Thy Kingdom Come

PRAYER JOURNAL

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Finally...

If you have worked your way through this booklet and made some notes about how you feel about God and how you make sense of life, and if the promises of God that we receive in Jesus are even beginning to make you wonder whether there is more to life than the things you see around you, and more to hope for than the fleeting promises of the world, then the best way of knowing and following Jesus is in the company of his Church. We're not perfect. Far from it. We are also followers in the way, working out how best to live this life and trusting in God, knowing how much we need God's love and forgiveness to keep us going. We are not an organisation looking for new members. We are a company of travellers and explorers who are very glad to have new people help us. We have things to share with you, but you also have things to share with us. Together, we can travel God's way.

Renew us by your Spirit

This booklet is intended for everyone. We all need the encouragement of the basic promises of the Christian faith to help us live the life God gives us to the full. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit every area of our lives: where we can go, whom we can see, how we can worship.

In the time between Ascension Day and Pentecost, Thy Kingdom Come is a gift to refresh our faith, especially if we felt isolated from our community or our Church during this difficult time. I have also written this in the hope that those who don't know Jesus at all may find in these pages the hope they long for.

So, if you are already a follower of Jesus, receive this as a reminder and an encouragement of why and how following Jesus makes a difference to you. Why not think about who you could give a copy to and how you could be praying for those you know who also need the hope of the gospel. And if you are yet to encounter Jesus Christ, my hope is that you will do so in what you read and reflect on in this booklet.

Each day there are a few things to read, a prayer to offer and then an invitation for you to make your own reflections on what it means to follow in the way of Christ. You don't have to write anything down, but you may find it helpful. Don't worry if this isn't you. Just ask God to help you see clearly how you can follow Jesus and who you can help.

And do this not only with yourself in focus, but also those you know – maybe pray for 5 friends, family, neighbours, colleagues – who live their lives yet to know the love offered to them in Christ Jesus.

In these days of hopeful waiting and praying between Ascension and Pentecost, may we all be renewed by the Spirit; made new in Christ.

Stephen Cottrell

ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

Day 1: Jesus

Following the way

The first followers of Jesus weren't called Christians. That came later. They were called followers of 'the way' (see Acts 24.14). This seems like a good place to start: especially at such a dark and difficult time for our world. The Christian faith is a way of life. In fact, Jesus himself says to his friends on the night before he dies, "I am the way".

Jesus shows us what humanity can be like when it is lived God's way. His kindness, generosity, goodness, and forgiveness are from God. This is what God is like. God welcomes everyone.

Life is hard. The way ahead isn't obvious. And faced with difficulty and uncertainty, God doesn't send us a rule book or a map. He sends a companion to walk with us: Jesus, the way. And he is not just the way for us – but for each and every person. Let us pray for those we know and love that they may find the way of Christ.

PRAYER

Loving God, when I'm feeling lost or lonely or afraid or uncertain of the way ahead, be my guide, a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. And today help me to be a good companion to those I meet.

Therefore, since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord
Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained
access to this grace in which we stand;
and we boast in our hope of sharing
the glory of God. And not only that,
but we also boast in our sufferings,
knowing that suffering produces endurance,
and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope,
and hope does not disappoint us,
because God's love has been poured
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
that has been given to us.

(Romans 5.1-5)

Receive the Holy Spirit

In the Bible there are two accounts of how God gives us the Holy Spirit. First, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, today's celebration. But in John's gospel, on Easter day itself, with the disciples locked away like so many of us have spent the last year locked away, Jesus breathes on them and gives them the Spirit. (see John 20.22)

Both stories have important things to say, but this year, with all the challenges we face, and knowing what lockdown has done to us and how many of us have slipped from the practice of our faith, I am holding onto a picture of Jesus coming to each of us and breathing his life and goodness into us. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he says. "My spirit of peace." And then He sends us into the world: praying for others, and serving them in the name of Christ.

PRAYER

Overflowing God, breathe the spirt of Jesus into me and into all those who long for peace, especially those who have drifted from your way, got stuck in their faith, or who have not yet found a way to believe. You believe in them. Renew them by your Spirt. And today may your Church be filled with joy.

