



Connection

Sunday 17th January 2021
Second Sunday of Epiphany



View from a Vicarage

Hello and welcome to this week's edition of the Bredon Hill Group Connection – a short publication which provides some simple resources and local information to support your personal worship and devotions as we journey through this current Lockdown.

Following our decision last week to suspend Communal Worship across the Bredon Hill Group of churches until at least middle February when the government has promised to review the national Lockdown position, our national news has once again this week been filled with details of daily record high figures of COVID cases, record numbers of daily deaths and images of NHS hospitals and staff on the point of collapse and being unable to cope.

It was therefore in the light of national messages by the government against the level of seriousness of the pandemic and its impact, that reluctantly the Archdeacon of Worcester, the Rural Dean and myself, had to take the decision earlier this week to temporarily postpone the selection process for a second incumbent to the Bredon Hill Group for a few weeks, due to the obvious risk from holding this physically, and feeling an appointment could not be achieved satisfactorily through a Zoom meeting.

I know this will come as a further disappointment to many. However, this delay is temporary and will hopefully only be for a short time, and until the national vaccination programme enables the government to lessen some of the strictest Lockdown restrictions.

Therefore, like many, I have found myself struggling to find ways of seeking to remain positive and upbeat; And when I have asked people how they are feeling and coping with this current Lockdown, there is often a shrugging of the shoulders, and a comment something along the lines of “*well, it’s harder this time, because of the bad weather, and we can’t do as much outside.*”

This is of course true, but the rapid acceleration of the distribution of the vaccines do at least give us hope, and more and more of our communities are now receiving at least their first dose of the vaccine. However, as someone who will have to wait a while longer, I have found myself needing to look to other sources and ways of staying hopeful: And this week I have found it in the words of the Jubilate, or “Song of Joy” which forms part of the Morning Prayer service. I encourage you to read it if you are not familiar with it, for in it we hear the words “*O be joyful in the Lord, all the earth; serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song*” and later “*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his court with praise; give thanks to him and bless his name*”.

For whilst it can seem increasingly difficult to “*serve the Lord with gladness*”, not because we love God any less or are any less happy to serve him, it almost seems as though it is wrong to be “*glad*” when there is so much suffering and uncertainty around us. Nevertheless, anyone involved in mental health care would say, if asked, that it is critical in times of stress and difficulty, to remain positive; And actually, when we find ways of looking for the things which give us pleasure, whether this is taking a walk, gazing at the stars or listening to music, such things create a chemical reaction in our bodies which helps us to feel better.

Therefore, this week, I am going to try and look for the positives when I pray and come into God’s presence, doing so with a cheerful heart, even though this might at times be a bit of a struggle. For in spite of all that is going on around us, we must not lose sight of God’s promise of love, hope, comfort and strength which surely offers something to make our hearts sing, and in Him and for His faithfulness, we can be truly grateful.

And on a positive note our first Zoom service of Morning Prayer of this current Lockdown took place at 10.30am last Sunday, and it was lovely to see people from so many different churches around the Hill join the service. We will continue to offer this for the coming weeks, and as this week is the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (further information below), it would be lovely to have you join the service if you can. If you wish to do so, then please let Alison Khan know and she will send you the Zoom invitation, and through which you can either join on your computer or by dialling in on the telephone. (Contact: email acbhteam@gmail.com or telephone 07984 748059).

We will of course continue to produce the Bredon Hill Connection with Reflections and Intercessions written by people from our different church communities, as well as signposting you to other Diocesan and Church of England worship resources.

So this week, I hope that you will all be able to find some blessing for which to feel grateful, and which will lighten your heart filling you with gladness; And may God bless you and all whom you love and care for in the coming days.

Allison

Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group



Service of Holy Communion for the Second Sunday of Epiphany

Collect

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen



Reading: Romans 5: 1-10

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

Reading: John 1: 43-end

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Post Communion Prayer

God of glory,
you nourish us with your Word
who is the bread of life:
fill us with your Holy Spirit
that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymns for the Zoom Service this Sunday

1 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

2 Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for you,
comfort your sorrows and answer your prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

