

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | April–July 2022 | **FREE**



Changing times

lasting promises

PLUS: Forgiving yourself | The Lord's Prayer | How to be a united church



We cry to God for peace

We have witnessed the devastating consequences of unprovoked aggression from Russian forces in recent weeks. We have been moved by the courage of the Ukrainian people and their President Zelensky. We have wept to see the displacement of the old and vulnerable, the bombing of a maternity hospital, the separation of families, the disruption of an entire country.

These events will reshape Europe and reshape the world in the coming decades. This is a world-shaking and world-shaping event. We face the greatest movement of peoples in Europe since 1945, and we will feel the effects of the war in our energy, commodity and food prices during the coming months.

The sanctions on Russia are vital but carry very high costs to our economy. We need a more serious strategy for energy and food security, defence and civil emergencies. There will be significant stress on lower-income households unless the government takes additional preventative action.

In these dark days we can feel powerless to change anything about ourselves or the world around us. But we can pray, we can act, we can give and we can stay informed. Find regular updates on the situation, advice on organisations to support, where to donate and prayers to use in services and small groups on the website.

Keep on keeping on

How we love others, and ourselves, is a thread that runs through this edition of *Pathways*. Our writers explore what it means to journey in faith as a whole church, and how we need to exercise radical generosity and forgiveness to ourselves.

The Lord's Prayer takes us back each day to our relationship with God as Father, who loves us and who loves this world. The prayer reminds us that God's work of redeeming the world and building the kingdom is not yet finished. See page 15 for more.

Once again, we discover the amazing work and journeys to faith of our fellow Christians. I'm always inspired to read these stories. I hope they are an encouragement both to readers who are exploring their faith and to those thinking about how they encourage others along the way.

I began in November a series of visits to every deanery in the Diocese of Oxford with a single aim: to listen and to discover how we are after the last challenging two years. I've found a church which is down but certainly not out and, especially over the last few weeks, a church where hope and determination are returning. That is very good to see.

Steven Oxford

Bishop Steven
oxford.anglican.org/bishop-of-oxford

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We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

Pathways is published four times a year by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance. To receive the magazine regularly, or to order bundles for your church, please get in touch.

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Andrew Lawrie



Jericho Youth Choir

With a grant from the Development Fund, St Barnabas Church, Jericho started a weekday youth choir to increase their engagement with non-churchgoing young people in the local area and help them to be more comfortable with faith and church.

oxford.anglican.org/development-fund

For regular news and updates, visit the website: oxford.anglican.org/news

Margaret Biddlecombe



Madley Community Café

With no space for the community to meet, have a coffee and chat in Madley Park, a small group of people from nearby St Mary's, Cogges, and living on the estate, started a free café to bring local people together. It is a space where all are welcomed, can form new relationships and the church can build bridges with the community.

oxford.anglican.org/growing-new-congregations





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Toddlers in the Woods

Every Friday, Ali Cork welcomes a group of energetic toddlers and accompanying adults to Crutches Wood in Jordans village, for a morning of outdoor play, craft making and singing. The pre-schoolers are encouraged to explore the woods to collect natural materials for crafting and sing children’s worship songs. There is space for the adults to chat over a hot drink.

oxford.anglican.org/children-young-people-and-families



Ken Smith

Restored to former glory

With full support from the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee), the congregation, PCC and external fundraisers worked together to generate funds to restore and relay 18,000 floor tiles at All Saints, Boyne Hill. It has given the congregation a new optimism and enabled previously inaccessible areas of the church to be opened for new ministry and outreach.

oxford.anglican.org/giving-and-fundraising

We’re on social media too. Search “Diocese of Oxford” on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

“Jesus said, ‘love one another as I have loved you’. I feel so passionate about that.”



Jo Anderson

A small leap of faith in the shape of a house group project four years ago led to Jo providing a vital lifeline to her community in Winslow through the pandemic.

Though church was a childhood staple, it was in her early 20s that Jo first began to discover faith for herself. Living in Sunderland as a young woman from the south presented Jo with some challenges.

"It was the 80s, when all the shipyards were closing, the miners were on strike. It was a very tough time for them, and I ended up there on my own thinking 'What have I done?'"

Jo found solace at St Andrew's Church, and watching Billy Graham speak live in 1984 was a powerful moment in her faith journey.

The end of a relationship brought Jo to Winslow, Buckinghamshire, where she explored two churches with very different worshipping styles. Though initially drawn to charismatic worship, Jo found a spiritual home in St Laurence. A teacher with young children at the time, Jo was asked to run the children's Sunday group and was dedicated to the "huge responsibility" of children's ministry, something she still plays a big role in today.

It was at Jo's house group a few years ago that the St Laurence Food Cupboard was born, after a conversation with the rector.

"He was getting people phoning saying they had no food... The first year we had four calls, the second year we had 12. And then we went into Covid."

As need skyrocketed, the Food Cupboard became bigger than ever anticipated, and Jo felt a physical pain as she saw more and more people in dire need. Her heart for people is deeply rooted in her faith.

"Constantly in my mind is that Jesus said, 'love one another as I have loved you'. I feel so passionate about that."

The lockdowns forced Jo, a self-proclaimed "bustler", to slow down. Recalling a poignant moment from an On Fire Mission event, Jo shares the personal importance of the words "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." With peace and service at the forefront of her mind, Jo was able to rally the community of Winslow together in the hardest of times.

Many of Jo's stories of the Food Cupboard stem from everyday conversations, and Jo's advice to anyone noticing a similar need is to start small and let it grow. The Food Cupboard's offerings now stretch far beyond food, supporting those seeking jobs and helping settle a local refugee family.

As she plans ahead, Jo, who recently received a British Empire Medal for her work, is confident that God is leading the way.

"My prayer every day is to be guided in all that we do." ¶

Words and photo: Emma Thompson



What small steps could you take to address poverty in your area? Watch our How To... series for some practical ideas: oxford.anglican.org/poverty-and-inequality



How to be united

Every time we take Communion, we affirm that we are “one body”. We celebrate our unity and emphasise how important it is. But it isn’t always easy to love your neighbour...

In *The Lord of Rings*, Tolkien has Elrond say: “This is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands.”

So, who has done the calling? It is a crucial moment in the book. Elrond is reflecting that there is a bigger power at work, and this is what the fellowship needs to hear.

We are not part of the church by accident: we are called, we are invited. “I will build my church” says Jesus – this is *his* church.

He prayed that the church would be united, and, as the New Testament unfolds, we can see how this was lived:

They looked out for each other, ensuring that resources were shared and people were not in need. They encouraged one another, and learnt together. They sometimes disagreed. They were taught that they needed each other, as different parts of a body need each other. They were taught that each person had God-given gifts which were to be valued and used. They were warned against getting involved in unnecessary quarrels. They were to have the mind of Christ towards each other and to remember the centrality of love. They were not to be tribal, nor set individual leaders on pedestals.

There was a sense of purpose, of partnership, in sharing the gospel. They ate together when they could, including sharing in the Lord’s Supper.

The commitment to unity could not be taken for granted, and occasionally people followed their

own agendas. There was thus an emphasis on faithfulness in prayer so it was Christ’s agenda that was followed. (It would be strange if I were picked for a cricket team and then began to play football in the middle of the game; the captain may wish to have words...)

To the Ephesians, Paul explicitly links unity to calling and the character of God: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”

In Christ’s church we are one. So, we learn to keep unity whilst disagreeing, to do what we can to include, to honour, to live with irritations (while remembering we might actually be slightly annoying ourselves...). It all seems to be rather important.

As for Elrond, he continued: “You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so.”

Yet *it is not so*. It is not by chance. A humbling, challenging and rather exciting thought as we travel together. ¶

Words: The Revd Anthony Buckley
Photo: Shutterstock



Fiction can play an important part in changing the way we look at our lives. What fiction inspires you to think about your faith?

Forgiving yourself

As a church, we talk quite a lot about forgiving others. We reflect on what radical generosity it requires. But have we neglected something equally important: how to forgive ourselves?

How many of us have found ourselves confessing the same thing over and over again because we don't quite feel cleansed of it yet?

