

ST. PHILIP'S MILFORD PRAYER CIRCLE



Prayers for Christian Unity

Thursday, January 19, 2023

Do good; seek justice (Isaiah 1:17)

The theme for this year's Prayers for Christian Unity is "do good; seek justice". The prayers for today are from the resources provided by the World Council of Churches.

Isaiah challenged God's people in his day to learn to do good together; to seek justice together, to rescue the oppressed together, to defend the orphan and plead for the widow together. The prophet's challenge applies equally to us today. How can we live our unity as Christians so as to confront the evils and injustices of our time? How can we engage in dialogue, increase awareness, understanding and insight about one another's lived experiences? These prayers and encounters of the heart have the power to transform us – individually and collectively. Let us be open to God's presence in all our encounters with each other as we seek to be transformed, to dismantle the systems of oppression, and to heal the sins of racism. Together, let us engage in the struggle for justice in our society. We all belong to Christ.

Elizabeth: Let us centre our hearts and minds in preparation for prayer

READER: **Our Psalm today is number 42, from the Order of Service for Christian Unity:**

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and behold the face of God?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually,

"Where is your God?"

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:

how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God,

with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock,

“Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?”

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

ALL Gracious God, in the night of distress we forget the days of sun and joy. Even when we do not know your presence, preserve us from the dark torrent of despair. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord **AMEN**

READER: Our Gospel is from the Order of Service for Christian Unity Matthew, Chapter 25:31-40:

TOGETHER: Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

This is the Gospel of Christ.

TOGETHER: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

READER: Lord, we ask you to guide us to do the right thing:

A lawyer asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus’ response asks us to see beyond the divisions of religion, tribe and nationality to recognise our neighbour in need. Christians likewise must see

beyond these divides and the divisions within the Christian family to recognise and love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

ALL: Lord, teach us to see who the marginalized or oppressed are in our society. Guide us in how churches might together walk with our brothers and sisters, respond to their need and speak up on their behalf.

Lord God, you called your people from slavery into freedom. Give us strength and courage to seek out those who are standing in need of justice. Allow us to see this need and provide help.

ALL: And we ask all this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

READER: Lord, we ask you to guide us when justice is done:

The religious leaders Jesus addresses have grown accustomed and comfortable with the injustices of the world. They are happy to perform religious duties such as tithing mint, dill and cumin, but neglect the weightier and more disruptive demands of justice, mercy and faithfulness. Similarly, Christians have grown accustomed and comfortable with the divisions that exist between us. We are faithful in much of our religious observance, but often we neglect the Lord's challenging desire that all his disciples be one.

ALL: Lord, please help our local congregations to support one another to withstand the opposition that may follow from doing justice.

Lord God, you are the source of our wisdom. We pray for wisdom and courage to do justice, to respond to what is wrong in the world by acting to make it right. We pray for wisdom and courage to grow in the unity of your Son, Jesus Christ.

ALL: And we ask all this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

READER: Lord, we ask you to guide us to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly:

"Walking humbly" was challenging for the rich young man who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. He had obeyed all the commandments from his youth, but he could not take the further step to join Jesus' disciples because of his wealth; he was beholden to his possessions. How difficult it is for Christians to let go of that which we perceive as riches, but which keep us from the greater wealth of joining Jesus's disciples in Christian unity.

ALL: Lord, lead your churches, in all Christian denominations, to better respond to the needs of our most vulnerable neighbours. Teach us how we can honour every voice in our communities.

The word used for justice throughout the Bible, and in Micah 6:8, is "mishpat", and it includes punishment, or retributive justice. But it also means more than that; it includes giving people their due or right. This is often referred to as restorative justice.

ALL: Lord, guide us to see what restorative justice would look like if our faith community's response to the TRC Calls to Action.

Gracious and loving God, expand our vision that we might see the mission we share with all of our Christian brothers and sisters, to show forth the justice and loving kindness of your kingdom. Help us to welcome our neighbours as your Son welcomed us. Help us to be more generous as we witness to the grace that you freely give us.

ALL: And we ask all this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, the tears of the oppressed:

Matthew recounting of the Beatitudes begins with Jesus seeing the crowds. In that crowd he must have seen those who were peacemakers, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, men and women who mourned, and those who hungered for justice. In the beatitudes Jesus not only names people's struggles, he names what they will be: the children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

ALL: As Christians we are called to see the holy struggles of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, guide us to see how you have engaged with Christian groups in addressing oppression in our neighbourhood, our community, our country, and our world. Lead us to see how the churches in our community can come together to better show solidarity with those suffering oppression

ALL: God of justice and grace, remove the scales from our eyes so we can truly see the oppression around us. We pray in the name of Jesus who saw the crowds and had compassion for them.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, those who are singing your song:

Luke's Gospel records that people, many of them women, follow Jesus even as he carries his cross to Calvary. This following is faithful discipleship. Furthermore, Jesus recognises their struggles and the suffering that they will have to endure in faithfully carrying their own crosses.

