

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024

Go and do likewise



Dos, a gwna dithau yr un modd
Imigh leat, agus déan féin mar an gcéanna
Imich thusa, agus déan mar an ceudna

18-25 January 2024


churches
together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND[®]

www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer

Welcome

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known passages of Scripture, yet one that never seems to lose its power to challenge indifference to suffering and to inspire solidarity. It is a story about crossing boundaries that calls our attention to the bonds that unite the whole human family.

In choosing this passage of Scripture for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the churches of Burkina Faso have invited us to join with them in a process of self-reflection as they consider what it means to love our neighbour in the midst of a security crisis. Communities in the British-Irish context may be less vulnerable to acts of mass violence than in Burkina Faso, but there are still many living with the memory and/or the threat of serious violence, centred on issues of identity and belonging. There are also groups within communities, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people seeking asylum, who feel particularly vulnerable to violence or being displaced by the threat of violence.

'Who is
my
neighbour?'

Our neighbours in Burkina Faso call us to reconnect to God's dream for us – a dream of a unity formed of ties of love and compassion. This challenges us not only to reflect on the learning from our ecumenical journey so far, but to widen our vision. What can we learn from people of other faiths, from those whose backgrounds are most different from our own, and what do we need from each other?

The reflections encourage us to consider the perspective not only of the

one who showed mercy, but also of those who passed by. Many of us will have been unaware of the threat faced by communities in Burkina Faso before reading this material. It is a powerful reminder of the many neglected conflicts that continue to destroy lives and devastate communities around the world, when only a limited number can capture, and fewer still can hold, the attention of the world's media. The Church is called to be an advocate for those caught in these forgotten conflicts, and to amplify the voices of those who feel forsaken.

In this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Church is being challenged to stop and tend to the wounded and, in so doing, to recognise our own wounds as churches and as communities. Facing the reality of our own brokenness helps to connect us to the suffering of others from a place of humility and deep empathy, creating a sacred space of encounter inspired by Christ's healing love.

**Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary,
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

Introduction to the theme

The materials for the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were prepared by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community (CCN)¹. The chosen theme is "You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27). Brothers and sisters from the Catholic Archdiocese of Ouagadougou, Protestant Churches, ecumenical bodies and the CCN in Burkina Faso collaborated generously in drafting the prayers and reflections. They experienced their work together as a real path of ecumenical conversion.

Loving God and neighbour in the midst of a security crisis

Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa, which extends into the neighbouring countries of Mali and Niger. It covers 174,000 km² and has 21 million inhabitants, of about 60 ethnicities. Approximately 64% of the population is Muslim, 9% adheres to traditional African religions

and 26% is Christian (20% Catholic, 6% Protestant). These three religious groups are represented in every region of the country, and in virtually every family.

Burkina Faso is currently experiencing a serious security crisis, which affects all faith communities. After a major jihadist attack was mounted from outside the country in 2016, the security situation in Burkina Faso, and consequently its social cohesion, deteriorated dramatically. The country has endured a proliferation of terrorist attacks, lawlessness

and human trafficking. This has left over 3,000 people dead and almost two million internally displaced. Thousands of schools, health centres and town halls have been closed, and much of the socio-economic and transport infrastructure has been destroyed. Attacks targeting specific ethnic groups exacerbate the risk of inter-communal conflicts. In the context of this dire threat to security, social cohesion, peace and national unity are being undermined.

Love is
patient;
love is
kind

Christian churches have been specifically targeted by armed attacks. Priests, pastors and catechists have been killed during

worship and the fate of others who were kidnapped remains unknown. At the time of writing, more than 22% of the national territory is outside the control of the state and Christians can no longer openly practise their faith in these areas. Because of terrorism, the majority of Christian churches in the north, east and north-west of the country have been closed. There is no longer any public Christian worship in many of these areas, but where worship is still possible, with police protection, usually in large cities, services have to be shortened owing to security concerns.

Despite the efforts of both the state and religious communities, the country is becoming increasingly unstable as extremist groups become more widespread. Nevertheless, a degree of solidarity is emerging between the Christian, Muslim and traditional religions. Their leaders are working to find lasting solutions for peace, social cohesion and reconciliation. To this end, for instance, the Christian-Muslim Dialogue Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Burkina-Niger is making a major effort to support inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation.