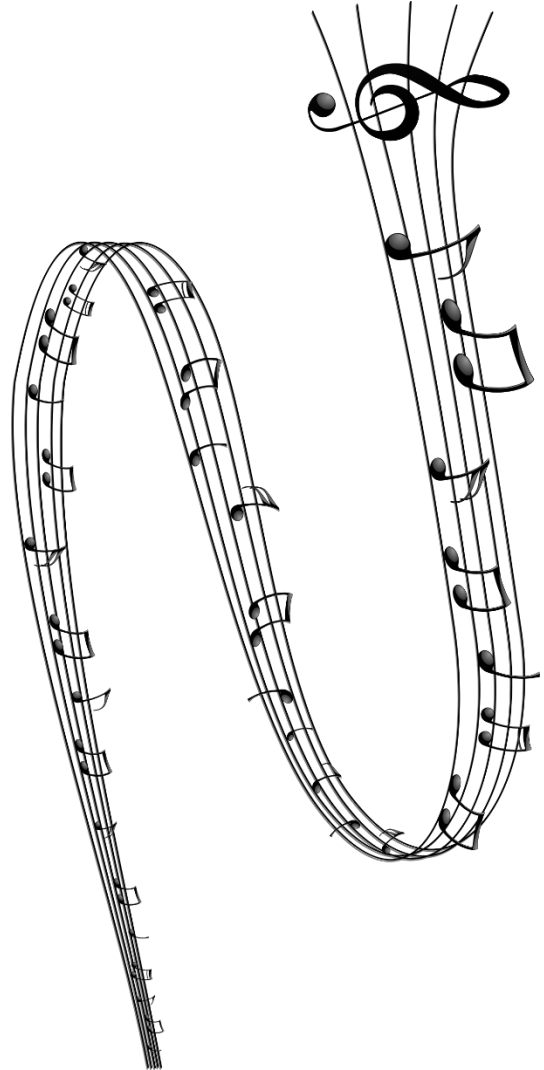
3 Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

4 These, though we bring them in trembling and
fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

5 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

Jubilate Hymns version of a text by J. S. B. Monsell (1811 - 1875)

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1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways:
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives your service find,
in deeper reverence praise,
in deeper reverence praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord
let us, like them, obey his word:
'Rise up and follow me,
rise up and follow me!'

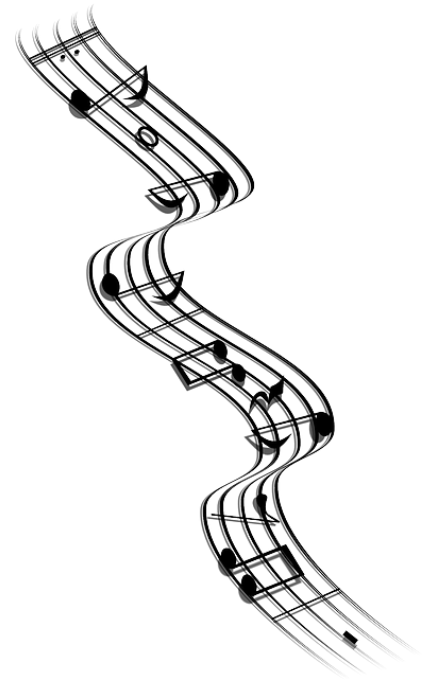
3 O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,

when Jesus shared on bended knee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love,
interpreted by love!

4With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of your call,
as noiseless let your blessing fall
as fell your manna down,
as fell your manna down.

5Drop your still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of your peace,
the beauty of your peace.

6Breathe through the heats of our desire
your coolness and your balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm,
O still small voice of calm!



Jubilate Hymns version of Dear Lord and Father of mankind John Greenleaf Whittier (1807 - 1892)
© Jubilate Hymns Ltd
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Reflection for the Second Sunday of Epiphany by Roger Spiller



We will all have been shocked by the assault on the citadel of the greatest democracy in the world, instigated by President Trump's inflammatory rhetoric. Why, we ask ourselves, do he and his cult followers, including a phalanx of conservative Christians, persist in claiming that the election was stolen? Such people must live in a different world, closed to evidence and argument.

But then even in the UK there are Coronavirus deniers, who claim that the pandemic is a conspiracy trumped up by malign forces to control and marginalise our freedom. They produce pictures of empty hospital corridors to support their dangerous claim. They, too, are closed to reason and persuasion.

