, deeper, different."

You see, the people were led by God in those days. But it wasn't always like that. In Ezekiel 10, we have a really sad story emerging, where the prophet Ezekiel speaks about the glory of God departing now from the temple in Jerusalem. He says this, in Ezekiel 10, beginning verse 18.

¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. ¹⁹ While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

You see, the people of Israel had wandered away from a focus on God Himself, and his presence lifted off the temple and moved away. And there is no evidence in the Old Testament of an experience of the presence of God returning. That's not described, until we get the story of Mary. That's why Lindsey read the story of Mary earlier.

Think of Mary. Think of Mary, hearing from Gabriel, that something new was coming. Just think of that, think of Gabriel saying "God is going to be with you

in a new way. God is going to fill you in a new way." And what she has to do is carry God, possibly a simple yes, possibly a yes with partial understanding, and then the consequences start to grow within her for a full nine months. Some of you know this very well. I mean, I am a bloke. I don't know the first thing about carrying a child, but this idea is very formative: you hear echoes of it in John's gospel where it says the "Word became flesh and dwelt with us," or Tabernacled with us, in John 1. It's like God's presence has come inside a person. Now, this is absolutely profound. And again, like Karen said at the beginning, God with us, Emmanuel, you can't get closer than this. Mary is our model in this sense, of God drawing near in a very personal and particular way.

It is my sense, at this particular time, that literally thousands of Christians are being drawn back to God, in prayer, in Scripture reading, and even people beyond the Church are beginning to tune in and listen, and some of them are starting to pray perhaps for the first time. Something seems to be happening. It's very difficult to define. It's difficult to describe in clear terms, but there is an increased awareness of our need of God, an increased awareness of his tangible presence as well. So I would say Mary is a model to us. And the model that describes also the complications of God drawing near. Pregnancies are wonderful, so people tell me, but they're also difficult. Most pregnancies have a whole range of symptoms: feeling heavy, feeling uncomfortable, feeling the baby move at awkward times. Everything is changing, you're having to make room for something that is going to kind of take over. You're a little bit out of control, because something inevitable is coming. So returning to an awareness of the presence of God is both delightful, and it's great! And it's like, oh, my gosh, God is there! But it also costs.

You see I've found, even in my own experience, to move closer to God means I get a bit more exposed to him. All of the usual pretensions that work with people when I'm speaking to them or describing things or just relating - all of those pretensions that work with them or even when I'm trying to persuade myself: that doesn't wash with God. When God draws near, I know that he knows exactly who I am. And it's in times like these, when we're learning to pray again, perhaps in a deeper way, that we start to wonder and maybe even get concerned is, is God really good? Does he truly love me? Is there something here that he's going to accept still, now that he's close enough to see? And so sometimes I think we wrestle with this. I think there is a trend where people tiptoe into trying to pray a bit more, but then they back off. Is that you? Have you tried, and then failed and tried again? And you know, something's there. You know, something is happening, but it's a bit demanding, it's a bit difficult. And so other priorities creep in or maybe there are other distractions. And we click back into this kind of, "I just hope this lockdown ends." But maybe there is something formative that is meant to be happening.

Think of not only Jesus, emerging in the womb of Mary, think of Jesus now coming to be with us as an adult, to be with his disciples as a grown adult now. Jesus was called by God. And the very first thing that happened to him, when he was filled with the Spirit, was when he was driven into the desert, just like Israel, his formative time away from everybody else. And then out of that time of wilderness, he gathered the twelve around him. It's very much replicating the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness and gathering now twelve men and some women around him, just like Israel in the wilderness gathered around the presence of God. Jesus is the new cloud and fire. The strong presence of God in Jesus was like a magnet. It would draw in crowds and crowds of people who wanted to be healed, who wanted to hear his words, there was something irresistible about him.

I know from my own personal experience of Jesus, sometimes it's just moved me to tears. I was sharing with some people recently, a story I think I've shared in church before, we were back in Derby. I had kind of a vision of Jesus being really close to me, and it's almost like he was sat beside me on a bench in this

vision I was having and I could see everything in extraordinary detail, and he just stirred me so much. But I also know that there are phases in my life where I've been very close to God in exposure and desperation, like during my illness.

