

**~AT HOME WORSHIP~**

**11th July 2021**

**Preparation**

Welcome!

Let’s start with prayer and scripture:

**Opening Prayer**

Dear Lord God, as we gather remotely today, we remember that we are all part of Your worldwide family. May our worship today bring You the praise that is due to You, our great and awesome God. Speak to us through Your word and help us to learn more about You and Your grace and mercy towards us all, as we read the scriptures, pray, and listen to songs in praise of You. Please build up our often small and faltering faith. If our week has had its share of troubles, bring comfort to us at this time. Remind us of what **Jesus said: “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.  Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew’s gospel 11 vs 28-30)

May we rest in Your love today, Lord. **Amen**.

**A scripture reading from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1, vs 3-14**

**3**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4**For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5**hepredestined us for adoption to sonship[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29212c)] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— **6**to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace **8**that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, **9**he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10**to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

**11**In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12**in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **13**And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14**who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Amen!

You may have noticed that there’s a major football tournament happening right now. Whether you are a fan, or whether you dislike the game, or even if you have no interest at all and would rather watch paint dry, it is a little difficult to escape right now. Since human beings are involved, there will always be something to be critical of. Maybe it’s some of the overly theatrical behaviour at times of some of the players that seems unsporting. Maybe it is despair over the decisions of match officials and the dreaded “VAR” system, or the team choice by their management and coaches. Maybe it’s the the media and TV coverage (too much, not enough, biased, overly critical, poor commentary…) Maybe it’s the bad behaviour of some of the fans. Maybe it’s simply dislike of a nation, represented by a team. We may “tut” over seeing mass gatherings happening when the Covid pandemic still goes on. We see these things play out in the media, and in conversations at work or school or gatherings of friends. And in the midst of it all, there’s talk of redemption for a gent named Gareth Southgate, the manager of the England men’s football team, in case you’d missed who he is. “The road to redemption” as one newspaper called it. As a player, back in 1996, in the semi-final of this very tournament, his missed penalty cost England the match, and out they went. Now, as manager, he’s helped guide the current team to the final. In that sense, he’s already redeemed himself for 1996. Should England win – and if they do, happy days – his path to redemption will, in the footballing world at least, be well and truly at its end.

So maybe this week you’ve been unsporting in your behaviour towards someone. Maybe you’ve said some unkind things because of a decision you have disagreed with. Thought unkind thoughts about someone’s failure, or even because of their success. As Christians we know that we are already redeemed in God’s sight. We know that” … all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”.. (Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 3). But we also know that Jesus told his disciples to daily pray for their needs, and this included asking for forgiveness from God for our sins, and also that we would forgive others as well when they sin against us. So let’s give a prayer of praise to the Lord, and also come before him and seek forgiveness for what we have done wrong this past week.

Father God, we give you thanks and praise that You care deeply for each one of us. You know all our faults and yet Your heart is full of grace and mercy and lovingkindness towards us. We thank you for your scriptures that remind us that you have chosen us, and that we are dearly beloved in your sight. Please work in our lives to make us people of justice and kindness and help us walk humbly with you day by day. We bring to you all the things that we have said, or done, or thought this week that have hurt others and hurt You. Sometimes we should have done or said something, and failed to do so, and let people down and let You down. We ask your forgiveness, Lord God, and we are truly sorry. We thank you that we know that when we confess our sins, You are faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins, and make us clean again from our past unrighteousness. In the name of Your Son Jesus, and with the helping power of the Holy Spirit, **amen.**

**And now for a song;** the link to Youtube is below, and for those who can’t link to Youtube, the words for the songs are given below, so that you can read them and meditate on them.

