29th August 2021

**Call to worship**

Today, in this service, may we bring to God
not only the words on our lips,
but the praise in our hearts.
May we bring our honesty and bravery,
our anxiety and fears,
all that we carry in our hearts.
May we meet with Jesus,
who accepts us – flaws and all –
with forgiveness and grace.



**HYMN: Lord Jesus christ**

**A prayer of approach**

Unchanging God,
refresher, healer and restorer,
give us wisdom and discernment today.
Open our eyes, Lord, our ears and our hearts.
May we be quick to see where you are at work;
quick to listen for your word;
quick to offer love and hope,
and slow to judge

We come to seek you and to hear you,
to be still and present with you,
to be transformed. **Amen**.



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

Unblemished God, forgive us
when we adhere to laws that are not of you,
when we criticise others because their ways are not our ways.
**Cleanse our hearts and make us pure**.

When we have not supported one another in love,
or protected those that are vulnerable.
**Cleanse our hearts and make us pure**.

When we have corrupted your laws and gone our own way,
or when we have not nurtured those in our families
and communities and let them go astray.
**Cleanse our hearts and make us pure**.

Help us to live as one community,
bound together in love and grace.
**Help us to live alongside each other**
**and be there for one another.**
**Amen.**

Thank you, O God, that we are a forgiven people,
cleansed and restored by you,
made pure in your image.
Today we are free because of the cross.**Amen**.

Open mike

*Some Pharisees and scribes accuse Jesus’ disciples of eating with unwashed hands. Jesus tells the Pharisees that it is what is inside the heart that is important. He says that they honour God with their lips but not their hearts. It is not what goes into a person’s body that defiles a person, but rather the words and actions that can come from the inside.*

*The choices we make and the words we speak reflect what is important to us, the values that we hold. How do the choices we make reflect the values we hold? Who and what influences those values? Today we are thinking about the things that make a healthy, supportive community, and what we need to help us live as disciples.*

**Mark 7.1-8,14-15,21-23**

**HYMN I danced in the morning**

One day, the religious leaders came to Jesus to challenge him.
They were worried about what the disciples did on the outside.
They said, ‘Why don’t your followers obey the rules about washing?’
They didn’t mean that the people were dirty, but that they weren’t following God’s rules about being clean.
Jesus challenged the leaders back.
He explained that being clean wasn’t about washing.
It wasn’t about what’s on the outside.
Jesus said it was all about having a heart that was clean.
It’s all about what’s on the inside.
It isn’t what goes into a person, from the outside, that matters,
it’s what comes out, from the inside, from our hearts.

* The Pharisees were a group who tried to keep every part of the Jewish law very strictly. Most of them felt that Jesus was not strict enough.
* The Pharisees were very concerned with rituals. Rituals are a series of actions that you do in a certain order, often to do with washing.

**Washing our hands** has become an important part of our lives since the pandemic. We have been encouraged to sing a song or a verse of a hymn to make sure we wash for a full 20 seconds.

Did you sing anything?

**But are we sometimes more dedicated to the idea of the ritual than to its practice – just as the Pharisees were to their rituals?** Things become rituals quickly, and we cease to notice what we are doing. The habit of mindfulness, of being present in the moment, is an important part of a quiet time with God. What can we do to bring to mind the day or week and encourage reflection ?

**When we make a cup of tea**, most of us have got used to teabags. Many of us dispense with a teapot and go straight to a mug. But sometimes, in a café or teahouse, we will be brought a pot with loose tea, a cup and saucer and milk in a jug. Somehow the slow pace of waiting for a brew and using a tea strainer feels decadent – a generous and hospitable waste of time, but one that results in a different experience.

Knowing Jesus and learning to live as his disciples should change us and inform the way we live with one another. We need to take time to learn from one another, to shape and support one another in our Christian values.

This week, the delayed 2020 Paralympic Games get underway in Tokyo. Like many events and organisations, the ethos of the event is set by a [series of values: courage, determination, inspiration and equality](http://www.paralympic.org/feature/what-are-paralympic-values).

**Courage:**It encompasses the unique spirit of the Paralympic athlete who seeks to accomplish what the general public deems unexpected, but what the athlete knows as a truth.

**Determination:** The manifestation of the idea that Paralympic athletes push their physical ability to the absolute limit.

**Inspiration:** When intense and personal affection is begotten from the stories and accomplishments of Paralympic athletes, and the effect is applying this spirit to one's personal life.

**Equality:** Paralympic Sport acts as an agent for change to break down social barriers of discrimination for persons with an impairment.

How do you feel about these values? Are there any you would change? Have you seen any examples this week of athletes demonstrating these values?[[1]](#endnote-1)

When the new Scottish Parliament was being opened in 1999, a ceremonial mace was created. On its head were meant to be five values that politicians should follow, but the designer found he could only make space to include four. These were wisdom, compassion, justice and integrity. What should the missing fifth value be? What helps people to live by these values?

In this week’s passage (Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23), Jesus challenges us to consider whether the way we live is consistent with the values we hold in our heart. If you had to **write down a set of values that you hold in your heart, what would they be**? What challenges have you faced in trying to live out these values? What helps you to keep them consistently?

**Create in me a clean heart 5 mins E S**

Ask God to help us clean our hearts

You will need: heart shapes, laminated; washable markers, water.

Give each young person a heart. Ask them to write on it some things that are getting in the way of living consistently, then to wash them off.

