**14th August 2022**

When Jesus walked on this earth,
he felt what we feel.
He saw human joy and pain.
He saw human vulnerability and strength.
As we gather today, let us be thankful
that he knows how our emotions work.

A prayer of adoration

Lord Jesus Christ, you walked this earth as we do,
you faced acceptance and rejection, you faced welcome and hostility.
You set your eyes on the journey to Jerusalem and we can’t imagine our life if you hadn’t.
God the Father, you gave us Jesus, an example, a teacher,
a friend, a prophet, priest and king and then a sacrifice for each of us.
God the Holy Spirit, burning within, inspiring, enlarging, warming, urging us ever on.
Triune God, our emotions change with the day, with the mood, with the moment,
but we adore you for your steadfastness, your faithfulness, your constancy.
Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

A prayer of confession

What I don’t understand, God, I cast aside, ignore, object to, ridicule and rebuke. What I don’t understand I think must be wrong. People that are different sometimes worry me, frighten me, disturb and concern me, so I ignore them, turn my back on them, ignore their needs, their cries for help, their pain and anguish.
Almighty God, I’m sorry that in my vulnerable moments, I can hurt these people and make them feel worthless, unloved and unwanted. Forgive me, I pray, and strengthen my resolve to see other people’s lives and views, needs and desires. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

God understands our vulnerability and our confusion and forgives all those who truly repent, who are really sorry for wrong deeds and wrong thoughts and wrong ways. God forgives; journey in peace. Amen.

**ALL AGE**

Think about real situations and the feelings they evoke.

You will need: paper and pens.

* Read out or display this list:
Starting a new school
Getting exam results
Changing jobs
Restructuring at work
Getting married
Going on holiday
Moving house
Having a baby
Training for a competition
Conflict with a friend
Difficulties with a neighbour
Getting lost
* Ask everyone to choose one or more situations they can relate to. Invite them to attempt to draw the situation they found themselves in, or something to represent it. Then, working in small groups, encourage people to show each other their drawings and discuss the situations illustrated – and, in particular, how they felt at the time

An active prayer to explore emotions

* Invite the group to join in this active prayer.

Dear God, we thank you that you created many emotions – happiness, sadness, joy, excitement, fear, stress and laughter.
*(invite children to move to one side of the room)*
We thank you, God, that you have given us emotions, so we can express and show others our love, happiness and joy.
*(invite children to move to the other side of the room)*
God, we ask that you help us in those times when we feel sad, gloomy and stressed.
Help us to find ways to express our feelings to people we trust, that help us and are not harmful to others.
Thank you, that you gave Jesus his disciples that he may have others to share moments of joy and stress with. Amen.

**Talk together**

* **Who do you choose to talk to when you’re upset or stressed?**
* **Jesus displayed lots of emotion in the passage today. Did anything surprise you?**
* **If Jesus were here today, do you think he would be upset or stressed about anything?**

**Luke 12.49-56**

Jesus warns that following his way is likely to bring conflict and division, even within a family. He also encourages people to see and understand what is really going on in the world, just as they understand that a cloud usually means rain.

Clouds bearing rain is something we would all like to see at the moment. The weather is a great subject of conversation and extreme weather conditions produce a variety of opinions. There will be those who thoroughly enjoy the hot weather and those for whom its too much.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is a trivial division but a division none the less. A more serious division concerns why we are enduring extreme weather conditions. Some say it is a result of climate change; others deny this. These conflicts place the present time very much into the situation Jesus spoke of in Luke12 49-56. Can we see and understand what is really going on in the world? What does climate change tell us of God and how we should respond?

At the same time we are boiling with extreme high temperatures, we are being warned of rocketing fuel prices. This will have a very real impact and fuel poverty is a serious threat for many people. Politicians are divided as to how the government should respond. Tax cuts? Hand outs? Windfall taxes or maximizing profits for the energy companies and keeping shareholders happy. Indeed there have been calls for a hosepipe bans but is speculated that water companies don’t want to because it will hit their profits and dividends to their shareholders. Once again in the face of crisis we see division.

However an additional way in which we can respond to fuel price increases and water shortages is to give serious consideration to how we use fuel and how we use water. It will not be a complete answer. Fuel poverty, drought are real and terrible threats but as Christians we should consider our response in the context of our concern for the creation of which God is at the heart.

Olivia Newton John died this week. In the film *Grease* she sang the song [*Hopelessly devoted to you*](https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Olivia-Newton-John/Hopelessly-Devoted-To-You). It is a song of one-sided love and the pain that such division brings.