The Bible doesn't talk much about this directly. But we know all too well that sometimes we do not let go of our sins when God tells us we are free of them. We do not *allow* ourselves to be forgiven by God.

Why is this? I think it is a defence mechanism, a way of protecting ourselves, either because we've been hurt before or because we're afraid of being hurt in the future.

We don't believe that God has really forgiven us as he says, or perhaps we have such low self-esteem that we don't believe God really means us when he calls us by name and says, "you are mine." We're waiting for the moment when the things we have done come back to haunt us; we're trying to protect ourselves by believing that we were never set free in the first place.

We don't believe we deserve to be forgiven. In a sense we're right about that! But God doesn't forgive us because we deserve it, he forgives us because he loves us.

In 1 John 4:9–10 we read, "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us".

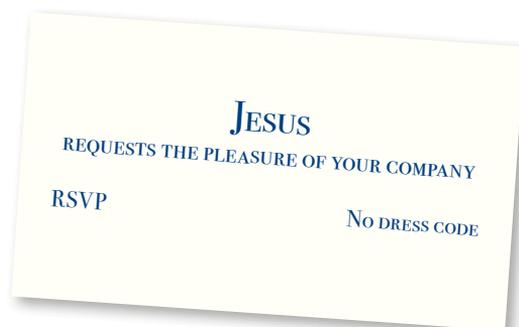
In the end, the key to allowing ourselves to be forgiven is not in the measure of our love for God or for ourselves; it is the measure of God's love that matters.

In her book, *Rising Strong*, Brené Brown wrote "To be forgiven is to be loved" and we are loved, very much, by the God who created and keeps us. The hard thing, when we have been hurt by others, is trusting that love. Trusting that we are forgiven by the one whose love is perfect.

Jesus tells a parable about guests who sit prematurely in the place of honour (Luke 14). He tells us: "go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'" For those of us who struggle to trust God's love, I wonder how that might go... ¶

Words: Emily Hockliffe Essex, Ordinand
Photo: Shutterstock

 The table is set, the banquet is ready, Christ our Lord is calling us to his side. Will you let yourself be loved? Will you let yourself be forgiven?



"Friend, come up here and sit with me."

"No, I think I'd better not."

"Why not?"

"You don't really want me there, Lord."

"But I'm telling you that I do."

"But you wouldn't want me there if you knew what I was really like."

"Do you not think I have known you from before your birth?"

"Well, yes, but you might change your mind if you spend more time with me."

"Do you not think I am constant?"

"Well, yes, but you shouldn't want me there. I don't deserve to sit with you."

"Ah, that's true. But I don't ask you because you deserve it. I ask you because I want you to be close to me. Friend, will you not come up here and sit with me?"

Is God a "he"?



Hannah Cartwright is Assistant Priest at the University Church, Oxford and also serves as a Vocations Advisor in the diocese, a member of the LGBTI+ Chaplaincy Reference Group, and is part of the Sacred service team at Christ Church Cathedral.

Traditionally the church has used only male pronouns to describe God and, in the context of his own time, Jesus presented and was "read" as male. We may make a case for imaginatively exploring the idea of "Christa" (a feminine representation of Christ) but we can't escape that God in humanity presented as male, with a gender identity and expression that appeared to align with his sex. Similarly, Jesus referred to God in heaven as "Father" (a distinctively male role) and taught us to do the same (Matthew 6:9).

Some make a sociological and linguistic case for referring to the Spirit as female, to counter the apparent male dominance within the Trinity. Whilst this has some merit, we know that grammatical gender and biological gender cannot be simplistically equated, and most arguments for "balance" in gender representation are still heavily binary, trans-exclusionary and can be doctrinally problematic.

"it's a nonsense to say that God is either male or female"

So, can there be a persuasive argument for referring to God using pronouns which are not male (she/her or they/them)? Simply: yes.

To refer to God the Father and God the Son with male pronouns is consistent with their biblical revelation, but to refer to the Trinity itself exclusively using male pronouns risks limiting our view of God and encourages unthinking conflation of the Persons of the Trinity.

There's also a strong sociological argument. The feminist theologian Mary Daly writes, "If God is male, then male is God". A good pastoral response to someone who has experienced male oppression or violence might be to understand that it is unhelpful to identify and relate to God only as male.

Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England have been clear that, doctrinally-speaking, it's a nonsense to say that God is either male or female, and by extension we might suggest it's also a nonsense

Hannah's article continues on page 14

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. We live in a society that has been shaped, or even oppressed, by patriarchy. Has that affected our theology too? Are we all limiting our understanding of the divine by referring to God using the pronoun “he”?

Praying each morning, I see in my notebook a reproduction of Rembrandt’s *Return of the Prodigal Son* painting, and beside it my own “purpose statement”, written years ago, which begins with my aim: “to live as my Father’s Son”. Most of my prayers then begin “Father...” or “Loving Father...” How so?

“I am calling out ‘Father!’ to him”

Not because fatherhood is a straightforward image for me. My own father died a few years ago. His last words to me were “Please help me.” He did not know who I was – it was dementia speaking – but in some ways those words expressed something that had always been true: that he was not equipped to be much of a father. After his death, I discovered the reality of his own upbringing, how his spirit was broken at an early age by his aggressive father, and I inwardly released him from my own sense of having felt let down by his inadequacies.

So, why do I call God “Father”? The Bible uses many different images

and words for God, and “Father” is, after all, only a word. I love language, and words matter, but words often only take us so far, then fall short. But surely this applies to

any other words I might choose to use for God? I could try “Mother” but if it’s all about my personal experience, that would just take

me down another rabbit-hole; my mother’s life was crippled by fierce fundamentalism, she too was mentally broken, clung unhealthily to me and died aged 53 after a nervous breakdown.

Why “Father”? I guess because I don’t actually believe my faith is boundaried by my personal experience.

I want to be plugged into a deeper, wider, great tradition: to be plunged into the spiritual realities that Jesus opens up when he talks movingly about his “Abba” and bids us pray “Our Father...”; I want to hear sounding in my own heart the “Abba, Father” cry that the apostle Paul says the Holy Spirit draws forth



Steve Hellyer was Vicar of St Matthew’s Church, Grandpont, until his retirement three years ago, and now lives in Eynsham.

Steve’s article continues overleaf

[Hannah...]

to say God is non-binary. God is God; attempting to assign human attributes is at best metaphorical and at worst heretical. However, it is natural for us to interact with other relational beings (and God is the very definition of relational being) using pronouns which acknowledge their personhood. As Jesus demonstrated, I can borrow the language of gender to help me relate to God prayerfully with intimacy, or to describe something of God publicly, without it necessarily making any finite biological claim.

To cease the use of gendered language for God altogether fails to represent either the relationship of humanity with God or relationship within the Trinity well, and risks losing the richness of biblical imagery. But using only binary pronouns for God (especially only male pronouns) diminishes our way of relating to God and limits us pastorally. We don't need to throw out tradition; we can both treasure its revelation and reframe it for today.

If the purpose of pronouns is to better identify beings and build relationship between them, then there's a strong case for referring to God using whichever pronouns help you, and those around you, to identify and draw closer to God. ¶

[Steve...]

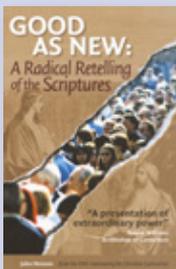
from within. For me, that word "Father" is better retained, and refilled, than refused.

Am I sensitive to the contemporary questions around patriarchy, pronouns and gender? I believe I am. And do I empathise with friends whose experiences of human fatherhood are far worse than mine, for whom the thought of calling God "Father" must feel like being asked to pull out their own teeth, to revisit scenes of abandonment or abuse? I believe I do empathise – though of course that's for them to say.

This is me, though: the son of Edward Hellyer – for whom I can at least now thank God. And this is me: a prodigal son, stumbling along, but daily led by the Spirit nearer to the freedom that comes with knowing the glorious "Abba" of Jesus and finding, to my amazement, that even as I am calling out "Father!" to him, he is running out to embrace me and welcome me home. ¶

Further reading

The debate over God's pronouns has stretched across the Christian church for centuries. In the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich referenced "our precious mother, Jesus", and more recently the Episcopal Church updated some of their texts to use more inclusive language.