These are extreme illustrations of the fact that we are all likely to see what we want to see and reject what doesn't fit. A few years ago, I failed to recognise my god-daughter in a London Church (she lives in Colchester and I rarely see her). She even called my name and came up close to me, but I still didn't recognise her; not, that is, until she introduced herself. I had got my sights on a meeting I was about to chair elsewhere. I saw only what I was expecting to see.

'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' declared one would-be disciple, Nathanael. Philip was bursting to tell his friend that he'd discovered Jesus and that he was the fulfilment of all Israel's hopes. But that didn't fit Nathanael's expectations, and his snooty attitude to Nazareth was all it took to dismiss this wonderful news.

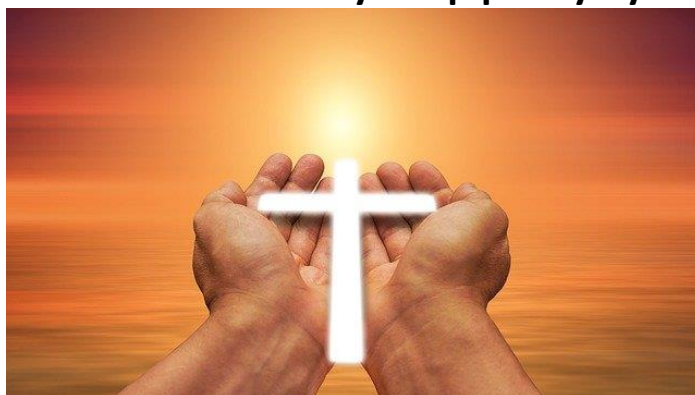
What expectations do we have that prejudice our ability to see beyond our 'blinded sight'? Sight is St John's preferred analogy for trust, faith and belief. There's a world of difference between, for example, trusting in God and trusting in our image (and expectations) of God or of Jesus; seeing only what reinforces what we already see rather than inhabiting something new.

How can we be released from our unrecognised captivity to our past, our myopic expectations and hardened convictions and prejudices? It's a subject of great interest to philosophers and psychologists. Most are agreed that it can't be achieved by logical argument. Whether religious or non-religious, it requires something akin to a conversion.

Philip wisely doesn't argue with his sceptical friend. Instead he says 'Come and see'. Suspend your expectations, start imagining and entering God's topsy-turvy alternative world of surprise, delight and reversals. 'Our whole business in this life', said St. Augustine, 'is to restore to health the eye of the heart'. We have, as Saint Exupery's Little Prince advised, 'to look with the heart.' I've known churches that open people's eyes, where people are changed like St John's blind man, in an instant. 'Whereas I was blind, now I see'.

'Come and see' is the invitation to immerse ourselves in the household of those who know and love Jesus, until we know and love him for ourselves.

Prayers for the Second Sunday of Epiphany by Colin Reeves



Dear Father, we come in the name of Christ to confirm our faith and to seek your peace and presence with us. You are the fount of all hope and goodness, Lord, so give us the desire to share with others your many blessings.

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

Turn our minds, please Lord, from the grief and anxiety that surrounds us to the joy and love we find in your fellowship. We thank you for one another here today, firstly those joining this worship, and then

wider afield in the enlarged Deanery, and then all those in Churches Together, praising God together in Christ at this moment. May this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity prove effective and encouraging.

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

We plead, Lord, that this time of suffering, death and anxiety world-wide will soon pass and we will emerge stronger in our faith and more effective in our ministries. Where death has stalked, be present, Lord, with your peace and comfort, giving strength to those afflicted and to those who care for them. While we bask in the comfort and wealth of our homes, we cry for your children worldwide who are less blessed. Many are oppressed for their faith, many face starvation and the effects of poverty. May their hearts be warmed from their times of prayer and, perhaps, the sense that they are prayed for.

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

Now Father, we listen for the still, small voice and commit ourselves to you again for this coming week.

In the name of Christ, amen.

Requests for Prayers

If there is someone or something that you would like to pray for please email us at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com



Please continue to pray for the ill and isolated, frontline, hospital and medical staff and for all those who are in any kind of need. We pray that we might all be one, we pray to you for the unity of Christians - may your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division and to hope beyond all hope.

