

Sunday October 2nd

A service of worship for use at home

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Growing Old

Welcome and Notices.

Welcome to our worship. If you have access to a computer or iPad, you may like to click on the [links](#) to join in the hymns. Otherwise, the words are printed here for you to use.

As we come to worship God, let us still our hearts and our minds as we say, slowly and quietly, this prayer by David Adam:

I weave a silence onto my lips
I weave a silence into my mind
I weave a silence into my Heart.
Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.
Still me, keep me from harm.
Let all the noise within me cease.
Fill me, Lord, with your peace.

Song So, let's sing: Be still for the presence of the Lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vep_Ty4Zx1o

Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy one is here
Come bow before him now, In reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found, we stand on Holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord, the Holy one is here.

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around
He burns with Holy fire, with splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord, is moving in this place.

Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

The prophet Isaiah, according to chapter 6, has a vision of God in heaven. As he is faced with God's glory and holiness, he falls down and cries:

'Woe is me. I am lost. For I am a man of unclean lips
And I live among a people of unclean lips.'

As **we** come into God's holy presence, let us confess all that spoils our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. Let's take a moment to reflect on:

The times we have failed to love one another as God loves us.
The things in our relationships that have been damaged or broken.
All that we long to see restored.
And all that can never now be mended.

So we pray: For the times we have hurt and torn down, rather than healed and built up
Heavenly Father **Forgive us and help us**

For the times we have been irritable and fought, rather than loved and sought peace
Heavenly Father **Forgive us and help us**

For the times we have looked on, and not lifted a hand to support or encourage
Heavenly Father **Forgive us and help us**

For the all the times, both unknowingly and deliberately, that we have broken our promises, failed
you and failed one another
Heavenly Father **Forgive us and help us**

Hear again the Words of Jesus: 'Neither do I condemn you. Go. Sin no more.'
Lord God, thank you for your full and free forgiveness. Thank you that you wipe the slate clean &
give us the chance to start again. As you have forgiven us, help us to forgive those who have hurt
us, and also to forgive ourselves. And, by your grace, help us to live lives of generous, self-giving
love. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord, who gave his life because he loved us so very
much. **Amen.**

Song God forgave my sin https://youtu.be/CGKhz1_C41s

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,
I've been born again in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to.

He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received, freely, freely give;
Go in My name, and because you believe, others will know that I live.'

All power is given in Jesus' name,
In earth and heaven in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His power as He told me to.

He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received, freely, freely give;
Go in My name, and because you believe, others will know that I live.'

Sharing the Peace

Jesus appears to his troubled and frightened disciples on that first Easter Sunday and he says to
them: 'Peace be with you'. And he says to **us**: 'Peace be with **you**.' If you are with others, share
God's peace with them now. If not, pray God's peace on those on your heart.

The peace of the lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

1st Reading John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised
from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those at
the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet,
and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas
Iscaiot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume
not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because
he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal
what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the
day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Introduction to theme

I meet with Alan Boyd (whom many of you will know) once a month to read a theology book together. We are currently reading a book by Richard Holloway called: '**Waiting for the last bus.**' The book reflects our theme today, which is: **Growing old and preparing for death.** Not a very popular theme these days, but one which is of huge importance. Growing old, finding that our bodies don't serve us in the way they used to, having less energy, maybe more forgetful, less steady on our pins, needing more help with things, taking a cocktail of pills, becoming frail, growing closer to the final curtain. The Queen's recent death has reminded us that **no one** lives forever.

Our first reading, from John 12, marks a really poignant moment in Jesus' life. Mary anoints Jesus' feet with this very expensive perfume and wipes them with her hair. It is an extremely sensual thing to do. And when she is criticised, Jesus defends her and says that she has anointed him for the **day of his burial**. She is, if you like, preparing him for death. That most popular of Psalms, Psalm 23, expresses exactly those sentiments – being anointed, prepared for the Valley of the Shadow of Death, ready to dwell in the house of the Lord, forever. So, let's sing Psalm 23 in a modern version, which I hope you will know.

Song The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want

<https://youtu.be/-elQQayhpak>

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

2nd Reading John 13:12-10

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.

For the Word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

Address

My daughter asks me: 'Why is it, dad, that you go: 'Oooooo' as you stand up and 'Ahhhhh' as you sit down?' Growing old. Taking more pills. Becoming flustered over trivial issues. Finding things difficult that you never used to. Struggling with modern technology. Asking yourself if you should still be driving? Not having a clue what your grandchildren are doing on their mobile phones. Getting to the top of the stairs and wondering why on earth you are up there? Living your life on a smaller and smaller canvas.

