

A Caring Trust

God of all the Earth, be present with me now, in my home, as I connect together with you and my neighbour. Build us into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to you through Jesus Christ, my risen redeemer and healer.

The Song, from the Church Hymnary 4, number 189 written by David J Evans (b 1957)

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The holy one is here
Come bow before him now
With 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 to hard for him
In faith receive from him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place



How many times have you washed your hands today? Today as you approach this prayer of confession and absolution, be mindful of the ritual significance of hand washing in the Bible. Hand washing in Scripture is closely associated with innocence and cleansing from sin. (See Exodus 30:17-21, Psalm 26:6, Job 9:30, Matthew 27:24, James 4:8 to mention a few.)

You may wish to bring a bowl of water, some soap and a towel and then join in this prayer: So let's pray.

As I turn on the tap, I turn my heart towards you, O God. As I wet my hands, renew my thoughts, so I might be transformed. As I lather soap between my fingers and over all my hands, purge from me all that brings me harm and might harm others. Remove the invisible guilt and shame that so often keeps me from you. As I rinse my hands, I trust in your overflowing grace, making all things new. Amen.

Reading - Psalm 31 (from the NIV)

- ¹ In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.
- ² Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.
- ³ Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- ⁴ Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.
- ⁵ Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.

⁶ I hate those who cling to worthless idols; as for me, I trust in the LORD.

⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.

⁸ You have not given me into the hands of the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

⁹ Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.

¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

¹¹ Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbours and an object of dread to my closest friends - those who see me on the street flee from me.

¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.

¹³ For I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side!" They conspire against me and plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God."

¹⁵ My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.

¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unflinching love.

¹⁷ Let me not be put to shame, LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and be silent in the realm of the dead.

¹⁸ Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

¹⁹ How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you.

²⁰ In the shelter of your presence you hide them from all human intrigues; you keep them safe in your dwelling from accusing tongues.

²¹ Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.

²² In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.

²³ Love the LORD, all his faithful people! The LORD preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full.

²⁴ Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.



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One evening, a nurse, while administering medication to an elderly lady told of the following exchange that took place between them. "Hi, I have your medication for you." Said the nurse. "Oh, okay." Replied the lady.

"I'm going to give you some Pepcid for your stomach, but I'm putting it in your IV." The nurse told her. The old lady looked a bit perplexed, but replied, "Okay. Uhhmm...I have a question."

"Oh, what's your question?" said the nurse. "Well, I hope you don't mind me asking", said the lady "but I was just wondering...why Pepsi and not Coke?"

As you may well know Tuesday 12th May was a significant day. The World Health Organisation (WHO) designated 2020 as International Year of the Nurse to mark the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth, in 1820.

The annual event, which was first marked in 1965, was created by the International Council of Nurses to mark the hard work of nursing staff around the world, and since January 1974, the global celebrations are traditionally held on 12th May the birthday of nursing pioneer Florence Nightingale.

During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale was known for carrying a lamp at night around the wards to visit wounded soldiers. (Picture next to the reading) The soldiers would see her lamp and feel that they had been given hope for survival. The Lamp has since become an international symbol of nursing.

Florence Nightingale believed she was called to aid the poor - a calling that ignited her commitment to train nurses and work for reform for the poor. She frequently referenced Luke 1:38 to summarize her calling: "it is such a blessing to have been called, however unworthy, to be the handmaid of the Lord."



Each year a service is held in Westminster Abbey in London. Central to the memorial service is the Lamp which was given to the Foundation by Sir Dan Mason OBE in 1968 in memory of his mother Kathleen Dampier-Bennett, a Trustee and supporter of the Foundation. The Lamp is housed within the Florence Nightingale Chapel at Westminster Abbey and it was agreed the Lamp will be processed by a Florence Nightingale Foundation scholar, signifying the knowledge of nursing and during the ceremony the Lamp is handed from one nurse to another signifying the transfer of knowledge to future generations, before being given to the Dean, who places it on the High Altar.

The Chelsea pensioners process in memory of, and in gratitude to, Florence Nightingale for her care of the troops, who were their predecessors, during the Crimean Campaign.

The final procession is of the Nurses' Roll of Honour, compiled by the British Commonwealth Nurses War Memorial Fund and is also kept in the Florence Nightingale Chapel at the Abbey. It is carried to honour those killed in conflict and to underpin the links with military nursing and nurses who have lost their lives in the service of others.

The celebration this year was to be "extra special" because 2020 has been designated the Year of the Nurse and Midwife and suddenly an unprepared and added poignancy arose making International Day of the Nurse special because of the extraordinary work all those who have followed in Florence's footsteps are doing in the fight against coronavirus. Nurses around the world have been vital to treating the sick and lifting spirits during the pandemic.

The battle against the deadly bug saw new NHS Nightingale Hospitals spring up across the country, named after the Lady with the Lamp. An image to remember the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, as well as a message of thanks, was projected on to her place of work, London's St Thomas's Hospital, from parliament.



