

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter

August 2025

Weekly Worship Resources

You are invited each week to offer prayers for others, and speak aloud, or think about, the words of the Lord's Prayer ...

Prayers of intercession

Hold before God in love, the people of the world: communities living in warfare and conflict ...; communities living with injustice ...; communities suffering from the effects of natural disasters and the climate crisis ...:

Hold before God in love, the people of this country: communities living in tension and uncertainty ...; families living with the shadow of domestic violence and abuse ...; people struggling with daily life and facing tough situations ...:

Hold before God in love, the people of your own community, your family and friends. Name those known to you who are in any need at this time ...:

Loving God, I pray that society may become characterised by the desire to serve one another; to help the weak and seek the common good. Help me to work out my place in the community of those who follow Jesus, and bless me to be a blessing to others. Amen

Lord's Prayer [modern form]

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

03 August – A new focus

Paul invites those who have been raised with Christ to have a new focus: to look beyond everyday realities to the life hidden with the risen Christ, who is seated at God's right hand. Those who share Christ's new life have stripped off the old self and must put to death old ways of living that separated them from God.

This week we consider how setting our minds on godly things has profound practical consequences on our day-to-day living, both for ourselves and those whose needs we see more clearly as a result.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 13 Year C

Ecclesiastes 1.2,12-14; 2.18-23; Psalm 49.1-12; **Colossians 3.1-11**;
Luke 12.13-21

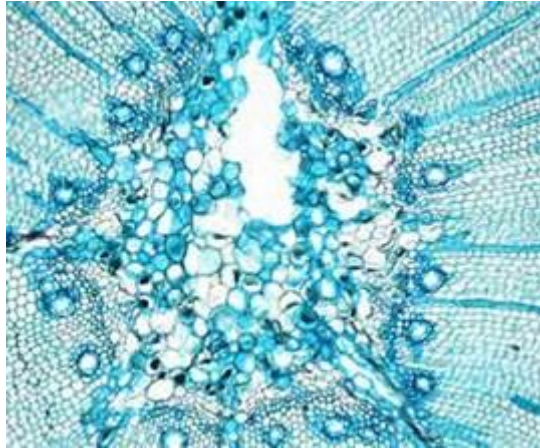
Colossians 3:1-11 [NIV]

Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. **6** Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. **7** You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. **8** But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. **9** Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. **11** Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.



Thought for the week

The character of Kate in the 2019 film ‘Last Christmas’ would certainly have been able to identify with our reading today from Ecclesiastes. Life for her was rubbish. The earthly things listed in Colossians 5 were pretty much all part of her experience and disaffection, and she really did hate her toil as one of Santa’s helpers in an all-year-round Christmas shop.

And then came Tom, who encouraged and helped her to ‘look up’ and get a new focus on life. There is something very Christ-like about the character of Tom. He is kind and, just like Jesus in the Gospels, he does not exploit a vulnerable woman but restores in her a sense of dignity and worth. He helps Kate to look beyond herself, introducing her to a homeless charity where she learns to love volunteering. Tom helps Kate be reconciled to herself, which enables her to be reconciled to her family. And why does this all happen? Spoiler alert! Because just as in the Wham! song *Last Christmas*, it transpires that Tom had given Kate his heart – literally – as Tom had died in a road accident and his heart has been transplanted into Kate and thereby saved her life.

In Colossians chapter 3, Paul encourages us, indeed urges us to change our focus, to look up and ‘seek the things that are above’ (Colossians 3:1). There is a particular value in doing this when life

feels like Ecclesiastes 1. When Christ becomes 'all and in all', then all things are possible.

One person who can testify to that is Trudy Makepeace. In her stunning book 'Abused Addicted Free', she courageously tells the story of the depths she plumbed through a series of dangerous addictions and abusive relationships. Jesus saved and healed her. He gave her a new focus in life. Trudy writes: *'Since I came to know Jesus, my heart has always been to make him known to anyone and everyone. However, I have always been particularly drawn to the most down-trodden and broken, perhaps because of my own story. I have seen the evidence and power of how the word of God worked out in my life. If he can do it for me and countless others, he can do it for you. There is no one beyond the reach of his mercy, love, forgiveness and healing.'*

My life is evidence of the fact that God will take the good, the bad and the ugly, and if you trust him, he will make something beautiful out of it all. As we allow God to work in us and heal us, he takes our brokenness and turns it into a blessing by using those things in our lives to bless and help others.'