Following the Government's calls for prayers for peace, social cohesion and reconciliation, individual churches continue to organise daily prayers and fasting. Action by the various Catholic and Protestant churches has intensified to assist displaced persons. Reflection and awareness-raising meetings have been organized to promote better understanding of the situation and of the value of fraternity, and to develop strategies for a return to lasting peace. This hope is also reflected in the traditional Mossi ² proverb: "Regardless of the nature or duration of the fight, the moment of reconciliation will come."

Faith,
Hope,
Love

The invitation to work together on the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 challenged the different churches in Burkina Faso to walk, pray and work together in mutual love during this difficult period for their country. The love of Christ that unites all Christians is stronger than their divisions and the Christians of Burkina Faso commit themselves to walking the path of love of God and love of neighbour. They are confident that God's love will overcome the violence that currently afflicts their country.

For footnotes ¹ and ² please see Appendix on page 25.

DAY 1

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25)

Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you

Additional scripture passages

Romans 14:8-9

Psalm 103:13-18

Commentary

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: “... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing the will of God in our lives. God’s dream for us (cf. Jn 10:10) finds powerful expression in the words of Saint Irenaeus: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive”.

Violence, greed and exploitation distance us from one another and from Jesus as “the Way” that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny. Speaking from a society that has been torn apart and traumatised by violence and identity-based conflict for the last eight years, the churches of Burkina Faso offer us a

message of hope in the promise of Christ’s all-embracing love.

Reflection

The reality of life in Burkina Faso may be very different from our own, but we can identify significant parallels in the challenges facing Christians in each context. Consider the following reflection offered by Church leaders in Ireland:

“In our approach to the past we have a moral responsibility to acknowledge the corrosive impact of violence and words that can lead to violence, and a duty of care to those still living with the trauma of its aftermath... Christ’s teaching, ministry and sacrifice were offered in the context of a society that was politically divided, wounded by conflict and injustice... In these encounters, as exemplified in the meeting with the Woman of Samaria (Jn 4:1-42), we see that Christ does not seek to minimise differences,

but rather to establish connection through gracious listening, replacing exclusion and shame with the hope of new beginnings.” (Church Leaders’ Ireland Group, *In Christ We Journey Together*, 17 March 2021)

Prayer

God of life,
You have created us to have life,
and life in all its fullness.
Help your wounded Church to be a
source of hope and healing.
As we follow Jesus’ way with
determination, may we lead
others to you.
We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions

Personal: How do you see God’s dream for you unfolding in your life?

Local: What might be weakening our witness as churches to God’s promise of abundant life?

Global: What more could faith communities be doing to build on their pastoral experience and global reach to further the work of peace and reconciliation?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Think of an example from the news that illustrates a society wounded by conflict. Research how Christian churches are responding. How can this be applied in your context?

Local: Consider sharing the theme from this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with members of other faith communities in your local area, reflecting on the connections between the local and global contexts. What more can your communities do to bring issues of global justice into our local inter-faith dialogue?

Global: Christians gathering to worship and witness in parts of Burkina Faso have been attacked and murdered, and the threat of violence continues to oppress and scatter that community. As we gather in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, pray for all those facing religious persecution in Burkina Faso and other parts of the world.

DAY 2

Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” (Lk 10:27)

Help me, Lord, to receive your love, that I may make you manifest in loving well, both myself and my neighbour.

Additional scripture passages

Deuteronomy 10:12-13
Psalm 133

Commentary

The answer Jesus draws out of the lawyer, from the well-known commandments of God, appears simple. However, the command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind will be a constant challenge, requiring a lifelong determination to learn, reflect and seek radical change in ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The instruction to love our neighbours “as ourselves” demands equal consideration. To love and value ourselves as God would wish demands intimate relationship. Is God saying that we cannot love our neighbour fully unless we love ourselves? It seems so, which is an immense challenge for so many of us. Do we recognise that we live in the glory of the love of God, whose compassionate gaze is always upon us. We are God’s beloved creation, made in God’s image, and adored.

