

ST. THOMAS' CHURCH ORDER OF SERVICE

This worship sheet is for all members and friends of St Thomas' Church.

As you will be aware, because of the serious threat posed by coronavirus we have been compelled to close the doors of St Thomas' Church until further notice. The situation we are facing in this country is quite unprecedented in peace time.

Naturally, we are all sad that we will not be attending meetings during the week or worshipping together in the same building on a Sunday. However, the elders and I feel that there is much we can do to help and support one another and keep the fellowship of St Thomas' close and strong.

To this end I have prepared this order of service which we can use for worshipping together even though physically we may be in different places. The idea is that at 10.30 on a Sunday morning we will each turn to the service sheet and use it to facilitate our worship together.

We tend to think of the Church as a building, but of course in reality it is we, the people, who are the Church. When we worship at the same time each in our own homes and think about and pray for one another, the fellowship of St Thomas' is kept alive. This is important because when the current crisis passes and things return to something approaching normality we will want to return to physically worshipping together in the St Thomas' Church building and so our Church family needs to be nourished and maintained over the coming weeks or months.

I hope and pray that you will find this order of service useful and that as you go through the words of the hymns, readings, prayers and message you will be truly conscious of the love of God surrounding you and upholding you.

With every blessing,
Gareth

Let us worship Almighty God, let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you for this time of worship which we can share together as part of the fellowship of St Thomas’.

We remember one another in our prayers. Send your Holy Spirit upon us now. Bless and sanctify our worship by the presence of your Holy Spirit among us. Draw us closer together in the bonds of the Gospel though we each may be in our different homes.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

HYMN

1 Lord, for the years Your love
has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us,
cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us,
pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years,
we bring our thanks today.

2 Lord, for that word,
the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts
and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains,
rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word,
receive Your people's praise.

3 Lord, for our land
in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure,
wealth and care:
for young and old,
for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land,
be pleased to hear our prayer.

4 Lord, for our world
where men disown and doubt You,
loveless in strength,
and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless,
lost indeed without You:
Lord of the world,
we pray that Christ may reign

5 Lord, for ourselves;
in living power remake us
-self on the cross
and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us,
for the future take us:
Lord of our lives,
to live for Christ alone.

© Timothy Dudley-Smith / Oxford University
Press

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 6:25-34 **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

Do Not Worry

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today”.

MESSAGE

In this passage Jesus counsels his followers against worrying so much about what may come in the future that all the joy of life in the present disappears. We need to put our trust in God today and also for tomorrow.

In his book ‘The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’ Robert Louis Stevenson writes the following:

“Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened, but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace like a clock in a thunderstorm”.

Whatever the weather the clock keeps evenly ticking and whatever the storms of life the person with the quiet mind remains calm and collected. This is essentially what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote: “*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair*” (2 Corinthians 4:8).

As we face the current situation surrounding COVID-19 the question is how can we obtain this ‘quiet mind’, during days of danger how can we attain a calm confidence, during days of tension how can we maintain a sense of peace, during days when so much seems to threaten our happiness how can we live life without fear?

Jesus Christ helps us to find the answer. He says we must learn to live one day at a time. “*Do not worry about tomorrow*” we are told. To live one day at a time is one of the most difficult things for us to learn to do because we have the power of foresight, and yet, we must try.

Principal Robert Rainy once said: “*Today I must attend a committee meeting; tomorrow I must preach; someday I must die. Then let us do each duty as it comes as best we can*”. We will be well on our way to obtaining a quiet mind if we can live each day as it comes.

Many people cannot help crossing bridges before they get to them, but worry is usually wasted effort. Worse, worrying unduly about something can actually impair our ability to cope with a thing when it does come. Therefore, let us turn to God in faith and trust in his strength and lean on him for comfort. If God is with us we are never alone, he is “*an ever present help in times of trouble*”(Psalm 46:1). Though you may be living by yourself in your home remember that you are not alone, God is with you.

The coronavirus pandemic is a very grave situation for the whole world and there seems little point in denying it. However, we must try not to worry. Through our faith we must seek the comfort and strength of God.

These are the days which test and try our faith and our Christianity. It is easy to have a serene and solid faith in God when things are going well. However, when days like these arrive, many are threatened with a collapse of their faith. There was a certain point in the life of Jesus Christ after which it became increasingly clear that the path he was on was leading not to triumph but rather to the cross and John in his Gospel comments on this with a very poignant statement: *“From that time many of his followers went home and walked no more with him”* (6:66). They left him when things became difficult. Let us pray that however dark things may become our faith is never eclipsed.

As well as being days which may test our faith, I believe that these are days which show us the value of our faith. I believe that our faith better enables us to face the world and its anxieties and uncertainties.

Perhaps during these days when many of us will be limiting the amount of social contact we have with others we can use it as an opportunity to deepen our experience of the preciousness of prayer and commune with our Heavenly Father. Because of what we are facing I am certain that our prayers will not be a formal offering of words to God, but rather a lifting up to him of our very hearts and souls on behalf of ourselves, our friends and neighbours, our community and our whole world.

So, far from viewing the present situation with gloom or even despair, let us see it as a test of our faith and a challenge to show the worth and depth of our faith.

To each one of you I wish all strength and blessing over the days and weeks ahead and be assured of my prayers for you all. Amen.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the way we experience your presence as we join in worship. May this time enable us to focus our thoughts upon you.

Teach us that you are with us whatever we may be doing and so help us to consecrate not just this short time week by week but every moment of every day.

Help us to recognise that you are involved in every aspect of our lives, in every part of the world and in every situation.

We pray for our community, country and world in the ongoing struggle against the effects of coronavirus. Be with all those who are worried and those who are ill. Be with those in hospitals, the caring professions and the emergency services. Be with those who are doing the basic jobs so that everyday life can continue. Bless the endeavour of those scientists and researchers attempting to find a vaccine against COVID-19. Be with and bless all those we care about, especially.....

Show us God that even during these dark days you have planned a way through, that where we see despair you see hope, that where we see sorrow you are longing to bring joy.

Strengthen our faith God, help us to use this time to grow inwardly and to reach out to you as you reach out to us.

And when we cannot see any answers to our needs or the needs of others, when we see only problems that appear beyond our capacity to cope, when we do not know what to pray for, teach us to be content to leave all things in your hands.

All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Our Father, who art in heaven.....

HYMN

1 Our 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 its 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 Guide while life shall last,
And our eternal Home.

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

BLESSING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen
