

July 19 2020
A Liturgy for use at Home

Notes:

*A liturgy for use at home. Please adapt it as you see fit. Words in italics are instructions. Words in **bold** are said by all.*

PREPARATION

A candle is lit

Prayer of Approach

Gracious God, as we rejoice in the gift of this new day, may the light of your presence set our hearts on fire with love for you, now and forever. **Amen**

Call to Worship

This is the day the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it

Prayer of Adoration¹

Holy God, to you alone belong glory,
honour and praise.

We join with the hosts of heaven as we
worship.

You alone are worthy of adoration from
every mouth, and every tongue shall sing
your praise.

You create the earth by your power; you
save the human race in your mercy, and
renew it through your grace.

To you, loving God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all glory,
honour and praise now and for ever.

Amen.

Confession

Let us confess our sins to God.

For our foolishness and our thoughtless use
of the gifts of your creation,

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

For our neglect of you, and our failure to
care for others,

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

For our selfishness in prayer and our
carelessness in worship,
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Silence

Here is good news for all who put their trust
in Christ

Jesus says: 'Our sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Scripture

Romans. 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Collect

Eternal God,

In Christ you make yourself our guest.

Amid all our cares and concerns

Make us attentive to your voice

And alert to your presence,

That we may prize your word above all
else;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Sermon

- *A written reflection is appended to these notes.*
- *The Sunday Sermon is online²*

THE RESPONSE

- Who can you share hope with this week? Who can you serve?
- How can you set aside time to become quiet & to hear God's Spirit affirm that you are God's beloved? Allow the Spirit to intercede through you with "wordless groans" (Ro. 8:26).
- If you are interested in a "small group" meeting "online" for prayer and reflection on scripture please email: mcguigan@durbmeth.org.za.³

Prayers of Supplication and Intercession

¹ The Methodist Worship Book

² <https://durbanvillemethodist.co.za/category/sermons/>

³ We'll use the online group to address the MCSA's FREEDOM FROM FEAR AND VIOLENCE theme.

These prayers may help as you hold before God the needs of our nation and church. Pray them as written or allow them to lead you into your own prayers of intercession.

For survivors of abuse⁴

Lord God,
hear our prayer for all in pain and vulnerability:
dispel their darkness and loneliness with your everlasting light,
so that they can recover their self-confidence
and through your grace and mercy find their true selves again,
healed and strengthened by your unconditional love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
God our strength and our redeemer:
you do not leave us in this life
nor abandon us in death.

Hear our prayer for those in despair,
when days are full of darkness
and the future empty of hope.
Renew in them your sustaining strength
for we believe that there is nothing in all creation
that can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All who minister to the sick

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ went about doing good and healing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people: continue his gracious work among us in hospitals and nursing homes; and send your blessing on all who labour to Prevent suffering and to forward your purposes of love. We pray for doctors and healthcare workers of the DMC family, Bianca, Debbie, Kayla, Karla, Stephen, Philip, Glynnis, Gideon, Liza, Magdas; may you keep them safe and renew them each day by the power of your Holy Spirit, may you bless
Creations groans...in hope!
Better not to have been born?

and protect their families and enable them to be salt light to their colleagues.

The poor and hungry⁶

Loving Father, look graciously on the millions in our world who are hungry, starving and at the mercy of poverty and disease: as you have given us the knowledge which can produce plenty, so give us also the wisdom which can bring it within reach of all. Grant that we who have lived so comfortably all our lives may have the gift of compassion, and do all in our power, as individuals and as a nation, to help others find the abundant life which is your will for them; for Jesus Christ's sake (George Appleton).

From our Prayer Bulletin:

Nellie and Glen Schooling as they mourn the loss of their daughter Candice, Cedric Fryer, Daphne Sneyd, Delores and Aubrey Eksteen, Ronel Breuninger and her family Olga Jardine whose mother is ill.

Dedication

Lord Jesus make me daily conscious of your grace and, as you have called me to serve you make me worthy of my call.

Amen

Our Father...

Sing or listen to a song/hymn

Benediction

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever more. Amen

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/>

⁵ Please let us know of medical workers who we may we have left out.

⁶ From "My Personal Prayer Book" by Bishop Geoff Quinlan.

