



## Worship liturgy for Sun 29<sup>th</sup> May 2022 Unity with God and other believers

**Call to Worship:** Read Psalm 133 (alternative is to read STF 833)

**Opening hymn STF 608, H&P 753, MP19** All Praise to our redeeming Lord

### Opening prayers

#### A prayer of adoration

O God, our loving Heavenly Father we gather to praise and worship you. You made our world by creating order out of confusion. You made each of us in Your image. We come to worship you knowing that your fingerprint is on our lives, knowing that You have engraved our names on the palms of Your hands. We celebrate that You are Sovereign over our world, yet You hear and answer all of our prayers this morning.

We praise You for our Saviour Jesus, who died in our place, rose again three days later and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the father. Thank you for not leaving us seeking, without being able to find joy and purpose in following You.

We thank you You for the freedom we have to meet and worship You. We praise You for Your word and for the many promises we have in You. We celebrate Your provision for us and Your faithfulness to us. We thank You for not turning Your face away from us; even though we sometimes turn our face away from You.

#### A prayer of confession

For the times when we don't listen, when we are too tired to pray or forget to read Your word and spend time in Your presence.

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

For the times when we struggle to follow You and are too quick to act from our own selfish motives and priorities

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

For our tendency to live comfortably without challenging injustice and suffering.

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

For the times when our self-interest strangles our compassion for others.

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

For our lack of forgiveness and sensitivity to the need of others

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

For the times when we spread disunity rather than unity.

Lord in your mercy, forgive us and change us.

We praise You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. Come to us now, fill us with your presence and open our ears to hear your message.

We ask these prayers in and through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

#### Bible Reading: John 17: 20-26

**STF 691, H&P 806** What shall our greeting be

## Unity with God and other believers

*A Christian has been stranded on a desert island by himself for many years. He is rescued one day, and the rescuers are confused to see that he has built two churches. They ask him why. Pointing to one of them, he says, "Well, that's the church that I go to." And pointing to the other, "And that's the one I don't go to."*

There are fifteen direct references to unity in the bible and we read Psalm 133 as our call to worship. In the previous part of John Chapter 17 Jesus prays for his disciples. Now He prays for the whole church throughout the ages, including us today. We reflect on how much He loves us because He thought of us before we were born and while He was facing death. Jesus public ministry was over. He faced a cruel and barbaric death reserved for murders and criminals. Yet He was not discouraged and He was looking to the future.

In this section from Jesus prayer before he died on the cross, we see that He focuses on the importance of unity *"that all of them may be one"* (verse 21). We think long and hard about the last thing that we say to our friends when we know we will never see them again. Often, we will remember in detail the last thing a person has said to us before their death.

### **1 We are united with God – future glory is certain.**

We have the glory of God within us (verse 22) and one day we shall see His glory fully in heaven (verse 24). Heaven is our inheritance! How encouraging for us on Ascension Sunday. How encouraging when we are facing a global pandemic, the war between Ukraine and Russia and very uncertain economic times!

It is helpful to think of our Christian lives as a journey that ends in heaven. Jesus death on the cross unites us with God. We praise God that the death and resurrection of His Son makes it possible for us to receive forgiveness and be united with Him. When we believe and chose to follow Jesus, we start this process of being united with God as we develop a closer walk with Him through the outworking of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

This process continues throughout our lives until we are united with God and our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven (verse 24). Jesus is revealing God to us (verse 26). As we grow and mature in following Him, people will see a little of His glory in us. As believers we are united in God's service on earth. The people that we come into contact with day by day cannot see God but they can experience God's love through us.

*Teresa of Avila said "Christ has no body now on earth but ours. Ours are the only hand with which He can do His work. Ours are the only feet with which He can go into Leeds. Ours are the only eyes through which His compassion can shine forth upon Leeds"*

Lord Jesus help us to be faithful witnesses, united in sharing Your good news and showing Your love, rather than prosecuting judges.

