



Call to Worship - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Today as we worship God, we are mindful of the plight of the persecuted and oppressed. Slaves' past and present fill our thoughts, People in poverty are on our minds and, Celebrating our freedom we pray for those constrained.

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example : We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. We worship God who, the more we are bound in service, the more we are free.

Hymn - 11 - Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy, there is none beside thee
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty!
all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and
sea;
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Prayer : *This Prayer called identity may help us in our reflection on our place in what we sometimes call 'the scheme of things'.*

Identity : Lord Jesus, in your time, you faced questioning by those who wanted to discredit you, who challenged what you were doing and even your authority. In wisdom and grace you challenged long-held assumptions. Like you, we are frustrated whenever we are asked to justify our right to be, when people question our identity, or want to make us feel small and marginal. Help us to follow you in exercising good judgement, asking counter questions, and challenging assumptions. In times when we despair, confirm by a gentle whisper that you love us, that we matter, and that we belong. Help us do all we can to respect, affirm, and love others. May we bring forth the fruit of your kingdom, so that all may know they truly belong. **Amen.**

Irene John @The United Reformed Church

Almighty God, we come before you in worship today, celebrating our freedom and recognising those who are constrained.

We come to worship today, praying that in our constrained state we may learn to be free in you.

We are free and we are bound. We are held back by our humanity and the sin that is ever around us. And we are released because of your divinity, your sacrifice on the cross, your resurrection, and the salvation which you have made ours.

As we confess our sin, we pray that we may, in faith, claim that freedom which you have made available. And rejoicing in it, may we live as those who are truly free.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *William Glasse*

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. And 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.

Introduction to theme - Anti-Slavery Day :

An Act of Parliament in 2010 created Anti-Slavery Day, kept on 18th October. The point of the day is to draw attention to modern slavery in all its forms. Modern slavery is around us. It touches us, and we touch it, even if we may be unaware of that. Modern slavery degrades the lives of the people involved: both its victims and the perpetrators of crimes that enslave. Alongside modern slavery stands the closely related theme of human trafficking. Modern slavery and trafficking are forms of constraint and abuse which, if we stop to think, are deeply shocking. Our Bible readings will help us to think about this in a different way. In Exodus, we will remind ourselves of the way in which God's people made a great mistake as they lost sight of him, despite all he had done for them in helping them out of slavery. Then, in Matthew's Gospel, we will be reminded of what Jesus had to say about paying taxes and civic responsibility.

Hymn - 662 - Have you heard God's voice?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzJr9T5JYRU>

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

Jacqueline G. Jones Words and Music: (c) 2008 Jacqueline G. Jones <http://www.spiritualsongs.co.uk>

Reading - Exodus 33:12-23 - Moses' Intercession

Moses said to the Lord, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'

The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'

Reading - Matthew 22:15-22 : The Question about Paying Taxes

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false
assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense
compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received—
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your
presence
every day, in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Martin E Leckebusch (born 1962) © 2000 Kevin Mayhew Ltd

Sermon - Righting a wrong

I think most of us would agree that, when we see something that is wrong and we can do something about it, we should act to right that wrong. What is more difficult is to see what is wrong, especially in the very familiar surroundings to which we become acclimatised as we live our lives. The point of today's focus on modern-day slavery is that slavery, in its most pernicious contemporary form, is all around us, and yet we may not notice. When I first started work in the early 1980s, we still employed some casual, manual labour to carry out tasks on the farm like lifting early potatoes that were easily damaged by mechanical lifters, or hoeing sugar beet to minimise chemical use.

In my naive, immediately post-college days, it would never have occurred to me that the gangmaster who provided labour may not have been paying the people properly, despite what we paid him. The more grown-up individual who has recently retired would now go to significant lengths to check out the people from whom labour was sourced. But that is because, in my case, I have had my eyes opened by a working-lifetime of training and experience.

Anti-Slavery Day is designed to teach us to recognise survivors, to understand the signs of slavery around us, and to encourage us to take practical action to create a society where everyone can live in freedom. That sounds all very well. What is it that we are talking about?

We are talking about forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, criminal exploitation and human trafficking. Most of us would say, "In no way are we operating or living in worlds where that is part of the reality of life." And yet those things are associated with restaurants, care homes, nail bars and car washes. Personally, a nail bar is an alien environment to me, but the other three are all places I frequent, either as a visitor or as a customer. People can be hidden in plain sight.

The point of 18 October being set up as Anti-Slavery Day was to bring together government, public services, businesses, charities, schools, communities and individuals. Churches are, of course, numbered in that list. It is a day to focus on the reality of modern-day slavery and the changes needed to prevent exploitation, so that people at risk are protected and survivors are supported.

The 18th of October is also Church Action on Poverty Sunday, when we are encouraged to give, act and pray together in our churches around the United Kingdom.