One of South Africa's leading philosophers, Prof. David Benatar, believes that it is better off never to have been born! He argues that it is always ethically wrong to have children. He makes this argument because of the inevitability of suffering pain and evil.

I learned of his ideas in an article I read a couple of years ago by one of his former students and I was intrigued. I thought of Job who curses the day of his birth saying, *"why did I not die at birth"* (Job 3:11). Similarly, the writer of Ecclesiastes laments: *"the dead...are happier than the living... But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun"* (Ec. 4:2–3). Even Jesus, warning of the horrendous suffering Jerusalem would face, said: *"Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days!"* (Mt 24:19).

A chaotic, meaningless world of suffering?

Theologian Ian Paul⁷ says *"It is a conceit of modernity to ... naturally expect our lives to be lived in security, peace and prosperity...crises like the current pandemic offend this sense of natural privilege"*. He reminds us that the Spanish Flu infected one third of the world's population and that, in fact, life has often seemed *"chaotic and meaningless"*.

Even if our eyes are half-open, we realise many suffer intolerably today as well. Conditions in Eastern Cape hospitals are so bad a doctor says *"Families have no idea what their loved ones are really going through. There is not a single healthcare worker who will ever be the same after this thing. We are emotionally broken."*⁸ We know that a toxic mix of corruption and incompetence has systematically eroded health care in the Eastern Cape - diabolical.

After the recent cold-front a Ground Up reporter interviewed shack dwellers in Mfuleni⁹. Avuziwe Mpiti, caring for her one-month old daughter in a shack was full of water said, *"I can't wash my baby here because she would be exposed to cold if I undressed her in this ice-cold shack."*

I'm sure Avuziwe doesn't regret the birth of her beloved daughter. Most of us don't regret being born. In our Call to Worship we said *"this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad.."*. But I'm quite sure that, as I have been talking (or you have been reading), your soul "groaned" with distress (c.f. Ro. 8.23).

Hope!

Why do we have hope and joy in a world that is so often chaotic and meaningless?

Paul, in Romans 8, is helpful. He says *"the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly"*

Paul isn't blind to suffering and evil. He feels it in his own spirit. He doesn't see this travail as the pain of death. But, rather, as birth pains. When you read of a woman in a flooded icy cold shack and you tremble with anger or sob with sorrow – the Spirit groans within you. Something is wrong and must be put right. A new world must be born! A new world is being born!

⁷ <https://www.psephizo.com/revelation/does-the-book-of-revelation-predict-the-present-crisis/>

⁸ <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/eastern-cape-healthcare-has-collapsed-sick-people-are-fighting-each-other-20200628>

⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y33wr9qc>

Paul has this faith because Jesus lived, suffered, died and rose again. Paul has this faith because the Spirit, God's Spirit, affirms within his heart that he is God's beloved child.

I don't have the intellect or training to engage with Prof. David Benatar's arguments, and I haven't read his books, but I suspect he is probably right: it would be better not to be born.... but for this glorious truth: In Jesus God has saved the world and will redeem creation. So, Paul can say "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (Ro. 8:15-16)¹⁰.

We have hope because *creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God* (Ro.8:21).

The **glory to be revealed** in us is not reserved for some future time after death. In the whole passage Paul's been urging us to live well now, in the power of the Spirit. You and I, when led and empowered by the Spirit, bring meaning and order to a chaotic, meaningless world.

I'm 100% certain that you have felt most content and most at peace when you have had the opportunity to offer comfort, healing, hope, or help in the Spirit of Christ – whether to friend or foe, family or stranger.

In ancient times believers have even been willing to risk death to serve others. Historians reminded us¹¹, at the start of the Pandemic, that in the ancient world, when everyone who could fled cities during times of plague, Christians stayed – caring for the sick whether Christian or not. It was one of reasons of early church growth.

Friends, these are desperate times for many people. But God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us (Ro 5:5). We fan this hope into flame each time we reach out in love and each time we receive the gift of someone reaching out in love to us. It is **good** to have been born as *you*, in *this* time, for you are God's beloved!

Now, to use the image in Jesus' parable, the wheat and weeds grow together, pain and pleasure, evil and good...but the harvest will come, God will root out evil and the righteous will shine like the sun.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.

¹⁰ i.e. it is good to be born into this suffering world because God offers us a new world, free of evil and pain.

¹¹ Many referenced Rodney Stark's book *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. See, for example, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5421>