(Trudy Makepeace, *Abused Addicted Free*, Sarah Grace Publishing, 2021, p226)

What is noteworthy in both the fictitious Kate and the real-life Trudy is how their change of focus resulted in the desire and drive to help others to leave places of Ecclesiastes-like despair and find wholeness and freedom. May it be so for us too.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God of all we have been, of all we are and of all we can be, you give each of us value, a unique identity and a common purpose.

You give each of us opportunities and call us by name.

We offer you our lives afresh to live as your people in the world, sharing your perspectives and passion for all you have made.

In Jesus's name, we praise you. Amen

10 August – Keep going in faith

Today's reading, part of a chapter on acts of faith by God's people, focuses on Abraham, who trusted God's call to leave his home and become a nomad. He and Sarah had no child and no home for many years, but their commitment to God's promise was unwavering. Sometimes faith seems to come easily (see this week's psalm). At other times it is tough (Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a baby – many faithful couples are not). Today we explore how the gifts of Scripture, prayer and the stories of others can help us and those we pray for to keep going in faith.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 14 Year C

Genesis 15.1-6; Psalm 33.12-22; **Hebrews 11.1-3,8-16**; Luke 12.32-40

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 [NIV]

Faith in Action

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for. ³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁸By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹²And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they

had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.



Thought for the week

Hebrews was written for people who were in danger of starting to lose interest in Jesus. It is possible that some were becoming disillusioned with faith because of personal issues. Most of the previous chapters deliberately remind people of how wonderful Jesus is – in particular, that he is the real high priest (compared with the shadows and copies on this earth; Hebrews 4:14-15).

Chapter 11 is an encouragement to keep on believing and to keep on going in faith. Abraham and Sarah are held up as exemplars of people who kept going in faith when the odds seemed to be stacked against them. The writer draws on Genesis 15:1-6 and the promise of an heir for Abram and Sarai (as they were then called), from whom descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky will come.

It is an inspiring story and has been an encouragement to many who have struggled, not least with the acute pain of childlessness, to keep on going in faith. There are many people who can testify to the joy of

having their prayers answered against the odds, often having walked very painful pathways. Michelle Obama in her book 'Becoming' tells of the struggles she and Barack had in conceiving and the pain they went through before their two daughters were born – daughters that brought them untold joy.

Such stories should be rightly celebrated but, alongside that, there is an ever-present need to be sensitive to and supportive of those whose stories do not have the hoped-for ending. Sheridan Voysey's book 'Resurrection Year' helpfully shares how he and his wife Merryn coped with this. The writer to the Hebrews is refreshingly honest about this. In verse 13, he speaks of those who 'died in faith without having received the promises'.

Why some prayers are apparently answered and others are not will always be a mystery on this earth. But, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, this earth is not the only reality, for there is also a better place – a heavenly one; a place where every tear will be wiped away and all will be made whole. This vision is offered as an encouragement to keep on going both to those who struggle and to those who don't. One day all things will be made new but in the meantime the need for a better country, a heavenly one, here on earth is all too apparent. We keep on going in faith not just for our own blessing and benefit but on behalf of others who long for peace, for justice (think of Mr Bates vs the Post Office), for freedom; on behalf of those clinging on to their faith and needing to know that God has not abandoned them.

Every week we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Where might that prayer be particularly urgent today? How might we be part of the answer to that prayer?

A prayer of confession

We are sorry, gracious God, for the fragility of our faith, which waivers when things get tough, wobbles when confidence gets low, gives up when the road gets steep, loses sight of how far you have brought us and forgets that you are there by our side.

Please forgive us, bolster us, empower us and use us to build up the faith of others. We ask this in Jesus's name.

