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EPIPHANY 6A

12th February 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

This prayer comes with some movements.

You are invited to follow the words with your body as you read.

You need your hands and the prayer can be offered seated or standing.

The movements can of course be imagined if that is what works well for you.

Loving God

We come to worship you this day – ready to notice your presence.

As we place our hands against our chest we are reminded to love you with all our hearts and we share with you in the silence our feelings as we meet with you.

As we place our hands on our tummies we recognise that we are to love you with our soul.

And we come to you again thinking about your call on us – what drives us and gives us purpose for your work.

We take a moment to roll our hands into balls and think of how we apply all our strength and resolve as we approach you with love

Finally, as we put a hand on our head we give thanks for all we know, all we can learn and all we can share. Our minds are yours O Lord.

Loving God, as we worship this day we come loving you with all our heart and soul and strength and mind,

Just as the ancients did before us and generations will to come,

Amen.¹

You may wish to say the Lord's Prayer now in a version or translation with which you are most comfortable.

Hymn:

67 STF – This, this is the God we adore - [YouTube](#)

Reading: [Matthew 5:21-37](#)

Response to the reading

One of the great questions we have to ask, as we study the Bible, listen to the Word of God, and learn what it means to try to follow Jesus, is to work out what to do with the bits of this tradition that make us uncomfortable. Do we lean into the discomfort and challenge ourselves to be better, to strive for a higher standard, to be counter-cultural, or do we say 'some of this is of its time' and needs to be context bound? Usually it's a bit of a mixture of the two, right?

¹ Opening prayers written by Jane Bingham

This week's readings give us plenty of chance to think about this issue. What do we do with all this?

Nadia Bolz-Webber, American writer and thinker, has preached on this passage from Matthew. Here's what she has to say:

'Our obsession with moral absolutes comes from clinging to the letter of the law as though it can love us and save us when really that's what Jesus is for. What Jesus seems to be doing here is reminding us of the spirit of the law so that we know how to love one another.'

It is a question that keeps coming up in Christian history: what do we do with 'the law', the Old Testament, in light of Jesus' life, death and ministry? Now that the law has been replaced by relationship, how much use is the law? We still have it, we don't wish to disregard it all together, but perhaps we have to treat it differently. In fact, Nadia helps us to see – perhaps we treat rule-making differently entirely.

In the Narnia stories, Aslan – the Christ-figure – is put to death by the wicked White Witch, who is following the laws as she understands them: that where there has been treachery, someone must pay for it with their life. What the White Witch is unaware of though, which Aslan knows about is the 'deep magic before the dawn of time', which means he cannot be killed and returns to life in C.S. Lewis' beautiful fictional recreation of the Easter story. The law is not enough to contain Aslan's act of self-sacrifice, his love, his desire to ensure that no one else suffers. Love conquers over law.

Can you think of an example where this has happened in your own life? Or a relationship that you have which could not be defined or contained by a list of rules?

Where is your relationship with God at the moment?

Is it largely defined by rules, or by love?

How do you view God and do you see the divine as interested only in 'thou shall not' or do you see God as inviting you to learn more about love?

Spend a few minutes in quiet reflection by yourself thinking about that.

Hymn:

615 STF – Let love be real - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Go from this place inspired,

Go from this place renewed,

Go from this place with the Spirit of God alongside, within and all around you,

Go from this place, a child of the Living God. Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

Monday 13th February

- Living, loving God, thank you for your love for me. Thank you that by your love, I am forgiven, accepted, set free.
- Help me to live a life that is not burned by my own guilt and shame, but rather is born of the freedom I am afforded by your love.
- This day, help me to spread my wings. Amen.

Tuesday 14th February

- A number of years ago, for Valentine's Day, the Climate Coalition – a group of charities and organisations committed to working to tackle the climate crisis – made this short film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zD3YxrZdyzo>
- Watch the film. Reflect on the challenging and inspiring words about creation, and reflect on how you can #ShowTheLove for the planet this Valentine's Day and beyond.

Wednesday 15th February

- What is your favourite song or piece of music? What about it inspires or encourages you?
- Listen to it now. Is there a way that you can hear some of the notes, or the words, or both, as a prayer?
- Thank you Lord, for the music of our lives.

Thursday 16th February

- Pour a glass of water. Think about the things you do that get in the way of your relationship with God. You might think it muddies the water of your life, but God forgives us for all these things, and offers us living water.
- Drink some of the water and give thanks for the way God reaches out to you with love and forgiveness.

Friday 17th February

- Go outdoors and find something natural: a stone, leaf, flower, or something else. Consider the ways God has made this thing and then reflect on how you too are wonderfully made by God.
- What does this mean to you?
- Pray about how you respond.

Saturday 18th February

- Today is the feast day of Colman of Lindisfarne – who was Bishop of the Holy Island (off the coast of Northumberland) in the 660s. Whether or not you are familiar with this particular place, perhaps you do know of a 'thin space' – a place where it seems like the divine is somehow closer, easier to see, feel, even touch.
- Close your eyes and imagine, just for a moment, what that place might look like right now. Open your heart and your mind, to listen to the sounds of nature, imagined or real, and listen out for God's voice, speaking amongst these sounds, this place, the natural world.