

A WARM WELCOME FROM  
ST.NINIAN'S PARISH CHURCH  
SUNDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2020



Today is the beginning of Christian Aid Week. Like many church activities at the moment, Christian Aid Week is being done differently and digitally this year. During this time together we'll have space to read and listen, sing and pray, and remember and acknowledge that we are part of a global community. We are neighbours near and far who are going through this coronavirus pandemic together. May our shared experience unite us in praise and prayer as one human family, separate but together in the home that is God's world.

**Gathering prayer** - God of all the Earth, be present with us now, in each of our homes, as we connect together. Build us into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you through Jesus Christ, our risen redeemer and healer. Amen.

**Opening song - Let us build a house where all can dwell**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=js8RtT0mJpc>

### **Prayer**

As we turn on the tap we turn our hearts towards you, O God.  
As we wet our hands renew our thoughts, so we might be transformed.  
As we lather soap between fingers and over all our hands,  
purge from us all that brings us harm and might harm others.  
Remove the invisible guilt and shame that so often keeps us from you.  
As we rinse our hands, we trust in your overflowing grace, making all things  
new as we share together the words that Jesus taught us to pray saying our  
Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will  
be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And  
forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into  
temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and  
the glory for ever. Amen.

## **Bible Reading: N.T. John 14:1-14 GNB**

“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?” Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. Now that you have known me,” he said to them, “you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.” Jesus answered, “For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “do not come from me. The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do — yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it. Amen.

### **Sermon Notes**

Introduction to the reading: This is an extract from the long farewell that Jesus gave over the last supper, shortly after he washed the feet of the disciples with his own hands. Even though we are now in the Fifth Sunday of Easter, these words have a poignancy and power for us to absorb and process this Christian Aid Week Sunday. Listen now to the Word of God.

- The promises in this gospel reading are often offered as hope and reassurance at times of bereavement and will have a resonance for those who have lost loved ones in recent weeks and months, whether or not as a direct consequence of coronavirus. We have always believed in life before death, and find in these words of Jesus challenge and inspiration for this exceptional Christian Aid Week.

- The comforting words of Jesus: ‘do not let your hearts be troubled’ are spoken to the disciples who have good reason to have troubled hearts. Jesus says these words at the last supper, just after he has washed their feet with his own hands, talked of his betrayal, and of Peter’s denial and his imminent departure (John 13). These are words of comfort offered for unsettling times and are worth meditating on in these challenging times today.
- With coronavirus resulting in many of us spending much more time in our houses, the spaciousness of the Father’s house, with many dwelling places, may sound appealing, particularly to those struggling to find their own space. ‘Dwelling place’ isn’t a term that we often use these days to describe the places where we live, but in this time of forced isolation our homes have become places to dwell more than we may have ever known before.
- Jesus uses the word ‘dwell’ again when he talks of ‘the Father who dwells in me’ (verse 10). And in these days when our church buildings have had to remain largely empty and closed for Sunday worship, we are presented with the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of what it is to dwell in the Father’s presence and to know what it is to have God’s Spirit dwell in us.
- Where many are turning to mindfulness and meditation in these anxious times, this gospel also offers us the invitation to spend time dwelling in the presence of God, and to not let our hearts be troubled. For those who can find the space, our homes can become our hermitage or poushinia – a dwelling place for spiritual retreat - and when we are finally able to leave our homes we can still carry this dwelling place in our hearts wherever we go.
- The gospels remind us how Jesus frequently rises early in the morning to take the time to abide with and in God. Maybe it is this dwelling with the Father that Jesus is referencing when he talks of doing the ‘works that I do’, along with the healing, ministering, speaking truth to power. This time to dwell with the Father is the source of all his speaking and doing in the world. May we also take strength from our time with God as we consider what we can do in response to these exceptional times.
- The honesty of Thomas in verse 5, a prelude to his honesty after missing the resurrection appearance, is an honesty to be welcomed in these difficult times. We share his uncertainty as we don’t know what lies ahead. Coronavirus has disrupted all routine and has many of us also saying: ‘we don’t know the way’.

Thomas' confusion invites us all to be honest in prayer before God and to be honest with each other as we seek to follow Jesus in these exceptional times.

- At some point, perhaps not quite yet, we too need to face up to the honest questions that the response to coronavirus prompts us to ask - questions such as how we can reimagine and recreate a world where no one dies of preventable diseases, that we already have vaccinations for and medicines to treat – why are there still more than 7,500 children under 5 dying every day from such diseases? These questions take on a greater resonance this Christian Aid Week.

- In response to their confusion, Jesus' response: 'I am the way, the truth and the life,' takes on new meaning through the lens of coronavirus. How precious life has become when we have come so close to our human frailty and vulnerability. What are the new truths that we need to face up to, now that coronavirus has shone a light on the weakness and cracks in our economic systems? What is the new way we can all walk together to ensure fullness of life for everyone?

- This gospel passage concludes with the call to action we are encouraging in this digital Christian Aid Week - a call to prayer. Right in the middle of the last supper, Jesus encourages the disciples to ask him for anything and he'll do it. He repeats his offer 'that he will do whatever you ask in his name'. These are hard words to reconcile with the prayers that have seemingly gone unanswered in these difficult days. And they may have been difficult for the disciples to accept in the events that were to follow in the days to come.

