

10th October 2021 – Morning Service

Prisons Sunday

Jill Martin

Call to Worship - Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you are saved by faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Prisons Sunday marks the start of Prisons Week. It has been recognised for 40 years and is a time of prayer and an awareness of the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all who care.

Prison Week Prayer

Lord, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in his strength and in his Spirit, now and every day. **Amen.**

StF 4 – Father in heaven

- 1) Father in heaven, grant to your children
Mercy and blessing, songs never ceasing,
Love to unite us, grace to redeem us -
Father in heaven, Father Our God.
- 2) Jesus, Redeemer, may we remember
Your gracious passion, your resurrection,
Worship we bring you, praise we shall sing you
Jesus, Redeemer, Jesus our Lord.
- 3) Spirit descending, whose is the blessing,
Strength for the weary, help for the needy,
Sealed in our kinship yours be our worship
Spirit descending, Spirit adored.

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Prayer of adoration

Glory be to you Lord God, King of the universe;
Glory be to you Lord God, dwelling in light and majesty;
Glory be to you Lord God, beyond our highest thoughts;
Glory be to you Lord God, giver of light and life;
Glory be to you from the company of heaven who see you face to face;
Glory be to you from your people on earth who have seen your salvation.
Glory be to you, Lord God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of confession

Almighty Lord, in Jesus you have called us to walk as children of the light; but we preferred our own way, the way of darkness. We have not been willing to let Christ into every part of our lives. We have not been willing to respond with wholehearted obedience and total dedication. Forgive us because we find it easy to profess faith but hard to translate it into action because we say so much but do so little. By your renewing love, grant us assurance of pardon and strength to live up to our calling through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen

StF 611 – Brother, sister let me serve you

- 1) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.
- 2) We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.
- 3) I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.
- 4) I will weep when you are weeping,
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.
- 5) When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.
- 6) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.

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Reading: Jeremiah 29:10-14

This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Reading: Luke 7:36-50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Reflection

“There are many things we take for granted and it is only when we lose it we realise the value it had. Due to COVID-19 a lot of people are now experiencing the loss of work, and at the same time, the loss of liberty. These two factors are bad enough but combined they risk diminishing the self worth of the individuals concerned. A lot of people can now relate to where I have been. In the same way I can now relate to their fears and insecurity” Former Prisoner, March 2020

Centenary of Howard League for Prison Reform.

In 1921 the country was recovering from a World War and ‘Flu Pandemic. The brutality and loss of life scared the nation and many people wanted to forget both - the roaring twenties. The people who worked for Penal reform recognised prison was a pointless and cruel imposition which was both morally and politically corrosive. It was a time of hangings and beatings in prison.

The Howard Association and Penal Reform League joined together under the leadership of Margaret Fry to form the Howard League for Penal Reform in 1921. The new joint organisation worked to abolish both capital and corporal punishment. Today they also work for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. Today their work continues to ensure justice and fairness in prisons; if we must have prisons they should meet the very highest standards of justice. Prison inspections continue to find evidence of bullying and fear affecting both staff and prisoners.

With COVID-19, they are working to keep prisoners and staff safe from the virus and encouraging courts and prosecutors to subject all decisions with anxious scrutiny - is a prison sentence absolutely necessary?

They have commissioned research on Crime and Problem Gambling looking at the relationship between the two and links to crime - almost every town now has a betting shop and there is 24 hour online gambling available.

They offer a free confidential legal service which can be accessed through their helpline - are we aware of the changes to access to legal aid which make help difficult to find. Through their legal service they identify children and young adults who are in trouble with the law and have set up programmes to reduce child arrests by working positively with Police Forces across England and Wales. The number of arrests has fallen by 70%.

They have ended the criminalisation of children in residential care. When a family breaks up and a child is taken into a children’s home they become very vulnerable and carry a stigma making them easy targets for bullying and being used by criminal gangs. Workers from the Howard League have worked with Police, Local Authorities and Children’s Homes to reduce the stigma and safeguard the children.

They are involved with high quality theory, research and debate on all aspects of the relationship between crime and justice across the globe.

