

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 6th November 2022
3rd Sunday before Advent (available on 01308 293062)

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

Hymn *O God our help in ages past*

1 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;

2 Under the shadow of thy throne
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

3 Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

4 A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

6 O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) (Public Domain)

Let us turn to the Lord and ask him to help us to live in a way that will make us worthy of a place in his kingdom.

Lord Jesus, you are kind, and full of compassion.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You seek out and save the lost.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You support all who fall, and raise all who are bowed down.

Lord, have mercy **Lord, have mercy.**

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect (special prayer for today)

God, our refuge and strength, bring near the day when wars shall cease and poverty and pain shall end, that earth may know the peace of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

READING *Luke 20:27-38*

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married

her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally, the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.' Jesus said to them, 'Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.'

REFLECTION

Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, and in our reading, some Sadducees came to Jesus with a story about a woman who had seven husbands, one after another. They wanted to know whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Their question was limited by human understanding, and Jesus countered this by explaining that in the life that they would enter, everything would be different. The Sadducees based their question on an obscure Old Testament law whereby if a woman was left a childless widow, her late husband's brother had to marry her and give her children. This applied, even if he was married already! In other words, the law of Moses ordered people to practise polygamy in some circumstances. Jesus cleverly avoided disagreeing with Moses, by counter-attacking the Sadducees attitude to resurrection. Like so many of the Jewish laws, this law sought to foster human well-being; without the support of a family, widows were likely to starve. Polygamy was necessary in a society where many men died in battle, leaving women unprotected unless they were taken as someone's second wife. The situation had changed by Jesus' time, when most marriages were monogamous. We talk about the unchanging Christian attitude to marriage, but in fact, our attitude has changed many times.

From the men of the Old Testament who had multiple wives, to the Romans for whom mistresses as well as a wife was often the norm, particularly with the ownership of slaves. From there, to the Feudal systems of the Middle Ages when serfs were at the beck and call of the Lord of the manor who often 'exercised his rights' despite already having a wife. And thence to the shameful abuse of African slaves by those who did not even count them as people; all the while retaining their respectability with their wife. (And don't forget the Church's involvement in slavery.). And through all of this, what Jesus said about self-sacrificing, caring love remained constant.

In our own day, the situation has changed again. Many people divorce and remarry; many couples don't bother to marry because they believe that 'living together' makes it easier if you ever want to split up. Homosexual relationships, which until relatively recent times were illegal in this country, and therefore had to be hidden can now, thankfully, be openly acknowledged and celebrated. We can't help who we fall in love with, and true love is surely something to be cherished by everyone.

Jesus condemned easy divorce, but that was to protect women, who, in his day, could be abandoned to starve on the flimsiest of excuses. He wasn't so much concerned with strict

rules, as with healthy relationships. Children feel more secure if their parents can stay together; men and women need the emotional security of knowing that their partner is loyal, and not sharing their affections with somebody else. So, the Christian attitude to marriage shouldn't consist of condemning irregular life styles but should concentrate more on relationships than on rules. Love, for the Christian, is a matter of behaving in a caring way towards someone, whatever your feelings may be. Falling in love is something that can happen to anyone; it is an emotional response, and we have no control over it. Growing in love as the years go by is only possible if both parties make an effort to work at the relationship and show commitment to it through good times and bad. And the marriage service is a public declaration of that commitment.

So, despite the changing face of marriage down the ages, the message that Jesus gave remains unchanging. Jesus taught, and demonstrated that love must always be unselfish, unconditional, and even self-sacrificing. **Amen**

INTERCESSIONS

Blessed are you, Lord our God, for you give us life and life eternal. You have given us the power to grow and to change. You have given us the freedom to ignore or turn to you. In your love you seek us and want us to have fullness of life. Blessed are you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord, we thank you for the Holy Scriptures, for those who have preached the word, and brought the Good News to our land. May we not be narrow minded in our views, or fail to bring the Scriptures to bear on our experience.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for all that we have received, and we ask that we might be generous in our sharing. We ask your blessing upon all who work for justice, as we remember all who suffer from oppression or poverty. Lord, give strength to all who are working for the freedom of others and for peace in our world.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the renewing powers of the body. We ask your blessing upon all who are involved in the healing and in the care of the ill; and we remember before you all who are suffering in body, mind or spirit.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the power of the resurrection of our Lord. Through him may we come to rejoice in eternal life. We ask your blessing upon all the faithful departed; may they share in the joys of your kingdom.

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

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,	as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen
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Hymn *Lord of all hopefulness*

1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever child-like, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Jan Struther (1901-1953) © Oxford University Press CCLI Licence 2370586

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen

We pray God's blessing on each other

May the Lord watch over you, keep you in his care, and grant you his peace.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and those whom you love and pray for, this day and for evermore. **Amen**