**Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service 21st August 2022**

prepared by Rev Ruth Lownsbrough

Welcome to this act of worship. Although you may be on your own, you are part of God’s church, worshipping God together with others, so take time now to be in God’s presence.

**Prayer**

Loving and gracious God, you are ever present with us, always walking beside us no matter what we face. You are God of the past, the present and the future, always unchanging in a world that is constantly changing.

Help us to continue to put our trust in you, to step out with confidence and follow you wherever you may lead us. May we always remember that no matter who we are, you will always welcome us with open arms.

Enable us to share your love, forgiveness, grace and acceptance with others that they too may come to know you and grow close to you. Amen (Rebekah Fairhurst, Methodist Prayer Handbook 21/22)

**Psalm 103: 1-8**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you liveso that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

**Hymn** StF 440 Amazing grace John Newton

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
’Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

**Reading: Luke 13: 10-17** NRSV translation

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.’

But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?’ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

**Reflection**

One of the joys of being on sabbatical was being given the freedom to set aside, for a while, my usual routine, to break out and do something different, something that in the normal course of living and working, I wouldn’t be able to do, something that would refresh and renew me physically, mentally and spiritually.

Try to imagine for a moment, the woman in this passage from Luke’s gospel, unable to break free herself from the ailment which, for eighteen years had kept her bent and bound and isolated. Perhaps for some, such a situation is not too difficult to imagine because it is in some way, part of their lived reality.

The woman went to the local synagogue where Jesus was teaching. Perhaps she had heard that Jesus was in town and she felt hope for the first time in a long while….maybe this Jesus could do something for her? It must have taken courage and determination to enter a place where, for the duration of her long suffering, no-one had offered her any help and if it hadn’t been for Jesus, she would not have received any help this time.

We are told that Jesus was teaching in the synagogue but as soon as he saw the woman, he stopped what he was doing and focussed his attention on her need in that moment. Jesus didn’t tell her to wait until he had finished teaching but saw her situation immediately and did something about it.

What a contrast to the reaction of the leader of the synagogue, who told the woman she should have come on a different day to be healed. The religious leader wasn’t really interested in the woman’s plight at all, only in the strict application of the Law to her.

Jesus sees our hearts and he was quick to call out the hypocrisy of the synagogue leader, who was quite happy to apply the Law strictly to others but not to himself, who considered the woman to be of less worth than one of his animals needing water on the Sabbath. The leader’s objection to Jesus healing the woman is clearly absurd and yet he is blind to the hypocrisy he demonstrates.

Do we sometimes become so familiar with the plight of others that we become blind or immune to their needs, unwilling to get involved in trying to make a situation better or just so involved with our own sphere of life that we don’t see outside it?

Jesus sees and knows each of our needs, even when we struggle to express them. He knows our hearts too, when they are open towards him and others and when they are not. As Jesus unbound the woman from her ailment, healed her and set her free to new life, let us come to him so that he can set each one free from all that holds us back from living life in all its fullness.

Just like the woman who Jesus healed, may our hearts and voices be raised in praise and thanks to the God who brings new life and hope. Amen

**Prayer of Confession & assurance of pardon**

O God, all people are part of your created order, all are worthy
of love and respect, care and attention, justice and equality.
Forgive us if our prejudice excludes people.
Forgive us if our views are entrenched and misguided.
Forgive us if we fail to see people as equals.
Forgive us if in our zeal to worship we exclude so many.
Forgive us for our excuses that stop us responding to the needs
of others – and to your command to love as you love us. **Amen.**

We do not understand how you can forgive us again and again,
Lord, yet we have again confessed our failings, our shortcoming,
our wrongdoings, our sins – and your promise still stands:
‘My child, go in peace, your sins are forgiven.’
So, let us go and serve the Lord. **Amen.** (from [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) 21stAugust 2022)

**Prayers for others**

Our Father in heaven we lift our world to you today, knowing that you have called us to do so and knowing that you care about even the smallest detail of that world.

We lift to you all who suffer today at the hands of others, through war, greed, the abuse of power, or the abuse of words. May they find you standing with them, giving them strength. May they find your people upholding them and giving them a voice, that your love may be seen and known.

We lift to you all those who find themselves in positions of authority today, whether it be by choice, or because their skills have been recognized and needed, or because there is no one else available. May they seek wisdom in the right places and have the humility to know when they need help.

We lift to you all who suffer today; through sickness, through the loss of loved ones, through the exhausting workload of caring for others or through anxiety over what the future holds. May they know comfort, healing, reassurance and hope.

And we lift to you all those known to us personally who are in need today … *(name them)* … May they find

grace, healing, and blessing.

We bring all these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us when we pray to say …

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father ……

**Hymn** StF 681 Community of Christ Shirley Erena Murray

Community of Christ, who make the cross your own,

live out your creed and risk Your life for God alone:

the God who wears your face, to whom all worlds belong,

whose children are of every race And every song.

Community of Christ, look past the Church’s door

and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.

Take hands with the oppressed, the jobless in your street,

take towel and water, that you wash your neighbour’s feet.

Community of Christ, through whom the word must sound –

cry out for justice and for peace the whole world round:

disarm the powers of war and all that can destroy,

turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish into joy.

When menace melts away, so shall God’s will be done,

the climate of the world be peace and Christ its Sun;

our currency by love and kindliness our law,

our food and faith be shared as one for evermore.

**Blessing**

May the One who makes all things new fill us with grace, hope, peace and joy, that together we may live and work to God’s praise and glory in our world. Amen.

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