We know that, by doing so, we can help "bring about a more just and compassionate society where everyone can live life to the full, freed from poverty". Yes, that is a quote, but I believe it. The theme for this year is comprised of food, faith and fellowship.

Do people have enough food? Do people have freedom to believe? Do people have the opportunity to associate together, or are they deprived: hungry, kept away from their own choice faith, or deprived of companionship? We must have noticed the recent furore over the comments made by a political party about Jews and we cannot avoid seeing the reports of violence against Jews in this country.

Freedom Sunday is a chance to join with many thousands of churches which pray, give and advocate for an end to slavery and to violence. This is a big day. But we come back to the question: how do we really know what is wrong, even though the day is about righting wrong?

We have shared two significant scripture passages, both of which may well have been familiar. In Exodus, the Israelites have made their journey out of slavery towards the Promised Land and had become bored while Moses was away from them, conversing with God on the holy mountain. To counteract their boredom, they melted down various objects they had and created a calf made of gold, which they worshipped because they perceived that God had lost interest in them.

That had a bad effect on God and distanced his people from him. But Moses knew that God was not hard-hearted. As they sought to journey on, God offered Moses a companion, but Moses was not keen on the presence merely of an angel, because he wanted nothing less than the Divine presence. Moses knew that the people needed God to lead them, and he beseeched God not to send them out otherwise. As a supplement to this, Moses asks to see the glory of God. God responds by showing him not just the glory, but the whole divine goodness, God's entire nature. God protects Moses from something he cannot see but shows him what he needs to know in order to be strengthened in faith and encouraged in his work.

Then, in the Gospel, we shared a well-known passage in which the leaders wanted to entrap Jesus. It was not unusual for people to try to embarrass public speakers with difficult questions, but when the speaker was able to answer, that established a sense of superiority. In the exchange between the leaders and Jesus, it was not so much superiority that Jesus sought to win, but the much more fundamental argument about priorities. It is one thing to give back to a mortal monarch something which bears his image, namely mere money. But when it comes to God, God's image is stamped on every individual person. And so it is people who concern God most.

We can conclude from this that people are all individuals, all made in the image of God. And, as we learn from the Exodus story, despite anyone's own actions, that individual is never ruled out of a relationship with God. We find it hard to accept this sometimes because we are so conscious of everything that we get wrong. So, we pull together these disparate and different thoughts under three headings.

First, true freedom is found in belonging to God. In Exodus, God's presence marks out and sustains his people. In Matthew, Jesus reminds us that, although we have civic duties, our deepest loyalty is to God. The more we are bound in God's service, the more we are free, as we reflected in our call to worship. We are not free from the duties and cares of life but free from the effects of what we get wrong.

Secondly, freedom brings responsibility. Moses speaks for a people who need God's guidance, while Jesus challenges his hearers to recognise what belongs to earthly authority and what belongs to God. Anti-Slavery Day asks us to use our freedom responsibly by noticing and challenging the forces that constrain and exploit others.

Thirdly, righting a wrong begins by seeing people as God's own. Modern slavery treats human beings as possessions or as commodities. The readings remind us that people bear God's claim and are known by God. Worship therefore leads to action: standing with the oppressed and helping to restore freedom, dignity and justice. Go back to where we began. Are the signs of modern slavery and of poverty around us obvious? No, they are not always.

But if we have our eyes open, are engaged in really seeing what is around, and notice the detail rather than just seeing objects to be navigated, then our hearts are warmed.

Having found our hearts warming, we start to see the faces of people. And we realise that, in every single one, whoever they are, there is the image of God.

This does nothing to help us deal with the root causes of modern slavery. But if we start to accept everyone with whom we are neighbours as fellow children of God, then, by a different route, we start to arrive at the same destination.

We could say so much more about this, but time does not allow us.

Please ponder it. Think of it as you go about daily living. And remember that God's image is borne by every one of his children. To him be honour, glory and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

Hymn - 670 - We have nothing to give that didn't first come from your hand

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf3qmSi8r_s

We have nothing to give
that didn't first come from your hand,
we have nothing to offer you
which you did not provide.
Ev'ry good, perfect gift comes from
your kind and gracious heart,
and all we do is give back to you
what always has been yours.

*Lord, we're breathing the breath
that you gave us to breathe,
to worship you, to worship you.
And we're singing these songs
with the very same breath,*

to worship you, to worship you.

Who has given to you
that it should be paid back to him?
Who has given to you
as if you needed anything?
From you and to you and through you
come all things, O Lord,
and all we do is give back to you
what always has been yours.
Chorus

We are breathing the breath
that you gave us to breathe.

