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ORDINARY 33B

17th November 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

God of all grace,

I gather my thoughts this day, and come into this space, choosing to open my heart to all that holds glimpses of your love in the world around me.

May I be open to the spirit of the autumn season, allowing myself to be at peace, despite all that tries to pull us away.

May I sit in your love with the peace of creatures hibernating below ground: resting safely with calm and steady heartbeats in the knowledge that now is time for stopping and that the warmth will come again.

May I experience the world around me with child-like tastebuds: savouring cinnamon, nutmeg and clove aftertastes and feeling gratitude to the earth for the sustenance of the root vegetables it provides.

May I allow the Autumn breeze to help me to let go of that which weighs me down and holds me back from entering fully into the wonder around and within me.

As ongoing news of violence, hatred and selfishness threatens endlessly to pull our world into despair, I pause with this time to turn my eyes and heart to the beauty of your creation. Thank you for the wonder of the natural world and for making me a part of it.

Amen.

You may wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Reading: Mark 13:1-8 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

Take a moment now to reflect on the changes in your life, and the wider world at the moment. Which of these are most dramatic to you? Just sit with those thoughts in the stillness for a minute or two...

[Hold a silence / quiet, you could encourage people to make notes or draw their feelings and responses if appropriate in your context].

If its helpful to share it, do find someone you can trust this week – it could be your pastoral visitor, your minister, a close friend or family member – to talk about the changes you've seen. It can be helpful to be intentional about recognising the change in our lives and how it shapes and shifts us.

How do you feel about change? Is change something you find scary, or do you have a more positive attitude towards it?

If we think our time is full of social turmoil and change, we can see some of those same themes in the gospels, can't we? Jesus is born into a population living through occupation, with all the challenges, uprisings, oppression and confusion that brings for the Jewish people at the time.

But, although there is much change afoot, as with all societies, there are lots of people in First Century Palestine who are personally invested in the status quo. They don't want to see radical change, because the system as it is suits them just fine, thank you very much.

What are the symbols of oppression we need to tear down? In Mark's gospel we hear about Jesus reflecting on the possibility of the very stones that make up the temple coming apart. Of course, we know that at least one of the things happening in this reading is a foreshadowing of his own death – Jesus' body as a kind of temple. But, what I'm particularly interested in looking at today is – what are our temples? If the temple is the institution of 'status quo', of keeping things as they are, of preserving the world as it currently is...if the temple is 'anti-change', then Jesus invitation to imagine it coming apart in a matter of days is a huge political (with a small p) point.

He is inviting his listeners, and he is inviting us today, to imagine a world in which we tear down the systems and structures that are only interested in preserving the status quo, keeping the rich rich and the poor poor, exploiting the many for the benefit of the few. Those systems are still at work in our world today. They might not be as inherently religious as they were in Jesus' day, as faith groups have become more marginalised (in Western Europe, anyway), but they are still out there.

You might like to reflect, make notes, or speak to a friend about your response to this question: what are our 'temples' today? What are the symbols of oppression serving the existing social structures that we might want to tear down, or at least radically rethink? You can think about big political, national or international ones, or focus on something much more local. What are some of the forces, individuals, organisations and systems at work in our community that only work for some, and not for others?

Where do we look for inspiration and courage to change the social order?

Finally, we come to an important emphasis when thinking about radical change – which comes from reading the Jesus stories together, from not taking any one verse of the Bible out of context, from understanding something of what Jesus' whole ministry is about. In this month of remembrance, when we think about conflict, and pray for peace, it is perhaps more important than ever to remember Jesus' emphasis on peace.

In the midst of all the social unrest of his context, Jesus' resurrection had the potential to spark full blown riots, a political revolution, the total overthrow of the social order with violence and counter-revolutions springing up all over the Middle East. However, in that moment after his return, the first thing he says to those closest to him is 'peace be with you'. He could have said: 'lets get revenge' or 'this will show them' or 'lets go get 'em boys!' but instead he insists on peace.

Yes, Jesus is a radical, he's transforming the social order even today, thousands of years later. But its not a violent act, it's not a bloody guillotine, or Molotov cocktails, or acts of terrorism that will bring about the Jesus-kingdom. Rather, it is the way of peace, the absolute commitment to non-violence, the work of building community, of sharing love.

Responding through music

81 STF – Now thank we all our God – [YouTube](#)

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded – [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Come, the time of focused worship is over,
Come, the time of life-long worship is just beginning again,
A fresh week awaits,
New opportunities to encounter the risen Jesus.
May you go out, and discover a God who is already there, waiting for you at every corner.
Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers

Monday 18th November

- God of hope, I ask for your guidance as I seek to build a future free from the horrors of war. Teach me to be a peacemaker in my daily life, in my decisions, and in my relationships. As I remember the past, may I commit myself anew to the work of peace, reconciliation, and justice for all.
- God of hope, fill me with the courage to build bridges of peace, and guide me as I strive to create a world where all people can live in dignity, free from fear and violence. Amen.

Tuesday 19th November

- God of love,
Show me something of the mystery of your love for me this day, I pray.
Help me to learn more of you and your designs for me and my life.
Amen.

Wednesday 20th November

- Why not spend some time in silent meditation today?
- You could set an alarm – perhaps for 10-15 minutes, and then finding somewhere comfortable, where you can sit and empty your mind.
- If it helps, you could use the Headspace app or website, or a similar service, to help you focus on the meditation and get used to the idea of sitting in silence for a length of time.
- Is this a practice you could include in your daily spiritual life?

Thursday 21st November

- If you can, go on a prayer walk. Or ask someone to help you make a journey around your neighbourhood – just the few houses near you would be fine, or go on a longer trip if you'd like to take in a whole estate or community.
- As you travel past each house, pray for the people who live there – just in your mind, or under your breath. Hold their situations, whether you know them or not, in your heart.

Friday 22nd November

- Use your camera or smartphone to capture images that reflect your spiritual journey. Look for moments of beauty, serenity, or even challenge. Reflect on how these images relate to your prayers.

Saturday 23rd November

- Prince of peace, Lord of light,
Today I bow my head in prayer for those caught in the tumult of war and conflict. Grant them strength in their suffering, shelter for the displaced, and peace for the troubled hearts. May your light pierce through the darkness, bringing hope, reconciliation, and a lasting peace to all who bear the heavy burdens of strife. In your mercy, I pray, Amen.