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ORDINARY 29A

22nd October 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayer

This is a divine moment, a moment for turning aside, a moment for noticing.

Hold a space of stillness – as long as you dare, or time allows. And listen.

God is here.

Enter a space of worship, notice the presence of the divine, the Holy Spirit, in the room with you.

Commit this time of singing, praying, thinking and reading to God,
Commit yourself to learn and listen, to grow and be transformed,
By the grace of God.

When you are ready, say these simple words:

I come to meet with you Lord God. My heart and hands are open to receive from you.
Amen.

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

Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding by singing:

662 STF – Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? – [YouTube](#)

713 STF – Show me how to stand for justice – [YouTube](#)

Responding by praying:

Living, loving God, here I am, in prayer.

Help me to hear what you are saying to me today, as I worship.

Help me remember that I, and everyone in the world, are all made in your image. Lord, in a world so full of greed, violence and selfishness, it can be so hard to see your likeness in creation.

God of all grace, where we see suffering, injustice and unfairness, today I pray that your grace and mercy may be a beacon of truth. That those with the power to positively change other people's lives will hear your message of grace and mercy.

Where power and authority are being wielded with an iron fist, forced onto communities and groups while simultaneously rights and freedoms are stripped away, today I pray that your strong message of fairness and love may break beyond the boundaries and walls that I might have built.

For those who suffer in silence, aching with the pain of loneliness, anxiety or self-doubt, may they feel your presence with them, guiding their life and accompanying their journey.

For those whose lives are full of sorrow and pain; those who are ill or dying, those who mourn the loss of loved ones; those who fear what the future may bring; may they see your

image reflected in those around them, and may your love through others bring comfort, peace and hope.

In a moment of quiet, I list before you now the situations that are worrying me:

[Pause]

Loving God, I pray today, remembering that I am made in your image, but so is all creation. And I recognise that you are calling me to be part of the answers to the prayers I make.

Today, give me the courage and wisdom to step forward in faith, to reflect your image in my lives, wherever you lead.

In Jesus' name, I bring these and all my prayers to you O God,
Amen.

Responding in action:

There are two invitations to action in today's gospel reading (well, there are plenty, but let's focus on two for now).

1. What does it mean to 'bear the image of God'?
2. What do we do with the things we call 'ours'?

The first one first...

How can we identify what, of all we experience in the world around us, is being led and managed by God? It is the same question being posed by the people of Israel in the Old Testament. It is the question of Christian discipleship today – how can I recognise the holiness within me, and seek to do justice to it... To live a truly peace-filled life, our strength comes not from a worldly image; a token of ownership or authority, but rather a recognition that we reside in a whole universe created by a God who cares and loves us.

A God who longs for a personal two-way relationship with his people, not a dictatorial reminder of who's the boss. A God who sent his son into the world to demonstrate his love for us. A God who we choose to worship, serve and follow rather than a trophy to be fawned over.

What does that mean for you today? This week, and beyond? How will you seek to live differently as a result? What will you do when people ask you about it?

And secondly...

The gospel story is an invitation into a long and politically tricky conversation about taxation, but the Jesus message at the heart of it seems simpler: what will you do with the things you have? Your life, your skills, your strength, your friendships, your possessions, your money? Will you use them for yourself, for the empire of this world, or for God and God's justice?

Today, you might like to think about how much of your own skills and wealth you use for good in the world. Could you use some of it differently? What could you stop doing?

Blessing

Lord of all hopefulness,

Lord of all joy,

Lord of all I am and have,

Inspire me, by your Spirit, to be a part of your mission in the world.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 23rd October

- God of all grace, thank you for all you are doing in my life and in the world around me. Today, help me to notice your presence, and give thanks.
Amen.

Tuesday 24th October

- Look at your feet. Notice the scraps and marks on your shoes or slippers, or if your feet are bare notice the lines and wrinkles. Wiggle your toes and notice how that feels.
- Look at the ground your feet are on. Is it a carpet? Or wood? Laminate or something else?
- Do you feel grounded and connected? Or a bit rushed and flustered and cut off?
- Spend a minute praying about your response to this exercise.

Wednesday 25th October

- Think about the fruits of the spirit.
- Pick one of them that you don't feel you are very good at, or that needs some intentional work.
- Spend some time praying about this, and then practice it for a whole day in all you do.

Thursday 26th October

- God of all grace, I take a moment to pray for all the stories in the news today. Holding before you leaders, nations, conflicts, disasters, and those working for a better world.
Come, Prince of Peace, come Lord of Light,
Amen.

Friday 27th October

- Write a note or a message to a friend with a Bible verse in it that you think might be relevant to your life.
- Tell them you're thinking of them, and pray about them as they receive it.

Saturday 28th October

- At some point this weekend, make 5 or 10 minutes to sit in stillness and light a candle.
- It might help you to say out loud, perhaps several times: Jesus is the light of the world.
- Pray about the places you experience darkness in your life, that Jesus' light might shine there.