Assurance of forgiveness

Eternal God, your faith in us doesn't waiver, your love for us doesn't wane; your trust never flickers; your grace never fails.

And so, with thankful hearts, we receive your forgiveness and go forward in faith, in your strength and with your blessing. Amen

17 August – Who's running with you?

The writer to the Hebrews continues to highlight acts of faith by God's people, recounting miraculous deliverance and steadfastness in trials. The author urges believers to persevere in the face of difficulties and opposition, focusing on Jesus – the ultimate example of faith and the source of salvation.

At times we need encouragement to persevere in our Christian faith. Who better to encourage us than those, from the past and the present, who know what it is like to be people of faith? Today's readings do not pretend it will be easy, but there is support and encouragement from those who run alongside us.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 15 Year C

Jeremiah 23.23-29; Psalm 82; **Hebrews 11.29 – 12.2**; Luke 12.32-40

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 [NIV]

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of

lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.



Thought for the week: A shared race

Have you ever seen the delight on the faces of a winning relay running team? The joy is all the greater for being shared. Even defeat shared is less bitter!

The writer to the Hebrews likens the Christian life to a race, stretching out into the distance before us. We need stamina and determination

to complete our leg of the relay and we need to be team players, encouraging those who run with us, and accepting help from them. Some people run much better as part of a relay team than they do in individual races and it is easy to see why. There is strength to be gained from those running with you or from being cheered on by those on the sidelines – even more so if they are not just spectators but people who understand what it is to run in a race.

According to today's reading from Hebrews, there is a 'great cloud of witnesses' who have run previous legs of the race we are running. Some of these legs have been extremely difficult – some have had to 'run the bend' or have a great deal of catching up to do.

The greatest encouragement an athlete can receive is from fellow athletes who have run similar races.

You may have heard of the very popular parkrun events or even taken part yourself. There are amazing volunteers who turn up each week to organise and run the events. parkrun is open to all and, although you are given a completion time, it is really all about running and finishing along with a group of like-minded and 'like-footed' people. At points in the race, there are people specifically appointed to call out encouragement and urge people to keep going. Then there are the 'tail walkers' (sometimes dressed as foxes, with suitably bushy tails), who encourage and help the stragglers, so that everyone can finish safely in the best time possible for them.

We might think of Jesus, who the writer to the Hebrews calls 'the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' as an excellent 'tail walker'. Not only that, but it is he who starts us off on the run, encourages us all along the way and is there to cheer us as we cross the finishing line. The writer to the Hebrews points to people from the past who have had great faith to complete their race. Along with them and our fellow 'runners for today', we can run with perseverance the race that stretches ahead of us.

24 August - Awesome!

Today's reading is a tale of two mountains, contrasting the terrifying experience of God's presence at Mount Sinai (where Moses received the Law) with a joyful approach to the living God through Jesus at Mount Zion.

As we approach God, do we come in awe, or even fear? Today we look at ways in which we can keep a sense of awe and wonder, yet approach God with confidence.

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL Proper 16 Year C

Isaiah 58.9b-14; Psalm 103.1-8; **Hebrews 12.18-29**; Luke 13.10-17

Hebrews 12:18-29 [NIV]

The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

¹⁸You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." ²¹The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

²²But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.”



Thought for the week:

Imagine a wedding with 10 bridesmaids, all excited for their friend the bride, in a celebratory, festive mood. Imagine the excitement as they get dressed and have their hair and make-up done, chatting and laughing together. When they are all ready, they climb into the minibus to go to the church, carefully negotiating the steps and helping the bride with her train.

Then imagine the scene in the church. The congregation are chatting together, full of anticipation as they await the bride's entrance, joking about whether the best man has left the rings behind. There are 'Oohs!' and 'Aahs!' as the bride arrives and the excitement rises. But then, as the ceremony begins, a hush descends. There is a sense of reverence and a palpable feeling of the presence of God as the couple make their vows.