Thanks to the ecumenical movement, Christians today share hymns, prayers, reflections and insights across many Christian traditions. We receive them from one another as gifts borne of the faith and loving discipleship. These shared gifts are riches to be treasured and give witness to the Christian faith we share.

ALL: Lord, teach us how to raise up the stories of ancestors and saints who lived among us and have sung songs of faith, hope, and peace and love.

Lord God, here in Canada, we know the whole story needs to be told. The song the psalmist sings is against their oppressors and in the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's experience, many of the songs and stories that are told are filled with anguish and anger against their oppressors and need to be heard. The TRC stories remind us of those who weep for the lost children of the Residential Schools.

ALL: God of the oppressed, open our eyes to the harm that continues to be inflicted on our sisters and brothers in Christ. May your Spirit give us the courage to sing in unison, and raise our voices with those whose suffering is unheard.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, the least among us:

The prophet Ezekiel describes the Lord God as a shepherd who makes the flock whole by gathering in those who have strayed and binding up those who are injured. We know that unity is the Father's desire for his people and he continues to bring about this unity, to make the flock whole, through the action of his Holy Spirit. Through prayer we open ourselves to receive the Spirit which restores the unity of all the baptised.

ALL: Lord, we know the "least of these" are not invisible to you. We pray for guidance and direction to your church in working together to care for and serve "the least among us".

God of Love, we thank you for your unending care and love for us. Help us to sing redemption songs. Open wide our hearts to receive your love and to extend your compassion to the whole of the human family.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, that what is now does not have to be:

The Magnificat is Mary's song of joy for all that she sees God is doing: restoring balance by raising up the lowly; righting injustice by feeding the hungry; and remembering Israel, his servant. The Lord never forgets his promises or abandons his people. It is easy to overlook or undervalue the faith of those who belong to other Christian communities, particularly if those communities are small. But the Lord makes his people whole by raising up the lowly so that the value of each is recognised. We are called to see as He sees and to value each of our Christian brothers and sisters as He values them.

ALL: Lord, guide us so we can come together in Christ, with hope and faith that you Lord, will "shut injustice's mouth".

Lord God of Hope, help us to remember that you are with us in our suffering. Help us to embody

hope for one another when hopelessness is a frequent unwelcomed guest in our hearts. Grant us the gift of being grounded in your loving Spirit as we work together to eradicate all forms of oppression and injustice. Give us the courage to love what, whom and how you love, and to express this love in our actions.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

ALL: AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, the justice that restores communion:

Jesus tells the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in order to teach the people "about their need to pray always and not to lose heart" (this is in Luke Chapter 18). Jesus has won a decisive victory over injustice, sin and division, and as Christians our task is to receive this victory first in our own hearts through prayer, and then in our lives through action.

ALL: Lord, help us that we may never lose heart, but rather continue to ask in prayer for God's gift of unity and may we manifest this unity in our lives.

Lord God, as your people, the people of God, help us discern how our churches are called to engage in justice that unites us in our actions to love and serve all.

Lord, we know that Indigenous communities have embraced Sentencing Circles as an alternative approach to the criminal system. Help us to understand how such a process might strengthen the justice system for all people, so they take part in "the justice that restores communion".

ALL: God, Creator and Redeemer of all things, teach us to look inward to be grounded in your loving Spirit, so that we may go outward in wisdom and courage to always choose the path of love and justice. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

READER: Lord, we uphold to you in prayer, those asking for our prayers;

Almighty and everlasting God, the comfort of the sad and the strength of those who suffer, hear the prayers of your people who are ill, suffer, or are in any trouble. Grant to everyone in distress mercy, relief, and refreshment.

We name, either silently or aloud, others we know who are in need of prayer....

Loving God, we pray that you will comfort all who are suffering, lend skill to the hands of their healers, and bless the means used for their cure. Give them such confidence in the power of your grace, that even when they are afraid, they may put their whole trust in you. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

ALL: AMEN

READER: A closing prayer:

Everlasting God, look upon our faces gathered together today in holy community and send us anywhere you would have us go.

ALL: Encourage us by your Holy Spirit to continue to tell our stories, to do good, and to seek justice for the sake of your Creation through our actions.

Sustain us that they may be one, so the world may believe that you sent your only Son Jesus for the life of the world.

ALL:

AMEN

Unite us in the Lord Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and who has taught us to pray, saying:

**TOGETHER: 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