

Worshipping at Home

30th August 2027

Call to worship

Come into God's presence and seek where God's glory may be. Come, seek and receive God's life-giving redemption. **Amen.**

Hymn 334: Praise to the holiest in the height

Prayers

Unite us Lord, as we worship you, with the other believers around the world, that we may be one in you. Help us to offer all our thoughts and feelings, that we may worship you with all our hearts and minds. Receive us, loving Lord, as we come before you with expectations and fears; with joys and with sorrows; with faith and with doubt. Receive us, challenge us and grant us your peace.

Living God, we give thanks for the truth that no adversity can separate us from you, because you love us. No challenge can overwhelm us, because you love us. No difficulty can divide us, or fear swamp us, because you love us. And, nothing can compare to the joy of knowing you, and that today, whatever we face, you will always love us. **Amen.**

Faithful God, forgive us when as your people the cross of commitment has felt too heavy for us to carry, and we have let you and those around us down. Grant us faith, courage and humility.

Forgive us when the cost of following your Son in our daily lives has felt too risky. Forgive us when we are reluctant to go beyond our comfort zone and embrace those situations that challenge us. Grant us faith, courage and humility.

Eternal God, your forgiveness enables us to begin again when we have come to the end of our own strength. It enables us to overcome our mistakes as Peter did when we get things badly wrong. It enables us to see more clearly the cost of following your Son, and to receive more fully the blessing of your presence with us, through conflict, through challenge and through change. **Amen.**

Readings: Jeremiah 15:15-21 and Matthew 16:21-28

Hymn 518: Father, hear the prayer we offer

Reflection

We have a weird relationship to suffering. We all suffer at some point in our lives. Some suffer more than most. A lot of suffering comes without blame – illness, injury, breakdown of relationships, bereavement, etc.

Some of it comes with blame – people being deliberately neglectful or deliberately harmful, or choosing to be indifferent to someone else's suffering. However suffering comes about, we rarely consider suffering to be a good thing any more. I'm not quite sure when the change happened. We used to talk about suffering being character building. I suspect that was just an excuse not to change how we did things, and was a cover for abuse.

Our culture has changed and we no longer consider suffering to be something we should seek, even though we recognise that there can be a silver lining to it all forming us as different people.

In this context, the reading this week is really uncomfortable. We know that Jesus is going to suffer at the hands of those who persecute him and he will need to die. It is hard to hear that without asking, "why does someone else need to be hurt so that we can live our lives freely"? Does someone else's suffering release us to do whatever we want? Why can't God just love us anyway?

These are the difficult questions at the heart of our faith.

What is most difficult about this reading is the statement by Jesus that if we want to follow him, then we are going to have to embrace suffering too. So, why should we embrace picking up our cross?

Well, suffering does indeed produce character. But I don't think God is offering a kind of spiritual finishing school. Suffering does require commitment – *are you really committed to this cause?* Suffering demonstrates to others that you are serious about what you believe – but we must be careful – fanatics also embrace suffering, weirdly glorifying it. Suffering is very real, and shouldn't be diminished by trying to glorify it.

Perhaps suffering is about remembering that this isn't about us. The very fact that we wouldn't willingly choose this for ourselves, if we could avoid it (or if we did, we might need to examine our motivations). It helps us to realise that what we are struggling (and suffering) for is something that is so much bigger than us.

But likewise, we shouldn't diminish when we are struggling, just because it isn't as bad as the suffering that Jesus faced. Jesus knew struggle and suffering and ultimately, he brought us life. We can take heart and indeed hope, from the fact that as God's son, he knew our life, our struggles, our hopes and joys, and he gave everything so that we could live in the knowledge of his love.

To ponder

What are you struggling with at the moment?

What does "carrying your cross" mean for you in your life?

Have you asked God to be with you in your struggles and suffering, to support you?

Hymn 629: God of my faith, I offer you my doubt

Prayers of Intercession.

(Feel free to pause after each line to reflect on those who we know or have read about who may be experiencing these things and consider how we may support them at this time.)

To those who carry the cross of persecution and oppression, loving Lord: **give strength and courage.**

To those who carry the cross of anger and abuse, loving Lord: **give strength and courage.**

To those who carry the cross of pain and suffering, loving Lord: **give strength and courage.**

To those who carry the cross of isolation and loneliness, loving Lord: **give strength and courage.**

To those who carry the cross of grief and mourning, loving Lord: **give strength and courage.**

Living and loving God, give wisdom and encouragement to us and to all your children, as we seek to take up our cross and to follow you faithfully. **Amen.**

We share the Lord's Prayer: Our Father...

Hymn 51: Great is thy faithfulness

Blessing

Lord Jesus, give us the wisdom to follow you, the strength to carry our cross, and the hope of your coming kingdom. **Amen.**