Cheshire South Circuit Worship at Home - Sunday 1st June 2025

Opening Prayer

God of love, God for all, your purposes are more beautiful than we can possibly imagine. Fill us with your holy Spirit. Help us to let go of all that holds us back. Open our lives and our churches to new seasons of humility and faith, of change and growth. Shake us up with the good news of Jesus and show us the way. **Amen**

StF no. 686 Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

1 Jesus, Lord, we look to Thee; Let us in thy name agree; Show thyself the Prince of Peace, Bid our jarring conflicts cease.

2 By thy reconciling love Every stumbling block remove; Each to each unite, endear; Come, and spread thy banner here. **3** Make us of one heart and mind, Gentle, courteous, and kind, Lowly, meek, in thought and word, Altogether like our Lord.

4 Let us for each other care, Each the other's burdens bear; To thy church the pattern give, Show how true believers live.

5 Free from anger and from pride; Let us thus in God abide; All the depths of love express, All the heights of holiness. Charles Wesley (1707 - 1788)

Let us pray together

Father, I desire that those... whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.' (*John 17:24*). We take a few moments to let these words really sink in, and quietly thank God for his amazing love for us. Lord, you are our God, our only God, we worship and adore you. Great God, universe-maker and life-giver: Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour: we worship you. Nearby God, touching and embracing God, God within: we worship you. God of promise, God of hope, God of new beginnings: we worship you. **Amen**

Sometimes, Lord, we feel as if we are imprisoned – by our circumstances; by our health; by our prejudices; by our own choices.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to walk in your paths.

Sometimes we take the easy way out, not knowing what blessings the hard way could have led to.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to walk in your paths.

When we react before we know what the situation is, and maybe make the wrong decision.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to walk in your paths.

Sometimes we don't realise what you have done for us, and that we have left the old life behind. **Forgive us, Lord, and help us to walk in your paths. Amen.**

Assurance of forgiveness

Paul saved the jailer's life by not taking advantage of the escape route. We don't need an escape route from you, O God. You are always there to meet us, and set us free from our sins. You have taken us from old life to new. We rest content in your forgiveness. **Amen**.

Acts 16:16-34 Paul and Silas in Prison (New Living Translation)

- ¹⁶ One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."
- ¹⁸ This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her. ¹⁹ Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."
- ²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.
- ²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"
- ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household." ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

John 17:20-26 (New Living Translation)

- ²⁰ "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.
- ²² "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴ Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!
- ²⁵ "O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶ I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

Message

Do you worry about what you will see when you turn on the news each day? When you cannot help but see one dreadful thing after another – war and death, power-hungry cruelty against human hunger and sickness, 'every evil under the sun'? So many of our fellow human beings are imprisoned,

not always physically, as many of them are forced to move from one place to another as their homes and livelihoods are destroyed, but by desperation and loss.

It is so very hard to remember that there are many good and wonderful things also happening: the rescuing, the tending, the feeding, and the donations and prayers from across the world.

The slave girl, in our reading from Acts, had no freedom to live as she might have wished, and Paul, who set her free by healing her of her demon, and Silas, were then themselves imprisoned, followed by beating and imprisonment. A cycle, you would think of evil led by powerful people, against what was good and of God, and this from (we assume) God(or god)-fearing people! The cycle might have continued, if Paul and Silas had remained silent in their prison cell, resting, perhaps, or trying not to move too much because of their wounds. But instead they sat up, as best they could in their chains, and started praying and singing hymns to God! And we are told that the other prisoners listened! In a way, Paul was not only praising God, but preaching the good news to any who could hear; coming alongside them in their pain and misery, and sharing the hope that he knew that he had in Jesus. And then, a massive earthquake. Not just an ordinary one, although that would have been frightening enough, but a 'quake that opened doors, and broke the chains from the legs of the prisoners. The jailer was ready to kill himself, because he was responsible for the security of the prison, but instead in that dark night of chaos and noise and fear, Paul was able not only to reassure him, but to bring him and his whole family rejoicing to God.

Towards the end of his life, Jesus prayed for his disciples: '... that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me'. And in time God answered his prayer, and empowered the disciples through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to spread the good news of Jesus throughout the known world and beyond. We are today's disciples – the people who hear the good news for ourselves, and accept it, and believe. We go on to try to learn more of what Jesus said and did, through the Bible, and by looking around us at people who are following him today, in the way that they live, and care for others and the world. Jesus never said that his followers would have an easy life, and many don't. Witnessing to the love and will of God is even more of a risk, when the world is in such turmoil.

But we do not work alone. We have the support of our fellow Christians, our church families, and the examples of those living for God in their public life. And, above all, we have Jesus, who promised to be with us always through his Holy Spirit, and we have been told that not only will the Spirit empower us each individually according to the time and our need, but also give us the words to speak when we are challenged and do not know what to say. All Jesus prays is that we will love: each other, those we know and those we don't, those we may not understand, and those who's way of life or behaviour challenge, distress or anger us. We have the Spirit of Jesus in us, and when we call on Him, His light shines through so that others will not just hear our words, but see the love and power of God in us. ²⁵ "O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶ I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them." May it be so with us.

'In this world of darkness, we must shine. You in your small corner, and I in mine'. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Come, Lord Jesus, into situations of imprisonment in our world today:

For those imprisoned against their will, exploited and abused...

for those imprisoned by special needs that the world doesn't understand or have time for...

for those imprisoned by the darkness of depression and anxiety...

for those imprisoned by addictions...

for those imprisoned by their pursuit of wealth...

for those imprisoned by fears of any kind...

For those known to us, and to you, Lord, and who are in need of your liberating love and peace, Come, Lord Jesus, and set your people free.

Loving God, give us eyes to see those around us who are sad or in trouble, and ears to listen to their story. Give us understanding minds, loving hearts and a willingness to help. Let your love shine out of us so that all can see your glory. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

StF no 346 Christ is the world's light

1 Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other; born in our darkness, he became our brother. If we have seen him, we have seen the Father: glory to God on high.

2 Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other;

no one can serve him and despise another; who else unites us, one in God the Father? Glory to God on high.

3 Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other; sold once for silver, murdered here, our brother -- he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father: glory to God on high.

4 Give God the glory, God and none other; give God the glory, Spirit, Son, and Father; give God the glory, God with us, my brother: glory to God on high.

CCL 821965 Fred Pratt Green

A prayer of blessing

In the dark, fearful, uncertain and confusing times; God is with us. In the bright, joyful, confident and clear times; God is with us. May God continue to bless us in all times.

This worship service has been prepared by Sue Taylor