



# WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



***THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST***

## 15<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

## 2<sup>nd</sup> BEFORE ADVENT

<b><u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u></b>	<b>PARISH OFFICE:</b> Closed during lockdown TEL:01252 331161; e- mail: <a href="mailto:office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk">office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a> <b>BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS &amp; BAPTISMS</b> – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 <b>WEBSITE:</b> <a href="http://www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk">www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk</a>
Zephaniah 1 v 7 & 12 - end	
1 Thessalonians 5 v 1 - 11	
Matthew 25 v 14 - 30	

### COLLECT FOR THE 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT

Heavenly Father,  
 whose blessed Son was revealed  
 to destroy the works of the devil  
 and to make us the children of God  
 and heirs of eternal life:  
 grant that we, having this hope,  
 may purify ourselves even as he is pure;  
 that when he shall appear in power and great glory  
 we may be made like him  
 in his eternal and glorious kingdom;  
 where he is alive and reigns with you,  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.



*Parable of the Talents*

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### LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

At present the Government have told all places of worship to close. We will resume our Sunday and Wednesday services in church as soon as we are given permission to do so. In the meantime there will be a weekly service of Morning Prayer on the website which you can watch by following the link, or read yourself from the text, also on the website. We will continue to provide resources for daily Evening Prayer. The church can be opened for individual prayer – just contact Fr Keith on 01252 321517 to make a time. Our Prayer Chain is still open too. As before, Carol and I and others will be keeping in contact with as many people as possible, and I am sure that there will be lots of other contacts being made either by phone or on social media. God bless and keep safe! See you in December we hope!

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### READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – CHRIST THE KING

Ezekiel 34 v 11 – 16 & 20 - 24; Ephesians 1 v 15 - end;  
 Matthew 25 v 31 - end

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 Congratulations and good wishes to everyone celebrating their birthday this week, especially: **ANDREW CROW (18<sup>TH</sup>); ANNE WILSON (21<sup>ST</sup>)**  
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### PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

RICHARD STOKES; EDNA PEARSON; JUNE MIDDLETON;  
 LIAM MURPHY; JULIE QUANTRILL; COLIN BARTLETT

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**CARE AND SHARE** - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please leave items on the doorstep of the Rectory.

It would be nice to have some Christmas treats to put out next month! Thank you.

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**SHOEBOX UPDATE** - SO PROUD of St. Peter's efforts this year. Despite all the difficulties we have made up 42 boxes which will be taken to a collection point when possible. Thank you to everyone who donated gifts, boxes or cash, knitted hats and toys, wrote cards or wrapped boxes. Barbara Rose.

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**MEMORIES OF JULIE QUANTRILL** – the family are putting together some memory boxes of Julie for Jamie and Ailsa. If you have any memories/photos of Julie and family please let Claire Boud have them or Fr Keith. e-mails or hard copies are both acceptable:

keithbristow1956@outlook.com clairehboud@gmail.com  
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**CSW INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER 2020** - Our theme this year is The Real Lockdown. There are some prayer resources at the end of this sheet and on csw.org.uk

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### ST PETER'S CHURCH CALENDARS

Ideal Christmas presents, our calendar for 2021 has pictures of St Peter's and room for appointments. Only £5 they will be available in December when we're back in church – or order before from Fr Keith – 321517.  
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**ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN** - If you would like prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

## ADVENT COURSE

This year we will be meeting online, but there will be hard copies of the sessions available for those unable to access the internet to use for themselves at home. It's all FREE!

The course is entitled 'Hope' and is by John Birch – a theme which seems particularly relevant this year! There are four Bible Studies and discussions: The nature of hope; Listen to the witnesses; Hope in the Gospel promises; Hope for the future. The dates for the sessions online will be Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> and Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November, Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December all at 7 – 30 pm. See the next page of this sheet for an introduction to the course.

If you wish to sign up for online, or receive a printed copy of the course, please phone Fr Keith on 01252 321517 or Carol on 01252 313239 or e-mail them at: keithbristow1956@outlook.com

carol.monk159@btinternet.com

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE ADVENT COURSE

#### HOPE by JOHN BIRCH

Our definition of 'hope' will depend on our situation, and whether we are in a stable place emotionally or facing difficulties and anguish. At its simplest, hope can be the wish for something we desire to happen, and as diverse as hoping to see a long-lost friend later in the year, hoping the next bus will arrive on time, a dear friend who is ill will recover, the country votes for our choice of government, or that the police catch the thief who recently broke into our car. It can relate to the small world we inhabit as individuals or reach out to touch all people.

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, hope takes on a different dimension. It is still about our day-to-day existence and seeing hope within it, but it is also about a future hope for 'salvation', 'resurrection', 'eternal life' and how these strands intertwine and influence our relationship with God and the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 was a few months old when I wrote this study, and we were emerging from an initial fear of the unknown into a period of increasing knowledge about this virus, those most vulnerable to its ferocity and how best to change our behaviour to minimise chances of infection for ourselves and others. It also brought out the best in so many people, offering their help to the vulnerable in local neighbourhoods. Into what was a period of mourning and fear for many, emerged a hope that there could be better times ahead.

