

A SERVICE OF LAMENTATION AND HOPE IN THE CONTEXT OF A PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE

Explanatory Notes

The following short act of worship is an attempt to make space for children's experiences of loss and sadness due to the disruption of the pandemic to be expressed within the context of the worshipping community. This may function as short, stand-alone act of worship either in a parish church or in a school at the start of the new school year. Alternatively, portions of what is suggested here may be incorporated into a regular Sunday morning service, for example, prior to the children being released to continue their worship at Sunday Club.

While we may hope for a return to our normal pattern of gathering in our churches, we also acknowledge that there is uncertainty as to what the situation in September may be. This act of worship deliberately leaves reference to place ambiguous and may also be suitable for use by Sunday schools continuing to meet remotely.

If advance preparation is possible, a number of children and adults may be invited to speak some of what has been difficult due to the disruption caused by the pandemic in the past year. A child may prefer to draw their experiences and have an adult they trust share the meaning behind their picture. Someone else may want to share what kept them going through their sadness – and show a plant from their garden or a breathing technique that calmed them. Explore what is possible here.

Invite the wider church family to engage in deep listening to the experiences of others so we can grow and heal together.

If advance preparation has not been possible, all present might be given a few moments to write or draw a short prayer expressing sadness and lament. These could be written on post-it notes and added to a notice board so that the person leading the service may read some aloud. Those who do not wish for their prayer to be read aloud can place their prayers face down below the noticeboard.

The congregation may engage in a symbolic action, for example taking small stones representing their sadness and placing them beneath a cross.

If the context is one in which very few children would normally be present, then grandparents, teachers or other adults may be invited to share something of the sadness they have felt for the children in their lives and the wider community.

Gathering as God's People

SENTENCE OF SCRIPTURE

I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Psalm 34: 4 (NRSV)

or

I asked the Lord for help, and he answered me. He saved me from all that I feared.

Psalm 34: 4 (ICB)

GREETING

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

These or other words of introduction may be said:

We are gathered as followers of Jesus, to worship God, to pray together to (... *commit our new school year to the Lord*), and to ask for God's blessing in our homes, schools and workplaces.

Often when we gather, there is joy and celebration, but sometimes we are sad and need to ask for God's healing and strength.

And so we pray:

God of our days and years
we set this time apart for you.
We bring before you our joys and our sorrows.
We place them into your hands
and ask that you heal and restore us,
so that our lives may glorify you. **Amen.**

Another suitable prayer may be used.

All may say

**In darkness and in light,
in trouble and in joy,
help us, heavenly Father,
to trust your love,
to serve your purpose,
and to praise your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Or

We have come together in the name of Christ

Encourage everyone to nod or smile a greeting to all in the congregation.

to offer to him our sadness, our worries and our thanksgivings,

Lift up hands high as an act of praise and offering.

to receive God's holy word and his healing,

Arrange the upward facing palms of your hands in front of your body, shaped as a 'V' formation like the open pages of a book.

to pray for our needs and the needs of the world

Put hands together, palm to palm and fingers pointing upwards, as for prayer.

and to seek God's love, peace and joy,

Hold out your hands in front of the body – palms up – ready to receive.

that by the power of the Holy Spirit

Link thumbs and gently flap the fingers as wings, imitating a dove – a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

we may give ourselves, as we are, to the service of God.

Put both hands across your heart and then move them outward in a gesture of self-giving.

Your word is a lantern to my feet

and a light upon our path.

c.f. Psalm 119: 105

O Lord, your word is everlasting:

it stands firm for ever in the heavens.

c.f. Psalm 119: 89

Let us then receive the word of the Lord.

so may the light of your presence shine into our hearts.

Giving our Sadness to God

PSALM 121: 1-2, 7-8

My help comes from the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
 from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
 he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep
 your going out and your coming in
 from this time on and for evermore.

My help comes from the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.

THE FIRST READING

Lamentations 3: 21-26 – The Song of Lamentation

The reader says

A reading from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, chapter three,
beginning at verse twenty-one.

But this I call to mind,
 and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
 his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
 great is your faithfulness.

‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul,
 ‘therefore I will hope in him.’

The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
 to the soul that seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly
 for the salvation of the Lord.

At the end the reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Or

Exodus 6: 1-8 - The Assurance of the Deliverance of Israel.

The reader says

A reading from the book of Exodus, chapter six, beginning at verse eight.

Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.’

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name “The Lord” I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.” ’

At the end the reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

God speaks to us through his Holy Word.

We praise his holy name.

He comforts and sustains us.

In him we find true healing and peace.

The Lord guards us and guides us.

Even when we are worried and downhearted.

The ideas suggested in the explanatory notes above may be used to encourage children and adults present to offer their prayers of sadness, whether written or spoken, here.

Placing Our Hopes With God

PSALM 71: 5-6

In you, O Lord, do I seek refuge
for you are my rock and my fortress.

For you are my hope, O Lord God,
my confidence, even from my youth.
Upon you have I leaned from my birth,
when you drew me from my mother's womb;
my praise shall be always of you.

In you, O Lord, do I seek refuge
for you are my rock and my fortress.

THE SECOND READING

Luke 24: 13-27 - The Road to Emmaus

The reader says

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke chapter twenty-four, beginning at verse thirteen.

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

At the end the reader says

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

God opens our hearts to his Holy Word.

We praise his holy name.

He walks with us when we are anxious or sad.

And hears us when we journey through difficult times.

The Lord is our refuge and strength.

He is our strength and our shield.

The ideas suggested in the explanatory notes above may be used to encourage children and adults present to offer their prayers of hope, whether written or spoken, here.

The Lord's Prayer

follows the written and/or spoken prayers.

We bring our prayers together in the words Jesus taught his disciples ...

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

or

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, we are bold to pray:

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 trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.**

For a movement based version of the Lord's Prayer see Messy Church:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOugEQpcc_k

For a sign language based version of the Lord's Prayer see the Makaton Charity

version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_a7mYX_gUIU

If possible, in advance of the service invite the children to practice the version of this most regularly used by your church family - either spoken or sung - so that they are confident to participate.

If a candle or candles are lit the following acclamation may be used:

We light *this candle* to remind us
that the love of God is like a light in our darkness.

Blessed be God for ever.

Renewing our Commitment to God

Jesus called his disciples to follow him.

And to do the work of his Kingdom.

He sent them out to do his work in the world.

And promised them his love and his peace.

This or another passage of scripture may be read:

John 14: 25-27

Jesus said, I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

ACT OF COMMITMENT

Will you help those who are sad to find happiness?

We will.

Will you tell others about the love and peace of Jesus?

We will.

Will you remember that God is with you, at all times and in all places?

We will.

Will you help those who are lonely or left out in the world?

We will.

Will you be faithful disciples of Christ?

By the help of God, we will.

Praise be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

Or

The Renewal of Baptismal Vows may be used as an appropriate act of commitment.

Going Out as God's People

A prayer for guidance may be said:

Go before us Lord, in all our doings
with your most gracious favour,
and further us with your continual help;
that in all our works begun continued and ended in you,
we may glorify your holy name,
and finally by your mercy attain everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

or

Jesus, we have seen you and known you.

We know your glory and your love.

We lift up our hearts to bless you.

As you lifted up your hands to bless your disciples

you lift them today to bless us, and in response,

we lift up our hands to bless you.

You have promised us the power of your Spirit

to guide and empower us in the work you call us to.

We lift up our lives to bless you.

THE DISMISSAL

The Lord be with you

and also with you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

If a priest is present:

May God give you his comfort and joy,

his healing and peace,

and the blessing

The minister says

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ. Amen.

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