

## Mothers' Union Thursday Prayers, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

### Zoom Contact details:

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### Serving Others

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Welcome everyone to our Thursday prayers here in the Cathedral and those joining from home via the internet.

St Paul writes to the people of Ephesus 'Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's Gift. **Amen**

We say together the Mothers' Union Prayer

**Loving Lord,**

**We thank you for your love so freely given to us all**

**We pray for families around the world.**

**Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life.**

**Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world.**

**In Jesus' name . Amen**

Prayer of the month

Thank you, Lord, that as we reach out in service, you are at the heart of our endeavours. Thank you that when our support fails, you uphold; when our arms grow weary, you sustain; when our love wavers, you stay constant. May we serve with the love of Christ and bring comfort that comes from God. May we share burdens through the power of Christ and bring strength that comes from God. May we view others through the eyes of Christ and show compassion that comes from

God. May we respond with the forbearance of Christ and show grace that comes from God.  
Amen

The Reading Today is taken from the First letter of Paul to the people of Corinth

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

*1 Corinthians 9.24-27*

Reflection

The focus for the prayers today is 'Serving Others'. What does that suggest to you? Does serving make you a servant? Are you happy with that connotation of one serving another. The prayer for today gives several examples if you happen to be stuck for an idea how best to serve the other person. Christians are called by God to be there for each other, whenever the need arises. The commandment to 'Love your neighbour' covers all eventualities suggested in the prayer. Having acknowledged that God is there in all we do and seek assurance for his strength, being in the right place at the right time should it all go horribly wrong.

Then a request, reminding us as we pray how God can be there as we serve that one true God in love, bringing comfort, sharing the burden through Jesus and the strength he brings, to see others as our Lord sees them, with compassion that can only come through the grace of God and his gift alone.

So that's the challenge, as much as the one St Paul lays down to the folk in Corinth. He does so at the end of a lengthy speech with the illustration of athletes running a race. Only one will receive a prize and at that time, the prize of a garland of laurel would soon be fit only for the compost bin. Better still says Paul, God gives an imperishable gift of love by grace; this is the reward for service. How does this play out in our lives? God calls us and we respond. For me the call to ordination wasn't as obvious to as it might have been to others. My sense was to serve in the choir, PCC secretary, Synod rep, co-leading Confirmation classes and odd job man. Changing light bulbs, vacuum cleaner belts and leading bible study groups. And fit most of that around family and a career in the Royal Air Force.

All that had to be laid to one side when the recommendation of training as an ordinand in Durham came from Archbishop David. At Cranmer Hall there was an emphasis on the call to being a Deacon, a servant exemplified in Acts chapter 6. The apostles addressed the perceived problem of neglecting the word of God whilst attending to the needs of the community and waiting at table for mealtimes.

My experience at Cranmer was something bordering on the bizarre at breakfast. Following on from Morning Prayer, staff and students would make their way to the dining room, standing for grace then offers to get cereals, toast, porridge, or the cooked items of the day. All wanted to serve the other such that it was quite uncomfortable to be served. The question in my mind, and lingers with me to this day, for servants to be effective there must be people to be served.

The lesson learned for me was to offer to help in all sorts of ways; but trying to oust the Mothers' Union from the kitchen and sink to do the washing up was a challenge too far.

The word serve/service occurs many times in the New Testament, usually in part of Jesus teaching. Martha served whilst Mary prayed. Choices had to be made between serving God and money. And no servant can serve two masters (Lk16.13)

However we may view being a servant and serving others, as we approach Ash Wednesday and begin our annual walk beside Jesus to Jerusalem it is to him I should leave the last word. The disciples had been arguing among themselves (Lk22.24ff). The usual stuff about who was regarded as the greatest. 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and are called benefactors.' But this isn't the way Team Jesus should behave. He leaves them pondering that the greatest must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. Then an open question 'who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Jesus reminds them he is there as one who serves. Ordinands mull over that question on a daily basis.

#### Time for prayer

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

In our Intercessions today we pray for –

The Worldwide work of the Mothers' Union and our worldwide president Sheran Harper, our chief executive Bev Julian and all who work in Mary Sumner House. Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President. For our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees and all task group leaders and MU members and all Clergy within the Diocese of Ely.

Worldwide Links of the Mothers' Union we pray for:

Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; plus diocese to diocese with Kigali and Velore.

In the Wave of Prayer for:

Bentui in South Sudan; Bunyoro Kitara in Uganda; Okigwe-North & Omu-Aran in Nigeria; Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh in All Ireland and Krishna-Godavari in India.

Praying in confidence as Jesus taught his disciples to say:-

**Our Father Who art in Heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come;  
Thy will be done;  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us,  
And lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
The power and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen**

We are a pilgrim people and our destiny is Heaven, as we travel towards the light of Christ, may we encourage one another through life's rough seas and stone filled paths.

**All Stand for our Hymn, please join in at home:**

Over the centuries poets and hymn writers have explored the nature of service and servant hood.

Charles Wesley in his extensive output of hymns explored every aspect of faith, left us Ye servants of God your master proclaim. A contemporary non-conformist (Wesley still an Anglican) Philip Dodderidge penned 'Ye servants of the Lord, each for his coming wait'. More recently well the 1980s 'From heaven you came helpless babe' by Graham Kendrick and Richard Gillard composed a delightful hymn 'Brother Sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you'. But locked in the mists of time, the words of Simeon we know as the Nunc Dimittis have been set to chants and musical settings to be sung at Evensong, here in this very place every day of the year.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace :  
according to thy word.  
For mine eyes have seen :  
thy salvation;  
Which thou hast prepared :  
before the face of all people;  
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles :  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel

Bishop Timothy Dudley Smith, adapted the words from St Luke to give us a simple yet thoughtful hymn Faithful Vigil ended. Our hymn for this morning.

**Faithful vigil ended,  
watching, waiting cease;  
Master, grant your servant  
his discharge in peace.**

**All the Spirit promised,  
all the Father willed,  
now these eyes behold it  
perfectly fulfilled.**

**This your great deliverance  
sets your people free;  
Christ their light uplifted  
all the nations see.**

**Christ, your people's glory!  
Watching, doubting cease:  
grant to us your servants  
our discharge in peace** (words Timothy Dudley Smith 1926-)

Closing Prayers

Go now and know that the Lord walks before you. Let him lead you each day into the quiet place of your heart, where he will speak with you. Know that he loves you and watches over you. Know that he listens to you in gentle understanding. Know that he is always with you leading the way. In hope and trust with the living God. Amen

The prayer of Mary Sumner:

**All this day O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee, and every life I touch, do thou by thy spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe or the life I live. Amen**

Seeking God's blessing on our work today, as we step forth from this place, give us the Grace to be authentic witnesses to your love by our lives and proclaim you on our lips with joy. Help us to walk in newness of life with your blessings upon us, this we ask of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen**

We bid farewell until we meet again in this place or in our homes as we say the **Grace together:**

**May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more. Amen**