Campaigners for a green revolution to combat changes to our climate hope that their influence, backed up by science, will ensure that we leave a healthier world for our grandchildren to grow up into. There are many 'hopes' that reach the news headlines, and far more that do not. They should cause us to question how our faith can speak into these situations and affect our response.

Defining Christian hope in a paragraph is not that easy, but I offer this as a starting point:

'Biblical and Christian hope does not mean living in the clouds, dreaming of a better life. It is not merely a projection of what we would like to be or do. It leads us to discover seeds of a 'new world' already present today, because of the identity of our God, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is, in addition, a source of energy to live differently, not according to the values of a society based on the thirst for possession and competition.' ([https:// www.taize.fr/en\\_article343.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article343.html))

'I've read the last page of the Bible. It's all going to turn out all right.' (Billy Graham)

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### Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

*If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.*

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

In this week of Remembrance, we give thanks for God's gift of everlasting life to all of the righteous, in words from the Book of Wisdom:

All God has found the righteous worthy  
and their hope is full of immortality.

- 1 The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God ♦  
and no torment will ever touch them.
- 2 In the eyes of the foolish, they seem to have died; ♦  
but they are at peace.
- 3 For though, in the sight of others,  
they were punished, ♦  
their hope is full of immortality.
- 4 Having been disciplined a little,  
they will receive great good, ♦  
because God tested them and found them worthy.
- 5 Like gold in the furnace, God tried them ♦  
and, like a sacrificial burnt offering, accepted them.
- 6 In the time of their visitation, they will shine forth ♦  
and will run like sparks through the stubble.
- 7 They will govern nations and rule over peoples ♦  
and God will reign over them for ever.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All God has found the righteous worthy  
and their hope is full of immortality.

*This hymn is said or sung:*

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Hearts to heaven and voices raise:  
sing to God a hymn of gladness,  
sing to God a hymn of praise.  
He, who on the cross a victim,  
for the world's salvation bled,  
Jesus Christ, the King of glory,  
now is risen from the dead.

Christ is risen, Christ, the first fruits  
of the holy harvest field,  
which will all its full abundance  
at his second coming yield:  
then the golden ears of harvest  
will their heads before him wave,  
ripened by his glorious sunshine  
from the furrows of the grave.

Christ is risen, we are risen!  
Shed upon us heavenly grace,  
rain and dew and gleams of glory  
from the brightness of thy face;  
that we, with our hearts in heaven,  
here on earth may fruitful be,  
and by angel hands be gathered,  
and be ever, Lord, with thee.

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Glory be to God on high;  
Alleluia! to the Saviour  
who has gained the victory;  
Alleluia! to the Spirit,  
fount of love and sanctity:  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
to the Triune Majesty.

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before  
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is  
close at hand.' So let us turn away from sin and turn  
to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith:

All: Lord God,  
we have sinned against you;  
we have done evil in your sight.  
We are sorry and repent.  
Have mercy on us according to your love.  
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.  
Renew a right spirit within us  
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

All now say 'The Te Deum':

We praise you, O God,  
we acclaim you as the Lord;  
all creation worships you,  
the Father everlasting.  
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,  
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
The glorious company of apostles praise you.  
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.  
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.  
Throughout the world the holy Church acclaim you:  
Father, of majesty unbounded,  
your true and only Son, worthy of all praise,  
the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory,  
the eternal Son of the Father.  
When you took our flesh to set us free  
you humbly chose the Virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death  
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.  
You are seated at God's right hand in glory.  
We believe that you will come and be our judge.  
Come then, Lord, and help your people,  
bought with the price of your own blood,  
and bring us with your saints  
to glory everlasting.

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance.  
Govern and uphold them now and always.  
Day by day we bless you.  
We praise your name for ever.  
Keep us today, Lord, from all sin.  
Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, show us your love and mercy,  
for we have put our trust in you.  
In you, Lord, is our hope:  
let us never be put to shame.

*We now say the collect for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Advent  
(see first page)*

*Read Zephaniah 1 v 7 & 12 - end followed by  
Psalm 90 v 1 - 12 concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as  
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 5 v 1 - 11*

(L) Alleluia, alleluia.  
Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to stand  
with confidence before the Son of man.

All: Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 25 v 14 – 30 Here are some thoughts on  
today's readings from Revd. Carol:*

'Use it or lose it!', that's what we are told, particularly when  
it comes to keeping ourselves fit and healthy through  
exercise, or keeping our minds active. If we don't then we  
become weaker, unable to do the things we used to and even  
become slow in our thinking, which leads to opportunities  
missed. Not being able to physically do things means we  
may miss out on going places and doing things that we  
enjoy. Having a slower mind means we are unable to make  
the right choices which can lead to all sorts of problems.  
That is sort of what the readings are about this morning,  
only this is more about our spiritual fitness, being ready and  
prepared to use the gifts that God has given us to further His  
Kingdom, both now and when He returns to us.