So the rarefied experience of Jesus is both marvellous and exposing, and it reveals our deep, deep need of him. It's almost like it whets your appetite. And once you've tasted it, you think I can't un-know this now. Think of how the story develops even later in the narrative of Scripture, when we arrive at Pentecost. We now have Jesus ascended. And he tells the disciples, "Go and wait." And so the disciples go to the upper room, and they wait for Pentecost, they wait for the Spirit to come. Just like the Israelites in the desert waiting for 40 years, just like Mary waiting for nine months, just like Jesus going for 40 days into the wilderness, for 10 whole days the disciples go into the upper room and out of obedience to Jesus, they wait. And they wait for the Spirit to come. We don't know what they did. We don't know what happened during those 10 days. I've already made the advert at the start of this service for 10 days of prayer towards our own Pentecost. What was it like for them in the upper room? what was it like for them waiting and waiting? And eventually, the Holy Spirit comes, eventually the Holy Spirit comes in ways that they cannot describe. That is transformative, that is empowering. That changes who they are because now they're not just with Jesus. They're with the Spirit on the inside, like having Jesus on the inside.

How are you doing at the moment with all of this? Do you have a sense of waiting with God? Do you have a sense that he's drawing near? Do you have a sense that he's calling you into something stronger and deeper? We were having a conversation in staff [meeting] recently and someone said, "When God comes, it is time of extraordinary visibility." When God comes it is a time of extraordinary visibility. He makes himself known and felt. This isn't airy-fairy imaginative stuff that only some people are exposed to. This is something that is for all followers of Jesus Christ. I've been reading recently some of the accounts from the Welsh Revival, which happened back in 1904-1905. We know Wales is a tiny little place with a relatively small population. But during that time, something happened, something remarkable happened and here's just a quote from someone who was writing a narrative of how it was like to be when things were moving in Wales, back in 1904. he says this: 'Another feature was the overwhelming sense of God's presence. One pastor said: "If one were asked to describe in a word the outstanding feature of those days, one would unhesitatingly reply that it was a universal, inescapable sense of the presence of God. The Lord had come down! A sense of the Lord's presence was everywhere. It pervaded, nay, it created the spiritual atmosphere."' ¹

Is this whole idea of focusing on God's presence just mere Christian self-indulgence? Is this something where it's all about me, me, me and my experience? Not at all. This is probably more essential than we've ever imagined. This is way beyond the living out of Christian principles which are of course essential and good. This is where we actually are following God closely, because he is so present. It is both scary, it is remarkably wonderful too. Some people might be thinking, well, what's this got to do with the call of God and the mission of God? I would say, the presence of God is the point of all the missional hopes and dream that we would ever have. We don't want people to come to us. We want people to come to him. You see, the presence of God is the magnet. When Jesus was present with twelve, crowds came. When the pillar of cloud and fire was there, the people gathered around it, and wherever it moved, they moved, and wherever it stayed, they stayed. You see, the presence of God is the rocket fuel for all of our evangelistic endeavours. How many of you have felt frustration over the things that you have tried to do or say, and it feels like your words or actions have just fallen on stony ground? Imagine, imagine a people in our

1 <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-welsh-revival-of-1904-06>

town, who are devoting themselves in a very, very close way to the presence of God Himself. And they move when he moves, and they speak when he speaks. Maybe you may start to see different things emerging, people responding in different ways. You see, we need his presence to fill our principles. We need his presence to overwhelm the way in which we function.

So the presence of God may actually be the main thing this time. The question I want to leave you with this morning is this: will you wait? And will you pray? Where is your heart? Where is your courage at this time? Where is your desire for God at this time? Has your heart been kindled to realize it's him that you want? Have you heard his voice already saying to you, "It's you that I want. It's you that I desire." I want to call you into a serious focus on the presence of God, particularly as we head now towards Pentecost. You'll remember from that video that we played earlier on, that from this coming Thursday onwards, we're going to be having 10 days, 10 days in preparation towards the Pentecost Sunday. If I'm totally honest, I'm not looking for some kind of magical result. It's not like some kind of button you can press or lever you can pull to make something happen. You can't control God. But it's just an opportunity for you and I, for all of us, to draw near to God, to give ourselves over to him and say, here I am. Here I am, Lord, whatever you want to do, have your way. So this is a time of going deeper. This is a time of being perhaps more open than before. Perhaps this is what God is really wanting to do at this time.

