

# Trinity 10: Order of service

## Welcome

Hello, and welcome to our service for today, Sunday 16th August.

Welcome! It's so good that you could join us, and I hope that this time can be a prayerful time, a time that you can set aside to be with yourself, to be with God, to remember those other people who will be watching this today. And that there will be something in today's service that will touch your soul, something you may learn, something that may change you, something that may bring new life.

Let us pray.

## Hymn

And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies:  
who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine!  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds inquire no more.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds inquire no more.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

# Prayers

God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us.

Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,  
for soon my salvation will come,  
and my deliverance be revealed.

Thus says the Lord God,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather others to them  
besides those already gathered.

Though apart, we are gathered.  
Though many, we are one in Christ.

Be with us, Spirit of God;  
nothing can separate us from your love.

Breathe on us, breath of God;  
fill us with your saving power.

Speak in us, wisdom of God;  
bring strength, healing and peace.

Lord, creator of all, from the ground beneath our feet,  
to the stars beyond our furthest sight,  
may we know your presence now,  
in the air we breathe,  
in the sounds we hear,  
the familiar things around us.  
In these things, and by your grace,  
open our eyes, that we may we come to know you,  
our comforter and our friend.  
Amen.

## Psalm 67

God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,

That your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

O let the nations rejoice and be glad,  
for you will judge the peoples righteously  
and govern the nations upon earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

Then shall the earth bring forth her increase,  
and God, our own God, will bless us.

Lord, in times of stress and uncertainty, we turn to you.  
When our future seems lost, our plans unmade, we turn to you.  
You are hope and clarity and light.  
You are love and we turn to you.

Lord, in times of turmoil and despair, we turn to you.  
When we are assailed from without and within, we turn to you.  
You are strength and peace and renewal.  
You are love and we turn to you.

Lord, in times of darkness and pain, we turn to you.  
When we are sad, or scared, or ashamed, we turn to you.  
You are comfort and healing and forgiveness.  
You are love and we turn to you.

## Lord's prayer

And we say together:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

## Hymn: In Christ there is no east or west

In Christ there is no east or west,  
in him no south or north,  
but one great fellowship of love  
throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts ev'rywhere  
their high communion find;  
his service is the golden cord  
close binding humankind.

Join hands, united in the faith,  
whate'er your race may be;  
who serve my Father as their own  
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,  
in him meet south and north,  
all Christlike souls are one in him,  
throughout the whole wide earth.

## Gospel reading

### Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting,  
'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'

But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying,  
'Send her away, for she keeps shouting aft er us.'

He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'  
But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'

He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'  
She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'

Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'  
And her daughter was healed instantly.

## Sermon

Many of you will be familiar with the exchange between Winston Churchill and Nancy Astor, which goes as follows:

"Sir, if you were my husband, I would put poison in your tea."

"Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it."

The French call this sort of thing "l'esprit de l'escalier", literally the spirit of the staircase, the idea being that the clever response is something that only occurs when you reach the bottom of the stairs upon having left the party.

And I'm sure we all have our own examples.

We see an example of this in today's Gospel reading. The woman in the story desperately wants Jesus to heal her daughter, she has been following Jesus and his disciples around and the group is heartily sick of her. They just want her to go away, and they make their feelings clear.

Even Jesus seems to dismiss her, saying that his ministry is intended only for the children of Israel – that

it's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. And she doesn't disagree with him, but she's got the perfect comeback – even dogs get the crumbs that fall to the floor.

Jesus relents, I like to think that he laughs, that there's a moment of connection between the two of them. And he tells the woman that her faith is great and that her daughter is healed.

What's going on here?

There's a lot in this reading about people doing unexpected things.

Someone asks Jesus for help, and he seems to ignore her. That's unexpected.

A woman defies social convention, shouting at and even arguing with a rabbi. That's unexpected.

Jesus – God with us – appears to change his mind about what he is going to do, in this one specific case but also perhaps in a wider sense. Is he going to heal the woman's daughter? Is he going to minister to Jews and non-Jews alike? That's unexpected.

There's someone hassling Jesus and the disciples get a bit possessive and annoyed and want him to send her away... oh, that's not unexpected is it? Loud women, crowds, children, each other, the disciples have a long and inglorious history of wanting other people to just go away. Maybe they are protecting their friend, let's give them the benefit of the doubt. But sometimes it seems like they want to keep Jesus to themselves. Do we do this? Do we have an understanding of how Jesus should be, how God should be, what God should do? Do we want to create God in our own image and keep out anyone who doesn't agree? Sometimes I think I do that.

I'll leave that one with you. For now, let's go back to our tale of the unexpected...

On one level, Jesus is saying something about his ministry. Is he sent to the Israelites, or to the whole world? At this stage the disciples would certainly have believed that it was the former. They weren't ready to hear that Jesus might have come to save the whole world, it's not an idea that they would have coped with easily.

And so Jesus is able to use this unexpected episode to teach his disciples and also to teach us. The disciples see an intrusive Canaanite woman, and they want her to go away. Jesus sees a courageous mother, fighting for her child. He needs to change the perspective. So he doesn't send her away, and he doesn't take the easy route, immediately curing her child to sort the situation out as quickly as possible.