Good As New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures is a 2003 version of the New Testament that avoids using pronouns for God entirely – and while Jesus is referred to as he, the Holy Spirit is referred to as she/her. It takes "inclusive language

that follows more closely the principles Jesus adopted" to reveal the gospel story through a modern lens.

A 2018 YouGov survey revealed that 36% of British Christians believe God is male but the most common view, shared by 41% of those surveyed, is that God has no human gender at all. Just 1% of survey respondents said they thought God was female. Older Christians were more likely to say that God has no human gender.

In a blog post for The Good Book Company, children's author and Oxford alumnus Carl Laferton shares his thoughts on the one major problem with calling God she – Jesus – and describes how God being "he" is great news, regardless of your own gender identity.

thegoodbook.co.uk/blog/news/2015/06/01/the-only-major-problem-with-calling-god-she

Daily bread

The Lord's Prayer can help us reshape our lives in sorrow and in joy, and shows us how to find our place in this ancient and expanding universe.

Bishop Steven explores the layers of meaning in each line.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

Our lives in this vast universe have meaning. God made humankind in God's own image, and there is something of the divine in us which longs for deep communion with our maker. We are all children of God; unique, known, loved and precious.

The heavens in the Bible are not another dimension to which we go when we die. The heavens first of all mean the skies, the universe beyond the earth. The God we are praying to is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the universe and everything in it.

Who is teaching us to pray this prayer? Jesus. He invites us to call God "Our Father". We are called into a relationship with God as a child to their parent, but we are also called into a family relationship with others.

All Christian people are our sisters and brothers. Everyone in God's world is our neighbour and, potentially, our friend. It is an immense blessing and responsibility, and a life-shaping truth.

If God is our Father then Jesus is our brother: also inviting us into a relationship of love and friendship. Christ walks with us in our journey every day, through the presence of his Spirit. We find ourselves and we claim all of this again each time we pray.

Our humility and surrender is caught by the words "hallowed be your name". We bow down in worship before God's majesty and power, remind ourselves of his wonder and holiness, own our humility before God, and climb down from the thrones and pedestals we have made for ourselves just since yesterday.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven

The story of the whole Bible is summarised in this line, it summarises the Christian way of seeing the world: the world is not yet as God intends it to be, but God is at work through Jesus and through the church to make it so. One day everything will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The second line of the Lord's Prayer reminds us whose side we are on and even how the story will end. It shapes every part of our lives for the coming day, especially the difficult parts.

It helps us to understand the difficult things in life: the illness and suffering and pain and even death. They are still really difficult, but they are not the end of the story. It's possible to acknowledge all the pain and the darkness we are wrestling with, but know that it is not the final word.

When we pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done" we are on the side of justice and peace and kindness and love. We are signing up again and again, not just for the joy of a relationship with our Father in heaven, but to live the whole of our lives in response to God's love: to play our part, however small, in the mission of the kingdom.

"Your will be done" is an offering of ourselves to God each day, a prayer to God to guide our lives in the big decisions we make and in the way we choose to live.

If you'd like to unpack this further, watch the short film at oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

continues overleaf...

Give us today our daily bread

These six words of the prayer are about how we live, and they contain the secret to happiness in a world in crisis. The words focus attention on our relationship with stuff: the stuff we need to stay alive and the stuff we don't.

We are bombarded by advertising that makes us unhappy with what we have. Spending on fast food, fast fashion, and online same-day deliveries has skyrocketed, but we can never spend enough to escape the grip of the advertisers. Our greed is destroying this fragile planet.

"Give us this day our daily bread" provides an antidote. It is a prayer for just enough for each day – food and clothing and shelter, and daily bread. We pray for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. It is a prayer with justice at its heart, for everyone to have enough.

Bread is an image of many good things in the Christian tradition: the story of the manna in the wilderness, told in the book of Exodus; Jesus quoting Deuteronomy in the story of his temptation: "a man or woman does not live by bread alone". Daily bread is a picture of the quiet time we need alone with God each day in prayer and scripture to nourish our spirits.

Perhaps most powerful of all, we remember that in John's Gospel Jesus says to the crowds, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." When we pray "Give us this day our daily bread" we are praying as well for a deeper relationship with Jesus.



Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

Part of the mystery of being human is that we make mistakes, that the darkness in the universe flows through all of us. We make wrong choices. We hurt others. There are parts of us in need of change.

We seek God's forgiveness for the bad things we have done and for the good things we could have done, but didn't. That forgiveness is possible only because of Jesus who gives us this prayer. Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. Amazing grace.

It can be very hard to forgive the sins others send our way, but things get incredibly stuck if we don't. The strength and will we need to forgive only comes from knowing that we are loved by God, we are forgiven by God and we are part of his great story.

All of us can fall into the trap of pretending everything is fine when it's not. Christian faith is not just for times when life is going well, it's even more for the hard and difficult seasons.

In these lines Jesus reminds us daily that in every life there is suffering and difficulty, lest bad things take us by surprise when they happen and disturb our faith. We are not to turn away from God but to turn towards him in those moments, to find love and strength in time of need.

For many of us, the pandemic shook our faith. It's important to recognise that and talk about it. We need time to grieve and to mourn all that has been lost. We can then begin the work of setting crises in the bigger story of God's love for the world and God's call to joy.

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
Now and for ever. Amen.**

The final lines of the Lord's Prayer open out into a wonderful short hymn of praise. You won't find the words in Luke 11 or Matthew 6, they were added by the church at an early stage to draw us back to where we began. They remind us of how our story and the story of the world will end: in the glory and worship of God.

Our purpose and destiny is not just to know about God, but to know God and to enjoy him for ever. We call God "Father" and know Jesus as our brother. We receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts and lives. We are called to resurrection life, to be in God's presence for evermore. We are able to taste this joy today, even in the midst of difficult times. To know God and enjoy God for ever is the answer to life's deepest questions.

Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer and prayed in this way. But there is one part of the prayer that Jesus cannot and does not make his own: "forgive us our sins". Our Lord does not fall short in any way. He lives a life which is blameless, which is without sin, a model and inspiration of what it means to be good and holy. This perfect obedience leads to his death on the cross.

Jesus gave his life so that our sins could be forgiven, so that we might have new life and friendship with God, so that we could be inheritors of life everlasting. That gift is received through repentance, saying sorry to God, and through faith, through trusting in God's grace and love.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

I am known and loved and called by God, made in God's image; I have a family and neighbours; Jesus is my brother; I surrender myself to God's will.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

The world is not yet as God intends it to be, but God is at work through Jesus and through the church to make it so. One day everything will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Ask for just enough each day and learn to be content with what you already have. Long for a deeper relationship with Jesus, our Lord and saviour, who teaches us to pray like this.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

We can forgive because we are loved by God and have been forgiven by him. When things are difficult, as they often will be, we turn towards God to find love and strength.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Ending the prayer as we began: in praise of God. Our purpose and our destiny is to know God and to enjoy him for ever, to find our joy in our maker, Creator, redeemer and friend.

**COME
AND
SEE**



This is an edited extract of a transcript of five short films by Bishop Steven exploring the Lord's Prayer. Find the films, along with additional resources, at oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

Sung worship

Singing is both a creative and an enjoyable way to express our faith. **Philippa White** explores a rich tradition of sung worship, and the varied ways we can worship God in song today.

In Exodus 15, Miriam, the sister of Moses, leads the Israelites in a song of praise after their escape from the Red Sea. From this auspicious beginning, song becomes a repeated motif in worship in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament Christian communities are encouraged to “sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.” (Colossians 3:16).

Two thousand years of Christian history later, we sing praise in many different ways. Worship music, hymns, chants and choral music are all ancient and living traditions.

We might sing (in the same service!) hymns written in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries; or new versions of psalms, adapted in 1708 or 2008 and accompanied by organ, guitar or keyboard and drums. We might listen to a choir singing text from Luke’s Gospel, music written in the 1600s and music written last year.

Listening can give us a glimpse of God’s glory and the beauty of heaven, a chance to be surrounded by something larger than ourselves and have our hearts lifted into praise. Singing is a different way of encountering text and of making that text part of us. Whether it’s hymns, contemporary Christian music or Taizé chants, when we sing we have a deeper emotional engagement with the words, and we’re entering into them with our whole body.

