

Call to Worship

How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. (Ps 36:7)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 23

Prayer of confession

Loving God, as we come before you and see you in your holiness, we confess the things we try to hide from you; the things we try to hide from others; and the things we try to hide from ourselves.

We confess the worry and heartbreak that we have caused, and the things we have said and done which have made it hard for others to forgive us.

We confess the complacency and lack of concern responsible for others being uncared for.

We confess the harm we have done and cannot undo, making it hard for us to forgive ourselves.

Lord, have mercy, forgive us and renew us, we pray. Amen

(Adapted from "Uniting in Worship")

Assurance of forgiveness

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving God, thank you for inviting us into your community.

When we were barred from your presence by our sin, you died on a cross to rescue us back to your community.

When we were fearful in our weakness, you empowered us by your Spirit and gave strength to your community.

When we allowed faith to become timorous and irrelevant, you compelled us to become a mission community.

When we felt frightened, alone and unsupported, you linked us in to Jesus who builds up

your community.

When we were appalled by our own unworthiness, you gave us an honourable role in your community.

When we despaired of achieving anything, you taught us to be strong by working as community.

When we felt cut off from you and very much alone, you took one loaf, your body to feed each in your community.

When we felt sinful and unworthy, far away from you, you gave wine, your blood, to cleanse all in your community.

Dear Lord our God what can we say, in the face of all you've done, but to thank you that we each belong to your community.

Holy Communion

Jesus asked us to remember him in the simple act of sharing in bread and wine. As such, Holy Communion looks back with gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made in taking the blame for all the bad things we think and do that would otherwise make us ineligible for life with God.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, broke it,

(pick up the bread, hold it aloft and break it in two. Hold out the two pieces.)

and said, 'This is my body broken for you'.

Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and said,

(Pick up the wine goblet and hold it aloft)

'This cup of wine is my blood which is poured out for you to take away your sins. Drink this,' said Jesus, 'all of you.'

It was also at this supper that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Holy Communion, therefore, not only looks back, but it commissions us to wash each other's feet, i.e. to serve one another, today. The act of Communion binds us together and commissions us share in Christ's mission of service and sacrificial love.

Finally, Holy Communion is also a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet Christians look forward to when God restores us fully to himself and makes all things new in his new kingdom. Christians are therefore a people of hope.

As such, Holy Communion celebrates three things. It celebrates the past, the present and the future.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the elements together.)

The Bible Reading

- John 5:1-15

The Message: Does God Heal Today

Jesus' heart was to set people free from whatever was stunting their lives. He showed this was the case both by healing people and forgiving their sins. Healing was therefore an integral part of Jesus' ministry. Sometimes he:

1. healed **every** disease present (Mt 4:23-25)
2. sometimes **many** diseases (Acts 8:6-7)
3. sometimes only **one** sick person (Jn 5:1-9). On this occasion, Jesus was in a crowd of sick people but healed only one person.

Clearly there were a lot of people who were healed. Clearly there were some that Jesus didn't pray for to be healed. However, it was obviously Jesus' natural predisposition to heal. It was something he was willing to do if appropriate because of his compassion (Mk 1:40-42).

With these foundational truths in place, let's look at one of Jesus' acts of healing in John's gospel.

Is the healing story of John 5:1-15 fiction?

Liberal theologians who cast doubt on a lot of biblical historicity have claimed that the gospel of John contains fictitious accounts written to embellish the Jesus story. They used to cite the account of Jesus healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda as one such example (Jn 5:1-9), as there was no archaeological evidence of such a pool existing.

And then... yes, you've guessed it... archaeologists working in the grounds of St Anne's church, just north of the temple mount, confirmed the existence of an extensive pool complex that comprised the pools of Bethesda. Archaeologists had been working in the area for many decades but it was only in 1964 that their excavations confirmed the existence of the pools

John's gospel describes the pool in some detail. He speaks of the existence of five covered colonnades. These have all been found. One of the reasons excavations took so long was that so many buildings had been built over the top of the pools during the ages, including a pagan temple and a large Byzantine church.

Excavations showed the existence of two main pools separated by a dam wall. The depth of the pools is surprising. It is thought that these pools were used to water animals being taken through the sheep gate to the temple to be sacrificed. John's account of the water being "troubled" by an angel probably refers to the occasional earth tremors that occurred in the area. Jerusalem is built over a geological fault line.