Zephaniah holds no punches as to what the outcome will be  
if we are not ready. Paul on the other hand is reminding us  
that the Lord's day will come and until then, as Christians,  
we should be using our talents and gifts to help one another,  
so that we can all be as ready and prepared as we can.  
Jesus, in the Matthew reading, through the parable of the  
talents, is also sending us a warning about not using the  
gifts given to us in the right way. It can lead to poverty. That  
is spiritual poverty, not actual poverty in the material sense  
of the word.

During the lockdown earlier in the year, I rediscovered gifts  
I had not used for a while. Over the years, through pressures  
of balancing work, parish and family life, I'd forgotten how  
many DIY skills I had acquired and how much gardening  
knowledge I had tucked away in my brain. Lockdown gave  
the time and space to put those things back into practice,  
and I must admit I was pretty pleased with the results of  
some of the jobs I tackled through the ideas I had and put

into practice. The other thing I was able to do during this time out from the world, was to spend more time with God through His word and by reflecting on life in general, trying to see things from a more spiritual sense. I'm not afraid to admit that some of those things had slipped too and it was only when I began to reuse my times with Him in a more concentrated way, that I realised how underused the gift of prayer and reflection had been. In other words' I had got lazy with it all. If Jesus had returned in those days, I would have most definitely been the guy who had buried his talents! Of course, it may not be laziness that keeps us from using those gifts God gives us. It maybe that we have felt our skills and talents are not appreciated by other people, in which case we can probably sympathise with the third slave for hiding the money away, so that at least he couldn't be accused of squandering it, or making the wrong choice as to what he should do with it.

The word 'talent' here is representative of all of the opportunities God has given His people to serve Him. Talents is not only about money, but it encompasses wealth, our abilities and learning. The parable teaches us to invest everything God gives us for His glory. If we really are faithful servants of Christ, then we must use what He gives us to spread the Good News.

Sometimes when we do God's work, we may not feel appreciated. But it shouldn't be about us. Yes, it is natural as human beings to want to be thanked and receive that word of encouragement and appreciation, but it doesn't always happen that way. If we really are offering ourselves, our practical skills, our ideas and our prayer life to do God's work, to grow His Kingdom, then we should do it without expectation of reward. That comes later. That will come when Jesus returns and we are with Him in the eternal Kingdom.

Of course, it may be that we feel the things we have to offer is too small or irrelevant. Don't you believe it! One thing that this Pandemic has shown, is that those who do the backroom jobs, the cooks, the cleaners, the van drivers, the bin men, the supermarket workers and of course those working in the caring and medical professions, they have all been seen in a different light. Their work has been appreciated by everyone in one way or another. The worth of the work they do has been felt and seen by us all. Whatever you have to offer to further God's work, it will make a difference. Yes, we are in different circumstances to what we've been used to, and it may be that we can't use those practical gifts that we have always used in the past due to the current situation. But we need to seek God's guidance to show us what else we can do. We need to use this time as an opportunity to hone in on our knowledge of Scripture, spend time in prayer, or learning to meditate and reflect on His world and how we can make a difference by seeking out ways in which we can reach out to others, to support each other and the wider community.

I don't know about you, but I have found this second lockdown more of a challenge in some ways. Having just got back into a routine with church services and being able to be back in the parish was brilliant. But once again I am getting that sense of being cut off, not so much from the outside world, because I am quite content with that, but being cut off from the community in which I am supposed to be serving. Now more than ever, we should be seeking God, asking Him to show us where and how He wants us to be and what He wants us to do, and in that seeking out, we need to ask Him to give us the gifts, or perhaps bring out the gifts and talents that are hidden within us, to ensure that we are ready for action when it is needed.

In the parable of the talents, the faithful servants gambled with the master's goods in pure blind faith that that was really what he meant for them to do. Those servants loved the master with all their hearts and souls and minds. Remember the first commandment!? 'You shall love the Lord our God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all our mind and with all your strength.' That is what Jesus is talking about, keep Him in focus in whatever you do, using skills He has given you and do it in love for Him.

To sum up. Be a good steward of your abilities. Remember use them or lose them! Don't be afraid to offer your gifts and to try. Never say, 'my contribution won't matter, I'm not good at anything. As the adverts say 'every little bit helps'. We may not have the same skills or talents, and we most definitely won't be asked to do the same things by God, but we can all put the best effort into what we bring to God's Kingdom here on earth. Jesus will come again, we don't know when, but by being prepared to roll up our sleeves and get on with the task of growing ourselves and others in faith, we know that He will be well pleased. AMEN

*Now pause for your own reflections.*

*(L): We now affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:*

*All* I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

*We now say together:*

- All* You will guide us with your counsel, O God,  
and afterwards receive us with glory.
- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦  
who has come to his people and set them free.
  - 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦  
born of the house of his servant David.
  - 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦  
to save us from our enemies,  
from the hands of all that hate us,
  - 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦  
and to remember his holy covenant.
  - 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
  - 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦  
holy and righteous in his sight  
all the days of our life.