Guess mine is not the first heart broken
My eyes are not the first to cry
I'm not the first to know
There's just no getting over you

I know I'm just a fool who's willing
To sit around and wait for you
But baby, can't you see there's nothing else for me to do?
I'm hopelessly devoted to you

But now there's nowhere to hide
Since you pushed my love aside
I'm out of my head
Hopelessly devoted to you

I loved the film. I was at secondary school when it came out. I always felt a bit uncomfortable that sweet and innocent girl next door Sandy, played by Olivia Newton John had to change her image to be the sexy bad girl dressed in black spandex to pull John Travolta’s Danny at the end of the film. I know many feminists have criticized the film for that reason – why do the women have to do all the changing of image? Why should you change yourself in order for another person to gain their attraction. She moves from one stereotype, a geek and a square wearing pinafores and flares to another stereotype wearing figure hugging trousers and leathers. But it is played for laughs. She looks at her friends for directions on how to drop the cigarette and play the bad girl. The film presented a divided Sandy. Who was the true Sandy?

It’s the pain of division that Jesus describes in part his own response to those who refuse to accept his love fully.

There are powerful words in this week’s reading about the impact of the choice to align yourself with Jesus. And the potential to divide people who choose discipleship over familial loyalty leads to an eruption of emotions from Jesus. The emotions expressed allow us to see the humanity Jesus shares with us. He displays vulnerability and, as we think about how he felt, we can take a moment to look at our own vulnerabilities and strong emotions.

In all of these situations there is an amount of vulnerability. Being vulnerable, whilst it is a normal part of life, is far from easy and can feel isolating. Jesus’ words reveal his humanity and the inevitable vulnerability that goes with that. This means that he understands our vulnerable response to conflict and division and is thus well placed to support us through it.

Conflict and division happens to all of us and to families. Whatever you thought about Oprah Winfrey’s now infamous interview with Harry and Meghan, it projected to the world the fragility of family, the complexity of familial relationships and how quickly things can fall apart.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Many of us will have a story about a family rift. Some family divisions last for decades and can even be passed down from generation to generation. Clearly, there are many and complex reasons for a family fall-out, but one of them stems from fundamental differences of opinion. During the Brexit vote, several news outlets carried statistics about the impact of the vote on family harmony. It is thought that disagreement on the politics of Brexit led to one in 20 people falling out with their family. You may recall that Boris Johnson’s own brother, Jo, famously left the government citing irreconcilable tension within himself over family loyalties and the national interest. However, when a family member moves beyond expressing different opinions and starts to live in a way that others don’t understand or follows a set of beliefs not shared by the rest of the family, things can get really hard for everyone.

Today’s Gospel reading portrays something of the difficulties of holding a deep set of beliefs that is at odds with the people you love the most. For the first believers, the decision to follow Jesus and the consequences of signing up to a life of faith in him were hugely complex. Following Jesus divided people from their families, because the decision to follow him required disciples to put their trust fully in Jesus and align themselves to him above and beyond anything and anyone else. Jesus took priority.

Perhaps to us this seems a little extreme. But even in today’s world there are many that face this level of cost for their faith. Being divided from family members is a very real prospect for people across the globe choosing a life of faith in Christ. And yet people still make this choice. People today are opting into a life that will divide them from family, friends and communities they have grown up in. The choice for Jesus and the associated costs can give us pause for thought, particularly if our life of faith brings us little conflict or division.

But if you are a Christian it may involve you making a stand at work when the dirty jokes are being told, or certain work colleagues are being racist or sexist. Those little perks you took at the employers expense like freebies you helped yourself to you don’t go along with any more. You want to be honest – but it runs the wrath of your less than honest work mates.

I remember a quote from the Edge the lead guitarist in the band U2 who said that when you mention Jesus in a group of people it can be like scraping your fingernails down a blackboard. Maybe people can’t cope with the idea of there being a Creator. A judge. Someone who they are accountable too.

Maybe they associate the Christian faith with oppression and imperialism and a lack of freedom and fairness. Whatever, people have all sorts of preconception, prejudgments about people fo faith.’ The ‘religious’. I’m not religious people say as though it’s a badge of honour – I’m not small minded or bigoted or humorless , or anti fun – its amazing what people associate the word ‘religious’ with. It’s a big divider. The religious v the normal people! We have to put up with a load of nonsense haven’t we!

It is our belief though that Jesus is the defining moment in history. Jesus brings division between those who will not see his crucial place at the centre of human life and those who are beginning to glimpse the meaning of it. A son will be found to be following the way of Jesus, while his father ignores the call; a mother will received the gift of the spirit while her daughter rejects the offer. The coming of Jesus is the most significant happening in all human history.

However, according to Jesus, the majority of people are hypocrites, they can see meanings and connections in various phenomena in the world and yet look at Jesus and make nothing of his remarkable facts of his life death and resurrection. So, using courtroom language Jesus warns those who ignore the signs of his coming that they will be called to account. There lies ahead for every person a final encounter with Jesus the judge as he says in the following verses:

**7**“Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right? **58**As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. **59**I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

That certain and final judgement will divide those whose minds have been set on earthly things and those whose treasure is in heaven.

