

Welcome to this act of worship, shared with sisters and brothers across the Circuit.

Coming into God's Presence

Holy God, I come to You, expectant, yearning for your Holy Spirit to fill me

I come, trusting that You will continue to illumine my heart.

I come, longing to be fed by Jesus, the Bread of Life; that graced, I may serve others.

Cover me with your Grace and healing so that I may serve others and bring them hope.

Hymn StF 318 Christ our King before creation Ivor H. Jones (*tune Blaenwern*)

Christ, our King before creation,
life before all life began,
crowned in deep humiliation
by your partners in God's plan.
Make us humble in believing,
And believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, forgive our self-deceiving,
Come and reign in us today!'

And believing, bold to pray:
'Lord by grace beyond conceiving,
Come and reign in us today!'

Word that ends our long debating,
Life of God which sets us free,
Through your body recreating
Life as life is meant to be.

Lord of time and Lord of history,
Giving when the world despairs,
Faith to wrestle with the mystery
Of a God who loves and cares.
Make us humble in believing,

Make us humble in believing,
And, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord in us your aim achieving,
Come and reign in us today!'

Prayers

Praise & Adoration

Exalted God, you are the constant lover who never forsakes us;

You are the mother who cradles her children.

You are the teacher patiently repeating your words for us.

We worship you.

Jesus Christ, in you, we are convinced that God loves us;

Through you, we are formed into your people;

With you, we serve those the world has forgotten.

We follow you.

Holy Spirit, you are the power that gives us peace;

You are the wisdom that reveals the broken in our midst;

You are the spokesperson of the voiceless to whom we are deaf.

We welcome you.

Confession

Called to proclaim repentance, we are reluctant to look at our own failings.

Invited to witness to God's loving forgiveness of sins, we would rather not speak of our own

In prayer, let us trust in the One who offers us hope and healing:

God most high, you call us to proclaim a Gospel we find difficult to practise.

We watch our clocks to make sure we spend more time with ourselves than with you.

We are hesitant to witness to your power from on high, feeling uncertain of your presence in our lives.

Forgive us, God of light.

Fill us with the healing presence of your Spirit, that we may proclaim your Good News, as we participate in the life and suffering of our world, as did your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

silence

Choosing to set aside judgement, God gives us justice;

Choosing to let go of punishment, God fills us with peace.

Choosing to release anger, God's steadfast love rests upon us.

Forgiven, redeemed, restored – we tell everyone, through the lives we lead, what God has done for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Readings

Acts 10: 44-48 NRSV **Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit**

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

John 15: 9-17 NRSV

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection

I regularly receive email articles from London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Recently, one about crossing over lines in various contexts caught my attention:

Crossing a line can land you with a traffic fine or a gold medal, win a rugby match or lose a tennis tournament. Crossing a line can bring hope or lead to conflict. Lines constructed with words, attitudes, responses, or something else, can join people together or keep communities apart.

In Acts Ch8 there is an encounter between Philip, a Jew, with the Gentile Ethiopian eunuch and because a line of understanding was crossed, the eunuch discovered that he was included in God's salvation, which changed his life for ever.

In Acts 10 is another encounter between a devout Jew and a Gentile, the Apostle Peter and Cornelius, a Roman centurion. We hear how God's inclusive salvation plan for all peoples is worked out in this encounter because after a vision from God, Peter becomes willing to cross a line concerning Jewish purity laws.

Peter had always followed these laws closely, which involved separation from all things unclean, including certain foods and peoples, especially Gentiles. What Peter ate and who he kept company with was strictly governed. So when Peter has a vision in which God commands him to kill and eat animals which he considered unclean, it was a real challenge for Peter as he wrestled with new insight as to what and who

was acceptable to God. Whilst Peter is trying to get his head around what God could mean, he is then called to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile.

Peter arrives two days later at Cornelius' house, having taken some friends from Joppa with him.....safety in numbers when facing uncertainty! Peter finds Cornelius, his household and friends waiting for him.

Those two days of travel must have given Peter time to think about his earlier vision from God. To be in Cornelius' house at all, Peter and his friends had already crossed a purity line; their purity according to the Law was in jeopardy.

But Peter was beginning to realise what his earlier vision meant: that from God's perspective, the line separating Jew and Gentile didn't even exist, for both were equally acceptable to God.

New horizons were opening up for Peter and the sense of expectation in the story is palpable as Cornelius asks Peter to tell them everything. What was God going to do?

Peter faithfully witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ; his life, death and resurrection....and the forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Jesus and put their trust in Him. Peter's testimony opens the way for God to move as Cornelius and his household turn to Christ. Peter and his friends are amazed at what happens next....the Holy Spirit being poured out on these new gentile believers.

In the most spectacular manner, God clearly indicates that those who were seen to be separated from God by the lines created by established religion, are actually counted in, by their faith in Jesus and worthy of God's Spirit and blessing.

In Jesus, God proclaims that no-one is outside the realms of God's love; everyone is counted in, despite all human attempts at drawing lines of exclusivity.

What lines do we draw around ourselves, individually and together as church, in order to keep the 'other' at arm's length? The lines are many and varied: emotional, cultural and social boundaries, visible and invisible but they are there, keeping people apart.

God loved the world so much that Jesus crossed the line between heaven and earth in order that we might all be reconciled to God. I believe that God calls us every day to cross those lines that separate people. He calls us to draw people together into fellowship, a community of acceptance and love.

Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another. We are to show our love for him through our love for others and Jesus says that if we are his friends, that is what we will do. This is how we remain living in God's love.

The call to love one another is not an easy path to follow; it is sometimes costly, difficult and challenging but we are chosen to do it. Matthew 5: 46 reminds us that our love should not just extend to those who love us, who are like us but should include too, those who are different from ourselves.

We are called to bear fruit for Jesus, the one who loves us more than we can imagine.

We are chosen and loved as friends, not forced or coerced, and if we choose to respond to the love of Jesus by loving others, crossing lines intended for exclusion of others, we too will be surprised what the Holy Spirit will accomplish in and through us. Amen

Hymn StF 242 A new commandment

A new commandment I give unto you:

that you love one another as I have loved you, that you love one another as I have loved you.

By this the world shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

By this the world shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

Prayers for others

Lord, in our world:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our government:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our friendships:

let your love flow.

Lord, in our families:

let your love flow.

Lord, among the suffering:

let your love flow.

Lord, among the bereaved:

let your love flow.

Lord, in this Circuit:

let your love flow.

Lord of all love, help us to know and to receive your love and to share this love wherever we may be.
Amen.

Hymn StF 499 Great God, your love has called us here

Brian Wren

1. Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

2. We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.

3. Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,

but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

4. Then take the towel and break the bread
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

5. Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

Blessing

In the coming days, may God give you the courage and love to cross the lines which have been drawn to keep people apart, and let others know that 'God loves you and counts you in.'
And may God's blessing rest on you now and always. Amen