Thomas said to him,
"Lord, we do not know where you are going.
How can we know the way?"
Jesus said to him,
I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.

(John 14. 5–6)

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.

(Psalm 42. 11)

The other side of words

When we do come to God. Or when we return to God. Or when we receive Holy Communion and hold that broken piece of bread in our hands. Or when we hear a passage from scripture that moves us. Or when we see in each other a love that holds and sustains us. And when we know we are loved, the only real response is silence.

There is a place beyond words, where the heart rests in peace, in the knowledge of being known and loved.

Not all of us experience such love in our lives. Some of us have been very damaged by life's injustices. But the love we receive from Jesus, the love that is from God, is secure. It is waiting for us the other side of words. We only need to turn.

PRAYER

Loving God, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. Hold me, for the storms are raging and the waves crash over. Be my rest and my security. And even though human touch and human love is so beautiful and so longed for, help me to know today that it comes from you and, like everything that is good and beautiful, will return to you in the silence of your eternal and never changing love. Be with me as I hold myself and hold others in your embrace.

God's love was revealed among
us in this way: God sent his only
Son into the world so that we
might live through him.
In this is love, not that we loved God
but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.
Beloved, since God loved us so much,
we also ought to love one another.
(1 John 4. 9-11)

The way of abundant joy

In Christian worship there is lots of praise. Christians often tell God how brilliant God is. What sort of God needs this, is often the response from those who are new to the Christian faith? God must be very insecure, they think.

But we don't praise God because God needs it. We do it because we need it. When we praise God we put ourselves in perspective. We acknowledge that God is the source and origin of everything, even the breath that we're taking right now. Without God, there is nothing.

There is no one who doesn't need to know that.

The way of life which is the way of Jesus Christ is a way of abundant, appreciative joy. Even in the darkest hours, we believe in the light, we praise him. And from the perspective of his light pray for others.

PRAYER

Faithful God, help me to understand myself, so that even in the most difficult times I may know your presence with me and may sing your praises, defiantly praising your goodness even when there is so much that is wrong. And today, help me show others the good things I receive in Christ and show the world His way.

Expanding the heart

When we stood outside on Thursday evenings in the summer of 2020 cheering the NHS, did we realise how much it would change us? By giving thanks, by praising, we learnt to put the needs of others before our own. We discovered a deep appreciation for those who put their lives at risk to serve us.

Thanksgiving expands the heart. We cheered other key workers as well. And who would have thought that the person stacking the supermarket shelves was an essential worker? We learnt that we belong to each other: that my well-being is tied up with everyone's well-being; that Covid-19 won't be dealt with anywhere, until it is dealt with everywhere. This is also the way of Jesus, where we learn that we are sisters and brothers, children of one God.

Let us pray that the people we know, and the whole world, may find the way of Christ.

PRAYER

Generous God, fill my heart with thanksgiving for all the blessing I receive in life. Expand my heart, and help me love, support and cherish those who serve me. And today help me to live as sister or brother to all whom I meet.

The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break,
is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread,
we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.
(1 Corinthians 10. 16–17)

Give us our daily bread

On the night before he died, Jesus had a meal with his friends. Breaking bread and sharing wine, he said they were his body and blood. He was giving them a way of understanding what his death and resurrection would mean. He was also giving us, for all time, a way of being nourished by his risen life.

It's hard to be a Christian on your own. You cut yourself off from this food and drink. And because faith is not a private thing, but a way of life lived in community, then we need to nurture this life in celebration with each other. This is what the church is: the bunch of men and women who know how much they need each other and need God. Join us. We need you.

PRAYER

Bountiful God, feed me with the bread of heaven, and give me today the things I need for today and save me from wanting more than my share. There are so many people who are hungry for love and thirsting for peace. Help me to help others find their place at your table.

Let the peace of Christ
rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were
called in the one body.
And be thankful.

(COLOSSIANS 3:15)

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.

(Hosea 6.3)

Ambassadors for Love

The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is love. We are most like Jesus when we love and adore each other, and when we love and adore the world.