Lessons from John 5:1-15

Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the three great Jewish festivals (either Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles). He goes to the Pool of Bethesda where a great number of sick people have gathered in the hope of being healed. These numbers would have been swollen because of the religious festival.

God Heals Today

Jesus can't heal them all. If he did, the crowd would have carried him off forcibly and declared him to be their king—abruptly ending Jesus' ministry (as nearly happened in John 6:15). However, Jesus sees one man and is told that this man has been unwell for 38 years. His was arguably the most hopeless, long-lasting and desperate case of all those present.

Jesus' compassion is aroused

Jesus asks the man a key question: "Do you want to get well?" It is a relevant question. Some people don't actually want to get well, as being sick keeps them on other people's agenda, forcing people to care for them.

The man replies with a silly superstition about getting into the water after an angel has troubled it. At first glance, it doesn't appear that the man has answered Jesus' question at all. However, Jesus discerns enough to learn that the guy is trying... even though it's hopeless. He wants to get well... even though his hope is based on a silly quasi-religious superstition.

This superstition was getting the man nowhere, but it was the best thing he could hope in... until he met Jesus. It was only when he let Jesus into his situation that he found wholeness.

As silly as the man's answer was, the man says enough to persuade Jesus about what it was he truly wants, so Jesus heals him.

But that's not the end.

A little later, Jesus finds the man in the temple (which was only a few hundred yards south of the Pool of Bethesda), and Jesus says something that appears quite disturbing: "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." In other words, Jesus makes a clear link between the man sinning, and him being crippled. However, in other teaching, e.g. Luke 13:1-5, Jesus makes it plain that suffering does not just happen to bad people, but is the symptom of a fallen sinful world for which we must *all* take responsibility. In other words, we must all repent.

Those involved in "healing ministry" are aware, of the need to ask the person seeking prayer to repent of any known sin, before praying for healing. Sometimes, it may be appropriate for them to even repent of the sin of their forbears that has given evil an opening to bring about suffering. So, whilst it is not the case the bad things only happen to bad people, sin is still a factor that needs to be taken seriously when praying for people to be healed.

Conclusion

Do you need to be prayed for so that you are healed?

Are you continuing to carry symptoms of brokenness (of any kind)... but you are not sure you want to be prayed for?

Is it time to address it?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20-32)

What a welcome!

Matthew 21:1-11

You will need:

- 1) A supply of leafy twigs
- 2) A few old clothes.
- 3) A cooperative person with a push-bike.

This talk can be organised so that it interrupts the adult message in a service. If you plan to do this, obviously, seek the co-operation of whoever is leading the service at the time.

Tell the children about Palm Sunday. Read Matthew 21:1-11.

Explain that this was a time when people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem when he went there for the last time. It was a time when Jesus' friends waved palm branches and laid a carpet of flat palm leaves and coats for him to ride over on a donkey.

Say that a lot of different people had different ideas about Jesus that day - and that lots of people still have different ideas about Jesus today.

"If Jesus was to come again today, the same sort of things would probably happen. In those days, Jesus sent two of his friends ahead to get the donkey for him to ride on. But if Jesus came today, he would ride on something we use today, perhaps a push-bike."

Ask the children to go into the church and ask a person (previously warned) if they can borrow their push-bike. If the owner asks why they want it, the young people are to say that "Lord has need of it".

Then ask all the children to stand behind the motorbike in the porch. Give out leafy twigs to the adults in the congregation, particularly those either side of the centre aisle. Also invite the adults to take off their jumpers or jackets and make a carpet down the centre aisle. (It may be propitious to have a few spare old clothes to cover any valuable items!) Make sure you at least put your jumper or jacket on the floor.

Give some leafy twigs to the children as well and ask them to imagine Jesus riding on the motorbike through the crowd at church. Ask everyone to stand and wave their branches as the children file down the front behind the motorbike.

When at the front, say to the children that some people in the crowd were very happy to welcome Jesus ...but others, the Pharisees, said things like "what a mess!", and "what does he think he's doing drawing attention to himself in this way!" (You should get a few guilty looks from some in the congregation as you can bet that some will be thinking this!)

Go on to encourage the children to always welcome Jesus into their lives. Ask them to be ready to speak with Jesus silently in their mind when they are at work or play - or at any other time. Ask them to be ready to do the things that Jesus would want them to do at any time.