*Continued*

- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, ♦  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, ♦  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

*All* Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now  
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*All* You will guide us with your counsel, O God,  
and afterwards receive us with glory.

*Now we turn to God in a time of prayer, written this week  
by Sheila Taylor:*

Let us pray:

Loving God, we offer our prayers now for all people and their situations; for lives that are going through upheaval or distress; for circumstances which only You can change.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for the Church throughout the world, we thank You for all teachers and ministers of the Christian faith, our Bishops, Clergy and all who work in Your name. We remember those Christians in countries where their beliefs make them vulnerable and place them in danger, uphold and strengthen all who are persecuted for their faith.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for our Queen and her family and thank them for their dedication to this country and the Commonwealth. We pray for peace in the world, for understanding between nations, religions and factions. We pray for the peoples of the Middle East, for Christian, Muslim and Jew, that they may live alongside one another in mutual respect and harmony. We pray too for a fair distribution of the world's resources, for fair trade and that the labour of the workers of the world be fairly rewarded.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray for the United States of America and we ask that You give the New President-Elect wisdom beyond his own understanding and the courage to choose the right path no matter how narrow the gate, especially at this difficult time of the ongoing Pandemic.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Father God, we thank you for the gifts, talents and abilities you have given each of us, praying that a deeper understanding of those talents be used and shared within our church and the community. Set us free from the fear that makes us inward looking. Give us a renewed generosity with our time, our talents and our treasure. Give us a renewed concern for those who are struggling in our congregations and our communities. Give us a renewed vision of what it is for us to be Your church, in this place, at this time.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the sick and suffering in our community. Here at St Peter's we especially pray for the Corona Virus situation and the "Lockdown" procedures that have been put into force to try to halt its spread. Help us all to be responsible in the things that we do in our lives to prevent the spread of the virus, by taking heed of the recommended precautions and avoiding situations which may make things worse.

We thank you for guiding the scientists working to provide a vaccine against the virus and pray their work is successful.

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we remember those who have died and those who are bereaved. May the light of Christ, which eternally shines, bring hope to their dark places and we pray for those who have died recently and those whose anniversary of death falls at this time.

We remember especially: Edna Pearson; Julie Middleton; Liam Murphy; Julie Quantrill; Petra Kent and Colin Bartlett

Lord in your mercy: Hear our prayer.

Gracious God, forgive us when we only turn to You when things trouble us, when we forget to thank you for Your blessings and bounty. Help us to recognise all the wonderful things in Your world for which we should be grateful and send us out into the coming week ready to show our gratitude in all that we do and say.

Merciful Father: Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

There is a redeemer  
Jesus, God's own Son  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah  
Holy One.

*Thank you, oh my Father  
For giving us Your Son  
And leaving Your Spirit  
'Til the work on Earth is done*

Jesus my redeemer  
Name above all names  
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah  
Oh, for sinners slain.

*Thank you, oh my Father  
For giving us Your Son  
And leaving Your Spirit  
'Til the work on Earth is done*

When I stand in Glory  
I will see His face  
And there I'll serve my King forever  
In that Holy Place.

*Thank you, oh my Father  
For giving us Your Son  
And leaving Your Spirit  
'Til the work on Earth is done*

*Let us pray:*

Heavenly Lord,  
you long for the world's salvation:  
stir us from apathy,  
restrain us from excess  
and revive in us new hope  
that all creation will one day be healed  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God,  
you have knit together your elect  
in one communion and fellowship  
in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord:  
give us grace so to follow your blessed saints  
in all virtuous and godly living  
that we may come to those inexpressible joys  
that you have prepared for those who truly love you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(L)* May Christ, who has opened the kingdom of heaven,  
bring us to reign with him in glory. Amen.

*(L)* Let us bless the Lord.  
*All* Thanks be to God.

*All:* May the souls of the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory.  
Amen.

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### Evening Prayer resources for this week

O Lord open our lips,  
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.  
O Lord, make haste to help us.

*A lamp or candle may be lit.*

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,  
our light and our salvation,  
to you be glory and praise for ever.  
Now, as darkness is falling,  
wash away our transgressions,  
cleanse us by your refining fire  
and make us temples of your Holy Spirit.  
By the light of Christ,  
dispel the darkness of our hearts  
and make us ready to enter your kingdom,  
where songs of praise for ever sound.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Blessed be God for ever.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,  
we pray with one heart and mind:

*Silence is kept.*

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,  
so may your mercy come down upon us  
to cleanse our hearts  
and set us free to sing your praise  
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 71; Tue 67; Wed 73; Thurs 76; Fri 77; Sat 78 v 40 – end, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between  
the two readings we say:*

*All* I saw the holy city  
coming down out of heaven from God.