Love is not just romantic love. It is the complete self-giving that we see in Jesus. This is the love the world needs if we are to navigate a way though the huge challenges we face.

Following Jesus, returning to the life of his Church, means being part of this great love affair. We become God's agents of change, God's ambassadors for love in the world.

However small or fragile your faith is, most of us have strong feelings of love. They are from God. Use this love to change the world. One heart at a time.

PRAYER

Quickening God, fan the embers of my little faith. Help me see that the love I feel for those I love is from you. It shows me that you are real, that you are love itself. Be my friend. And today, draw me back into the fellowship of your church and help others, who also long for love and acceptance, to find it in Jesus, the one who lays down his life for his friends.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

(John 15. 12-14)

Turning around

Jesus begins his ministry with the word repent (see Mark 1.15) It means turn around. You're going in the wrong direction. Re-orientate your life.

The whole world needs to hear this message. Whether it is the way we treat each other or the way we treat the planet, we are going in the wrong direction. No one seriously disputes this. The world has to change. But who has the answers? Who do we follow?

Jesus says, follow me and you will be walking in the light (see John 8.12). Jesus gives us a way of inhabiting the world and living with each other that is, truly, the world's best hope.

It begins by turning around. By following him. The Christian faith is a way for everyone.

PRAYER

Steadfast God, redirect my life and redirect the life of the world. Help us to live in peace with each other and with the planet. And today help me to tread lightly on the earth, praying for others that we may all find for ourselves the way of being human that God shows us in Jesus. Give me the chance to start again. To turn around.

A new heaven and a new earth

The offer of the Christian faith is the offer of abundant life (see John 10.10). Not a life lived somewhere else, but this life lived to the full; this life lived in the way God intends.

Some people have never really heard this offer. They thought the Christian faith was just a private thing with God, a way of getting to heaven. But God doesn't just promise life after death, but heaven come down to earth, a better and more fulfilled life now. It starts by turning around. We see ourselves in right relationship with God. That God is the source of life. That we are the ones who have received the gift of life. Acknowledging this, our hearts overflow with thanksgiving. We start to live differently. We follow the way of Jesus. We pray that this way of life will be found by everyone.

PRAYER

Generous God, pour your abundant life into my heart. Help me to live differently. And today may others see and receive this offer of life through me.

Jesus said, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

(John 14. 25-26)

Send your Holy Spirit

In order to live the way of life we see in Jesus, we need help. We can't do it on our own. We can't manage in our own strength. Who can we help today by our prayers and example?

As the Church waits to celebrate the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, let's remember that Jesus calls the Spirit 'helper'.

God knows we can't manage on our own. Of course we can't. After all, we are made for community with God and with each other. Jesus makes this possible by uniting our humanity with God in his own person. The Spirit is the spirit of Jesus, helping us become like Jesus and uniting us to God. All we need to do is let go of the pride that puts self first and cuts us off from God, and in the end from everyone else as well.

PRAYER

Overcoming God, make me new in the Spirit of Jesus so that I can truly become the person I am meant to be. And today may your Spirt help me help others, especially those who have drifted from your way, or who find it impossible to believe, or who are trapped by fear and guilt. Set me free, God. Set me free to be myself. Free to help others.

Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favour and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

(Proverbs 3.3–6)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone.

(1 Timothy 2.1)

Day 6: Pray for

Make your life a prayer

What then should we pray for?

Paul sets the bar of expectation very high. We should pray for everyone. We should pray all the time.

I see it this way. Make your life a prayer. Make your life an offering. Ask God that your life and your prayers, your words and your actions, might make a difference in the world. To follow in the way of Jesus means living a Jesus shaped life, so that all the good things that we see in him can also be seen in us, at least in part.

In this way our following Jesus is more than attending services, or even believing certain things. It is a way of life. A way that makes a difference for us and for the world.

PRAYER

Transforming God, make me more like Jesus. And because I know my life is not like that, show me Jesus today. And change my prayer from asking things for myself to asking you what you would like for me, so that my life can be part of your story. And help me to pray for others, that they may know Christ for themselves.