Matt Redman (p.1994) © 2004 Thankyou Music/Adm. by worshiptogether.com songs excl. UK & Europe, adm. by Kingswaysongs.com. www.kingswaysongs.com .

Dedication of Offering : God, creator and life giver, We bring gifts and lives, We offer time and resources In the work of your Church. May it glorify you. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession : Today we pray for the lives of those around us that are not all they seem to be . We pray for ourselves when we struggle to be open about our needs and circumstances. We pray for your liberating life in our lives to help us to really see those we are alongside and to enable us to be transparent about our own troubles, fears and emotions.

A prayer for light in the pit of despair : Lord of all hopefulness, your presence brings everlasting joy, greater than any fleeting high. We feel it when like the psalmist, we trust more in you than in ourselves and believe in your forgiveness, as you believe in our potential for good. Lord of all gentleness, your presence is soothing balm for hurt and pain, a light in the psalmist's dark pit of despair, grief or regret. Man of sorrows, you've plumbed those depths for us. Calvary's sorrow and love flow mingled down into the river of life, with your promise to always be there, guiding and loving us, Lord of all.

Rachel Shackleton, volunteer prison chaplain, Yorkshire North and East District © The Methodist Church

We pray for all who are the victims of modern slavery or trafficking, Lives demeaned by personal circumstances, Victims of criminal activity that exploits, Enriching one at the expense of the other, Leading to the ruin of personality and affecting health. Make us aware of the services we use, Conscious that those employed must be properly paid, That our endless searching for the cheapest deal, Determination to hold on to our cash May be taking away from others what they need to live full lives.

We pray for a sense of responsibility in the business community, A desire to trade in a way that looks out for abuse, To operate within supply chains that are transparent, that respect people and understand the wider impact of decisions made. May we grow into a culture where value overshadows cost. Show us how we can expose and influence the dark, hidden areas, the parts of life that are unseen, and for many of us, unknown. The worlds of illegal drug trading and abusive sex working, business models that take everything, deliver nothing, destroying hope and aspiration for people crossing borders in pursuit of freedom.

We pray for the ever-present risks facing those illegally crossing the English Channel. Help us focus more on safety, motivation and desperation, enable us to see that illegal immigration is a symptom of a greater ill. God, you created a world and, in your Son, redeemed it, may we live by the truth that sets us free and freely share the source of that freedom.

William Glasse

Let us pray for situations of extreme poverty in the world: *Much of this information is from the World Bank.*

Help us understand that poverty is about more than money. That 1.1 billion people experience 'multidimensional poverty' including inadequate nutrition, sanitation, housing, electricity or clean cooking fuel.

Help us recognise that poverty is most prevalent in rural areas and is often associated with conflict, weak government, climate hazards, limited education and healthcare and lack of secure employment.

We might focus on: Sub-Saharan Africa Countries affected by war and political instability South Asia The Middle East and North Africa Pockets of Latin America, the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific

We cannot hope to understand the detail of all these situations but we can be silent in reflection and commend to God those whose faces we do not see but who God knows.

Based on [WBG Poverty and Inequality Update - Fall 2025](#)

And let us pray for the people we know in need that we understand because we have experienced or shared the experiences: Those awaiting medical outcomes or facing news of a diagnosis, Those in the midst of treatment, Those who are struggling at home, All who are just managing, but only just, Everyone for whom today will be a battle requiring physical or mental strength that appears elusive

We pray for those whose life is nearing its end, for all who are in the midst of the grief of bereavement and everyone battling through the big changes that sometimes come in life.

Prayer for the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

Our Father in Heaven, Thank you that every one of us has a value and dignity that comes directly from Your creation, in Your own image and likeness. We acknowledge that modern slavery and all forms of exploitation are an affront to Your will, and rob those experiencing exploitation of so much.

We pray that you bring an end to modern slavery: our greed and selfishness for cheaper products and services will stop fuelling the demand for more and more exploitation; those perpetrating modern slavery will cease; and those experiencing exploitation will be set free, know true healing and rebuild flourishing lives of freedom, independence and fulfilment. Help us to all play our part with You to declare freedom for the captives and walk alongside those who have been exploited to heal and thrive. Amen

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Hymn - 701 - Heaven shall not wait

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHMT3YJHbZE>

Heaven shall not wait
for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:
Jesus is Lord;
he has championed the unwanted;
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:
Jesus is Lord;
he has married word and action;
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:
Jesus is Lord;
he has shown the master's privilege -
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:
Jesus is Lord;
in our present imperfection:
his power and love are for now and then for evermore.

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019) © 1987 WGRG, c/o Iona Community, 21 Carlton Court, Glasgow, G5 9JP, Scotland.
www.wildgoose.scot

Benediction : God with us, as we go into the world may we renew our commitment, and be reenergised to strive for freedom for all. May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us and remain with us now and for evermore. Amen.