God’s commandment to love, calls for deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God’s will. God’s grace to us is never ending. Ask, says God, and we will receive such grace to follow Christ’s example, the one who offered himself up completely and said, “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42) demonstrating great love to all humanity, including his enemies.

We do not get to choose our neighbours. Sometimes we must cross difficult barriers to serve them, rather than walking by. Loving means being attentive to their needs, accepting who they are, with humility, encouraging their hopes and aspirations. Christian unity demands the same humility – in Christ, we are one. Let’s learn to celebrate difference and glory in Christ’s unifying life, death and resurrection – inaugurating a new way of living available to all.

Reflection

Beloved, my heart is for you.
I created you, I know you.
Your name fills me with delight.
My every action, reaction,
thought, emotion
and prayer for you is founded
on love at its highest.
Receive my compassion,
bask in my gentleness,
delight in my joyful kindness.
Let me cherish you –
let me die for you –
may my heart become your heart.
A renewed heartbeat,
flowering within you,
unfolding its gentle,
love-soaked vision;
a courageous, unswerving hope
bursting with grace.
Dear one,
allow heaven to manifest
in every human encounter,
tenderising it
with love's dignity
and promise.

Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to know you
deeply,
in order to love you entirely.
May the gift of your Holy Spirit enable
our eyes, ears and minds to receive
the unconditional love with which
you love us.
Purify our hearts that we may always
be ready to love our neighbour,
however different, as ourselves.
Through the self-giving life of Christ
our Lord. Amen.

Questions

Personal: How do you see yourself?
How do you think God sees you?

Local: Does God's view of you
change your view of those around
you?

Global: How does God's view of you
change how you respond to the news?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Resolve to get to know a new person in your road and find a loving way to engage with them.

Local: Explore where you live and what opportunities there are to cross barriers to serve.

Global: Explore an issue regarding the displaced and dispossessed. How could you meaningfully contribute to the situation?

DAY 3

“Who is my neighbour?” (Lk 10:29)

Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see

Additional scripture passages

Romans 13:8-10

Psalm 119:57-63

Commentary

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our Church communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is nothing special. Jesus steers us towards a much more radical version of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as

he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbour?”, but “who was a neighbour to the man in need?”

Our times of insecurity and fear confront us with a reality where distrust and uncertainty come to the forefront of relationships. This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbour?

Reflection

The Lawyer’s Tale

I love God’s Law.

I dearly, dearly want to keep
the Law.

It’s the foundation of my life
and my eternity.

But I want to know how,
I want to do it right.

That’s why I asked
who it is that I should love as myself.

And he answered
with a tale about a strange
encounter,
an encounter of strangers.

And I will reflect
about the one who showed mercy.
And I bear the challenge
to be like that one,
to walk
in the outlaw's shadow.

Prayer

God of love,
who writes love in our hearts,
instil in us the courage to look
beyond ourselves
and see the neighbour in those
different from ourselves
and to be the unexpected neighbour,
that we may truly follow Jesus Christ
our brother and our friend,
who is Lord, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Questions

Personal: Why do you think the lawyer asked his first question?

Local: Who are the people who are excluded within your community and why?

Global: How can you, and your church or group of churches, be neighbours to people in other parts of the world with whom you have little or no contact?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Think of a person you have never really thought of as your neighbour. How can you be a neighbour to them in a practical way?

Local: Think of the church/congregation geographically nearest to your own with which you have little or no contact, and make contact!

Global: Take practical steps as a church or group of churches to be neighbours to the people of Burkina Faso.

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from 18th to 25th January (the octave of St Peter and St Paul). However, some groups choose other times of the year, particularly around Pentecost which is a symbolic date for the unity of the Church. Do make your own decision, taking local factors into account. To allow for use at any time in the year, the Days material uses the notation 1-8.

Order of service

The order of service in the centre of the pamphlet can be pulled out and photocopied if you wish. Alternatively, all resources can be downloaded from the CTBI website and you are welcome to further edit or adapt them for local use. Please acknowledge the source of material as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resources.

Christian unity wall

Please add details and photos of your events, prayers and messages of unity to the Christian unity 'wall' at weekofprayer.org by posting to Twitter using the #wpcuwall hashtag. Posts appear automatically (after a slight delay).