What we sing becomes part of our own history. Hymns become precious to us and our families because of where and when we sing them – and we become part of the history of God’s people, reflecting on their stories throughout time. We sing in continuity with those who have sung praise

in the same place in previous generations. We join in with the song of the angels who stand forever around the throne of God singing “Holy, holy, holy.”

This is true however confident or good at singing you think you are. Joining in with singing for the

first time can be daunting, and many of us are scarred by childhood experiences of not doing well in music lessons or struggling with vocal changes as we grew up. Listen to those singing around you and join in when you’re ready. God

listens with delight to the worship of his children – and the people around you should be too busy worshipping to notice how well you are doing! ¶

Words: The Revd Philippa White
Photos: Steven Buckley

“What we sing becomes part of our own history.”

I want to know more

Try *O sing unto the Lord: A history of English church music* by Andrew Gant (Profile Books, 2015) – a funny and fascinating tour through choral history. A great thing about Anglicanism is that we can meet God in many different ways. If choral music isn’t for you, that’s fine!

I've sung in a choir all my life. What's new?

The Multitude of Voyces project regularly edits and publishes new and old music by female composers. The Royal School of Church Music have lots of resources for you to explore, including a series of lunchtime lectures. Visit rscm.org.uk and multitudeofvoyces.co.uk



I run a parish choir/I'm a vicar

The RSCM's *Sunday by Sunday* magazine is a great resource. If you want the whole congregation to think creatively about the use of music, try the course *Inspiring Music in Worship* by Helen Bent. For guides to aspects of the hymn tradition, visit The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland: hymnsocietygbi.org.uk/guides

There are many options for creativity in worship, even if your church has no choir or organist. Jubilate Music is a good source of recorded music. Your creativity need not stop there – have you ever tried a hymn in sign language? For further sources of high-quality recorded music, visit: oxford.anglican.org/pathways



A good relationship with God and with each other grows as we dedicate time and attention to dwelling in the Word. Once again, we reflect on the first chapters of 1 Peter to discover the truth that sustains us.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers, and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures for ever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation –³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
“The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner”, ⁸ and
“A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.

These verses are from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Dwelling in the Word

Bible passages “come alive” in different ways as we journey on through our lives as Christians. Some circumstances make us view the text through a different lens, as **Kate Tuckett** discovered.

I’ve been in post as Vicar of Wolvercote and Wytham for six months. The pandemic has been a uniquely strange time to start a new role, so a passage which is, at its heart, a call to holiness feels particularly apt as I look forward with my church communities.

When the New Testament letters were written, the early Christians were confident that Christ would return soon. They didn’t want to be found wanting, so living a holy life was of central importance. As we try to live in God’s love in our times, this call is ever more relevant.

St Irenaeus said that “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Often the people who most inspire us are the ones who seem fully alive, who have the energy and generosity that enable others to live well. We might call this holiness. Surely this is what we are called to in our churches – to encourage, support and inspire one another to live as human beings fully alive.

As I read, I am drawn to what we are called to rid ourselves of. We all have things that stand in the way of holiness for ourselves and our churches, things that “wage war against the soul.” Paying attention to these helps us to build intentionally holy communities.

I have started working with my PCCs on setting a vision for our future together, for the churches that we want to be. If we want churches that are multi-generational and places of justice, welcome and kindness, it can be helpful to ask what the opposite would be. What is the opposite of

welcome? How can we rid ourselves of this? How can we show in our actions who we want to be as communities of love?

The crux of the matter is that we are called to have “genuine mutual love”, to “love one another deeply from the heart.” As Christians we follow a God of grace, holding onto the almost unbelievable promise that we are loved whatever we do, that nothing can make God love us any more or any less. If we truly believe in grace, this affects how we behave towards each other.

And yet the most difficult place to live gracefully is often with the people we see the most – with our families and friends, in our workplaces, and sometimes in our church communities. Irritations and resentments can lose all proportion when we are sharing life together. Living with grace may mean being intentional about keeping perspective, challenging ourselves to see the bigger picture and having the humility to step into another person’s shoes.