On this remarkable day and year, it is right we all thank the incredible nurses and carers who are on the frontline in the battle against the greatest health emergency in NHS history. Their professionalism and skills are helping to save and rebuild countless lives, said the Chief Nursing Officer for England, Ruth May. She added, nursing is a challenging but hugely rewarding career and urged anyone inspired by their example to sign up to join us and become a nurse. The BBC news reported a large number of enquiries have come in recent weeks from [people wishing to join the profession. It has also been hugely important that our Nurses, carers and doctors are appreciated and the public's support has buoyed them during this testing time, as we in our cities, towns, villages and communities have gathered on Thursday evenings at 8 p.m. to "*Clap for NHS and Carers*".

Turning to the Old Testament book of psalms, for many with faith, the psalms have taken on even greater meaning in these exceptional days of the coronavirus global pandemic. Our scripture text today is Psalm 31 and while the context in which the psalm is written may not be the same as our circumstances, it expresses many of the honest emotions of grief and lament that many of us are currently experiencing. Verse 24 alone is one that many may find helpful to meditate on in these days when we wait on the Lord for the strength and courage that we otherwise find difficult to summon.

The psalmist prays, as we do now, for the refuge and fortress of God to protect us and for deliverance from that which is hidden and invisible to us but would threaten our very lives (verses 3 and 4). While written as an individual's prayer, the psalmist inspires our collective prayer for the global community: God, incline your ear to us; rescue us speedily. Be a rock of refuge for us, a strong fortress to save us. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

In these days of isolation, when we have had to retreat to the fortress of our own homes, may we gain a new understanding of God as our fortress, the place of security and safety we turn to in this time of trial. God is not a fortress that barricades but strengthens and reinforces, enabling us to look out for our most vulnerable neighbours, near and far – albeit virtually or from a safe distance.

There is something refreshingly honest about these prayers of lament which tell God how things really are, and this shows that God is interested in our physical suffering and our bodily wellbeing. That's important to remember today. The description of the psalmist's symptoms is very resonant with our contemporary experience.

Jesus too, turned to the psalms for strength and courage when enduring suffering. The 5th verse of Psalm 31, is that Jesus quotes on the cross: 'into your hand I commit my spirit'. This verse takes on particular poignancy as we face the reality that coronavirus has and will lead to the end of life for many of our neighbours, near and far. It is into the hands of God that we entrust them to his eternal keeping.

How we view our neighbours in these threatening times is brought into sharp focus in verse 11. Some have found it easy to 'other' distant neighbours who were thought to be carriers of the virus, holding them in contempt rather than compassion. Others have found themselves judging closer neighbours who panic bought important goods, while failing to understand the fear that motivated them. When the virus reached the UK, some of us became an 'object of dread' for even our closest friends – maybe even an object of dread for ourselves as we feared meeting others and infecting them.

Thus we find ourselves at the second significant moment in this month and at the end of what is 2020's Christian Aid Week, which has always been about how we can be good global neighbours. Asking ourselves how we can extend the love that never fails to our neighbours near and far has never been more important than it is this year.

When our own hands and the hands of others have become something of a threat, and when many are no longer experiencing the reassuring touch of a hand on a shoulder, or no longer being comforted by the embrace of a hug, the references to hands in verses 5, 8 and 15 are also particularly poignant. It feels particularly apt to pray, with the trust of the psalmist, that our times are in God's hands and also for deliverance from hands that might harm us, including our own.

This absence of touch was also a great challenge for communities in Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak of 2014. The cultural practice of washing the bodies of the deceased was banned and made the process of saying goodbye to loved ones even more heart wrenching and painful.

As we wash our hands more carefully and more often, we can pray to God to hold in his care all those we have held hands with, carried and hugged. We can also pray for those who we have never had the opportunity to physically embrace, but who we have reached out to with generous hands, giving what we could through our envelopes during many previous Christian Aid Weeks.

Christian Aid are incredibly grateful to all who have delivered and collected Christian Aid Week envelopes by hand over these more than 60 years, and for all the hands that have made soup for church lunches, poured cups of tea and coffee, made toast for Big Brekkies, put up posters and bunting advertising events, sorted books and art for sale, and of course counted and returned the money collected. Thank God for the hands that have put love into action.

The world's poorest people are the most vulnerable to this crisis. They are less resilient, have less access to healthcare and will be less able to weather the economic impact. Christian Aid have been standing alongside them for the past 75 years and will continue to stand with them through this crisis and will be with them afterwards. So with thanksgiving to God, we pray for the hands of all those working on the medical frontline now to help save lives, in Britain and around the world. May their times be in God's hands, may God's face shine upon them. May the unfailing, steadfast love of God be their constant strength (verse 16).