## **2 We are united with other believers.**

We are united with all believers because we place our faith in the same Saviour and we have the glory of God within us (verse 22). We will one day share the same heaven (verse 24). We may have differences but we have so much more in common.

Unity with other believers is a difficult thing for us as a body of believers or God's church. We are all human and we can easily be annoyed or upset by other believers. Sometimes we find that they can upset and hurt us more than our non-Christian friends. It is a sobering thought that - *A survey of church mission plans for the noughties – showed that most did not involve anyone else but themselves and they all felt they would succeed.*

Thus, we cannot consider unity with other believers without mentioning forgiveness. We know from experience that forgiveness can be very difficult and challenging, especially when we have been annoyed or hurt by another believer. If we look at the example of Jesus, He shows us the importance of forgiveness. Later as part of our prayers for others we will say these words from the Lord's prayer - *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* The little word "as" is very interesting because it shows that God's forgiveness is conditional upon our forgiveness.

A helpful way to think about forgiveness is like peeling an onion layer by layer until suddenly there is no onion left! The worst bit is the first bit, which is getting the tough skin off. It is true that the most difficult bit about forgiveness is taking the first step of deciding to forgive the person. We are often tempted to harbour bitterness which fuels divisions and upset. We can also be tempted to go over our hurts. Lord Jesus help us to be able to take that step of deciding to forgive people who have hurt or annoyed us.

Once the first step has been taken and the skin has been removed, we begin a gradual process of dealing with the anger and hurt that has occurred. This is a step by step process rather like taking away the layers of an onion. When we start this process, we may not be sure how long this will take, but the important thing is to keep moving forward during this part of the process. Finally, we will reach the core or final layer, which is where we can honestly go the person who has hurt or annoyed us and say I forgive you. Lord Jesus help us to promote unity with other believers by forgiving those, who have hurt or annoyed us.

As we draw our thoughts to a close, we give thanks we are united with God and other believers through Jesus death and resurrection. We praise Him that heaven is our inheritance and we ask God to help us follow Jesus example and forgive those who hurt or annoy us.

**STF 676, H&P 764** Christ, from whom all blessings flow

### **Prayers for Others**

We pray for all who have authority especially the leaders of warring nations. We pray for the governments of Syria, Afghanistan, and in particular the Ukraine and Russia, where war continues. We pray that the hearts of all in power will be changed and they will seek to bring about peace. We remember all in our world affected by conflict and despair. We

pray particularly for churches worshipping in the midst of war. We thank you for their acts of love and service. Lord, renew our commitment and fervour to care for refugees, the stateless, frightened and despairing.

We pray for the people of China and especially those living in Shanghai as they face tough measures to control the coronavirus outbreak. We pray for the medical staff who work round the clock to treat those who are ill. We remember all those in government quarantine facilities who face illness alone. We pray for comfort for all who struggle with the loss of loved ones.

We pray for everyone facing poverty and financial hardship due to the economic crisis. We give thanks for all of the charities like Christians against Poverty that work so hard to alleviate financial suffering. We give thanks for the many charities who serve the homeless. We remember the growing work of food banks and the vital services they provide for so many people.

We pray for our community. We remember those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of each day. Bring people alongside them to provide support and encouragement. We pray for all of the local councillors who have been elected recently. Inspire them to serve our community faithfully and seek justice for those who are oppressed and in trouble.

We pray for those who are ill, for those close to death and for those who are grieving. Help all who struggle with ill health (name anyone specific). Be close to all those who are grieving (name anyone specific). May they experience a renewed sense of Your comfort and presence. May they know that You are with them day by day through all of the challenges they face.

We pray for ourselves; we give thanks we are united with God and other believers through Jesus death and resurrection. Lord help us to be faithful witnesses, united in sharing Your good news and showing Your love. May people that we meet see a little of Your glory shining through us. Lord also give us the strength to forgive those who have hurt or annoyed us so we can promote unity among believers.

Let's bring all of our prayers for others to a close as we say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

**STF 690, H&P 515, MP 640** The church's one foundation

**Let's close our worship by blessing one another** - May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and for evermore. Amen