

**Worship for Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
(complete text. A video version is also online)  
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

A very warm welcome to this service on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Just as we are, Lord, we gather in your presence. We listen and read God's word as Jesus did in the synagogue on the Sabbath. We pray today for everyone taking part in our service, all those behind the technology and to the Rev. Jemima Strain for the sermon. We pray that we will hear your voice through your word and know that our lives can be changed.

Our first song is from Singing the Faith number 544 'As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.' Its chorus reminding us that God alone is our strength.

Hymn: StF 544 – As the Deer Pants for the Water

**1. As the deer pants for the water,  
so my soul longs after you.**

**You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.**

***You alone are my strength, my shield,  
to you alone may my spirit yield.***

***You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.***

**2. I want you more than gold or silver,  
only you can satisfy.**

**You alone are the real joy-giver  
and the apple of my eye.**

***You alone are my strength, my shield,  
to you alone may my spirit yield.***

***You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.***

**3. You're my friend and you are my brother,  
even though you are a king.**

**I love you more than any other,  
so much more than anything.**

***You alone are my strength, my shield,  
to you alone may my spirit yield.***

***You alone are my heart's desire  
and I long to worship you.***

Martin J. Nystrom (b. 1956)

Opening Prayer

The heavens declare your glory and the skies proclaim your handiwork. Morning sun and moon by night, the light and warmth that fuel our life: Rolling hills and mountain peak, flowing stream and ocean deep: Thunder's roar and gentle rain, creation sings its song of praise: The heavens declare your glory, and the skies proclaim your handiwork.

**Amen.**

Prayer of confession

You speak to us in many ways, through rushing wind or still small voice, in scripture's word or through your grace.

And we in turn find many ways to hear the world's insistent voice break through and take your place.

Forgive the frailty of our faith. Help us hear your voice above the clamour of this world, recognise the difference and follow only you.

Declaration of forgiveness

God of all grace,  
We come to encounter something of your grace  
this day,  
To hear again your words of forgiveness and  
hope,  
Your messages of love and peace.  
May we be inspired to continue our journey of  
discovery with you.  
**Amen.**

Hymn: StF 78 – Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

**Give thanks with a grateful heart,  
give thanks to the Holy One;  
give thanks because he's given  
Jesus Christ, his Son.  
Give thanks with a grateful heart,  
give thanks to the Holy One;  
give thanks because he's given  
Jesus Christ, his Son.**

**And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'  
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'  
because of what the Lord has done for us;  
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'  
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'  
because of what the Lord has done for us;  
Give thanks.**

Henry Smith (b. 1952)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6,8-10 (NRSVA)

<sup>1</sup>All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel.

<sup>2</sup>Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup>He read

from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

<sup>5</sup>And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

<sup>6</sup>Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen', lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

<sup>8</sup>So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

<sup>9</sup>And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. <sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (NRSVA)

*One Body with Many Members*

<sup>12</sup>For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

<sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

<sup>14</sup>Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the

body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup>whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup>And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup>Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>But strive for the greater gifts.

Luke 4:14-21 (NRSVA)

*The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry*

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

*The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth*

<sup>16</sup>When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup>'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the  
captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

<sup>20</sup>And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Sermon

Each time that I read scripture and come to writing a sermon I ponder, 'What might God be saying to us through this scripture in this unique and demanding season?'

Most seasons of life bring with them joys and demands, blessings and sorrows along the way.

But collectively as a church, a nation and a world, there has been a season of struggle as we try to

live through, and now with, an international pandemic.

So today as I read the scriptures, my question to ponder is this: 'what does the Church look like in a post pandemic world?'

So, let's start by looking at the Nehemiah passage.

The book of Nehemiah, one of the minor prophets, continues the story of Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. It records the first tangible signs of the fulfilment of prophecies such as Isaiah 60 – 62 (see Isaiah 61.4) in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. But Nehemiah and Ezra recognised that outward rebuilding was only a prelude to true restoration, which must arise from renewed obedience to Yahweh.

This passage tells of the sensational day when, for the first time since their return, the people gather to hear the words of the Law by the waters gate.

*Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

Surrender. Yield. Honour. An act of worship with the whole community gathered again. In the presence of God, this feels like the only response. And reminds me of the surrender of the covenant service. In the light of the God who loves us so much, how can a response not be to bow down to worship?

Echoes of an exiled community gathering again and post lockdown community gathering again. Relevant to the life of the church as we have emerged and start to rebuild from the lockdowns in church and society and have the opportunity to reset and rebuild for the future.

Come into the presence of God. In awe and wonder. Receive all that God has for you. And surrender to God's love.

The passage carries on to say this...

*"This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.*

*<sup>10</sup> Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

I guess we have stories and many reasons to weep and mourn. We've lost so much. People. Time. Special moments. Health to name a few.

I wonder what it would look like if we went and enjoyed the food and sweet drinks. Go and do the things that give you joy. And by doing so, you'll know something of the goodness of God.

Do the things that feed you. Where are the places in our churches where we meet with the fruits and joy of the Lord? Where could we be focusing our ministry in such a way that gives and breaths life. Do the things, just for a moment that give life, and entrust the rest to God. And the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Luke...

Again, this passage from Luke shows us something about what mission looks like as Jesus quotes from the book of Isaiah.

We are people of Good News. I'm often mindful, that we can't possibly be a people of Good News until we have experienced it to be good news for ourselves. And the joy of the Lord.

*'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me*

*to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the  
prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of  
the Lord's favour.'*

Freedom for the oppressed. Freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. I always hear these passages now on a physical level after working in a prison as a chaplain on placement whilst training for ministry. And preaching about God's forgiveness and love which is available, to a large room of young offenders.