As we emerge from a deeply challenging couple of years, there is such a need for us to be living with grace. May we be holy people, helping each other to lead holy lives, proclaiming the mighty acts of him who calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light. ¶

Words: The Revd Kate Tuckett, Vicar of Wolvercote and Wytham



All of us find members of our church family difficult at times. Who could you reach out to this week?

For my Christian family

Father of all, we thank you for the shower of your blessings,
For the gift of your unconditional love
And for the joy of being a part of your family.
As a father you guide us with your Word,
You find us when we are lost, lighting our path to salvation.
Teach us as a Christian family to pray together.
Help us to bring others into our hearts and into our lives,
So they too experience the power of your love and forgiveness.
We pray for our brothers and sisters
who worship you in fear and in silence,
And for all who are vulnerable and ask, "Where is my God now?"
Grant them courage and patience in their struggles.
Place your healing hand upon the nations.
We ask for food and water where there is hunger and thirst,
For shelter and belonging
where there is homelessness and displacement,
For love and compassion
where there is hate and condemnation.
Father, we thank you for our Christian family.
Help us to be a guiding light to others, drawing them close,
and revealing your love to those we meet every day of our lives.
Holy God, may your will be done,
Amen.

Just as any family life can be a delight or a challenge, our feelings about being part of the Christian family are likely to fluctuate. Praying for others helps to release the flow of God's love into our lives as well as theirs. ¶

*Prayer by the Revd Polly Falconer
Photo: Shutterstock*



The Revd Polly Falconer promotes greater unity in our multi-cultural diocese through her work as UKME Development Enabler. Find out about racial justice in the diocese:

oxford.anglican.org/racial-justice

Patricia told me...



I grew up in a staunchly atheist household, and going to church was, in a sense, my teenage rebellion! I turned up at a church with maybe a dozen members all well past retirement, as

an unaccompanied 14-year-old going through a difficult time adjusting to becoming a young carer. I was looking for something, but I didn't know what it was.

That first experience was so alien to me that by the end of the service I'd decided this church thing wasn't for me. It didn't make sense, I hadn't got anything out of it, and I wouldn't be going back.

That might have been the end of the story, if it weren't for Patricia.

Patricia was in her eighties, and not a likely evangelist, to put it mildly. I think she found the idea of talking about God quite embarrassing. Nor was she one of those stalwarts of the church who keep things running. I don't think she was even on any rotas.

But it was Patricia who said: "Hello, dear, you're new, aren't you? I'm sorry, I didn't see you come in, or I would have asked you to sit with me. Would you like to sit with me next week?" Being a well brought-up girl who didn't like to disappoint old ladies, I said "Yes."

And then, because I said I'd sit with Patricia next week, I felt obliged to go back to church. So I turned up again the next week, and the next, and the next. Patricia sat beside me, pointing out what page we were on, and telling me when to stand up and sit down.

That's it. That's all she did. There was no great proclamation of the faith, no singular moment of "conversion". But, faithfully and patiently, week by week, Patricia helped me to make enough sense of church for it to become somewhere I could encounter God. And everything else followed from that.

Quietly, unspectacularly, on an ordinary Sunday, this very unassuming woman changed my life (though she'd have been terribly embarrassed if anyone had put it to her like that) by her gentle witness to the steadfastness of God.

Not only Patricia, but that whole little, unspectacular community of older Christians taught me something valuable about who God is. They were gentle and patient with my questions, and a consistently loving presence when much in my life was chaotic. In being so, they showed me that God is like that too – gentle, patient, faithful, steadfast, and full of love. ¶

As told to Pathways by the Revd Ruth Harley, a curate in Milton Keynes.



Who told you? is our ongoing series of stories from Christians about coming to faith and the people who helped them along the way. Share your story with us: communications@oxford.anglican.org

- Whose hospitality have I received today?
- What's God saying to me in the Bible?
- Who have I noticed and met today?
- What have I noticed God doing, and who can I tell?
- What have I said no to, so that I can say yes?
- What's God up to here?

Time to change the world

Our greatest gift to a distracted and busy world is the ability to dance to a different, more profound song. Be contemplative. Be compassionate. Be courageous.

Become more Christ-like