

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

A prayer of praise

Father God:
we welcome you.

Jesus, Son of God
we welcome you.

Holy Spirit
we welcome you.

Friends, old and new
we welcome you.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear God
Thankyou for all the good things in this world.
Thankyou for friends and family, for those we are
locked down with and for those who support us in
lockdown. We thank you for everyone who keeps us
alive at this time. Thankyou for doctors and nurse and
all who work in hospitals. Thankyou for teachers and
technology which has helped us to connect with life
and learning. Thankyou for each other your church
here in Hounslow. Most of all thankyou for Jesus who
shows us how to live.
Amen

A prayer of adoration

Lord our God, our rock on which we live: we praise you.
You give us meaning and purpose: we thank you.
You give structure and integrity to our being: we adore
you.
You are our way, you are our guide in life,
we marvel at your existence.
For all you are, have been and will be,
we worship and adore you, and bless your holy name.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

You are not boxed beyond sight, eternal God,
yet we sometimes dare not look.
You are not invisible, eternal God,
and yet often we cannot see.
You are not bound within one place, eternal God,
and yet we sometimes wish you were.
You cannot be destroyed by wind or fire, by age or

death,
eternal God, and yet we do so often lose you.
Bring us now, eternal God,
to see your ever-present presence with us.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

All-knowing God, confusion can overwhelm us.
Who are you? Who are we? Who am I?
All-knowing God, our lives can so easily become
compartmentalised
and your 'bit' can so easily be annexed off.
We confess how often this can be the case
and we seek your forgiveness.
We pray that your words 'brother, sister, your sins are
forgiven'
may become integral to our being,
and the scaffold of all our compartments.
Amen.

Address

One thing about a good builder is that they choose each brick carefully. They will tell you that each brick has its place. One builder with a batch of bricks once exclaimed 'it's like building with bananas!'.¹

You see the 'house' we are building is one that is meant to be a house eternal. In our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he writes:

'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

It is certainly true that 'our earthly tent' has been well and truly shaken and for some people it has been destroyed over the past few months.

As we begin to emerge from months of living in a lockdown world, we have been forced to rethink and change our priorities. I think I have learnt some surprising facts about myself and the world I find myself in:

1. First amazing fact I have learnt- I need to be more kind to myself. I have often spoken about the amazing words of Jesus in Mark 12:

³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.^[a] ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'^[b] There is no commandment greater than these."

It's like a triangle of commands to love: God, neighbour and the one we often forget, self. Miss any one out and the triangle is broken. For the mathematicians here I am talking about an equilateral triangle, where each angle is equal at 60 degrees. Too much of one of these and the triangle becomes distorted and could possibly break.

If we want a code for living, then we can do no better. Take time to love God, take time to love our neighbours and crucially, take time to love ourselves.

So think of a triangle.

2. The second amazing thing I have learnt is there is beauty in simplicity. In taking time to breathe, to stop and contemplate. I have lost count of the number of people who have told me that their gardens and allotments has never looked better. They have had time to tend to it, to dig and water. With the lovely weather we have been having, there is time to appreciate it. I for one have enjoyed watching my old familiar friends re-emerging in the garden and being reacquainted with their beautiful flowers and fragrance! It is no surprise that so many different religions use a garden for their image of paradise.

It really is like a circle. The circle has the reassurance that when you get round it once, it just starts again. That for me is a reassuring and hopeful thought. At least it is reassuring as long as the circle is a positive one. For many the constant circle of stress and anxiety is a real problem at this time and there many people who need our love, care and help to move out of this circle into more positive circles. But for me the circle still remains a symbol of eternity and a symbol of hope.

So think of a circle.

3. The third amazing thing that I have learnt is a sense in which I need to take time to be aware of what is happening around me in the world. There are times when I have just needed

to shut myself off from the daily stories throughout the pandemic, from the frightening rise in illness and deaths, from the pain and suffering around me. Sometimes shutting off is the only mechanism for coping we can have for a short while.

But also I have needed to find ways to celebrate the good around me, the amazing work of the NHS, of all those who have striven to support us through the crisis. So often it is the individual stories that warm my heart. Those people who have been the extra mile: to do someone's shopping, to make that caring phone call and many other cases. These people have been the bricks that have enabled so many to get through the worst of times.

So think of the rectangle.

4. So there we have it, the triangle, the circle and the rectangle. Love God, neighbour and self; Remember the reassurance that hope God will see us through and give thanks for those who have given so much for their neighbours at this time.

But there is one more thing:

Just because we are not meeting in a building, the church is still called to challenge injustice and speak truth to power where that which is clearly wrong in our society. We still need to speak out against these. To be agitators like many of the early Methodists were. Over the past few months we have heard accounts of hypocrisy, mismanagement and corruption, some of which have tragically have caused suffering and loss of life. Those people need to be called to account. Just as two thousand years ago Jesus turned the tables in the temple as a protest against these very same things, so we are called to speak out, to agitate if required.

As Paul says: 'So we don't lose heart'.

You see we are all vulnerable, weak and fragile. There are times when we need the security of our church... of our worship...of our gathering in fellowship. But it is in reaching out to those in need, in standing up to injustice, to give sacrificially of ourselves when find true worship in God. We will become agitators for change. But do not lose heart...

'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

As we journey together my prayer as that we will love God, our neighbour and ourselves, we will give thanks for beauty around us and will be agitators for truth, justice and above all - Love. 'For we are building a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'

Amen