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LENT 5B

17th March 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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For more information <https://theworshipcloud.com/terms/free-weekly-resource>

Hymn:

20 STF – Be still, for the presence of the Lord – [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Find a comfortable position to sit or lie down in.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let it out through your mouth.

When you are ready, say out loud or in your head...

Lord, I come into your presence.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I come just as I am.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring everything I have experienced this past week - the things I'm proud of, and the things I wish had been different.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring the people that enriched my week, and the people I found it hard to share my week with.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring the moments of joy, peace, pride, sorrow, frustration, regret and pain.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring my hopes for next week.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I lay all of these things at your feet, and rest in your loving presence.

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

This Jeremiah reading is often used in the Methodist Covenant service – an annual reminder of our commitment to God, which many Methodists use as part of a journey of discipleship, often at the beginning of the year. It is also the lectionary for today, and helps us to think again about the role of our covenant with God.

The context for the prophet's writing is that he is addressing a nation in the midst of a deep struggle. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, we encountered the people of Israel in exile, living in Babylon and having strayed from God. They haven't been faithful to the promises they made to God in the old covenant, and in response they have been threatened with the destruction of their towns and cities. In the midst of this doom and gloom, we reach chapter 31. Here, we are introduced to something different – a 'new covenant'. In this passage, God makes the people a

promise, a commitment to a new way of life different from the one experienced by their ancestors. In the midst of the consequences of broken promises, God is lifting up their eyes towards a different future.

This new covenant is personal. We know that the substance of this covenant is the same as the original one God made with the people, when they initially went into exile. God's law is still at the heart of it – to love your God with all your heart, and to love your neighbour. What is different this time is that God declares the understanding of this calling will be set within each person, 'written on their hearts', part of our very nature. God's promise invites each person into direct, personal relationship with God. We are called to know God's love for us directly, and to be invited personally to love God in return. Jeremiah writes about how this will feel different from what's gone before – that instead of needing to rely on a few special people to know about God everyone will be invited to know God for themselves.

Forgiveness is an important part of this promise – God says that in making the covenant afresh, the people's sins won't be remembered anymore. As God works in each of us to rewrite God's love upon our hearts, God confronts the challenges and questioning that resides in all of us. This is intimate – for God to forgive us, to write upon our hearts, first God has to know us – in all the messiness and complication.

The good news is that in making this new promise, God faces our challenges head on, determined to forgive. God is not content with being at a distance from us – in this new covenant, God commits to embracing all that we are. Just as David longs to be in the presence of God, in the promise of the new covenant, we see this very longing fulfilled. By forgiving our sins and inviting us into personal relationship, God is calling each of us into new life.

The striking, demanding message of God's new covenant is that wherever we stand, whatever we bring with us – God's presence is not something that exists elsewhere, for us to avoid or miss out on. God's presence is personal, deeply set within our hearts. God is ready to come into our messiness, and begin anew.

Questions for you to reflect on this week, and perhaps to find someone else who uses these resources who you could speak to about all this:

- When have you stood at the back of the crowd, worried to get personal in your relationship with God? What fears and worries stopped you?
- What is the impact of a personal relationship with God in your life? How have you seen it change the way you live?
- What does it mean to give up our lives, and see them bear fruit? What actions could you take this week that would mean loving God and your neighbour, by giving up something of yourself?

Hymn:

255 – The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

May you go out with joy, and be sent forth with peace.

May the Spirit of God go with you, that you might be a person of peace to all who you meet this week.

May you know the light of love in your life,

And trust in Jesus every step of the way,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 18th March

- What does the good news of the Gospel feel like to you? Can you express it as a prayer of thanks in just a sentence or two?
- You might like to share your notes with someone and compare similarities and differences – not because there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ answer, but because we learn together as disciples.

Tuesday 19th March

- Creator God,
Thank you that your love for me is part of your great outpouring of love for the world.
Thank you that I can see your care in the life of all you have created,
From tiny seed to flourishing fruits.
May I be reminded of your goodness in all that surrounds me,
Constantly aware of your presence in the fullness of created life. Amen.

Wednesday 20th March

- Think of a question you have about your faith. Either look it up on the internet, or ask somebody else about it. How does God meet you in what you hear? Have you changed your thoughts or beliefs or feelings as a result of what you’ve learned?

Thursday 21st March

- Draw a picture of your local church building. Include on the picture all the ways you see God at work, and all the things you want to ask God to work in. Pray about it.

Friday 22nd March

- God of all grace, create in me a heart that longs for you, that I may love you deeply, worship you always, and trust in your everlasting life.

Saturday 23rd March

- God of all grace,
May you be at work in my gift-giving, so that the financial gifts I give to charity, church and community, and the other gifts that I am blessed with, can be used for the transformation of lives, hearts, climate, creation and the whole cosmos.
- Come, Lord Jesus, Amen.