

**Bible Reading:** Psalm 106: 1-6

**Hymn:** Who can sound the depths of sorrow <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88VCX7bqKJo>

Who can sound the depths of sorrow  
In the Father heart of God  
For the children we've rejected  
For the lives so deeply scarred?  
And each light that we've extinguished  
Has brought darkness to our land  
Upon our nation, upon our nation  
Have mercy, Lord

We have scorned the truth you gave us  
We have bowed to other lords  
We have sacrificed the children  
On the altars of our gods  
O let truth again shine on us  
Let your holy fear descend  
Upon our nation, upon our nation  
Have mercy, Lord

Who can stand before your anger?  
Who can face your piercing eyes?  
For you love the weak and helpless  
And you hear the victims' cries

Yes, you are a God of justice  
And your judgement surely comes  
Upon our nation, upon our nation  
Have mercy, Lord

Who will stand against the violence?  
Who will comfort those who mourn?  
In an age of cruel rejection  
Who will build for love a home?  
Come and shake us into action  
Come and melt our hearts of stone  
Upon your people, upon your people  
Have mercy, Lord

Who can sound the depths of mercy  
In the Father heart of God?  
For there is a Man of sorrows  
Who for sinners shed his blood  
He can heal the wounds of nations  
He can wash the guilty clean  
Because of Jesus, because of Jesus  
Have mercy, Lord

**Prayers:**

Father God, creator of the world and universe, look down upon us as we gather in your name. Although we may be worshipping in different places, we pray that we shall be strengthened through your Word and the unity we have in Jesus Christ. We are not alone in our worship and add our praises to all who meet in the name of Jesus today. Creation speaks of your love and we are blessed with many gifts. Sadly, we have abused those gifts and have not always acted in ways that are pleasing to you. Have mercy upon us O' Lord and show us how we can make your world a better place in which to live. May your blessing be with us today and every day; for we ask this in Jesus' name.

**Old Testament Reading Exodus 32: 1-14**

For maybe the first time in my life I can empathise with the Israelites, the challenges set by dealing with the Coronavirus have forced the Church to make turns that we would have preferred not to have to make and I suddenly find myself looking back and longing for the days of old as I look through rose coloured spectacles. I think that I understand where I am heading and then I have to re-think everything and find myself shifting in a different direction.

The line that intrigues me in this passage is the very final one "and the Lord changed his mind" which leaves me wondering about the whole issue of predestination, is everything written in the book of God and do we simply go slavishly through life with everything pre destined?

*Consider:*

- *Can you recall times when you have made a significant mind shift and changed your mind about something really important?*
- *Do you think God changes his mind? Or, Do you think that everything is predestined and we have no control?*
- *If God does change his mind, how do you think that we might influence such a mind shift?*

### **A time of prayer:**

God of love and compassion; we lay our broken world at your feet. Our world continues to be torn apart by war, fear and hate and people are oppressed by those who seek power for themselves with little thought for the needs of others.

We think for our towns and communities, many of which are fragmented and divided. Diversity can bring richness and strength to our communities, but can be used to promote fear and hatred. Show us how old pains and wounds can be used to bring new life and hope.

We think of those whose lives have been broken, through sorrow and grief, illness, and fractured relationships. Life may seem to have lost its purpose. May the gift of your healing grace bring a new sense of purpose and love.

On this Homeless and Prison Sunday we think of those who have found themselves homeless and destitute not knowing where to turn. We remember those who have committed crimes, and are in prison or just been released. As we recognise the need for justice may we act with compassion and mercy, remembering how God deals with us.

We draw our prayers of intercession to a close by saying aloud or in our mind these words:

Almighty God, give us hearts of compassion so that we can bless those whom we meet. Help us to bring peace and comfort to those who are in distress. May your Spirit give us life and strength and show us how we can share God's love, joy and peace and be true servants of Christ. Amen.

### ***The Lord's Prayer:***

#### **Gospel            Matthew 22: 1-14**

For many years, the annual book of the National Children's home was called "Highways and Hedges" reminding people of how Thomas Stephenson, Alfred Mager and Francis Horner, went out to the highways and hedges to seek out homeless children. The story has a nostalgic air, that makes the gospel message feel quite cosy and lovely. However, all is not so rosy for the man who came unprepared, he was cast out to the customary weeping and gnashing of teeth. What did he do that was so wrong? He appears to have just been plucked off the street, maybe he didn't have wedding attire? Why does Jesus add this final bit into the parable? It was all going so well up to this point.

#### *Consider:*

- *How important do you see the work of the Church as "going out" or do you see the role of the Church as "drawing in?" are we only successful as a Church if our chairs (or pews) are full every Sunday?*
- *Jesus talks a lot about being ready. Jesus might well take us by surprise with his second coming, is not being prepared an acceptable excuse?*
- *Are you ready, if like the man in the parable, you are called at a moments notice, what do you need to do to put your house in order?*

#### **Hymn: Father, hear the prayer we offer**

The Church of Christ in every age  
Beset by change but Spirit led,  
Must claim and test its heritage  
And keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,  
The victims of injustice cry  
For shelter and for bread to eat,  
And never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise,  
A caring Church that longs to be

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd\\_K44OAvAM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd_K44OAvAM)

A partner in Christ's sacrifice,  
And clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,  
Can cure the fever in our blood,  
And teach us how to share our bread  
And feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve  
In full obedience to our Lord:  
To care for all, without reserve,  
And to spread his liberating Word.

#### **A prayer of blessing**

May your grace, love and peace, inspire and strengthen us now, and in the days to come. In Jesus' name we ask this. Amen.