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ORDINARY 3C

23rd January 2022

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Centreing Prayers

Use the following words to help centre yourself in the moment. Say them out loud, or speak them in your mind.

Jesus, open my heart.

Prepare yourself to hear God's word in a new way.

Jesus, open my heart.

Listen for God's voice, calling you to serve others and love radically.

Jesus, open my heart.

Hold the joys, regrets and frustrations from the week, and look ahead to the opportunities next week will bring.

Jesus, open my heart.

Hold the people you share your life with, and the challenges that come with relationships and friendships.

Jesus, open my heart.

Rest a moment in the quiet.

Jesus, open my heart.

Amen.¹

Hymn: 463 STF – Deep in the shadows of the past

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fBnZ0C8Tj4>

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version most familiar or comfortable to you.

Readings: [Luke 4:14-21](#)

Responding to the reading

The beginning of the New Testament describes a time of political turmoil, of large nations accruing wealth and military power, of rising inequality, the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, of mistrust in leaders and politicians.

Nothing like the times we live in at all then!

Into that context, into that uncertainty, steps Jesus of Nazareth. Here, in his first public appearance as an adult, he lays out some of what his ministry is going to be about. Some scholars refer to this passage as The Nazareth Manifesto. And it reads a bit like a Manifesto doesn't it: a kind of political (with a small 'p') statement of the

¹ Centreing prayers written by Tim Baker

key priorities and principles for Jesus' time on earth. You could call it a vision or mission statement. Or a strategy document.

Jesus says he will stand for:

- Good news to the poor
- proclaim release to the captives
- recovery of sight to the blind
- the oppressed go free
- proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

That last one, perhaps the most poetic, has been translated a whole range of different ways, including 'this is God's year or this is God's time', but there is also a hint of the Old Testament idea of the 'jubilee' here: the idea that there is a time when all debts and injustices are wiped away. A time of equity and equality.

In which case, all five of these 'manifesto statements', these 'strategic goals', are about social justice. Jesus is committing to a transforming of the social order – a transforming that begins with the prophets of the Old Testament, and which he comes to continue, to update and to renew. A reminder that his ministry – indeed all God's ministry – needs to include good news to the poor, the possibility of people's potential being fulfilled, a hope for and a working towards a better time.

But, crucially, Jesus doesn't stop there. He says his five points, about social justice, but he is actually reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Many of his original audience would have already known all these words. Perhaps they were mouthing along with him. Perhaps a few groaned, muttering to themselves, 'not another one on this passage, surely'. Perhaps a few lent forward, thinking, 'I wonder what this young rabbi makes of this passage, it's one of my favourites...'

And this is when Jesus says a sixth thing. 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

And that's when they get really upset. This is the point at which a few people would have walked out. This is when someone probably starts the muttering and murmuring that leads them to taking him up to the cliff top a few minutes later. Because this would have been shocking to his original audience. It's a bold and a brave statement.

But it is also the most important, most exciting moment in this gospel passage – and for us, the most relevant. It might even be the single most important thing Jesus says in the whole of his ministry.

Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

And in that moment, what was word, becomes flesh, what was old becomes new, what was law becomes relationship, what was dead has come to life.

Jesus hasn't just reminded people of the principles Isaiah was writing about thousands of years before, he's embodied them, brought them to life, moved them out of an ancient scroll and into the world of people who are living, moving and breathing. Can he do the same for us today?

That's our challenge – can we say the same today? Can we embody these principles of social justice, of God's love in action? Can we be Christ's hands and feet here on earth? What does that look like for you? How can you go into the places where you

are known, and proclaim a transformation of the social order that brings more justice, that fulfils scripture in people's hearing, today?²

Let us pray

God of all grace,

Your world is a place of much need – where there are still people living in poverty, still people living with oppression and disease and captivity, where there is still a need for your Kingdom to be proclaimed.

Help me to live in the Spirit of Luke 4, and to be a fulfilment of Scripture, an embodiment of God's love, for whose I encounter this week.

Amen.

Blessing

As you leave this time of worship, go with the courage to live the Jesus manifesto, go united to and connected with a whole community of people who are seeking to know the nature of God who is Spirit, seeking peace in a divided world. Go, by the grace of God.

Amen.³

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for This Week

Monday 24th January

- On this day in 1984, the company Apple put the first personal Macintosh computer on sale in America, and began a revolution in computing that continues today.
- Let us pray for all the innovators, all the dreamers, all the people who think the world could be different. Come, Lord God, and open our eyes to different ways of being.

Tuesday 25th January

- It's Burns Night today in Scotland which – amongst other things – is a celebration of poetry. So, today, you might like to take a moment to find a poem or two that inspires or speaks to you. You could look up the poetry of R S Thomas – who has a lot to say about the life of faith – or for something more contemporary, Padraig O Tuama.
- Thank you God for the poets, and the way their words can help inspire us in our walk with you.

Wednesday 26th January

- Today is a chance to embrace stillness. Can you manage 10 minutes of sitting, in complete silence, simply making space in your mind to listen to the still small voice of God.

² Reflection written by Tim Baker

³ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

- To do so, you might have to still what Elaine Heath calls the ‘monkey mind’, full of all the thoughts and distractions of modern life. The skill with meditation is to recognise those thoughts, as they enter your mind, and to put them down again, and return to the stillness.
- You might like to use a mantra – something like ‘be still and know that I am God’, or similar.

Thursday 27th January

- Loving God of all the world, we hold before you the nations.
To the God who reigns over governments, bring justice where injustice rules.
To the God who carries a weary world without growing weak, give strength to the struggling and hope to the hopeless.
To the creative God who dreamt up our world, grant vision and insight to those with a heart to change things for the better.
To the compassionate God, heal what is hurting and restore what has been broken.
With grateful hearts we thank our loving God, whose compassion never ceases, whose love for us never runs dry, whose fight against injustice never relents.
Amen.⁴

Friday 28th January

- Our friends at All We Can are currently focusing on tackling poverty in Zimbabwe. Find out more at allwecan.org.uk/nextsteps
- O Ancient of Days, we pray for Zimbabwe,
A country teeming with history and culture,
And a nation of people with passion and purpose.
Lord, bring justice where there is injustice.
Where the effects of climate change and land mismanagement ravage the earth,
Bring sustainable and resilient methods of farming.
Continue to raise up community leaders and local organisations who have vision and commitment to seeing all people flourish.
We give you thanks for Zimbabwe and pray that you will bless and protect all who dwell there. Amen.⁵

Saturday 29th January

- Today is Andrei Rublev’s saint day in the Episcopal Church in the USA. Rublev is the Russian artist who painted a very famous painting of the Trinity (worth looking it up on Google if you haven’t seen it or can’t remember what it looks like!)
Rublev’s Trinity is an invitation into relationship, a relationship with God. Today, take a moment to look at a copy of the painting, and open your heart out for relationship with the divine again today.
- Come into my heart again today, Lord God.
Amen.

⁴ Prayer written by All We Can

⁵ Prayer written by All We Can