Together, pray and ask God for help to be consistent in how we live.

***Play the track ‘Clean’, Hillsong UNITED on People (Live), during this activity.***

**Staying true**

**Jesus asks us to look at our hearts and to keep them pure so that our walk matches our talk Mark 7.6**

**Context**

It is hard for us to put ourselves in the place of others - to see things as they see them and to understand the daily battles that sometimes make up their lives. Compassion and empathy spring from really beginning to walk with others and to see their pain as being our own. It is this kind of compassion that leads us to question the status quo and to challenge unjust structures wherever we see them. It’s this kind of compassion that can lead to real change in the world.

The Paralympics began on Tuesday amid much soul searching about its transformational impact. Does it really change the daily struggles that people with disabilities face in their daily lives? [Scope](http://www.scope.org.uk/news-and-stories/paralympics/) urges us to turn cheers to change where our words about inclusion and opportunity turn us to action.

The situation at Kabul airport worsens almost daily as desperate people try to get out of Afghanistan before the [evacuations end in 24 to 36 hours](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/24/us-has-no-plans-to-delay-afghanistan-exit-beyond-31-august-pentagon-says).  What must it be like to leave everything you have known and to run, not knowing where you will end up or what your life will be like. How can our words about the people of Afghanistan turn to practical welcome and support?

**Ideas for sermons or interactive talks**

Put up a map of Afghanistan and/or watch some footage of the scenes in the airport in Kabul. Pray in silence with biddings or aloud for:

* the needs of those with nothing except the clothes they are wearing;
* children in the crush of the desperate seeking escape;
* the future of families seeking new homes and security;
* all those who have left behind someone they love;
* the future of the country and for what lies ahead;
* people in danger who will be left behind.

You might like to light a candle for each group or situation that you pray for.

**Value of hospitality**

How easy or how challenging is it to show welcome - in our neighbourhoods and in our nation?  And how do we keep showing it? What can we do to welcome others and to help them feel at home?

You might like to think about those who have a gift of hospitality in your church community and give thanks for them.

Jesus was often found enjoying hospitality usually with those who found disapproval in society. He owned nothing, lived simply and challenged those whose lives were based on material goods - those whose hearts were in the wrong place. As a child, he became a refugee before he was two years old when Mary and Jospeh, warned of the murderous intentions of Herod, fled for their lives with Jesus. He lived his early years in another country. Pray for all in our world who are in need of acceptance, belonging and welcome.

**integrity**

The actions of many of our leaders often do not match up to their rhetoric. Sometimes we notice but at other times we shrug and comment that this is what all politicians do. At the moment in Afghanistan, promises are being made by the Taliban concerning the role of women in society and the kind of governance they will employ. This is a matter of serious importance that could alter the rights that women currently enjoy. In a situation where the West has very little leverage over the decisions to be taken, the world is watching to see how far the words about inclusion will be supported by actions and choices.

At home, the consequences of a lack of integrity in the lives of politicians may not seem crucial; however, it damages the whole of society if we too readily accept that talk is never matched by the walk. How can we work together in society for more integrity in our politics so that words and actions match and the stated good intentions actually turn into reality?

In our own lives we often promise more than we can deliver. In a world where so many voices compete for our attention is it often hard to say true to our calling and true to the radical intentions of the gospel and of the kingdom of God. Sometimes what is asked simply feels too hard for us and we say words that are not then backed up in changed lives. There is a call to root ourselves more deeply in the word of God and to feed our intentions with openness to God’s empowering Spirit.

**Examen**

Washing our hands has become an important part of our lives since the pandemic.. But are we sometimes more dedicated to the idea of the ritual than to its practice, just as the Pharisees were to their rituals? Things become rituals quickly, and we cease to notice what we are doing.

The habit of mindfulness, of being present in the moment, is an important part of a quiet time with God. There is a way of praying called ‘the examen’. It is a slow way of praying that comes from Ignatian spirituality, where we are encouraged to bring to mind and reflect on the important parts of the day. And it can be a helpful exercise to do last thing at night, or when you are away on holiday with more time to spare – or just every few days when you can manage it. Let’s try it now.

So, for a few moments, sit comfortably, feet on the floor and arms in your lap. Close your eyes and notice your breathing. What thoughts and feelings are distracting you from a sense of prayerfulness? Recognise them and let them go, returning to breathing slowly and deeply. Now, ask yourself, ‘What am I thankful for from today?’ Next, consider, ‘What has been difficult today?’ Offer these thoughts and reflections to God in prayer. And, finally, ask God how you should respond to these thoughts tomorrow.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, Lord, for our communities.

Thank you that you have set us where you want us to be.

Thank you for those who support us.

Thank you that you give us strength to help each other.

Thank you that you can turn us inside out as we work together

to make our communities the places you want them to be.

Thank you for the strength to be doers and hearers of the word.

Thank you that every perfect gift is from you. Amen.

Amen.

**Hymn: Make me a channel**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Loving God, every day
give us the courage to look and listen,
the ability to notice,
the determination to help,
and the compassion of Jesus. **Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Lord, go with us into our everyday lives,
to honour you in all that we do and say.
May our being and doing
reflect your love and your grace.
And when we next meet,
may we recognise with thanks
the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
**Amen**.

1. https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/114-july-august-2021-b/proper-17/the-week-in-focus [↑](#endnote-ref-1)