

Suggested Bible readings for 10th – 16th June

Please use these suggestions, notes, and questions if they are helpful in your own prayer and study time.

Morning Prayer is on Youtube on Mondays - Thursdays at 8am: you are welcome to join us.

The readings can all be found on the Bible Gateway website if you don't have access to a Bible:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Wednesday 10th June

Readings:

- Psalm 119:1-32
- Joshua 8:1-29
- Luke 11:1-13

Brief reflection:

Prayer is the most important thing we can do. One of the great lies of the enemy is that our prayers are worthless, and are barely worth saying. It is easy to lose heart, to give up, to stop praying – I suspect most of us have had times when this has been the case. There have also been times for many of us where prayer has been hard work – nothing seems to be answered, God seems absent, and it feels like we're talking to the ceiling. For some people, prayer has always felt this way, while for others there seems to be a strong connection to God whenever they pray.

However we personally feel about it, and no matter how we respond in ourselves, the truth is clear: prayer is the simplest and most direct way for us to communicate with God. This is powerful indeed, whether we sense it or not. Prayer is a direct conduit between our earthly existence and the power of God Almighty: and so I can say with absolute confidence it is the most important thing we can do.

But even the disciples found it hard to pray. That's why they ask him: "Lord, teach us to pray." And Jesus teaches them the staggering prayer which is so familiar to us all now. Our familiarity means we don't always see just how groundbreaking this prayer is. Jesus begins by teaching us to say "our Father" – calling the creator of the universe "Dad." We go on to pray the most subversive prayer there could be: "your kingdom come." If we're praying for God's kingdom, we are automatically standing against the earth's kingdoms. "Give us each day our daily bread" – give us all that we need, and *only what we need*, for this day. "Forgive us our sins" – wow! Amazing stuff, so simply expressed. We can be free of the consequences of our worst actions – all we need to do is ask. Oh, and forgive other people when they hurt us too: "...as we forgive those who sin against us." And, finally, a plea for freedom from trials and temptations: "do not bring us to the time of trial."

This is an incredible prayer. Can I encourage you to persist in your prayers and petitions, asking God to give you all you need, and to use you to help build his kingdom? If you struggle to pray, you could do a lot worse than use the model that Jesus has given us, and pray the Lord's prayer each day.

Prayer for the day:

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.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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

Food for thought:

- How is your prayer life?

Thursday 11th June

Readings:

- Psalm 147
- Deuteronomy 8:2-16
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-17

Brief reflection:

Today is *Corpus Christi*, a day of thanksgiving for the institution of Holy Communion. At the present time we are unable to meet together to share in this meal, and this, I know, is heart-breaking for many of us. If we are unable to gather physically, we cannot share the common cup or the bread which Paul talks about in today's passage from 1 Corinthians. He says we are one body, because there is one bread (using words which may well be familiar to you from our Communion liturgy).

There's no getting around how hard this is, and there's no way of sweetening the pill. But it is worth reflecting, during this time of enforced exile, on the fact that we do all still share one bread. Earlier in the passage, Paul suggests that the Israelites, when they were journeying through the wilderness, were able to eat spiritual food and drink spiritual water. He goes further, telling us that they drank from the spiritual rock who followed them, which was Christ.

We may not be able to meet physically, but we are still able to share in our spiritual bread together. Jesus is the bread of life, and in him we have life. We are one body, because we share in him together: and this unites us even at this time of separation.

Prayer for the day:

Lord Jesus,

You are the bread of life.

We come to you again for sustenance,
and we look to you for hope and restoration.

Bring us together in unity in you,
and restore us to your kingdom.

Amen.

Food for thought:

- Ask God to show you ways of being united with your brothers and sisters at this time in prayer. Perhaps pick one or two people and pray for them today.
- Have you engaged with any of our 'Agape Meals' online? How have you found them?

Friday 12th June

Readings:

- Psalm 117
- Jeremiah 9:23-24
- Acts 4:32-37

Brief reflection:

The early church is a challenge to us today. We read in the passage from Acts of the way in which those first Christian people shared their lives, possessions, and wealth with one another, and we are (I suspect) challenged by this. Giving generously for the work of the church and the support of our fellow Christians has always been one of the hallmarks of the true disciple, and yet many of us struggle to do this.