- 1 I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ♦  
for the first heaven and the first earth  
had passed away and the sea was no more.
- 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,  
coming down out of heaven from God, ♦  
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, ♦  
'Behold, the dwelling of God is among mortals.
- 4 'He will dwell with them and they shall be his  
peoples, ♦  
and God himself will be with them.
- 5 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes, ♦  
and death shall be no more.
- 6 'Neither shall there be mourning,  
nor crying, nor pain any more, ♦  
for the former things have passed away.'
- 7 And the One who sat upon the throne said, ♦  
'Behold, I make all things new.'

*All* To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦  
be blessing and honour and glory and might,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

*All* I saw the holy city  
coming down out of heaven from God.

*Readings:*

Monday      Isaiah 9 v 8 to 10 v 4; Matthew 7 v 1 - 12  
Tuesday      Isaiah 10 v 5 - 19; Matthew 7 v 13 - end  
Wednesday:    Isaiah 10 v 20 - 32; Matthew 8 v 1 - 13  
Thursday:     Isaiah 10 v 33 to 11 v 9; Matthew 8 v 14 - 22  
Friday:        Isaiah 11 v 10 to end of 12; Matt. 8 v 23 - end  
Saturday:     Isaiah 13 v 1 - 13; Matthew 9 v 1 - 17

*Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)*

*All* The righteous will shine like the sun  
in the kingdom of their Father.

- 1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit  
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on  
his lowly servant.
- 2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the  
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his  
name.
- 3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation  
to generation.
- 4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered  
the proud in their conceit.
- 5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting  
up the lowly.
- 6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the  
rich away empty.
- 7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to  
remember his promise of mercy.
- 8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and  
his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.  
Amen.

All The righteous will shine like the sun  
in the kingdom of their Father.

*Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.*

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week:

*This hymn may be said or sung:*

Thy kingdom come, O God,  
Thy rule, O Christ, begin;  
Break with thy iron rod  
The tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace  
And purity and love?  
When shall all hatred cease,  
As in the realms above?

When comes the promised time  
That war shall be no more,  
And lust, oppression, crime,  
Shall flee thy face before?

We pray thee Lord, arise,  
And come in thy great might;  
Revive our longing eyes,  
Which languish for thy sight.

O'er lands both near and far  
Thick darkness broodeth yet:  
Arise, O morning Star,  
Arise, and never set.

Let us pray:

Heal us, O God, from all our afflictions  
and keep us steadfast in your love;  
bind up our wounds,  
raise us from death,  
and lead us to fullness of life;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

O God,  
the source of all good desires,  
all right judgements, and all just works:  
give to your servants that peace  
which the world cannot give;  
that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments,  
and that, freed from the fear of our enemies,  
we may pass our time in rest and quietness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great  
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,  
for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all  
evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the  
mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

A SERMON FROM BISHOP ANDREW  
FOR THIS WEEK

Matthew 25:14-30

*'Sarah-Jayne, I've been wondering what you do, and now I know what you do... You've moved yourself over into a convenient place, and I think you've been in that convenient place for the last six weeks. For that reason, Sarah-Jayne, you're fired!'*

Well, the firing of Sarah-Jayne Clark in week 6 of the Apprentice caused quite a stir among fans of the show, because on the surface she'd done nothing wrong. She'd been on the winning side for most of the past few weeks. She'd been a good team member and a reasonable team leader too. She was popular among her fellow contestants. Her only mistake, it seems, is that she'd consistently played it safe, taking low risks or no risks at all. That was the 'convenient place' that led to the dreaded sight of the Lord Sugar finger extended towards her.

And today's Parable of the Talents has something of the feel of *The Apprentice* about it. 'Here are five talents', said the master to one of his slaves in the parable. 'Here are two', he said to another; 'Here is one', to a third. 'Look after them, until I return'. And then he left for a long while before returning on what St. Paul describes as 'the day of the Lord' and summoning them to the dreaded boardroom.

A talent was both a unit of weight and a unit of currency in Jesus' day and was worth 6000 denarii – a denarius being what most people earned for a day's work. Take 6000 of those, and a talent was worth nearly half a million pounds. It was a shedload of money, in other words. And the master didn't spell out just what he wanted them to do in terms of using that money or investing it. Instead he encouraged their initiative, giving them the freedom and dignity to figure it out for themselves.

So as the three returned to the boardroom, the first announced that he had traded with his master's investment, and doubled it, and likewise the second. Their five talents and two talents had become 10 and 4: that's £5 million and £2 million pounds to you and me. 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave', said the master in response to each, 'You have been trustworthy in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and enter your Master's happiness'.