They are working to prevent women being imprisoned. For the majority of women who receive a custodial sentence it is short but it does not take into account the problems they face in the home or neighbourhood nor the fact they may be expectant mothers. Many women who are pregnant when imprisoned face giving birth alone in their cell and there is a high incidence of still birth or losing the baby shortly after birth.

There are currently 78, 830 people in prison - the majority are men. There is severe overcrowding and many buildings remain unfit for purpose. There is little opportunity to rehabilitate prisoners who are locked up for 18 hours a day. Recently there was a decision to ban prisoners having access to books, fortunately over turned, but time after time the media tells us that prisoners are lucky - hot food, hot showers, television sets in their cells, they have done wrong and so they need to be punished why are they living in luxury? I have met released prisoners who have been to the Foodbank, they are given a room to live in but rely on the public to provide them with basic requirements like soap, food, cutlery, sleeping bag. There are also prisoners released with a small amount of cash and a tent.

Restorative Justice (RJ) has its roots in Judaism, it is being used more commonly to encourage prisoners to meet with the victim of their crime, to discuss and accept what they have done and gives an opportunity to repent. 'Shalom' is the Bible's word for salvation, it means justice and peace. There can be no justice without peace and no peace without justice. Restorative Justice is a peacemaking response to crime for all people affected by it. It is God's intention that all people should live in physical well-being. Secondly, that God's people should live in harmony with God and each other. Oppression and injustice are contrary to Shalom. There is an ethical dimension - there can be no Shalom without the restoration of social, physical, spiritual and moral justice. We are taught that Shalom is only possible when we care for one another even in wrongdoing.

Jesus gave the Good News "Your sins are forgiven" in all he said and did. Repentance is seen as conversion; there is no guilty verdict when Zaccheaeus is freed from his greed, the fallen women from her clients or Matthew from his profession. Jesus helped them and us to know our true value and gives hope for the future. The mercy and grace of God in Jesus are the means by which we know we are sinners but more precisely, forgiven sinners. The love of God is always generous and can create radical changes in hearts and minds. "The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives" Amen

StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice?

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| <p>1) Have you heard God's voice;
Has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
Though the way be rough and narrow?</p> | <p>3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless?</p> |
| <p><i>Ch) Will you walk the path that will cost you much
And embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?</i></p> | <p>4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?</p> |
| <p>2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent?</p> | <p><i>E) We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
The disciples of tomorrow.</i></p> |

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father, we your people, give you thanks and praise.
We thank you that through long years you prepared a people to be your own.
We praise you for the patriarchs, the prophets and the lawgivers, who gave us your words.
We rejoice in the constancy of your love, that rebellion and indifference could not prevent you from loving those you have chosen and called.
We thank you, most of all for the coming of Jesus Christ your Son, in whom your love has reached its climax and it's goal.
We thank you that he is the perfect copy of your nature, that in him we see what you are truly like.
We thank you for his birth and his ministry, his death and his resurrection, his glorious revelation of your boundless love.
We thank you for all the hope and strength and courage he gives that we may live as you intend.
Heavenly Father, you have called us to cast off the works of darkness and to walk as children of the light.
We give ourselves to this work in the confidence that you will strengthen us in time of need.
Recreate us in the image of Jesus, we pray, and renew us by your Holy Spirit, that our lives may reflect the salvation Christ has bought. We ask this, Heavenly Father, in the names of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of Intercession

Let us pray for prisoners...[Silence]

Let us pray for the victims of crime...[Silence]

Let us pray for families affected by crime...[Silence]

Let us pray for communities...[Silence]

Let us pray for those working in prisons...[Silence]

Let us pray for those working in the criminal justice system...[Silence]

United in prayer, we come before you Jesus, our Judge, Redeemer and friend as we say:

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

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.**

StF 481 – The Lord's my shepherd

1) The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green,
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*Ch) And I will trust in you alone,
And I will trust in you alone,
For your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

2) He guides my ways in righteousness,
And he anoints my head with oil;
And my cup - it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

3) And though I walk the darkest path -
I will not fear the evil one,
For you are with me, and your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

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Blessing

Creator God, you made us all in your image. May we discern you in all that we see and serve you in all that we do through Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. **Amen**