Instead, Jesus gives her the opportunity to engage with him as an equal, and she doesn't disappoint him. In the fine tradition of sassy women in the Bible, she gives as good as she gets.

What can we learn from this? As a good theology student, I can see that there's a fine opportunity here to consider the immutability of God. Sounds fun, doesn't it? Basically it's a question of whether – or not – the mind of God can be changed. But I have a feeling that this is a bit of a rabbit hole, and that we don't need to go down it today.

What we get in this reading is a demonstration of how real our relationship with God can be. It's not a distant and one-sided pretence at a relationship, where God is so almighty and remote that God has no time to spend being genuinely interested in us. That's not the relationship that we are offered.

Instead we're offered a relationship that is as real as our closest friendships – there's nothing we can't say to God, no idea that will be too challenging. We can laugh, we can complain, we can be angry, we can cry. We can shout and we can ask over and over and over.

Sometimes when we pray, just like the woman in today's reading, we have real clarity, we know what we need, and we even know how to ask for it. And sometimes – quite often for me, we don't really know what to say. Sometimes I can't even formulate how I'm feeling into words at all, and instead of a thoughtful and well-crafted prayer, what it feels like I'm holding before God is a tangled ball of wool – hundreds of thoughts and feelings and hopes and fears, all in one go.

But however they are expressed, we can be confident that God hears our prayers, and that God cares about our prayers. I'm not pretending that everything we ask for will be given to us, even if we can express ourselves in exactly the right way, or even that our prayers will be answered in the way we think they should be. Sometimes all we can hope is that our prayers will align themselves more with God's purpose for us, that we will find a new understanding, or even a new peace with an existing situation. Sometimes we might even feel like we're making do with the crumbs that fall to the floor.

Whenever we pray this week, whatever beautiful words or tangled wool we bring before God, my prayer for us all is that we will do so with the faith of the Canaanite woman, unafraid to enter into real conversation, and real relationship with God who knows us, sees us as we really are and delights in us anyway.

Amen.

## Intercessions

Let us come together this morning in the knowledge that we are all accepted by God's love, grace and mercy.

So as we bring our prayers to him, let us acknowledge afresh that he is faithful to us through all times of uncertainty and distress, however faltering our faith may be.

Lord, we pray for the church throughout the world during this difficult time, as it wrestles with ways to sustain and nurture church people, as well as helping those who may want to explore the message of the gospel further.

We pray too for all clergy and leaders, both here in our diocese and benefice, and in the wider world, who have to make decisions about the future role of the church. Give wisdom and courage, hope and guidance, as they consider the way forward that is subject to your will and teaching, as faith and action work together.

We give thanks for the services prepared for us each Sunday and pray your blessing on all who hear them, leading each one to be aware of your presence in different, maybe unexpected ways, giving a sense of unity, harmony and purpose during this time of physical segregation.

Lord, look in mercy upon this troubled world, especially Beirut after the massive explosion. Give courage to all those endeavouring to rebuild their homes and their lives. We pray that artificial barriers between peoples or nations everywhere may come down. We pray for those who are judged because of race, colour or creed, remembering too, the refugees and ethnic minority groups. May all who think they are not deserving of your love and forgiveness, for whatever reason, may be reassured that when you said, "*whosoever* believes in me", you meant it to be all-inclusive.

We give thanks for our family, friends and neighbours; all who show care and concern; those voices that have brought reassurance;

and those who have been willing to serve us in so many ways.

As your love is spread amongst us, may it bring peace and thankfulness into relationships.

We pray for all who are sick in body, mind or spirit.

We remember all who are finding this time of separation from family, friends,  
and even the outside world, almost unbearable.

We pray especially for those who are unwell or in hospital, sometimes unable to see the people who love them; those awaiting tests which have been delayed; those needing ongoing treatment.

Surround them with your love, bring them your peace,  
and give them, along with their carers, 'strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow'.

We pray for all who mourn the loss of loved ones, including those who died in the train crash this week. As families deal with all the practical issues, as challenging as they are at the moment, may they be helped to bear the pain of loss by allowing themselves time to reflect on memories of the past, and special moments shared together.

As we begin a new week, may we 'maintain justice and do what is right', 'stand firm in the faith and do everything in love', as we allow God's word to dwell in our hearts.

Merciful Father,  
accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Hymn

Sing of the Lord's goodness,  
Father of all wisdom,  
come to him and bless his name.  
Mercy he has shown us,  
his love is for ever,  
faithful to the end of days.  
Come, then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,  
risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken,  
one bread he has broken,  
new life he now gives to all.  
Come, then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,

worship him and bless his name.

Courage in our darkness,  
comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary,  
pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.  
Come, then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.

Praise him with your singing,  
praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp;  
praise him with the cymbals,  
praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.  
Come, then, all you nations,  
sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.  
Ring out the Lord's glory,  
praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.

## Blessing

Let us ask for God's blessing upon us all.

May you know the love of God, burning and healing deep within your soul.  
May you recognise the presence of God in the faces and voices of all you meet.  
May you know the comfort of God in your prayers and in the silence.  
May you know the anger of God: a fire against all that is unjust and all that is without compassion.  
May the creator, redeemer and sustainer,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
stir up your soul and bless you with peace and all good,  
today and always.  
Amen.