**Hymn/Song: Christ Our hope in Life and Death** Getty/Papa/Boswell/Kauflin/Merker

[**https://youtu.be/OibIi1rz7mw**](https://youtu.be/OibIi1rz7mw)

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to him belong
Who holds our days within his hand?
What comes, apart from his command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

What truth can calm the troubled soul?
God is good, God is good
Where is his grace and goodness known?
In our great Redeemer's blood
Who holds our faith when fears arise?
Who stands above the stormy trial?
Who sends the waves that bring us nigh
Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

Unto the grave, what will we sing?
"Christ, he lives; Christ, he lives!"
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with him
And we will rise to meet the Lord
Then sin and death will be destroyed
And we will feast in endless joy
When Christ is ours forevermore

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death
O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

**Now, grab a bible! Let’s read from God’s Word.** A word of warning. The Bible does not sugar-coat life, at all. It certainly does not gloss over humanity’s bad behaviour, and often presents this in a very blunt and up-front way. Our main reading for today records the sad ending to the life of a true man of God, who was also part of Jesus’ human family, for we know that John was a cousin of Jesus. John’s death at the hands of Herod’s men foreshadowed Herod’s role in the torment and execution of Jesus.

**BIBLE READING**

**Mark 6 verses 14-29**

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying,“John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.”

But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled[c]; yet he liked to listen to him. Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.” And he promised her with an oath, “Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”

She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist,” she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

**REFLECTION TIME**

**Children may choose to use the Activity Sheet**

When I was (much) younger, I was given a children’s bible by my grandmother. I still have it, though it’s dustcover has long since been lost. It’s artwork was typical of its publishing time from the mid 1970s – the pictures of the Hebrews and Israelites in general seem pretty fair skinned and not very middle eastern, and Jesus seems to have lost the olive-brown skin tone he most surely would have had, and has acquired light brown or blond flowing locks that made Him look sore suited for playing in a rock band like the Eagles, or the Doobie Brothers, rather than His somewhat more important role as the Messiah and Saviour of the world that had long been foretold in the Old Testament. From that point of view, the artwork has dated badly, but the overall pictures were still entertaining, and some of the more bloodthirsty elements of the bible were not airbrushed out. If you wanted pictures of people drowning outside of the ark, or King Ahab having a millstone dropped on his head, this was the children’s bible for you. The picture of John the Baptist’s head on a platter certainly stuck in my memory. Kids love this kind of stuff, or at least I did. The bible does not sugar-coat its historical details, and it “tells it how it is”. And so, we come to the scripture for today, which tells us of the fate of John the Baptist, and in typical Gospel of Mark fashion, gets on with the story in a straightforward, direct way.

It’s worthwhile here getting a bit of context. This event is set early in Jesus’ ministry, soon after he had preached in his hometown synagogue and been rejected by the locals. As Mark’s gospel tells us, Jesus then sent out “the Twelve” to take the good news out to the local towns and villages, the same message that John the Baptist had been preaching out in the wilderness before his imprisonment. That message was very direct and simple: The time is now: Repent, turn from your bad ways, here is the good news of Jesus Christ. They were to heal the sick and cast out demons in the same way Jesus had done. The disciples were truly blessed by God in their mission, but Jesus was starting to attract more than just local attention. You can’t go around calming storms, healing the sick and lame and even bringing someone back to life without being noticed, and so Jesus had come to the attention of King Herod, the man responsible for the death of John the Baptist.

Now, pay close attention because this gets a little complicated.

There were several Herods, and they were a very unpleasant family dynasty. The first Herod was Herod the Great, and he was king of a large area of Palestine, under the overall rule of the Roman Empire. He was ruthless and did not hesitate to get rid of family members, including some of his sons if he felt they were trying to take power away from him. This was the Herod at the time of the birth of both John and also of Jesus, the Herod responsible for the murder of young boy children in Bethlehem shortly after the birth of Jesus, and the Herod whom the Magi met.