Last week our reading came from John 14:1-14 and when we read further in this chapter, we find in verse 27, Jesus words, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." These comforting words of Jesus: 'do not let your hearts be troubled' are spoken to the disciples who have good reason to have troubled hearts. Jesus says these words at the last supper, just after he has washed their feet with his own hands. Right in the middle of the last supper, Jesus encourages the disciples to ask him for anything and he'll do it. He repeats his offer 'that he will do whatever you ask in his name'. These are hard words to reconcile with the prayers that have seemingly gone unanswered in these difficult days. They may have been difficult for the disciples to accept in the events that were to follow in the days to come. These are the words Jesus wants his disciples, his followers, to remember when he's no longer with them. He wants them to come to him, as he does the Father, with every cause, concern and request, even if they can no longer see him or be with him in person. These are words of hope and promise of connection for us all and always, but particularly in these days when we are so separate, but never alone. These are words of comfort offered for unsettling times and are worth meditating on in these challenging times today and ahead.

**Prayer:** Join now in a time of prayer that allows for some interaction with your hands – let's pray:

God our refuge, I come to you with open hands, with a heart full of questions, and I know there are many bruised by bereavement, fearful of what the future holds, stunned by the events of this year.

Draw close to me and all in each home today as I place my honest questions and hopes into your open, resurrected, yet scarred hands.

With the honesty of the psalmist, the wrestling questions of Job, and the lament of the prophets, I bring to you my questions or our silence.

*(Hold your index finger and, in silence, ask the question that most burdens your heart or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)*

Hear the cry of my heart, Lord, silent and aloud, for bereaved neighbours, near and far. Comfort those pained by being absent, and hold close those who are hurting alone.

*(Hold your ring finger and pray for comfort for those you know who are bereaved or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)*

In this season of Easter, renew me with resurrection hope that while weeping lingers in this night, joy will come with the morning.

*(Hold your middle finger and in the silence tell God what you are most looking forward to in the future or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)*

At the end of Christian Aid Week, I pray for and with communities across the world who are most vulnerable to coronavirus. I pray for people living in refugee camps and city slums, with limited sanitation facilities, who are unable to wash their hands regularly, and have little opportunity to isolate from others. I pray for Christian Aid partners working to provide soap and buckets, communicating clear, accurate information, raising the voices of the most vulnerable and ensuring they are kept as safe as possible.

*(Hold your thumb as you pray for the most vulnerable, those closest to God's heart, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)*

For those like me, who are self-isolating, which can sometimes feel like we aren't doing anything, remind me that I am all doing my part, and saving lives by staying at home.

*(Hold your little finger and ask God for what you need, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)*

Restoring and healing God, thank you for nurses, carers and medical workers everywhere, embodying sacrificial love in these challenging times putting the welfare of others before their own staying away from their family and loved ones comforting the concerned and bereaved, reassuring the anxious and vulnerable, working to heal and restore people who are ill. Be their guide, strength, wisdom and hope.

I pray for much wisdom and resources for those in local and national authority that they would do right for all frontline and key workers here in Britain and across the world and where resources and protective equipment are always in short supply, not only now but always. May these extraordinary times lead to deep and necessary changes in how our world works, resulting in a genuine effort to address the profound injustice of life expectancy being determined by geography, to awaken us all to the reality of how connected we all are and to work together to create the community and world we all want to be part of. So help us, God,



(Put your hands together and pray for the many frontline workers and volunteers and for Christian Aid partners working to help others across the world, or simply sit in silence before God. Hold the silence together.)

I offer to you God the nurses prayer, give me strength and wisdom, when others need my touch; a soothing word to speak to them, their hearts yearn for so much. Give me joy and laughter, to lift a weary soul; pour in me compassion, to make the broken whole. Give me gentle, healing hands, for those left in my care; a blessing to those who need me.

I remember the work of Florence Nightingale as I commemorate her birth 200 years ago and I pray for all our nurses, carers and health worker today, thanking you for their dedication to be met with much gratitude when they return home, exhausted. As I have clapped to honour them, I clap my hands now in praise of your glorious creation, and with the hope that the first shoots of another possible world are coming into view.



*(Clap your hands in praise of God's glorious creation and with the hope of new possibilities for the world.)*

God in your mercy, hear all my prayer in the word Jesus taught me to say; Our Father .... Amen.

**Hymn** from Church Hymnary 3, number 680 written by William Freeman Lloyd (1791-1853)

My times are in thy hand;  
my God, I wish them there;  
my life, my friends, my soul, I leave  
entirely to thy care.

My times are in thy hand,  
whatever they may be;  
pleasing or painful, dark or bright,  
as best may seem to thee.

My times are in thy hand;  
why should I doubt or fear?  
My Father's hand will never cause  
his child a needless tear.

My times are in thy hand,  
Jesus the Crucified;  
those hands my cruel sins had pierced  
are now my guard and guide.

My times are in thy hand,  
I'll always trust in thee;  
And, after death, at thy right hand  
I shall forever be.

If you wish to make a donation to Christian Aid, you can do so online at [www.caweek.org/payin](http://www.caweek.org/payin)

### **Blessing**

As I go now and wash my hands again, I say this blessing:

May the presence of the Creator refresh me, may the comfort of the Son renew me, may the inspiration of the Spirit restore me to be love in action, even from a distance, in my neighbourhood, near and far, this day and for evermore. Amen.