



Call to Worship

The cry of injustice calls us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross,
as we prepare to celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us.

Jesus respected all, without favour; enable us to seek the good in all things.

Together, we seek to follow your path to justice, rising to the call and demands of discipleship.

Hymn: StF 556 *Just as I Am, Without One Plea* (Charloette Elliot, 1789-1871) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ka6143Nt4M>

Just as I am, without one plea
but that you died to set me free,
and at your bidding, 'Come to me!',
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, you will receive
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:

because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am – your love unknown
has broken every barrier down -
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,
here for a time and then above,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Opening Prayer

God of us all, we recognise that there is strength in our diversity, as we seek truth and renew our commitment to justice. There are times when we need to make space to honour and glorify you in quiet adoration and contemplation. There are times when we honour you by our actions and our deeds. There are times when we honour you in the way we support, care, nurture and encourage each other through dark moments, and there are times when we honour you through our loud proclamations. May your spirit guide us to find balance in all that we do, and to give you your rightful honour in each moment. Amen.

Scripture John 12:1-8 – *Grumbling when Jesus is honoured*

Sermon *Rising to the Call: How do you find balance?*

Mary anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume. The nard would have cost a year's wages for a labourer and was a very extravagant gesture on Mary's part. Mary was motivated by generosity and a desire to anoint Jesus before his death. We do know that Jesus did not criticize Mary's actions and defended her when Judas and others complained.

Mary was a close friend of Jesus, and we learn more of her from the occasion recorded by Luke (10:38-42) when Jesus is staying with her and her sister Martha. Mary spends her time sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching, whilst Martha works hard preparing the meal. Just like Judas, Martha grumbles at Mary's behaviour, spending too much time listening to Jesus when there is more productive work to be done.

It has been suggested that Mary was the only one of Jesus' followers who understood the real meaning when he repeatedly told them that he would suffer and die. Where all the others had responded by denying that such a thing could happen, Mary had accepted the full implications of what he was saying and felt the need to pour out her love in this extravagant gesture. This explanation is supported by Jesus' own words when he defended her actions.

Judas sees Mary's actions as being wrong. The nard could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. It was a missed opportunity. And yet, the gospel writer John tells us that there is an unstated self-interest here because Judas himself was stealing from the money collected for the poor.

When is it right to be wastefully extravagant? As you walk around British cities and towns you will see so many big church buildings that have been built over the centuries. Could that money and time not have been given to the poor? And now, we continue to spend money maintaining those buildings. Can we still justify it today? How about sending people into space?

It is easier to choose when there is an obvious good answer and a bad answer. But how do we choose between two good things? Does it matter which good you choose? Is it better to choose something than not choose at all? We can get stuck in analysing all the options and never taking any action. Perhaps it is better to set off in wrong direction

and easier to turn when going even though you might go a longer way. An ocean supertanker, for example, is easy to turn with the smallest rudder, once it is moving, but impossible when stationary.

The same choices occur as we consider climate justice. We can be caught up with excessive analysis and waiting for the perfect solution and take no action. For us all to eat more sustainably, we are being encouraged to buy local food so that we minimize eating food that is transported over long distances. However, the poorer areas of the world need the richer countries to buy their produce in order for them to make a living and feed their own families, and that food will need to be transported long distances. As drought occurs and sea level rises due to global warming impact, then this will be even more essential for the poorer nations. Striking a balance is not easy. Will we realize later that we got it wrong?

We frequently encounter the need to keep checking that we have an appropriate balance in life, so that we always focus on the intended outcome rather than blindly follow rules which may have been correct when written but is now outdated. Jesus was not bound by rigid interpretation but sought to bring scripture to life in whatever situation people found themselves. Matthew 7:29 tells us that the people were amazed “because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

When we seek to find the right path on our faith journey, the Methodist Way teaches us that there are four distinct aspects of our faith journey: worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. Wesley’s teaching points to four different sources of insight that we must hold in balance: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. As science opens up new frontiers of understanding, reason will teach us new things, our traditions adapt and as we experience new situations which surprise us, we must wrestle in faith to gain new understanding.

Consider:

- *How do we judge the balance point?*
- *Is extravagance always wrong? How do you feel about the extravagance of others? How do you justify your own?*
- *When have you not taken action because you could not figure out what the best solution was? What would it feel like to you to take some action even knowing that it might not be the best action?*
- *How well balanced is your life between Worship, Learning & Caring, Service, and Evangelism?*

Prayers

O God of mercy, we hear the cry of injustice calling us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross. A little of the light which has come into the world is snuffed out when we take no action because we are afraid of doing the wrong thing. As we take this Lenten journey, guide us towards the darkness of the cross, emboldening us to rise to the call of each new challenge placed before us, as we trust in your promises, revealing the power of transformation, and the hope of resurrection.

Reconciling and redeeming God, in a world where views are increasingly polarised, we pray for all who seek to reconcile and unite. We pray that your spirit may bring comfort and challenge in equal measure, empowering all those who seek to bridge the gap between conflicting views so that the world may harness the strength and joy of human ingenuity and creativity to protect your world in all its glory.

In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Our Father ...

Hymn: STF 383 – *Holy Spirit, Gift Bestower* (Church Hymnary, 4th Edition) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaN5iG2Olcg>

Holy Spirit, gift bestower
breathe into our hearts today.
Flowing water, dove that hovers,
Holy Spirit, guide our way.
Love inspirer, joy releaser,
Spirit, take our fears away.
Reconciler, peace restorer,
move among us while we pray.

Holy Spirit, Christ proclaimer,
wisdom bringer, light our way.
Fire that dances, wind that whispers,
Holy Spirit, come today.
Ease disturber, comfort bearer,
move among us while we pray.
Truth revealer, faith confirmer,
rest within our hearts today.

Blessing:

Go from here to walk with Christ and find your balance in a world of conflicting views.
May God the Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer be with you now and evermore. Amen.