After Herod the Great died in 4BC, his kingdom was divided up between several of his sons and one daughter. One of his sons, Herod Archelaus, took over around half of his father’s territory, the area of Judea, Samaria and Idumea, and reigned until 6AD. Herod Philip became tetrarch ( = a ruler of a quarter of the kingdom) of territories north and east of the Jordan, and Herod the Great’s daughter Salome 1 had control of three cities, Herod II also known as Herod Philip II fell foul of his father, and was disinherited, and finally there was Herod Antipas. He became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, from 4BC to 39AD, under the Roman Empire, and this is the Herod in the scripture today, and is also the Herod who was involved in the execution of Jesus.

There were other Herods, Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great, who turns up in the book of Acts, and finally his son Herod Agrippa II, who was the last king of the Herod Dynasty.

I hope you are still with me! Herod II married Herodias. I hesitate to call her a “lady”. She was his half niece (yes, really), and she divorced Herod II to take up with and marry Herod Antipas, effectively breaking yet more Jewish law in the process. It was this marriage between Herod Antipas and Herodias which was to lead to the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist, as recorded here in Mark’s gospel.

So that’s the background! It’s like a bad soap opera come to life. Mark recounts that some locals thought that Jesus was somehow Elijah the prophet brought back to life, others that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, which is what King Herod feared. Mark then retells the earlier events which led up to John’s execution. If you are wondering how Mark could have got details from the royal court, Luke tells us that one of Jesus’ followers was a woman called Joanna, and she was the wife of Chuza, who managed Herod’s household ( Luke chapter 8 vs 1-3).

The sad thing about Herod’s relationship with John is that he had the key to forgiveness and redemption right there in front of him, yet he did nothing about it. We read that Herod feared John, probably because the prophet was everything he was not: John was honourable, without malice or guile, and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Herod’s sins were many, and of some of the worst kind. He was a murderer, an adulterer, a man whose life demonstrated greed, lust, and pride. And John had not hesitated to call him out for his adulterous and incestuous marriage to Herodias, and Herodias hated him for it, so much so that Herod had John imprisoned to protect him from her. Herod was mystified by John’s life, his actions and by what he said. Yet we are told, he liked to listen to him. There was something about John’s life and words that were compelling to him, and that drew his attention and desire to keep John alive. When the king’s lust at his stepdaughter’s dancing provides the opportunity for Herodias to get rid of John, we are told that Herod was “greatly distressed”. As king, he could have dismissed the demand, and kept John alive: but his pride overcame him, and his earthly status and standing with his guests was more important to him than John’s life. And so, he had John executed, and thus he lost his first chance at redemption. Herod was to have another opportunity for redemption when Jesus was brought before him before his crucifixion. Luke tells us that Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time and plied him with questions (Luke 23). Perhaps Jesus had decided that Herod had been offered chances before to mend his ways, but like many before him, his heart was hardened, and his way was set. Herod wanted a “sign” from Jesus, as if Christ was some sort of performing monkey, to act on command. Had Jesus given Herod the “sign” he had asked for, it would not have changed him. And so, he gave Herod no answer, and Herod resorted to mockery and ridicule before the final rejection of Jesus in shipping him back to Pilate.

Our God is the God of last chances. The parable Jesus told of the prodigal, or lost son ( Luke 15) shows us a wonderful story of repentance and redemption, the father who was once rejected comes out to meet his humble and repentant son, returning to ask forgiveness, and welcomes him with joy and open arms. The son is redeemed. As he is dying on a cross, a repentant thief turns to Christ, who is being executed along side him, and Jesus assures him of redemption and everlasting life. If ever there was a death-bed conversion, that was it. God is indeed full of lovingkindness and rich in mercy. But He is not the God of infinite chances. There comes a time when God is silent, as Jesus was with Herod. The good news has been given. Redemption is on offer. Mercy awaits. And if we act like Herod, that chance will slip away, and one day it will be too late. Now, none of us here are anything like Herod in our general behaviour. At least, I hope not! But that does not mean that we are given a free pass if we do not mend our ways. Herod had many idols, things that he put ahead of seeking God. Power. Wealth. Lust. Status. Greed. Arrogance. He allowed these things to come between him, and the message that John had been preaching. It is too easy for us to allow other things in life to crowd out the gospel message. The good news gets buried under a ton of stuff. Possessions, status, money are not bad in themselves, but when they become the driver for our lives and we allow them to crowd God out, then they become idols. When we pursue bad relationships that do not honour God, or when we do not seek to act justly or we act without kindness and mercy, these are things that can get in between us and God. And then, one day, if we continue to follow the wrong path, caught up in our own selfishness, we might miss that final chance to turn back towards God, as Herod did.