Those who are sick: Roy and Margaret Putnam, Richard Clements, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam, Alison Edwards, Mari (friend of Lynette Mantle)

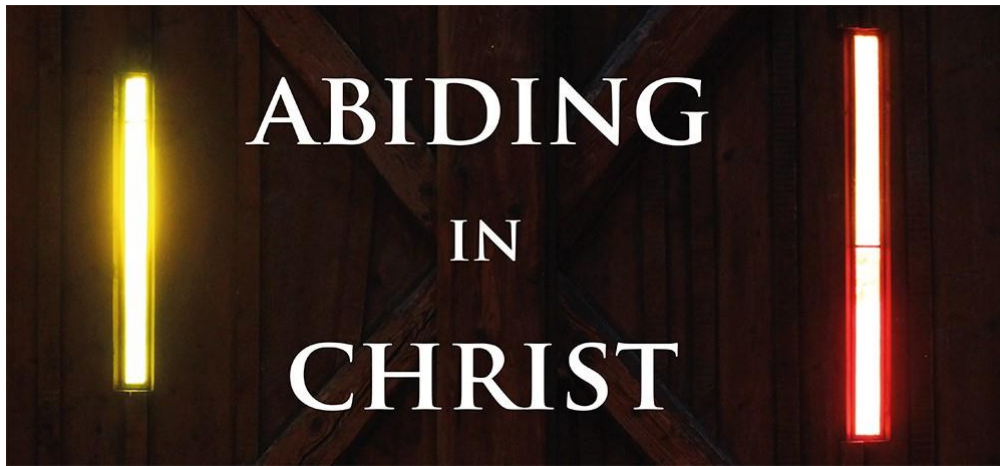
We continue to pray for: Don Dufty, Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt, Mary Doney

Those in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton, Rita Sheppy

Those who have died and their families: Simon Flynn, Doreen Byrd, Geoff Relph, Revd Margie Schutte, Carol Newman, Michael Pilliner, Eileen Fincher, Stephen Jeenes

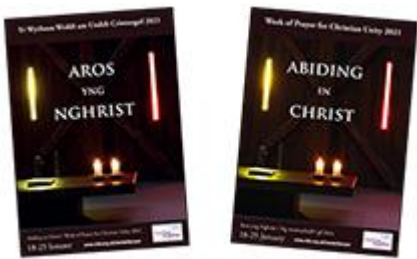
Anniversary of a death: Please pray for those who have lost loved ones this year

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021



Resources are available to download for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021, traditionally held between 18-25 January. Materials have been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland – see the introduction below.

Resources



For 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are making the resources available to [download](#) only and printed versions will not be available to order.

[Download resources](#)

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to the 25th January – the octave of St. Peter and St. Paul. However, some areas observe it at Pentecost or some other time

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2021 has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme that was chosen, “Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit”, is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community’s vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family.

Today the community has fifty sisters, all women from different generations, Church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion. They remain faithful to a life of prayer, life in community and the welcoming of guests. The sisters share the grace of their monastic life with visitors and volunteers who go to Grandchamp for a time of retreat, silence, healing or in search of meaning.

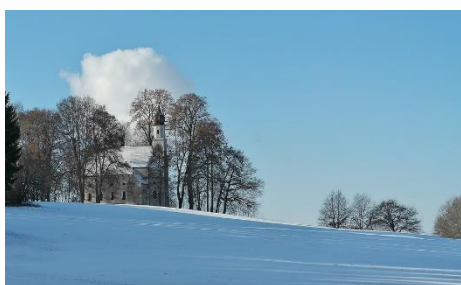
For 2021, the sisters are inviting churches across the world to enter into their tradition of prayer and silence that is rooted in the ancient traditions of the Church catholic.

Christian Aid

Each year Christian Aid provides the [Go and Do action points](#) for each of the daily reflections – linking into the important work of Christian Aid in the relief of poverty and advocacy of justice.

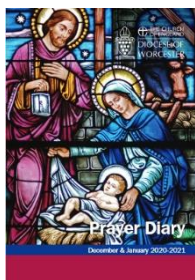
Social media

Show your support for Christian Unity by posting unity messages and details of your events to our [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Twitter wall](#) – simply add the #wpcuwall hashtag to your Twitter post (note there is a delay before they appear). You can also find updates about the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on Twitter by following the [#wpcu2021](#) hashtag.



Church Services during Lockdown

Reverend Allison will be leading Morning Prayer via Zoom at 10.30am this Sunday. If you would like to join the service either by video or dialing in from your telephone; please contact Alison Khan at acbhteam@gmail.com or 07984 748059 who will send you the invite link.



News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk

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