So onto the third one – and here the conversation with the Lord Sugar of the parable took a most unlikely turn. First the apprentice came very close to insulting his lord, calling him a 'harsh man', even a dishonest man, who 'reaped where he didn't sow and gathered where he did not scatter seed' – that slander was probably enough to get him fired on the spot. And next he continued in a similarly sulky way, informing the master that he'd buried his £500,000 in the ground – and now, here it was – a little dirtier than when he'd first got it perhaps, but otherwise just as the master had given it to him – 'Nothing added, nothing taken away', to quote the strapline for Shredded Wheat. 'You wicked and lazy slave', was the master's response: 'if that's what you thought of me, you could at least have put the money in the bank and got some interest on it!' And so the man's talent was taken from him and added to the fortunes of the 5-talent man, the so-called 'worthless slave' was thrown out of the boardroom into a place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth', and Jesus concluded with a rather puzzling statement:

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*'To all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away'.*

So what's that all about?

Well, Jesus told the parable of the talents in the last week of his life on earth. He was already in Jerusalem, and within a few days the religious leaders would have their way, and he'd be hanging from a Roman cross. Those leaders – the so-called scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees - had received a whole lot from God. They'd been given the Law, the Temple, all the promises of God towards his chosen people. Many of them were financially secure too, and highly respected pillars of Jewish society. They were incredibly blessed. And with that blessing had come a responsibility: to make the very most of what they'd been given, and to live out their calling to love God, to love their neighbour, and to be a 'light to lighten the Gentiles'. As we read elsewhere in the gospels, 'from those to whom much has been given, much will be expected'.

So what had the leaders done with this amazing talent, this ridiculously vast sum of money? On one level they'd nurtured it, valued it, cherished it. They'd obeyed the Law to the letter – well, most of the time anyway; they'd taken good care of the Temple, even extending it massively during the days of Herod the Great; they'd ensured that all the rituals were properly followed, and all the sacrifices duly made. But here was the problem: that like Sarah-Jayne in *The Apprentice* they'd moved themselves into a 'convenient place'; they'd consistently played safe and refused to take risks; they'd turned their backs on their very first calling to love and to be a light, because in the end it was easier to obey the various 'Thou shalt nots' in the Bible than to obey the 'Thou shalt' – and especially the greatest commandment of them all, that passionate commitment to love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength, and love their neighbour as themselves.

And so they'd kept their talent under wraps; they'd buried it in the ground; because only that way, they believed, could they live a 'convenient' life for themselves while also guaranteeing that the fearsome God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, wouldn't be cross with them.

And in the end that would prove a disastrous mistake. For one thing, it would lead to them killing their own Messiah, because of the inconvenient challenge that Jesus posed for them. For another, it would lead to the destruction of their beloved Temple just forty years' later, in one of the darkest periods of Israel's history – a time in which weeping and gnashing of teeth would definitely become the order of the day. In this parable, in other words, Jesus was giving them one last chance to dig up their unique talent and to start to use it as he and his followers were beginning to do: to reconnect with their true calling to love and to be a light – to preach good news to the poor and bind up the broken hearted - and so to avert the coming disaster.

But the full meaning of Jesus' parables can never be contained in a single moment of history. Because Jesus' story of the talents reminds us of a really important truth for today: that as Christians we too have been given extraordinary gifts – Jesus and the gift of His Spirit, the Scriptures, prayer, our worldwide Christian family, 'strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow'; and as Christians, we too have been chosen for a purpose; and the moment we forget both that blessing and that purpose – the moment we put our baptism and confirmation certificates safely away in the filing cabinet, and quietly forget about them – is a moment of real spiritual danger. For one day, this parable teaches, we will be called to give an account of our lives before Almighty God.

Our English word 'talent' as in 'Britain's got Talent' comes from this very parable: but today it no longer means a unit of weight, of course, or a sum of money. It rather means a particular gift, or a series of gifts, that God (if we believe in God) has entrusted to us. And it's true of our everyday lives, of course, that if we don't use our talents but bury them in the ground – if we don't practise the piano, say, or train for rugby, or work hard at school - those talents are in effect taken away from us. They wither on the vine. They may as well be given to someone else for all the use we've made of them.

But there's a spiritual principle here too, that St Paul later spells out in his picture of the Body of Christ: that each one of us has been given a spiritual gift, or maybe several spiritual gifts – each one of us is like a part of the body, a hand perhaps or a foot, an eye or an ear; and if we fail to exercise those gifts, the whole of the rest of the body will suffer.

So think back to those first two servants in Jesus' parable, summoned to the boardroom: the five-talent slave and the two-talent one. Both had used their initiative to put their talents to work, to exercise their gifts to the utmost. Both had doubled their master's investment. And that should be aim too, not least as we look ahead to these coming weeks of lockdown, where some doors may be closed to us, yes, but others are wide open, as we do all we can to 'love and serve the Lord'.

