

**Sunday 7 March 2021**

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### **Opening Prayer**

God, whose temple is the whole creation,  
we praise you for the signs of spring:  
crocuses breaking through the cold earth,  
early morning sunshine through the clouds,  
days lengthening.  
We praise you that earth tells us of your presence.  
God, whose temple is found in community,  
we praise you for the people around us:  
our families and friends,  
the neighbours we'd like to know more,  
the strangers who surprise us with kindness.  
We praise you that we look at others and glimpse you.  
God, whose temple is written into our bodies,  
we praise you for our human bodies, and we praise you that our bodies  
are a temple of your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

**Hymn: [Love divine, all loves excelling](#) (StF 503)**

Let us pray together

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are wisdom in our world; you flow through creation and consciousness.  
Our attempts to house you in bricks and mortar are foolish. Come to us as we gather here within this church made to honour you, and lift the stones from our hearts, so that we may be your Church in word and in deed. Amen

**Today's Gospel Reading: [John 2: 13-22](#)**

### **Time to Reflect**

When I am writing we are in the middle of a lockdown. Many of our church buildings are closed for public worship, though a few are open. We have had to get used to worshipping in our homes, using You Tube videos or Zoom video meetings, or through worship sheets like this one, or a mixture of all three and perhaps other possibilities. Many will miss the architecture and the atmosphere of their building, or the fellowship and bustle and chatter before and after services. Some people have been deprived of that for nearly a year. This causes us to ask what makes a church?

In the story we just read, Jesus was forcing people to face the same question. Traditionally there was only one "house of God" for the Jews - the Temple. That was where God dwelt. There is very little archaeological evidence of synagogue buildings in and before Jesus' time - some scholars would say

there was none. There is evidence in Jewish writings that synagogue meetings happened in this period, but not perhaps in dedicated buildings. The house of God was the Temple. And, as you may imagine if there is only one house of God it becomes even more special. And here Jesus is, wading into this holy place, clearing it out and laying down rules as to who can do what there! What right had he? Jesus would appear to be claiming to be the “messenger of the covenant” whom God promised to send to his Temple in Malachi 3: 1-4, who would purify not only the Temple, but God’s people - starting with the religious officials! But then he gets even more radical. When he says “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days”, he is essentially saying God is not living in the Temple Herod built, but in his own body. He is the real temple, the real house of God.

Do we tend to get too attached to our local building? Sometimes churches are called Bethel, which is Hebrew for “house of God”, and sometimes we think God dwells there and we feel we cannot worship him anywhere else. Jesus challenges that way of thinking. He is the one above all in whom God dwells. In him God became flesh and dwelt among us. And it is in drawing closer to Jesus in a personal relationship that we enter God’s house and offer him the worship he truly seeks. And we can do that anywhere - in our kitchen as much as in St. Paul’s Cathedral, or in our local chapel. Draw close to Jesus, and he will draw us close to the Father and the Spirit, so we can worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Take a time to sit quietly

### **A time of prayer**

In the name of the one who came to cleanse the Temple, we pray for the institutions by which we organise our society: for churches and chapels and house groups; for educational establishments; for places of healing, law and order, commerce and recreation.

May they serve the greater good,  
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to redeem the world, we pray for those institutions by which we regulate global relations: for governments and rulers, democracies, monarchies and dictatorships; for bodies that regulate trade, diplomacy and the balance of peace; for environmental, development and welfare organisations.

May they serve the greater good,  
and adapt to the changing needs of the time.

In the name of the one who came to save us from ourselves, we pray for those institutions we have in our lives: for our friends, families and colleagues; for our local communities; for the church communities to which we belong.

May they serve the greater good,  
and adapt to the changing needs of the time. Amen.

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

*Our Father .....*

**Hymn: [King of Kings, Majesty](#)**

### **A prayer of blessing**

The almighty and merciful Lord,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
bless us and keep us, now and always. Amen.

Original Materials by John E Staton

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