

Order of Worship for Sunday 11th October

Welcome

Call to Worship

Lord God, faithful and loving,
we do not always feel like rejoicing.
Even as we gather to worship you,
our minds are sometimes distracted and
elsewhere,
weighed down by the burdens of our lives.
Help us, in this moment, to find it within our hearts
to REJOICE in your constancy and loving care for us.
People of God, let us rejoice.



Amen

Hymn For the beauty of the earth

Prayers

Lord God, we never know what the future holds or where life will take us next.

We never know what is just around the corner and what the outcomes of things will be.

But we know that whatever follows on from this moment, you are here with us, by our side, above and beneath us, entwining your life with ours, surpassing all human understanding.

In this moment, bless us and awaken us to your abiding presence.

Eternal God, so often we give up if something goes wrong or doesn't go our way.

So often we are overwhelmed by our own problems that we forget to look out for others.

So often we are consumed with negatives and endings that we lose sight of the positives and beginnings.

Eternal God, forgive us for our self-centredness, our blindness and our deafness, and reawaken your Spirit within us.

For eternal hope that comes from you, almighty God,
we give you thanks and praise.

For your gentleness and compassion...
For your peace within...
For your light in the darkness...
For hope when all seems hopeless...
For love beyond measure...

Amen

Readings Isaiah 25: 1-9
 Philippians 4: 1-9

Hymn The Lord's my Shepherd
 (Stuart Townsend version from Mission Praise)

Reflection

One of my favourite things in the world to do is a visit to a theme park – I love the rides, the scarier the better and I particularly love the ones in the dark, where you can't see where you're going or what's around the next corner. The jolt as you fall vertically or come to a dead stop and immediately begin travelling backwards at high speed. I love it!

I love it but I am very particular about the safety measures before we set off. I always double and triple check my harnesses to make sure there is absolutely no way I can fall out, only then can I relax into an adrenaline rush for 30 seconds.

In the passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians we've just heard, he's talking to them about stepping out into the unknown into the dark. "Do not be anxious about anything" he says to them. "Rejoice in the Lord always – the Lord is near"

In every situation he says that by prayer and thanksgiving they should present their requests to God.

When we are in a tough place, we really don't feel like praising God. But praising when we don't feel like it can be immensely rewarding. Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice even as they face uncertainty. The passage we heard from Isaiah is one long poem of praise from a time when it would not have been easy for God's people. Paul speaks of a 'sacrifice of praise' in Hebrews 13.15 a

sacrifice of praise we heard about in our first hymn. To praise God in difficult or uncertain times requires personal sacrifice. It takes an act of will to lay our 'all' before a God we don't understand. When we bring to God a 'sacrifice of praise', we choose to believe that even though life is not going as we think it should, God is still good and that he can be trusted. It's a bit like my harness on the roller coaster. There are times when the harness hurts a little, or lets you feel just a little bit vulnerable, but it is always there and it will keep you safe.

The Philippians are about to find themselves alone. Paul and his co-workers have supported them throughout their early days, and he has every faith that they will manage once 'released into the wild'. He tells them that even though he will not be there, God will be. And God will remain close and guard their hearts and minds. For anyone moving towards independence for the first time – and at this time of year there will be plenty of young people doing exactly that. I often comment at this time of year that there is one particular weekend when life as normal in Selly Oak becomes difficult because of the number of students arriving and dragging their parents around Sainsburys for one last shop before they are left on their own! It is a scary business. But just like a concerned parent, God dares to let us go – along with much encouragement and wise words of advice.

The Philippians faced a time of uncertainty. The future may have looked bleak to them. Paul encourages them to rejoice rather than worry. It is a question of attitude – as the American writer Dale Carnegie put it, in a book called *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*: 'Two men looked out from prison bars, one saw the mud, the other saw stars.' Paul wants the Philippian church – and all who follow Christ – to look for the good in everyone and everything, and to fill our minds with all that is right, and beautiful, and just (4.8).

We are fed a lot of bad news these days through all forms of media, what no one seems to mention is the hope that we can find through God, as Psalm 23 reminds us "Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure"

So let us, although we can't yet sing together, lift to him our sacrifice of praise and who knows, maybe one day soon I'll get to

go to Alton Towers again!

Amen

Prayers

O God, we come to pray not for ourselves, but for each other – for those we know and those we don't, for situations we understand and for those that confound us.

The news tells us of trauma and heartache across the world and we try to grasp the intensity of it all.

Bless, O Lord, all involved in the hurting and the healing.

We hear of death and dying, of grieving and weeping...

We hear of pain, scarring and disfigurement...

We hear of anguish and confusion...

We hear of those in need of help, and those who struggle to find it...

We hear of the grieving and the sorrowful...

We hear of the lost and the alone...

And we know, Lord, there are myriad others known only to you.

Bless them all in their hurting and their healing. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Generous God who gives us so much we ask your blessing on our gifts today, however we have brought them and we ask that they may be used to serve your will in our world today. **Amen**

We bring all our prayers together now in the words you taught us.....

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Now thank we all our God

Blessing

We go our separate ways, Lord – perhaps with smiles or frowns; with our hopes and with fears; with answers but also questions; maybe crying and with heavy hearts; or with anxieties, or relief. We go our separate ways, Lord, but we never go alone. With thankful hearts, we share the journey of life with each other and with you. Be with us as we go. **Amen.**