And think back too to the third servant, the one-talent one, who lived by the Shredded Wheat strapline, 'Nothing added, nothing taken away'. For what this man had failed to recognise was this: that without risk – without a degree of enterprise, energy, boldness, initiative – we can never achieve anything for the Kingdom of God: that faith itself, as someone once put it, is spelt 'RISK'; and so is hope, for that matter, and so is love.

That's a challenge, of course, a challenge especially for those who instinctively like to take life easy and to play it safe. I don't want to look an idiot. I don't want to fail. I don't like to stand up against bullying or dishonesty or discrimination in my workplace. I don't want my friends to think I'm that I'm some sort of religious fanatic, indeed that I'm religious at all. I don't want to give away a significant chunk of my income – after all, who knows when I might need it? I don't want to engage with sensitive questions, like those raised by the 'Living in Love and Faith' resources issued earlier this week.

Yet the warning of the parable is this: that if we constantly play it safe with the gospel – if like Sarah-Jayne we ensure that it doesn't become inconvenient for us - if we just keep it as a trophy or an insurance policy or a hobby like golf or stamp-collecting – then we're gambling with our very souls. In trying to play safe, the bad servant was playing the most dangerous game of them all.

And so to some words that I haven't said much over the past few months, as baptisms and confirmations have largely gone on hold – but words that could hardly be more relevant than they are today:

*Do not be ashamed of Christ. You are his forever. Stand bravely with him against all the forces of evil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life'. Amen.*

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## Special Evening Prayers for the Nation

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York and senior church leaders have called a month of Prayer for the Nation during this second lockdown. The suggestion is that as many of us as possible unite to do this at 6 pm each day. These prayers and themes are offered as tools to enable all to participate and are intended simply as suggestions:

Loving God, at this time of crisis when so many are suffering, we pray for our nation and our world. Give our leaders wisdom, our Health Service strength, our people hope. Lead us through these parched and difficult days to the fresh springs of joy and comfort that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Loving Father God be with us in our distress: with our families, friends and neighbours, our country and our world. Give health to the sick, hope to the fearful, and comfort to the mourners. Give wisdom to our frontline and key workers, insight to our government and patience to us all; Overcome disease with the power of your new life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### A Family Prayer

Loving God, you know us and all that we are facing. We thank you that we can come to you as we are – with all our fears and concerns, our difficulties and challenges. Please draw close to each of us and those we remember before you now. Bring to us your peace and comfort. And fill us with your Spirit that we may be bearers of your grace and hope to others. As a country protect us, encourage us and keep us. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen

### Prayers for the Nation

Lord Jesus Christ, in these dark and difficult days we turn our hearts to you. In ages past you have delivered our nation from disaster. Do it again we pray. Give Wisdom beyond human wisdom to our leaders. Give strength beyond human strength to the NHS and all our frontline workers. Give comfort beyond human comfort to children and the elderly and all who grieve. Lord, Jesus Christ. In these dark and difficult days, turn your face towards us, have mercy upon us, and heal our land we pray. Amen.

Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ came that we might have life and have it abundantly; pour out your blessing upon our nation; where there is illness, bring your healing touch; where there is fear, strengthen us with the knowledge of your presence; where there is uncertainty, build us up in faith; where there is dishonesty, lead us into truth; where there is discord, may we know the harmony of your love; this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Daily Themes

#### Sunday: Family, friends and loved ones.

We lift to God those we hold in our hearts – praying for their health, their well-being and their sense of hope.

We pray that even when loved ones cannot physically be together they would not feel apart.

We ask for God's help in our communicating, our connecting and our caring.

#### Monday: Schools and colleges, children and young people.

We pray for all those involved in the shaping of young lives.

We give God thanks for the sacrifice and commitment of teachers and all those involved in serving children and young people in education.

We pray that all might be nurtured and cared for and that every needful resource would be made available – that all lives can flourish even in these difficult times and that no-one would be overlooked.

#### Tuesday : Elderly, isolated and vulnerable.

We echo God's commitment to those most at risk of this virus by praying today for those who are particularly vulnerable and isolated: praying for their deliverance, protection and comfort.

We hold before God those who care for them – that they would be strengthened and encouraged in this work.

#### Wednesday: Businesses, the workplace and economic wellbeing.

In this time of great challenge, we pray for the economic wellbeing of the country.

We remember before God those who face great uncertainty in their work. We lift before God those who have lost their jobs and face an uncertain and difficult future.

We pray for a renewed commitment to our common life together.

#### Thursday: The NHS and other key workers.

Our God is the great healer – and the agent used more than any other is the NHS. Today we voice our gratitude for those who serve this country in the National Health Service and pray for that God would prosper the work of their hands – that they would all be encouraged in their continued work of sacrifice and care amongst us.