During Jewish festivals, whole towns could be taken over. At the Passover feast in Jerusalem, there was an atmosphere close to chaos. But there was a serious intent and reverence as well as celebration and festivities. When the commonwealth Games came to Birmingham in 2022, the people there got some idea of a festival taking over the whole city for a common purpose.

So, what about this 'party' in the heavenly city, with 'innumerable angels in festal gathering'? Today's reading from Hebrews suggests a

‘universal party’. But it is more than this. The whole place is shaken to its core, but here we are talking about a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, giving rise to further celebration and worship. There is worship and awe and reverence in the midst of great celebration – and on an unimaginable scale.

It may seem strange to think about this in August, but at Christmas we may sing, ‘Heaven invites us to a party, to celebrate the birth of a king’. At the same time, the shepherds kneel in awe at the manger and we too worship the new-born king in wonder. The coming of Jesus among us brings a whole ‘new look’ to our celebration. We see the awe and wonder of God, but with a human face. We can worship here freely with confidence and without fear, as the woman Jesus heals in the Gospel reading is able to do after being set free.

Call to worship (based on Psalm 103)

May all that is in us bless God’s holy name, for he is the one who forgives our sin, saves us, and crowns us with love and mercy

A prayer of approach (based on Psalm 103)

Majestic God, we bless you with all our being, we remember all your touches of grace in our lives and thank you for the gifts of healing and strength.

O God, you are just and righteous, so we come to worship you in prayer, song and silence.

In Jesus’s name. Amen

31 August – Confidence to care

The final chapter of Hebrews gives encouragement to keep on in faithful worship and loving concern for others, including strangers and those in prison. Christians are to live lives consistent with their calling, free of the love of money and rooted in the love of Christ. How can we find the confidence to look outwards from our own concerns and care in the way Jesus asks? Could it be through the confidence we have in God’s care for us?

Lectionary Bible readings for RCL RCL Proper 17 [Ord 22] Year C
Proverbs 25.6-7; Sirach 10.12-18; Psalm 112; **Hebrews 13.1-8,15-16**;
Luke 14.1,7-14

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 [NIV]

Concluding Exhortations

13 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. ²Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. ³Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

⁴Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. ⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

⁶So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

⁷Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

¹⁵Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.



Thought for the week:

Sister Helen Prejean, the author of *Dead Man Walking*, came from a well-to-do background to take holy orders. She was expecting to lead

a life of quiet contemplation but experienced a spiritual awakening that made her realise that she needed to translate her faith into action. She was led to work with residents of the St Thomas' housing project in New Orleans and worked alongside people who were struggling in poverty. This then led her into contact with Patrick, a condemned prisoner on death row and the subject of her book. She began supporting the families of condemned prisoners and, ultimately, she campaigned against capital punishment (a campaign she continues today). None of this came without personal cost and took her into situations she would naturally have avoided.

This was a far cry from the life she was expecting – or was it? Sister Helen's faith and confidence in her Lord enabled her to look outwards to those in need.

There are many other examples of people who have stepped out in faith and confidence in God to help others. A prison chaplain with an interest in labyrinths for prayer, reflection, and well-being realised that they could be used to help long-term prisoners cope with the stresses of confinement. This led to the provision of labyrinths in exercise yards and finger labyrinths in cells, for the benefit of all prisoners, not just those who attended the chapel. This chaplain had the boldness and confidence to think 'outside the box' in order to help others in new ways.

Both Sister Helen Prejean and the prison chaplain have self-sacrificially lived out the commands in our reading from Hebrews, to 'show hospitality' and 'remember prisoners, as though you were there in prison with them'. As we learn more about having confidence in God, our helper, and Jesus, the same yesterday, today and forever, how can we be more adventurous in reaching out to others? What is God calling you to have the confidence to do?

A personal prayer

Lord, thank you for welcoming me, a stranger; so may I extend the hand of friendship to strangers.

Lord, thank you for your hospitality to me; giving me the strength to be

hospitable to others.

Lord, help me not to be suspicious or afraid, but to see in each new face the angel I might entertain. Amen

A sending out prayer

May I go forth, always, in the knowledge that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and for ever;
may he be my constant in a world of change. Amen

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