



Opening Prayer

God of Heaven and Earth, God of the sunrise and the sunset, God of the highest mountain and the deepest valley, hear our prayers as we come before your throne of glory. Declare your message to us and grant us the courage to listen. May our listening turn to action and Heaven nearer to Earth.

Hymn StF 185 Sing we the King who is coming to reign

Charles Silvester Horne

<https://youtu.be/mva0xZkDlCY>

Sing we the King who is coming to reign:
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King:

*Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase.;

Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
Doubt shall not darken his witness within;
Hell has no terrors, and death has not sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King:

Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song thy creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King:

Prayer of confession

Good God of creation, we sing praise to you.

But even as we raise our voices we know we have faltered and failed. Walking on paths that turned our hearts inward, sitting with those who scoffed at the cries of people in poverty, mocking those on the margins, denying the earth in her distress.

But even now it is not too late, for in the face of judgement comes the offer of grace and the hope that deadwood can spring to life.

Where we have failed to bear good fruit and share your abundance for the earth **GOD HAVE MERCY**
Inspire us now to delight in your purposes, to embrace your possibilities, to inhabit your promises,
to flourish as fruit for the world you so love and bring healing for all the nations. AMEN.

Scripture Revelation 21: 1-6

Sermon

When I was training to be a local preacher the topic of Heaven raised its head and the tutor asked us what we thought it was like. Sue replied that we knew what it was like because the bible told us – and started talking about the description just beyond the passage we heard read – a passage that tells us about a city made of gold with walls of jasper and decorated with emeralds, sapphires and other precious stones.

Tutor John's immediate response? "And how many people died in the mining of these stones and gold?"

I remembered this firstly because it reminds us that scripture is not a text book. Genesis is poetry and Revelation is full of images and symbols. This doesn't make it an easy read for modern minds.

Secondly this is the very image that our lectionary passage directs us to today. An image of an end time when God dwells with his people in the holy City and there will be no more suffering for the time has come when God will make all things new.

Well sort of. In the same way as the poetry of Genesis tells us the world was created - instantly and from nothing – this view of a replacement Earth misses something.

What St John sees is not a replaced, but a redeemed heaven and earth ... teeming with life because the impediments to life with God and his people are overcome. The resulting city may not look like the Garden of Eden but the relationship with God certainly does take us back to Paradise. It renews creation in the space where God has always been.

Relationships between people are renewed. Architecturally the city is walled and gated but socially it is a welcoming. The gates into New Jerusalem are open and even foreigners are invited to enter this radiant city, whose lamp is Jesus. In our time when nations seek to secure themselves against outsiders, can the church claim Revelation's vision of openness and welcome for all? Can we see ourselves coming out of our houses in the morning and greeting with delight refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan and Janet* and her family?

In this new city the value of the whole created order is valued and its potential recognised. To live by this vision will require us to cherish and nurture all that potential be it papaya or people, beans or babies.

The famous words from this reading are found in verse 4. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order has passed away."

That sounds like Heaven to me. You can keep your gold and jewels if people are free from those things that are death dealing and painful.

- Things like not having enough to eat despite your best efforts because the forces of nature seem to be ganging up on you. Even worse, not being able to keep hunger from those who you love and take responsibility for.
- Fleeing your home and loved ones to escape brutality and the ongoing lack of basic amenities, and fear for your future in any place.
- In our complicated world that which is deathlike can still be poverty, cold and hunger but it can also be oppressive work practices from the gig economy to those who work in high places.
- It can be pressure from drug gangs in big cities or the all-pervasive social media.

I once went to a course at a hospice about the issue of forgiveness as death approaches. The question was put to us "What would forgiveness look like?" What John is showing us here is the answer to the question "what would life lived in harmony with God look like?"

In a world that can value everything and nothing it's difficult to have commitment but this is the vision that's held before us. A heavenly vision that needs *our feet on Earth*.

It's a political vision which requires us *to take care of our environment *to raise the value of community in an individualistic world *to fight for all people to be included not excluded *and to enable (rather than impose) the conditions for all people to experience fullness of life.

So ... what does that look like to you? What does Janet* say it looks like to her? What are we going to do about it? Whatever the answer know that Jesus, the light and the lamb of Revelation stands with you.

Prayer –from Christian Aid

Creator God, cultivator of our faith, thank you for the privilege of living in this global garden planted to bear your fruit, to delight our tongues, to fill our bellies, to energise our bodies. You have given us life in all its fullness. You have given us life, yet millions still hunger.

In our hunger for peace, we pray for Ukraine, but may our concern for them not stifle our concern for Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Syria and all those other places to whom our hearts have become hardened through over-familiarity. **THEY WILL HUNGER NO MORE AND THIRST NO MORE**

In our hunger for justice, we pray for those who are struggling with the increased cost of living, but may our concern for them not stifle our concern for Janet* and others in similar situations, and all those known to us who hunger to provide for those they love in our global community.

THE SUN WILL NOT STRIKE THEM, NOR ANY SCORCHING HEAT

In our hunger for justice, we pray for our politicians and for those who sit on the boards of huge companies. But may our concern for them not stifle our concern for your little ones, children who go to bed hungry, whose parents struggle to provide for them in times of desperate drought.

GOD WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES

And in our hunger, we pray that you will fill us with your hope, your passion and your life, that we may give, act and pray so all who hunger to provide may be filled to overflowing. In the name of Christ, farmer, gardener and cultivator, AMEN.

Hymn StF 738 There is a new heaven

Ruth Duck.

(You probably won't know the tune, try singing it to 526 Lord of all hopefulness)

There is a new heaven; there is a new earth;
there is a new city that God brings to birth.
It lives in the mind of our Saviour this day
where tears, pain, and sadness are all wiped away.

The homeless and hungry will sing a new song,
for leisure and labour to all shall belong;
distinctions, divisions which hurt and destroy
will all disappear, leaving love, hope, and joy.

*Come, people of God, your courage renew,
for God reigns already, creates life anew.
Be faithful and bold to welcome God's day,
that tears, pain, and sadness may vanish away.*

The river lifegiving shall stream from God's throne,
with healing, forgiving: war shall not be known.
The nations shall gather to live in God's light,
united forever in joy and delight.

Blessing – from Christian Aid

In the name of God who plants the seed of justice: Be hungry.

In the name of Christ who hangs on the tree of love: Be fruitful.

And in the name of the Spirit who inspires God's will in our hearts and our lives: Be celebrated.

You are Christ's people, here and throughout the world now and forever. Amen.

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If you would like to support Christian Aid Week
and help turn hunger into hope,
online donations can be made at
caweek.org

*Janet's story can be found at Christian Aid
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/appeals/christian-aid-week-churches-film>