Of course, many of you reading this will already be giving generously, and for this I want to thank you. But all of us, perhaps, need to consider our giving regularly, and to seek to ensure that we are living with generosity towards each other and the church.

The churches are struggling financially at the moment – this is no secret, and the fact of Covid-19 has simply brought things into sharp relief (as well as accelerating some of the difficulties). Indeed, this financial struggle doesn't just affect us in Mistley, Manningtree, and Bradfield, but across the Deanery of Harwich (of which we are part), the Diocese of Chelmsford (again, to which we belong), and the whole Church of England. Money is a problem right now.

God is doing so much during this crisis, and one of the ways in which I believe he is at work is in showing us what it means to be church again. It's not about the buildings, or the traditions, or the words we use. It's not about the style of music, or the dress code, or the candles and colours, or anything else like this. It's about Jesus – he is at the centre of our lives, and is the destination and hope of the church. We can be generous because he has first been generous to us – giving everything for us, so that we might have life.

Prayer for the day:

Lord Jesus, help us to live generously
with our money, gifts, and time.
Help us to live as your church,
and to hold lightly to things which are not central.
Amen.

Food for thought:

- What has God been speaking to you about with regard to the Church? What does it mean to be church here today?
- Pray about your finances, and seek God over whether you should increase your giving.

Saturday 13th June

Readings:

- Psalm 20
- Joshua 10:1-15
- Luke 11:37-end

Brief reflection:

I don't know how your hands are holding up, but mine are feeling quite rough at the moment. We're all washing our hands a lot more than we're used to, and although my skin seems to be getting used to it, there are still patches of dry and split skin across the backs of my hands. Nevertheless, I continue to wash my hands regularly: this is one of the key ways in which we can combat the virus.

The text from Luke today begins with a hand washing incident, and ends with Jesus proclaiming woe to various groups of people. Jesus visits the house of a Pharisee, but doesn't wash before eating. The Pharisee is amazed (and, one assumes, appalled) by this, but Jesus' response reveals the need for a deeper, more significant, cleansing. We need to be cleaned from the inside out by God, and no matter how hard we scrub we cannot achieve this internal cleansing with external washes.

Does this mean we shouldn't be washing our hands? Of course not! But, just as we wash our hands to stop the spread of the virus, we must be washed internally to stop the spread of a much more serious disease, which has infected everyone: the sickness of sin. Without this cleansing we risk being like the Pharisees and lawyers in today's text: busy with good actions (we spoke yesterday about giving financially, for example), but neglecting justice and the love of God, because we are dirty inside.

All of us need to be washed, and the one who will wash us is ready. We just need to ask.

Prayer for the day:

Lord Jesus,
wash us from the inside out, we pray.
Give us a clean heart,
and a desire to follow you,
that we may live justly and with mercy and love.
Amen.

Food for thought:

- Whenever you wash your hands today, why not say a brief prayer, asking Jesus to wash you from the inside out? You could use the prayer above, if you wish.

Sunday 14th June

Readings:

- Psalm 45
- Deuteronomy 10:12 – 11:1
- Acts 23:12-35

Brief reflection:

After his conversion, Paul lived entirely for Christ. He had a one-track life, with every ounce of his being focussed upon his Saviour and the coming kingdom. He gave everything for Jesus, and he often suffered because of his faith. Indeed, he sometimes boasted of his sufferings, as a way of ensuring that others would understand the truth of his words. In 2 Corinthians, for example, he tells us that compared with others he has “worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.” He was whipped, beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwrecked three times, in danger from bandits, rivers, his fellow Jews, Gentiles, and false believers everywhere. He has been hungry and thirsty, cold and naked. He has known suffering (you can read all about this in 2 Corinthians 11:21-31).