I'll, also, never forget leading and preaching at First Sunday, a youth church that used to meet at Leamington Spa Baptist church 10 years ago. I asked the young people to lie down. Perhaps 80 of them, all crammed into the hall (it was a few weeks later, where we swapped spaces of worship to the sanctuary, because there wasn't enough space, and the usual evening congregation had to use the hall). So, as they lay down, we introduced a prayer meditation. Where you relax your body, and breathe in the breath of God and allow the Holy Spirit to fill you.

After we had finished one of the young girls came up to me and my friend and showed us that somehow, during that moment, God had healed her. She hadn't been able to see through her periphery vision and now she could.

We were quite excited. The presence of God can actually heal. We say it often. But when do we actually see it? Real moment of Joy.

This passage works on metaphorical way as well. I wonder what holds you. What prevents you from finding life in its fullness, what's holding

you back and how you might need to be released.

I am convinced, once you have spent time in finding joy and the Good News of Jesus Christ, you can't help but be Good News. It just kind of overflows.

So many people I speak to have felt burn out because of this pandemic.

But this passage is the Mission of Jesus/ God/ the Church. Come into the presence of God. Be healed, free, loved into fullness again and receive joy. Stop for a moment. Stop doing all those other things and come and be held and healed by God.

For so long we talk about this as if it were our individual mission. And it is our mission, collectively as a Church. But it's God's mission. Its Jesus' mission. And it is done through the power of the Holy Spirit. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me'. It's not your mission. We join in God's mission. And the Spirit of the Lord will be upon you.

1 Corinthians...

Finally, we simply look at this passage from 1 Corinthians 12. A previous mentor of mine Andrew Roberts, used to work for fresh expressions, before he wrote the book Holy Habits. He also jointly wrote a book called 'Fresh', which is about the fresh expressions of Church and pioneering. In it, he talks about belonging to a community before believing and a faith.

Who belongs? Everyone.

This passage simply says that we are all needed in our individual personalities, gifts and skills. We are stronger together. Everyone is needed. You belong. There is a place for you.

We have become independent people to survive parts of these past few years, but we are stronger when we are interdependent. What the church is collectively together, is greater than a sum of all its parts. Build each other up. Re-create community. Do it together.

So, in summary, come into the presence of God, surrender, find the joy, become a people of Good News, join in the mission of God and do it together.

May the Spirit of the Lord be upon you. And may you know the joy of the Lord as your strength. Amen.

Hymn: StF 395 – Spirit of the living God

**Spirit of the living God,  
fall afresh on me.**

**Spirit of the living God,  
fall afresh on me.**

**Break me, melt me,  
mould me, fill me.**

**Spirit of the living God,  
fall afresh on me.**

Daniel Iverson (1890–1977)

#### THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Jesus, we are yours.

Gathered together we make up many parts,  
but one complete and perfect body.

We are your hands and eyes and ears,  
each part valued and indispensable.

Thank you for one another,  
and for the gift that each one here brings.

Thank you, Jesus, that you are our head,  
teaching us with wisdom.

Help us to be attentive to your leading,  
and to rejoice in all that, together, we can be

as your body here on earth.

**Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Almighty God

We thank you for the gift of scriptures which we hold, passed to us through many voices and hands, over many centuries from different parts of our world.

We pray for your church, that we may work in unity to study and listen to your heart of love revealed to us in those scriptures.

We pray for the parts of the world where misunderstanding, human failing and greedy power have been used to control, hurt and kill other human beings and our natural world. Here we pray for the persecuted church especially in North Korea and Afghanistan who are the most persecuted countries in the world.

Help us to live as people shaped by scripture.

We thank you for the gift of your Spirit. Your very self, Holy God, come close to us.

We pray for your church that it may be open to the leading of your Spirit.

Leading, teaching and empowering the church for action in an ever-changing world.

We pray for those, near and far away, who need the comforting, healing presence of your Spirit.

We also pray for those, near and far away, who need your love and strength in difficult circumstances.

Help us to be open to your Spirit, to water and grow our spiritual discipleship.

We thank you for the gift of your good news. The message of grace for all, embodied in Jesus Christ.

We pray that your church may be authentic to the message of good news, so that its words be matched by its deeds.

We pray for those who are marginalised. May they know the truth of the gospel of Jesus as we work together to make your world inclusive, joyful and just for all.

Help us to be disciples who demonstrate the meaning of good news to others even as we continue to experience the freedom, hope and love shared with us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray,

**Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us join together 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**

The Offering & prayer

Living God, accept these gifts, that we may use them and ourselves to bring good news to those in poverty, freedom to the oppressed, release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind – may we proclaim that this is God's time.

In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 663 – I the Lord of Sea and Sky

**1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
my hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord.  
Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord,  
if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.***

**2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain;  
I have wept for love of them.  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them.  
Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord.  
Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord,  
if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.***

**3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide  
till their hearts are satisfied.  
I will give my life to them.  
Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am, Lord.***

*Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord,  
if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

Prayer & blessing

As you leave this time, go with the courage to live Jesus's words and follow him. Go united in the Spirit, seeking peace in a divided world. Go, by the grace of God.

May the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit go with you and all those for whom we have prayed now and always.

**Amen.**



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Martin J. Nystrom (b. 1956)

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StF 663 – I the Lord of Sea and Sky

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

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StF 78 – Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

Henry Smith (b. 1952)

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StF 395 - Spirit of the living God

Daniel Iverson (1890–1977)

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