Growing old. Getting to the back-end of life. Maybe, even, facing death. **Not** a topic we often talk about – or even like to think about. But death is a really important issue. In the Bible it is mentioned directly 372 times – plus a lot of more indirect references, such as 'he breathed his last' or 'he was gathered to his forefathers'.

One of the great Biblical themes around death is '**being ready**'. This was indeed a major preoccupation of previous generations, but not something we tend to spend time on today. John Donne, the 17th Century poet & Dean of St Paul's, apparently slept every night under his funeral shroud, as a reminder to him of his mortality. In many old portraits you will see a skull, alongside the subject, as a reminder that we all face death. Billy Bray, the famous Methodist preacher, before he descended into the dangerous Cornish tin mine where he worked, prayed, every day: 'If anyone should have to die today, let it be me, Lord, for I am ready.'
I fear that is **not** a prayer *I* could say today with any conviction or enthusiasm!

Of course, there are lots of practical things we can do to prepare for death, such as writing a will, sorting out a power of attorney, getting our finances & affairs in order for our loved ones, making sure we try, as best we can, to mend relationships and be at peace with others. I don't have time to address such things now. Luckily, however, there is a relatively new resource, produced jointly by the C of E and the Methodists called: '**Seasons of my Soul**'. It is written specially for people like me, in the second half – or more like the last quarter – of life. It deals with many of these issues.

But we haven't got time to deal with these things now. Instead, I'd like to focus on something which, for me at least, is at the heart of growing old and preparing for death. In John chapter 21, Jesus talks to Peter about his future. He says: 'Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted to go; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you, and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus is telling Peter what sort of death he is to die.

However, it strikes me that this passage is a perfect description of becoming elderly & frail and ending up in a care home. Someone else dressing you and taking you where you do not want to go. For very many of us, that really goes against all we have come to value hugely – our dignity and our independence.

We see this again in our 2nd reading, where, at the last supper, poor old Peter, gets it wrong yet again. John's gospel, instead of focusing on the Bread and the Wine, hones in on that well-known Palestinian ritual: foot-washing. The first thing you did when you gathered for a meal was to have your dusty, dirty feet washed. It is something which happened to one side, in the entrance hall, perhaps. A really important activity carried out, generally, by the lowliest member of the household. But instead, here, it's **Jesus** who goes around, with a bowl and a towel, to wash the disciples' feet, something Peter finds utterly unacceptable. In our culture, today, foot washing, personal care, is not a centre-stage activity either. My son-in-law, Antonio, is a carer. He loves it and is clearly good at it. But he is paid a pittance, a sign, perhaps of how much we fail to value such a hugely important ministry.

One of the most profound things that happened to me in all my ministry was when I was a curate in Cambridge. I visited a member of our congregation in Addenbrookes Hospital. However, I

happened to know that our Assistant Bishop, Gordon, was also in hospital. He was very seriously ill. He'd been rushed in with an aortic aneurism & had had emergency surgery. I didn't really think he'd want to see me - a humble curate - but, as I was there, I decided to pop in anyway. The ward sister told he was in a side room. So, I knocked, went in and said: 'Hello?' But he wasn't in bed and was nowhere to be seen. Then I heard a small voice, coming from the bathroom. It said, rather weakly, 'Is that Alan?' I peered around the door, and there, completely naked, apart from a huge dressing across his chest & stomach, which was dripping blood onto the floor, stood the bishop. He said: 'Thank goodness you've come. The nurses had to go off for an emergency & they've left me here. Could you wash me?'

Well, I had never washed a bishop before – nor since! But, I took a flannel, warm water & some soap and gently began to wash him. I washed him all over, including his most intimate parts. I could scarcely hold back the tears. It was one of the most moving, most profound moments, of my whole ministry. I washed him, as best I could. I dried him and got him back into bed. I said a prayer with him and left. I felt deeply humbled and profoundly blessed.

I didn't tell anyone about this incident. It seemed far too private. But then, a couple of weeks later, I had an appointment with Stephen Sykes, the Diocesan bishop and he brought up the incident. It was then I realised that bishop Gordon himself had told **lots** of people about what had happened. Bishop Stephen, said to me, rather wistfully: 'You know, I've thought a lot about that incident. And I have asked myself this question: "If that had been me, would *I* have had the grace & humility to ask a visitor, a curate, a colleague, to wash me? Or, indeed, been willing to **allow** them do it?" And I have come to the conclusion that: **No**, actually, I wouldn't.' Just like Peter, in fact, who cannot bear the idea of **being** washed, by Jesus.

I suspect most of you are, or have been, involved in many acts of service of one kind or another. Many of you may well feel very comfortable **servicing others**, even when that service involves intimate, personal care. Many of you will have cared – or are caring - for close relatives. But many of us, especially in our western culture, are **not** comfortable about **being** served, **being** cared for, **being** looked after, **being** dependent on others **being** washed.

