



Opening Prayer

We come before you Almighty God, ever mindful that you have called us as your own. Lead us in your truth and teach us your paths of steadfast love and righteousness. Amen.

Hymn Singing the Faith 18: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbBImzfVy94>

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
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In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Let us pray:

O Lord we lift up our hearts and minds and bless your holy name. For you have created all things and your glory is seen in the heavens and on the earth. Thank you for your bountiful provision and your love that goes before us. May this time of Lent enable us to walk humbly and be mindful of your covenant with us. Forgive us Lord for the words said and deeds done that have been selfish, inconsiderate, or hurtful to others. We thank you for your mercies that are new to us each day and that wash us clean. In Jesus Name. Amen

Bible Reading: Mark 8: 31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Hymn Singing the faith 636 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt69WDtYNLo>

O Love that will not let me go
I rest my weary soul in Thee
I give Thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be
O Love, that will not let me go.

Oh Cross, that liftest up my head
I dare not ask to fly from Thee
I lay in dust life's glory dead
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be
O Love, that will not let me go.

Oh Joy, that seekest me through pain
I cannot close my heart to Thee
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be
O Love, that will not let me go.

Reflection:

When on holiday in the Yorkshire Dales, I love to climb up to Conistone Pie in Upper Wharfedale. As I get older, and not as fit and agile as I used to be, I find the climb up through Conistone Dib more challenging these days and by the time I reach the top, my heart is beating so much that my chest feels as though it will explode and my legs ache. Despite that, I love to walk along the path through the limestone outcrops and look down on the picturesque Wharfedale way down below me and the wonderful Kilnsey Cragg. Gazing up the dale I can see where Littondale heads of in its own little valley to the west and further across to my right, I can see the old trade route climbing up out of Kettlewell, high onto the moors and for a few moments, I forget the pain of the climb, and wallow in the glory of this corner of heaven for me.

It is normal practice during January each year in the Methodist Church for us to renew our covenant with God in a special service. I always use the traditional words for the Covenant prayer, not because I am a staunch traditionalist, but because I believe that the words are so powerful. One of the most difficult lines in this prayer include the words “put me to suffering” and these are words that some people find difficult to say. I understand that, during my life, there have been times when I have felt the searing pain of loss, not least, when our daughter died as a baby and the thought of being willing to suffer pain of that magnitude seems too much for many to bear. I don't believe that when we are saying the words to God that we are asking him to cause us pain and suffering, I have always been pragmatic about those occasions when I have suffered in life and the last thing, I have ever done is blame God, indeed God has given me comfort and strength when I have needed it the most.

When Jesus is talking to his disciples in our gospel reading today, he is preparing the disciples for what lay ahead, his suffering goes way beyond being nailed to a cross, it involves public humiliation, rejection, hatred, and being reduced to lowest place known to humankind, but this journey leads him to the glory of Easter day. Peter ticks him off, the idea of his friend being exposed to all of this is unthinkable, maybe Peter believes that Jesus, with all his power and authority can be raised to glory without having to experience the pain of suffering. But Jesus rebukes him and reminds his disciples that following Christ is a costly process, this is not an easy path to follow and if they want to share in Christ's glory, then they must be prepared to share in his suffering.

As I say the words of the Covenant prayer each year (often several times) I reflect on what my discipleship costs me. I have been part of the Christian Community all my life, and as I look back there have been many occasions, which, a bit like standing near Conistone Pie and drinking in the panorama, life has felt good, and I have felt close to the Kingdom of God. Equally, there have been many times when life has been tough, when I have flogged away, feeling weary, lost, distressed, anxious, and have wondered why I do this. On those occasions I find myself reflecting on the Covenant Prayer once again, I never signed up to an easy life, if we are to share in Christ's glory, they we must be prepared to share in his suffering.

Consider:

- *Have you ever thought about what your own journey of faith has cost you? How often do you complain that this is all too much?*
- *Think of occasions when you have felt the glory of God surrounding you, maybe an event that took, effort, and even money. As you celebrated the euphoria of success, did the cost feel to be worthwhile?*
- *How do you feel about saying the words “put me to suffering? Jesus said ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’ What is the cross you carry, and do you do it willingly, or begrudgingly?*

Prayers for Others.

Lord God, we pray for those who find themselves in restricted spaces and unexpected places.

We pray for places affected by climate change, areas where water is scarce and crops fail, places where flooding is affecting people's homes.

We pray for those who are homeless and have lost everything through earthquake or fire.

We pray for those who wait for medical results, for those who are ill in hospital or at home.

For those who have lost their jobs and those who await news about benefits.

We pray for our healthcare workers, nurses and doctors, essential service workers, teachers and police.
For our children whose education has been so badly affected, and parents who are juggling time constraints.
For those who are grieving the loss of loved ones.
For Religious leaders and funeral parlours who minister to the bereaved.
For those who are working on the Vaccine rollout, scientists, government leaders, economists, and medical aid associations.
Breathe new life into your people and all circumstances as we approach Easter. May we always know your presence with us. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah" Stf 465 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j48TLIRb4Q>

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

The Blessing

May Almighty God, who has called us by His grace bless and keep us by confirming and strengthening us through Jesus Christ, our Lord, and fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit to His instruments of peace in the world. Amen.