- These are the words Jesus wants his disciples, his followers, to remember when he's no longer with them. He wants them to come to him, as he does the Father, with every cause, concern and request, even if they can no longer see him or be with him in person. These are words of hope and promise of connection for us all and always, but particularly in these days when we are so separate, but never alone. Physical absence and separation do not mean abandonment, and by entering into the dwelling place of God in prayer, he brings us back to the way, the truth and the life, again and again.

**Prayer** - In this season of Easter, renew us with resurrection hope that while weeping lingers in this night, joy will come with the morning. On this Christian Aid Week Sunday, we pray for and with communities across the world who are most vulnerable to coronavirus. We pray for people living in refugee camps and city slums, with limited sanitation facilities, who are unable to wash their

hands regularly, and have little opportunity to isolate from others. We pray for Christian Aid partners working to provide soap and buckets, communicating clear, accurate information, raising the voices of the most vulnerable and ensuring they are kept as safe as possible. For those of us who are self-isolating, which can sometimes feel like we aren't doing anything, remind us that we are all doing our part, and saving lives by staying at home. We pray for much wisdom and resources for those in local and national authority for all frontline and key workers here in Britain, Ireland and across the world. As we have clapped to honour them, we clap our hands now in praise of your glorious creation, and with the hope that the first shoots of another possible world are coming into view. God in your mercy, hear all our prayers. Amen

Song Be thou my vision

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs>

### **Response - Look at your hands. Have a good look.**

However your hands look to you, they are most certainly clean in these days of regular hand washing to prevent spreading the coronavirus.

Our hands really are the most remarkable and useful tools, involved in so much of what we do and how we do things, even in these days of social distancing.

The psalmist writes of committing his spirit into God's hands, and at times of being in God's hands. He also describes his desire to be delivered from the hands of his oppressors and from a hidden invisible net that threatens to entangle him.

Our hands have become even more significant in these days of physical distance. We might long to hold the hand of a person we can no longer touch. We pray for the hands of medics to bring healing and comfort. We are grateful for hands stacking shelves and delivering groceries and post. And we are extra wary of everything our hands touch that comes from outside our own home.

This Christian Aid Week we also think of how our hands can be far from idle. Though not handing out envelopes or hosting Big Brekkies or the many things we usually busy ourselves with this week, our hands can still reach out virtually to our neighbours around the world. Neighbours in refugee camps

and cramped living conditions, neighbours without adequate hand-washing facilities, neighbours who face the devastating impact of coronavirus with even less of the medical resources we have struggled to access here.

We reach out by clasping our hands together in prayer for our neighbours, and holding our hands open before God as we declare our needs and concerns for their wellbeing and our own.

We also reach out by participating in this digital Christian Aid Week, through making our online donations and sharing the stories from Christian Aid partners, working on the ground to be the hands and feet of love in action.

### **Prayer of lament and intercession**

God our refuge, we come to you with open hands, some of us with hearts full of questions, some of us bruised by bereavement, some of us fearful of what the future holds, all of us stunned by the events of this year. Draw close to us now in each of our homes as we place our honest questions and hopes into your open, resurrected, yet scarred hands. God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

With the honesty of the psalmist, the wrestling questions of Job, and the lament of the prophets, we bring to you our questions or our silence.

(Hold your index finger and, in silence, ask the question that most burdens your heart or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Hear the cry of our hearts, Lord, silent and aloud, for bereaved neighbours, near and far. Comfort those pained by being absent, and hold close those who are hurting alone. (Hold your ring finger and pray for comfort for those you know who are bereaved or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In this season of Easter, renew us with resurrection hope that while weeping lingers in this night, joy will come with the morning.

(Hold your middle finger and in the silence tell God what you are most looking forward to in the future or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

On this Christian Aid Week Sunday, we pray for and with communities across the world who are most vulnerable to coronavirus.

We pray for people living in refugee camps and city slums, with limited sanitation facilities, who are unable to wash their hands regularly, and have little opportunity to isolate from others.

We pray for Christian Aid partners working to provide soap and buckets, communicating clear, accurate information, raising the voices of the most vulnerable and ensuring they are kept as safe as possible.

(Hold your thumb as you pray for the most vulnerable, those closest to God's heart, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For those of us who are self-isolating, which can sometimes feel like we aren't doing anything, remind us that we are all doing our part, and saving lives by staying at home.

(Hold your little finger and ask God for what you need, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for much wisdom and resources for those in local and national authority for all frontline and key workers here in Britain, Ireland and across the world.

(Put your hands together and pray for the many frontline workers and volunteers and for Christian Aid partners working to help others across the world, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we have clapped to honour them, we clap our hands now in praise of your glorious creation, and with the hope that the first shoots of another possible world are coming into view.

(Clap your hands in praise of God's glorious creation and with the hope of new possibilities for the world.)

God in your mercy, hear all our prayers. Amen.

**Closing Blessing:** May the presence of the Creator refresh you, may the comfort of the Son renew you, may the inspiration of the Spirit restore you to be love in action, even from a distance, in our neighbourhoods, near and far, this day and for evermore. Amen.

If you wish, you can go on to the Christian Aid website and sign up for daily reflections or the daily fun quiz. You make a donation online to help vulnerable communities at [caweek.org/payin](https://www.caweek.org/payin)