Some other cultures accept it a lot more easily. I think of our Jamaican friend, Paul, who used to go every night to see his 90-year-old dad, who lived just down the road, to wash him, and massage his old legs, and rub them with oil, every day, for years, until his dad finally died. It was a very beautiful thing to do. A thing too hard for many of us to imagine doing. And especially, too hard to accept it **being done** to us.

Old age and infirmity: when we will have no choice but to depend on others for our daily needs and for our most intimate care. We'd all love to be fit and well until, one day, we die in our sleep in our 90's. But sadly, that is not most people's experience. Like it or not, most of us will become increasingly frail and dependent. There will come a time when we will be **dressed** and **washed** and **fed** and **carried** by others, to places we do not wish to go. I have seen it happen to members of my family, to my friends and to church members, even this past year or so. It is no respecter of persons. Sometimes people are able to accept it graciously and thankfully. But often they **resist** it with all their might - including Christians.

Like an elderly man I know, now in his late 80's, who is absolute murder to try & help. Difficult, embarrassed, awkward, resentful, angry. Someone who has been a committed Christian for over 60 years, and, in his day, a great **giver of help** to others, but who now, when he can no longer look after himself, is finding it impossible to receive, to **be** ministered to. Like Dylan Thomas who says to his dying father:

'Do not go gentle into that good night, but rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

Like it or not, many of us will find ourselves facing the daily indignity of **being** washed and **being** fed, by someone else. It will come very hard to a lot of us - as indeed it has for many of the elderly

people I have visited, who find themselves **raging** against the dying of the light, rather than accepting it graciously. And that care may well include having to be washed and changed, when we are incontinent, and have soiled ourselves.

Bishop Gordon has been dead for many years now. But I will be deeply grateful to him for the rest of my life. I will never forget that experience of washing him. I will never forget the very gracious & humble way in which he **asked** me to wash him. **Allowed** me to wash him. **Thanked me** for washing him. I will never forget what a blessing it was **for me** to wash him. But I would never have known that profound, poignant blessing, which has stayed with me **all my life**, unless he had been gracious enough, and humble enough, to say those words to me: '**Alan, will you wash me?**'

I hope and pray for that same **grace**, not just when I am elderly and incontinent, but **now** as well. Not just to wash and serve others, which, on the whole, I do not find so difficult. But to allow myself to **be** washed, to **be** served, by others, **now**, and in the future, as I prepare for **frailty**, for **diminishment**, for **being dependent** on others, and, finally, for **dying & death**. And, through it all, for the grace to be **thankful**.

'Peter, unless you let me wash you, you have no part in me.'

'Alan, unless you let me wash you, you have no part in me.'

Amen.

Song So now, let us sing again. '**There is a Redeemer**' <https://youtu.be/ldRcFz7rK7w>

There is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own son
Precious lamb of God, Messiah, Holy one
Thank you oh my father, For giving us your son
And leaving your spirit, 'Til the work on earth is done.

Jesus my redeemer, Name above all names
Precious lamb of God, Messiah, oh, for sinners slain.
Thank you oh my father, for giving us your son
And leaving your spirit, 'til the work on earth is done.

When I stand in glory, I will see his face
And there I'll serve my king forever, in that holy place.
Thank you oh my father, for giving us your son
And leaving your spirit, 'til the work on earth is done.

Intercessions Let us pray.

We pray for ourselves as we grow older. For the grace to accept frailty, diminishment and dependency on others. For the grace to allow ourselves to **be** washed, to **be** fed, to **be** cared for by others, when we can no longer look after ourselves.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for those we know who are struggling with infirmity and old age. Let us name them before God now. And we pray for ourselves that we may be gracious, compassionate, understanding and faithful in our commitment to them.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our Prayer**

We pray for this world of uncertainty, with war in Ukraine and political disputes across the globe dangerously affecting the economy and peace of the world; with climate change already devastating people's daily lives, with flooding in Pakistan and drought in east Africa to name but

two disasters. Lord God, what a mess we are making of your creation! Grant us the courage and determination to live unselfishly and well, not just for ourselves but for our children's children.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our Prayer**

And let's bring before God anything else which is on our hearts and in our minds.....

Lord in your mercy **Hear our Prayer**

Let's end our prayers by saying the Lord's prayer together:

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 and forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

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

Song Our final hymn is '**Guide me O thou great Redeemer**' <https://youtu.be/ietK7-57iFY>

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
Pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through;
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer
Be thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises, Songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look kindly upon you and grant you peace.

And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

be among you and remain with you, now and always. **Amen.**