Which are you?

The great composer Ludwig van Beethoven used to sometimes play a trick on polite salon audiences, especially when he guessed that they weren’t really interested in serious music. He would perform a piece on the piano, one of his own slow movements perhaps, which would be so gentle and beautiful that everyone would be lulled into thinking the world was a soft cosy place where they could think beautiful thoughts and relax into semi slumber. Then, just as the final notes were dying away, Beethoven would bring his whole forearm down with a crash across the keyboard and laugh at the shock he gave to the assembled company.

A bit cruel and impolite perhaps. And of course, in many compositions Beethoven found less antisocial ways of telling his hearers that the world was full of pain as well as of beauty- and also of making the transition in the other direction, bringing joy out of tragedy, including in his own tragic life, in wonderful and lasting ways. But the shock of that crash of notes interrupting the haunting melody is a good image of what Jesus had to say at the end of this chapter.

You may have thought the gospel was all about peace – Jesus the Prince of Peace eh? Jesus seems to be saying. No: Prince of division. Once this message gets into households there’ll be no peace: families will split up over it, just as the prophets foretold. He quotes Micah 7.6 a passage in which the prophet warns of imminent crisis and urges the only way forward is complete trust in God.

Maybe there are times when like Jesus himself on this occasion, we need to wake people up with a crash to what is going on in the world and where people are in opposition to the kingdom of God.

Prayers of intercession

The response for this week’s prayers is:
Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Father, we thank you for the week just passed.
We pause for a moment to remember times when we felt ourselves to be vulnerable…
We thank you for the moments when you were clearly present… perhaps in helping us to feel your peace…  or in nature…  or through the word or touch of friends and family…
We ask you to help us see you even more clearly in the week ahead and, even when we can’t feel you, help us to trust that you are there and you do care.

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Father, we pray for all who are expecting exam results this week.
The culmination of all they have worked for will soon be in their hands.
We rejoice with those who have achieved what they hoped for, and we ask for your comfort and strength for those who will be disappointed.
We ask for wisdom and guidance for our young people as they decide what to do next with their lives.

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Father, we lift to you the vulnerabilities we face in this country around the spiralling energy costs and the bills we will need to pay.
We know that many people are afraid of what is already facing them with predictions of worse to come.
We pray that the authorities will act quickly to alleviate the situation as soon as possible in a fair way for everyone.

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Father, we pray for places in our world where there is division.
We pray for families in crisis, especially any known to us.
We ask for your comfort and love to surround all children in the care system.
We pray for help for all who are bullied or abused.
We lift to you countries in conflict, especially: Gaza and Israel, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar…
We cry to you to bring peace and courage to all those who are being persecuted for following you.

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Creator God, we know that our planet, this beautiful world you have made, is currently in crisis and it is because of our misuse of resources.
We pray for all those who suffer most because of our recklessness, particularly those who live in areas of famine, or in places of drought where there used to be plenty.
We pray for our own farmers, struggling with lack of rain.
We ask that grain stored in Ukrainian ports may soon get to those who need it most.
We cry to you our sorrow for the cutting down of rainforests, melting of polar ice and hotter and hotter weather.
We are sorry for our misuse of this vulnerable, beautiful planet.
Help us not to leave it to our children to DO something. We are responsible… help us behave justly.

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Father, we pray for our health service and all who work in the NHS.
We thank you for their love, care and support for us when we are vulnerable.
We pray for all those awaiting operations or consultations and all who have been adversely affected by the pandemic.
We pray for all those who are adversely affected by our current heatwave.
We lift to you now those we know who are ill or struggling at this time… we pray for those who care for the elderly and housebound… we pray for those who are dying or mourning the loss of a loved one…

Lord, you know all our vulnerabilities: help us to put our trust in you.

Heavenly Father, we focus now on the week ahead of us.
We bring to mind moments where we might feel ourselves to be vulnerable.
We ask you to go before us into every situation to pave a path of peace in front of us…
Help us to be alert to others in our community or workplace who might be feeling vulnerable this week and give us the courage to put aside our weaknesses so that we can support others.
Help us to trust that you know everything about us and care for every situation in our lives.
Thank you, Lord, for being there.

Lord, as we leave this place, travel with us and keep us close to you.

Amen

A sending out prayer

Lord, go with us.
Help us to seek your treasure.
Help us to look for all you’re doing right now.
Help us – by our example as much as by our words –
to share your treasure and your life-giving story
with the people we meet this week. Amen.

1. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-15/the-week-in-focus> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2022/120-july-august-2022-c/proper-15/explore-and-respond> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)