**Let’s pray**. Father God, we thank you for the example of John the Baptist, the greatest of Your prophets, who faithfully prepared the way for the Lord. We thank you that you are indeed the God who offers us forgiveness and redemption, for you are full of mercy and lovingkindness. Help us to spread your good news and help us to pray for those whom we love who do not know you, that they too may be saved. In the name of Jesus**, amen.**

**Prayers for ourselves and others**

Lord God, sometimes we get so tired,

we feel like we are carrying

the weight of the world

on our shoulders.

There aren’t enough

hours in the day

to get everything done.

There are too many

people and situations

that need our help.

**Jesus said, ‘Come to me**

**and I shall give you rest’.**

Lord God, sometimes we get so fed up,

we feel that no matter

how much we do

nothing really changes.

Poverty is all around us,

too many people

have too little.

Corruption is present

at all levels

and seems unstoppable.

**Jesus said, ‘Come to me,**

**my yoke is easy and my burden is light’.**

Lord God, sometimes we get so stressed,

we feel frustrated

and struggle to make it

through each day.

Life is demanding,

we have to deal with

so many situations and emotions.

We get caught in a cycle

that only leads us

to more stress and frustration.

**Jesus said, ‘Come to me**

**and find rest for your souls’.**

Lord God, sometimes we get so angry,

we feel let down

by family and friends

and this causes us pain.

Conflicts and disagreements

tear us apart

and break our relationships.

Holding on to grudges

only makes us feel worse

and brings no healing.

**Jesus said, ‘Come to me**

**and learn from me,**

**I am humble and gentle**

**in heart.’**

O Lord God, gentle and wise

hear our prayers,

restore our souls

and revive our spirits.

Give us strength to

keep following

the way of Jesus.

Help us learn from him

and take up his yoke.

We want the rest he offers.

We long for it for ourselves

and for others.

**Lord, give us patience**

**to await your response**

**to our requests.**

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**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/Song**

**O church arise** This one is a cracker….the link takes you to a version by Stuart Townend.

[**https://youtu.be/q67YLf0MeOc**](https://youtu.be/q67YLf0MeOc)

 Stuart Townend & Keith Getty
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**O CHURCH, ARISE** and put your armour on;
Hear the call of Christ our Captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
In the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth,
We’ll stand against the devil’s lies;
An army bold, whose battle-cry is Love,
Reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war, to love the captive soul
But to rage against the captor;
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole,
We will fight with faith and valour.
When faced with trials on every side
We know the outcome is secure,
And Christ will have the prize for which He died,
An inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross, where love and mercy meet,
As the Son of God is stricken;
Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet,
For the Conqueror has risen!
And as the stone is rolled away,
And Christ emerges from the grave,
This victory march continues till the day
Every eye and heart shall see Him.

So Spirit, come, put strength in every stride,
Give grace for every hurdle,
That we may run with faith to win the prize
Of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way,
Retelling triumphs of His grace,
We hear their calls, and hunger for the day
When with Christ we stand in glory.

**Closing Prayers & Sending Out**

The Blessing

**Jesus said, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.’ (Mark 5:19)**

**The blessing of God be upon you,**

**the One who loves you,**

**the Christ who calls you,**

**the Spirit who makes you holy, today and always.**

 **Amen.**



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Prayers for ourselves and others from Spill the Beans 2012