In today’s passage from Acts we read about more of Paul’s tribulations. He’s in prison, again, and the Jews are out to kill him, again. They are so serious about this that they resolve not to eat and drink until they’ve achieved their aim – although we don’t find out if they keep their resolution when they fail to kill him. Paul is protected by the people who have him captive – Paul’s nephew gets the message to the Tribune, telling him that the Jews are plotting to kill his prisoner – and the tribune sends Paul to another prison, during the night, and under heavy guard.

So even as he’s protected from harm, he’s still imprisoned for Christ.

We are living in difficult times, and many of us feel imprisoned in our own homes. But our freedoms are immense compared to Paul’s, and to many other Christians in the world today. Across our world, our brothers and sisters in Christ struggle with oppression, imprisonment, and even the threat of death because of their faith. We must stand with them in prayerful support.

Prayer for the day:

Father God,
we know that we are one body, in you.
When one part hurts, we all hurt.
We pray now for our sisters and brothers across the world,
who are suffering for your name.
Amen.

Food for thought:

- Find out about Christian oppression across the world today, and ask God to show you one place or situation that he wants you to especially pray about.

Monday 15th June

Readings:

- Psalm 27
- Joshua 14
- Luke 12:1-12

Brief reflection:

The passage from Luke today has been the source of angst for some Christians. It's easy to read it and then to begin worrying: "have I blasphemed against the Holy Spirit?" or "will my secret deeds and thoughts send me to eternal damnation?"

I'm not going to talk about hell and damnation today – this is a huge subject and we couldn't do it justice – but it's worth saying that I think hell represents eternal destruction. Without God's presence, we cease to be: and this is terrible when you consider that we were created originally for eternity in Eden.

So how do we avoid this fate? The passage makes it clear that this is difficult, if not impossible. We can hide nothing from the judgment of God, and all our misdoings will be counted and weighed before God, who knows how many hairs there are on our heads, and who values each one. This is a fearful prospect, and it's small wonder that reading this passage leads some people to feel real terror about the future.

But Jesus makes it clear that, if we acknowledge him before others, he will acknowledge us before God. We are flawed and broken, and in the final judgment we are doomed to fail. But if we have faith in Jesus, we will be saved from the fate we've earned. In Romans 10:9, Paul tells us that "if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This is good news, and worth shouting about.

Prayer for the day:

Jesus, you are Lord.

Be our Lord today.

Lord Jesus, we believe that you were raised from the dead,
and that in you we have salvation.

Give us courage to proclaim this good news to others today.

Amen.

Food for thought:

- When did you last tell someone that you are a Christian? When did you last talk to someone about Jesus?

Tuesday 16th June

Readings:

- Psalm 32
- Joshua 21:43-22:8
- Luke 12:13-21

Brief reflection:

Today's passage from Luke serves as a stark warning against the wisdom of the world. We are conditioned, in the West, to be self-reliant and self-sufficient, at least to the extent of being able to purchase all that we need. Our work ethic tells us that we must work hard in order to provide for ourselves and our family, and we are trained to think in terms of saving up, being financially cautious, and looking after the pennies so that the pounds will look after themselves. Most people either have savings, or worry about the fact that they don't.

Don't get me wrong – these aren't, in themselves, bad things. But Jesus makes it clear that they shouldn't be the central things either. Wealth which is stored up and saved is useless if we are unable to spend it. We don't know what the future holds, so as we plan ahead we must recognise that our planning doesn't put us in control. Sometimes people think about where they might be in a year's time, or five year's time, but nobody predicted, even just a year ago, that we would be in the situation we are in now. People went a bit crazy at the start of the pandemic, panic buying enough toilet rolls to supply an army, but not one of us can control the future in any really significant way. This, I think, is at the heart of Jesus' message today. It's not that we mustn't make any plans, but rather that we ought always to live for God, and not think that we are somehow in control. We are God's people, and, as such, we ought to be responsive to him and his Spirit. When we plan and plot, and think that we're in charge, we block out God from our lives, and this is the most foolish thing we can possibly do.

Prayer for the day:

Lord Jesus, we are sorry
that we so often plan and plot in vain,
building our own kingdoms,
and making ourselves into gods.
Forgive us, heal us, and help us to live for you,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Food for thought:

- Do any of your plans risk taking you away from the freedom you have in God?