



We take a breath and come into God's presence.

Holy Spirit draw us close and minister your grace to us. May we recognise your presence in our midst. **Amen.**

God of all, through all time and in all places, in each circumstance and season, You call us together in this place and welcome us with open arms as your beloved children. Each one of us is precious to you and called by you.

In this time of great change and uncertainty, you are unchanging and ever faithful. Through this time together, let us feel you speaking to us, leading us, teaching us, Filling us with your spirit and strengthening us for the journey ahead. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Reflection

Voltaire famously said 'Judge a person by their questions rather than their answers' which is rather fitting for today's reading.

Over Jesus' earthly lifetime he is asked many questions by many different people; ranging from passionate heartfelt pleas to detached arrogant goading. Sometimes we can put ourselves in the askers shoes, sometimes -well this might just be me- you want Jesus to answer 'Is that question for me or to impress and stir up those around you?! Sadly social media comments experience can often seem like that too. It is certainly the posts sharing human story which speak most to me.

There is something about the intent of a question. Is it a genuine desire to know and learn more, or an opportunity to display one's own knowledge or particular opinion. The disciples and searchers ask Jesus questions of upmost importance for their and subsequently our faith.

Jesus of course rarely gives a straight answer! Instead he offers a thought provoking question 'Well. Who do *you* say that I am?' or story back to us. In this usual style he responds to the question he is asked today- with a question, and a parable to illustrate it!

The chief priests and elders have asked Jesus where his authority comes from. His question to them where John the Baptist's baptism comes from reverses the trap they appear to be setting for him. After a heated discussion between them they realise they are now caught in a similar trap and plead the fifth!

The parable Jesus then gives asks us to consider who is the better son – the one who says he will do what his father asks, but doesn't, or the one who says he won't, but does. Once we have made a judgement on the sons, and as we use the bible as a living tool relevant to our lives today, we must then ask ourselves 'which one am I most like and why?'

Are there times when you are the first one? Ready to help, eager to please, but without the time, energy or resource to complete it or remember to do it!

Are there times when you are like the second? Say no but then feel guilty for saying no and go and do it anyway!

And as we question ourselves and our intentions in this and other situations, Jesus adds further reflection to our thought processes and maybe any stubbornness and closemindedness we may be nurturing. He tells us who it is who come to him most freely, who have the most openness to understand and learn – the vulnerable, the pained, the excluded. They are the ones who are actually most likely to get it.

Is it because there is a rawness to their belief? Is it because they are not held back by any social trappings of 'how would this reflect on me'? is it because they are desiring to take on a radical new message? Whatever the answer or further question! They will take the time to pause and listen, and question. Do we do that?

I wonder what are the questions you would most like to ask Jesus?

What answers would you like to hear?

We can ask Jesus these and any question, as we know the Holy spirit intercedes for us in the gap between heaven and earth. We can reflect on scripture. The book of Job is famous for asking God the difficult questions. You can google 'Where would you find readings on ... in the bible' for some suggestions. Through questioning we may of course get an unexpected answer or indeed a reflective question back - from God, in our prayers, through scripture, nature, a fellow traveller... . Possibilities with God are limitless, we just require an openness to seek them.

According to Google (and I haven't looked it up in the bible or questioned it so do let me know if you do!!) Jesus is recorded as being asked 187 questions to which he gave only 3 answers. Whilst he himself asked 307 questions! It goes to show that what Voltaire suggested and our Godly example leads, humility and asking questions of God, of ourselves, of others, of those who lead, of those considered 'lesser', of our representatives, of scientists, of young people, of everyone - widens are mindset and leads us closer to the truth.

May God be in our seeking. **Amen.**

Worship Music

Immortal Invisible God Only Wise – with lyrics:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfu1dqKCGd8&ab_channel=HymnChannel

I cannot tell – Lucy Gibson (attached)

Be thou my vision – with lyrics Evolsiy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg&ab_channel=EvolsiyTulip

10000 reasons – with lyrics Matt Redman Live in Times Square:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo--H_yx2vg&ab_channel=MattRedman

Intercession Prayers - Kindly written for us today by John Dalton

Let us by prayer and intercession with thanksgiving make our request to God.

Lord God, through your grace we are your people

Through your Son you have redeemed us

In your Spirit you have made us your own.

We pray for the renewal of the Church in faith, love and service

We pray for Reverend Nikki who leads our parish in worship and faith

We give thanks to the gift of your word

The grace of the sacraments

And the fellowship of your people.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray that the leaders of nations and all those in positions of authority will work tirelessly for justice and peace.

We pray for refugees, for those fleeing war, oppressive or tyrannical governments, for those driven from their homes by natural disasters, environmental destruction and climate change. Help them to find freedom, peace and livelihoods, and help us to remember that we are all equal before God.

We pray for children returning to our schools and young people to our colleges and universities.

We pray for those returning to work and those who continue to work from home, for all professions across all sectors who are working hard to maintain the fabric of our society and culture, here and across the world.

In these uncertain times, we pray for those who have lost their jobs or are facing redundancy or reduced employment, for those whose already difficult and challenging lives and circumstances have been worsened by the pandemic.

Pray let us not forget those who are marginalised by our society as Christ did not forget them, but was drawn to them, as we too must be drawn towards those who need our assistance and help.

We pray that we act as one community, locally, nationally and internationally, and through bonds of friendship, respect, understanding and common cause, we learn to live together in a better way with each other and the world which is our home.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Police Officer shot dead at Croydon Custody Centre, for his family, friends and colleagues, in their pain and grief.

We hold in your presence all who are troubled and distressed, whether in body, mind or spirit.

We pray for those in need, for the sick and all who suffer, for those in our community in hospices, hospitals, nursing homes, and for those who are housebound.

We give thanks for the lives of Chris Hurrell and George Pettitt as we entrust them into your care, and we remember all those who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again. May we with them enjoy the fullness of your presence.

Let us in silence commit our own prayers, for those close to us, for those that we know are suffering at this time, and for those we wish to remember.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who through their life and works celebrate the natural world, for those who write, paint and compose.

Let us not through our arrogance, greed and vanity erode and eradicate that which sustains and nourishes us and brings us closer to you. Let us with every breath renew our covenant to the earth, in all its naked beauty, our only dwelling, and the expression of your creation.

In this we pray most humbly for guidance, for your courage, strength and love, so that we may move through life with atonement, meekness and humility, in fellowship with all and with the world.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of glory, it is good that we are here, gathered as your Church in person or in our homes

Help us to proclaim your beloved son to the world

Help us to listen to the promptings of his spirit

May we be renewed in holiness, recapturing the wonder of encountering God

We put our trust in your son and pray that the dark places of our fragile earth and lives be eclipsed by the shining light of your word.

We rejoice in the fellowship we share with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all your saints. Encouraged by this great cloud of witnesses, may we follow in the footsteps of Christ, and come at last to our eternal home.

We commend ourselves and our whole creation to your unfailing love

Merciful Father,

**Accept these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ
Amen.**

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord shine his face upon you and give you peace.

And the blessing of God Almighty,

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

be with you and those whom you love always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: In the name of Christ **.Amen.**