

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Call to worship StF 27 Jesus tawa pano (verse 1(twice) verse 2(twice))
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWY0ZSrbwmk>

Prayer

Gracious God,
we thank you that we can come to you in prayer,
that for all your greatness, and wonder, and holiness,
we can speak with you as to a friend,

Hear now our prayer

We thank you that we can open our hearts to you,
that we can pour out our innermost souls
and share our deepest thoughts,
in the knowledge that you are there,
always ready to listen and understand,

Hear now our prayer

So now once more we lay our lives before you,
open to your gaze -
the bad as well as the good,
the doubt as well as the faith,
the sorrow as well as the joy,
the despair as well as the hope,

Hear now our prayer

We bring the anger as well as the peace,
the hatred as well as the love,
the confusion as well as the certainty,
the fear as well as the trust,

Hear now our prayer

Gracious God,
we bring these,
not with pride or any sense of arrogance,
but honestly,

recognising that you know us through and through,
Hear now our prayer

Help us to be truthful to ourselves and truthful to you,
and so may we discover the renewing love
which only you can offer -
a love that frees us to live as you would have us live,
and allows us to be the people you would have us be!
**Hear now our prayer,
in the name of Christ.
Amen.**

Reading:

Psalm 128 – often referred to as The Marriage Prayer, used frequently at Jewish weddings

There's a quiet understanding StF 36

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9g0hZoIUe8>

Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God,
we are here to worship you,
Meet with us afresh this day.

We come to reflect on your greatness,
your otherness,
and your holiness.
Meet with us afresh this day.

We come to praise you for your faithfulness,
your goodness,
your kindness,
and your forgiveness.
Meet with us afresh this day.

We come through the grace of Christ,
and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
recognising you as our God,
our Father,
and our Creator
Meet with us afresh this day.

We come to bring ourselves, all we are and do,
to bring our loved ones, all they mean to us and others,
to bring our fellowship, in all its variety and richness,

to bring our world, with all its joy and all its sorrow.
Meet with us afresh this day.

Almighty and everlasting God,
we come to speak,
to seek,
and to find.

Meet with us afresh this day.
Filling us with the knowledge of your presence,
and so help us to walk each day
in the light of your love,

Prayer of confession:

Loving God,
you call us to live as your people -
to walk each day by your side,
seeking your will,
pursuing what is right,
and showing your love in our attitudes towards others.
Teach us what you would have us do.

Forgive us that we sometimes make your call so complicated,
losing sight of the things you really require,
Forgive us that we become preoccupied with the trappings of faith,
rather than focusing on the essentials.
Forgive us that we are often good at being religious,
but poor at doing justice, loving kindness,
and walking humbly with you.
Teach us what you would have us be.

Loving God,
help us to offer you the sort of lives you want to see,
and to be the people you would have us become.
Teach us what you require,
and by your grace may we live as your people,
to the glory of your name.
Amen

Lords Prayer (own choice of version)

God how can we forgive StF 613
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuBTuh4CsyE>

Readings

Proverbs 20:23-30

Matthew 18:15-20

Address:

I find it amazing even now that a sentence of scripture will remind you of people, places and occasions in your life even years later. One such verse for me is found in Matthew 18:20 “Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them”. I remember when I was a Local Preacher On Trial back in the ‘70’s preaching as I often did at my home church in Peterlee, County Durham. One of the more experienced Local Preachers was a Church Steward there and praying with the preacher (whoever they were) he always quoted that verse in his pre-worship prayer. Over several occasions over the years he never forgot to use it!

Matthew 18:20 has been referred to as the Charter of Gathering at some point in history and it has been a blessing to many over both millennia. **“Where”** is seen as the Divine Place, in other words it doesn’t truly matter where we as Christians choose to meet. Wherever it may be becomes for that moment a holy place set apart for our encounter with the Lord. **“two or three”** has been referred to as the Divine Testimony, in fact even John Wesley stated the Bible does not speak of solitary religion. It is about people being together and sharing His Story and theirs.

“are gathered” is seen as Divine Assembly – in fact it is solely about togetherness even when we are socially distanced from one another. Coming corporately into a what some folk only ever see as themselves coming into the presence of God and worshipping Him as an individual. **“together”** is the idea of Divine Fellowship, the group of singers known as the Spice Girls sang “2 become 1” well in this case 2 or 3 (or more) become 1. We became (or some will say we already are) the Body of the Church. Together we are about worshipping our Lord in word and deed, one day we hope also in song together again.

“in my name” is I suppose the Divine Authority” – we come not necessarily because it’s comfortable or even preferable to being at home, we come because we have been called together as God’s People. It is the Lord who lays down the imperative command to come and know Him corporately – there are echoes here of Charles Dickens writings from “A Christmas Carol” when the Spirit of Christmas Present says to Scrooge “Come in and know me better man”.

“there am I” assures us of the Divine Presence, definitely saying we are not alone for in that gathered occasion God in Christ is there with us. I know there are probably certain places where each of us feels closer to God than other places. For some folk it is their usual place of worship, for others it may be a forest, a beach, a mountain top, their own garden or somewhere on the Moors. Wherever it may be as

you know His presence there so know and feel it when you are in company of other believers.

The final piece of the promise from Matthew 18:20 is “**in the midst of them**” the Divine Centre so to speak. Note it does not say that he’d just be there, sort of hanging round the group, in the periphery so to speak. The whole promise is that he (Jesus) will be at the centre of it all, he will be in the centre of his church.

So, whenever you come to worship, now or in the future, together with others or maybe today on your own be aware of that promise of Jesus. For even if you are physically alone – now or later – remember the world is a big place, whenever you pray remember there are other Christians somewhere else who are praying with you and for you as you pray for them .

Noel Paul Stookey wrote: “Go back to the old wells, to the sweet waters, Isaac dug the wells again which they had used in his father’s day. Returning to ‘the old wells’ may mean the renewing of a promise. Many couples in particular renew their vows, or return to places that for them hold important associations.

*The union of your spirits here
have caused Him to remain,
for wherever two or more of you
are gathered in His Name
there is love*

Intercessions:

Living God,
we pray for those who face the future
with uncertainty or anxiety -
**those who fear it,
who despair of it,
or who feel they have no future.**

We pray for those in the troubled places of our world -
**those who long for peace,
an end to conflict and a time of harmony,
but who in their hearts have given up hoping.**

We pray for those who face trauma
and upheaval in their lives -
**what seemed secure swept from under them,
what they hoped for denied them,
what they had trusted in proven false.**

We pray for those who doubt their ability
to cope with what life may bring -

**those overwhelmed by pressures,
paralysed by fears,
crushed by sorrows.**

We pray for those faced with difficult decisions -
**circumstances beyond their control,
unexpected dangers,
awkward choices.**

Living God,
reach out to all for whom the future
seems uncertain or unwelcome,
and bring the assurance that even in the darkest moments,
the greatest challenges,
the most worrying times,
you are there working out your purpose;
able to bring light out of darkness,
hope out of despair,
joy out of sorrow,
and good out of evil.

**Grant the confidence that there is nothing in heaven or earth,
in life or death,
in the present or the future,
that is finally able to separate us from your love.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen**

Jesus calls us here to meet him StF 28
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvBGtFPd6TQ>

Blessing:
God of life,
may the promise of the sunrise
be echoed in our minds.
May the warmth of the midday sun
flow through our hearts.
May the peace of the sunset
touch our souls.
And when life seems dark
teach us to remember even then you are with us,
and that we will again see your light.
**In the name of Christ.
Amen.**