#### Friday: National and Local government.

We pray for those who are in positions of authority with responsibility for decision making at national and local level at this difficult time. We ask that God would give great wisdom, deep commitment to all and right judgment.

#### Saturday: All who are grieving, and all suffering with physical and mental ill-health.

'Lord the one you love is ill....' John 11 v 3

We bring to God all those who suffer in body, mind, spirit or with grief. We ask that in God's great loving kindness they might know God's sustaining presence amidst their pain.

We pray for those who are stretched beyond their own capacity to cope and remain hopeful – that in the roar of these waterfalls God would bring a sense of coherence, comfort and strength.

#### A Grace

Dear God We are grateful for all that you have given to us – this food, each other and our health. We pray for those who lack these things we enjoy. Give us thank full hearts and opportunities to share your gifts with others. We lift before you this country in these difficult days – and pray you would protect us, encourage us and keep us. Amen.

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## CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE

### INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

#### The Real Lockdown

We've all missed gathering with our church to worship during lockdown. But, as hard as that's been, it has helped us appreciate the religious freedom we enjoy that countless people around the world have never known. In India, many can't gather to pray in their homes, for fear of attack. In China, even Christians who join online services risk arrest. This is the Real Lockdown, and it's not just temporary.

This Sunday please pray for the persecuted Church. Find out more at the [csw.org.uk](http://csw.org.uk) website.

#### PRAY FOR CHINA

Have you joined an online church service during lockdown? In China, even praying online can put you at risk. On Easter Sunday, at least six leaders of Early Rain Church were taken from their homes and their electricity was cut off, after government officials learned they were joining an online church service. This was just one incident in years of intrusive government surveillance and harassment the church has endured. Many members are in detention, on bail or under house arrest, and their leader, Wang Yi, has been sentenced to nine years in prison.

Recently a letter has been widely shared on Chinese social media describing the church members' experience. The letter is by Brother Zhou (name changed for security reasons), a member of Early Rain. Brother Zhou described the experiences of some church members who are being kept under guard in their own homes: Our three families have now been under [house arrest] for more than 480 days...They saw the guards bitten by mosquitoes in summer, and almost frozen in winter...The couple felt compassion. Sometimes they give food, sometimes they give the Bible... This is the way Christians express their love. Yes, we treat them as human beings. However, their leaders use them as chess pieces and dogs. Even when the virus raged, they stood pitifully at their posts...

President Xi Jinping has made it his mission to repress every religion in China with a severity and determination not seen since Mao. Not only churches, but mosques and Buddhist temples have been torn down, leaders imprisoned and congregations forced to recite atheist slogans and propaganda as they worship.

Prayer points:

- Thank God for the love and compassion towards their guards shown by the members of Early Rain Church under house arrest.
- Pray that the government will stop harassing, intimidating and detaining Early Rain Church, so that church members can practise their faith freely and peacefully.
- Pray for Pastor Wang Yi as he faces such a lengthy prison sentence, that his faith would stay strong and he'd be able to see his wife and son again. Pray for the release of all those being held unjustly for their faith.

## PRAY FOR NIGERIA

*'Our faith is now even stronger than at any other time...I was strengthened by my husband's message in the video; he spoke like a man of faith, a man who was already prepared to meet with the Lord.'*

These words were spoken by Mary Andimi, wife of Rev Lawan Andimi, who was executed in January 2020 after being abducted by a faction of Boko Haram.

Mary is just one of countless Christians whose faith and courage continues to inspire us, even as the news from Nigeria continues to be heartbreaking.

*'The goal of the total restriction on human and vehicular movement in Kaduna state was to curtail the spread of the deadly coronavirus ravaging the world.'*

*'But ironically, since Wednesday, 25 March 2020, when the total restriction on movement came into effect in the state to ultimately stop people from contracting and dying from the COVID-19, attacks by Fulani militia on Christian villages, especially in the rural areas of Southern Kaduna, have increased and killed more people than the coronavirus in the State.'*

We received this report from Reuben Buhari, CSW Nigeria's Research and Press Officer, describing violent attacks on Christian communities that continued during the COVID-19 lockdown and ongoing 24-hour curfews. These attacks have ravaged the country for many years. Yet the faith of people like Mary and Reuben spurs our prayers, as we petition God for a breakthrough of peace and justice for Nigeria.

Prayer points:

- Ask God for physical and mental healing for the survivors of attacks, and that God would bless and comfort those who mourn.
- Pray for effective strategies and action to end violence from the Boko Haram factions, and from militia and armed bandits from the Fulani tribe.
- Pray for a change of heart for the attackers, that they would put down their weapons, and would find ways other than violence to solve any grievances, or to secure an income.

What's the next step I can take? Go to [csw.org.uk/lockdown](http://csw.org.uk/lockdown) to find out how you can keep praying and speaking up for freedom of religion or belief in Nigeria and in other places where CSW is working around the world.

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