Prayerful response

So let's have a time of responding to that now. Let's maybe close our eyes. And we'll pray now. So let's pray.

Father God, in the light of the narrative of Holy Scripture that talks about your presence, marking out your people, would you lead us now again, as your local people in this town into your tangible presence, would you come Lord, would you draw near? Would you meet us where we are?

[Pause]

I do ask, Holy Spirit, that you would bring to mind the things that you have been saying to us.

Help us to hear your voice.

[Karen:]

So just as Andrew was speaking, I had a picture of a garden that is coming out of winter, and I understand that good gardeners cover their precious plants with loads of fleece and all sorts of things to protect them in the winter. And so this gardener was taking off the fleece and all the bits that were protecting this tiny little plant and opening it up and exposing it to the warmth of the sun. And I think in our lives sometimes there's layers of stuff that covers up potential little green shoots. And so maybe this is a time of about lifting off those things, so that the potential growth in us is exposed to the warmth of the sun.

[Andrew:]

Just continue to pray and maybe dwell on what Karen's just said. Come Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit.

Show us what you're doing, Lord.

[Karen:]

Father God, just increase in us a desire to be with you and to work with you and to spend time with you and to enjoy your presence.

[Andrew:]

I want to pray, Lord, for not only an increased sensitivity to your presence, doing our normal Christian things like now or Bible reading or praying on our own. I want to pray, Lord, for an awareness of your presence during the day while we work, while we watch TV, while we tidy the house, whatever it is, Lord. Holy Spirit, would you increase our sensitivity to your presence? Always.

Just switch that on in us, Lord.

Come Holy Spirit.

And I do pray, Lord, you would set in our hearts a hunger for more and a willingness to wait.

Lord, in this time of confinement, bring to birth something new, something good.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name.
Amen.

We have a video that we can play now so use this video as an opportunity to continue to receive, to be aware of God's presence.

Hymn: A Day Will Dawn

God you are my God I need not fear.
When the evil day draws close to me
You are closer still.
In the day of trouble be my shield,
Refuge for my soul when hope is gone -
You will dry each tear.

Chorus:

A day will dawn like morning sun
When Christ shall pierce the greatest darkness in this world.
When glory breaks upon that day
My heart is healed from every wound this Earth has made
When Christ shall come.

God you are my God, I trust in you.
In barren times my soul will find
Streams of mercy flow.
In the darkest valley where I tread
Even there I find your hand in mine -
Still I'm being led.

Chorus

God you have declared a day will come
When saints are raised and clothed in grace
In garments from the Son.
I will take my place around your throne.
I will bow in awe, all questions gone,
And worship you alone.

Chorus x2
And forever I will worship you with praise
When Christ shall come

Intercessions

[Karen:]

So let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, I am with you always.

Be with us today as we offer ourselves to you.

Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves and keep us in your care.

Lord Jesus, we pray for all those affected by this virus through illness or isolation or anxiety, that they might find relief and recovery.

We pray for those who are guiding our nation and shaping national policy, that they might make wise decisions.

We pray for our doctors, nurses and medical researchers, that through their skills and insight, that many may be restored to health. We pray for the vulnerable and the fearful, for the gravely ill, and the dying, that they may know your company and your peace.

We pray for a blessing on our local community, that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship, where all are known and cared for, for our homes and our families, for our schools and our young people.

We commend ourselves and all for whom we pray to your mercy and protection.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ,

Amen.

So as we come to the end of our service this morning, can I just encourage you not to rush away but just to spend some time being in God's presence and thinking about the things that have been said this morning and the things that perhaps God has been speaking to you about this morning and just dwell on them for a little while.

So if you've been busy with your little houses, maybe you'd like to send pictures into Denise at the office because that's always very encouraging to see that something has happened. And also can I just really encourage you to book a slot to pray: just helps us to see that if we commit to doing something, then we'll probably get around to doing it.

Blessing

So I'm going to end with a blessing. And then there'll be a reminder about the prayer initiative that's coming up. And so God bless you for the rest of the day.

May the love of God unfold you. May the light of God surround you. May the power of God protect you. May the presence of God watch over you. Wherever you are, God is.
Amen.

[Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> with help from Hamish Blair]

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