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Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024

Order of Worship



Jesus prayed that we may all be one. Christians gather annually to pray that this be realised. Each year Christians from a different part of the world choose a theme and offer prayers and reflections that speak from their context. This year the form of our prayers is the gift of the churches of the West African nation of Burkina Faso. This service should begin with refreshments as people arrive as a symbol of welcome and fellowship.

Gathering and Sharing God's Love

(this may take place where refreshments are shared)

Reader

In Burkina Faso, a calabash – a hollowed out gourd – is used to share water with guests who arrive tired from their journey.

Water from the calabash (or jug) is poured into a bowl.

It expresses welcome, hospitality and fellowship. After the visitor has been refreshed, conversation can begin, and the purpose of the visit can be expressed.

As we arrived we were welcomed with refreshments
and now as we enter into prayer, we continue to share
hospitality and welcome.

Let us hear how Abraham welcomed three visitors and
provided for their refreshment.

Old Testament Reading

Genesis 18:1-8

Hymn or Song

(during which the water is carried into the worship space, followed by the congregation)

Invitation to Pray

Leader We are gathered to pray for the visible unity of the Church.

So let us praise God, saying:

Assembly **Glory to you, Father, for you reveal yourself in your creation and call all people to live in your presence. Glory to you, Christ Jesus, for you give yourself entirely to each one of us and invite us to do the same. Glory to you, Holy Spirit, for you gather us together in love and unity. Glory to you, God of love, in whom we are created, redeemed and made one. Amen.**

Litany of Praise and Thanksgiving

Reader Let us turn our hearts to God in praise:

Praise to you Lord for you have poured out your love into our hearts so that we never lose hope.

- Assembly** Lord, we praise you.
- Reader** By your love you free our lives from fear and dress our wounded and injured hearts.
- Assembly** Lord, we praise you.
- Reader** For all who sow seeds of compassion and love for their neighbours around the world.
- Assembly** Lord, we praise you.
- Reader** Eternal God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus your Son, the Redeemer of all creation.
- Assembly** Lord, we thank you.
- Reader** For the grace that renews and the blossoming of faith, hope and love.
- Assembly** Lord, we thank you.
- Reader** For the faith we received from the apostles, for Jesus' prayer for unity and for the gift of the Good News of salvation.
- Assembly** Lord, we thank you.
- Reader** Gracious God, for the generosity of your love for all people, a love so perfect, it is beyond our comprehension.
- Assembly** Lord, we adore you.

Reader For sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

Assembly **Lord, we adore you.**

Reader For continuing to fill our lives with your love through the Holy Spirit.

Assembly **Lord, we adore you.**

Hymn of Praise

Prayers of Confession

Leader We come before you, O God, to confess our sins:

Reader By seeking happiness without God and ignoring the command to love, we have turned from our neighbour. Our selfishness and desire to possess and control separate us from God.

Silence

Reader Merciful God:

Assembly **forgive and heal us.**

Reader When we disregard the humanity of others and build walls of division, we sow seeds of hatred and violence, abandoning the Lord's command to love.

Silence

Reader Merciful God:

Assembly forgive and heal us.

Reader When our lack of compassion hardens our hearts, we no longer see Jesus in those different from ourselves.

Silence

Reader Merciful God:

Assembly forgive and heal us.

Reader When we fail to open our hearts and minds to God's infinite and unconditional love, the world is darkened by selfishness, violence, and indifference.

Silence

Reader Merciful God:

Assembly forgive and heal us.

Leader God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and transform us by your Holy Spirit.

**Assembly Holy God! Holy and Strong! Holy and Immortal,
have mercy on us!**

**Holy God! Holy and Strong! Holy and Immortal,
have mercy on us!**

**Holy God! Holy and Strong! Holy and Immortal,
have mercy on us!**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 138

Reader I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love
and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.

Assembly **On the day I called, you answered me.**

Reader On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength of soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.

Assembly **On the day I called, you answered me.**

Reader They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Assembly **On the day I called, you answered me.**

Reader Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.
The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Assembly **On the day I called, you answered me.**

Reader Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the
Holy Spirit;

Assembly **As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

The reading of the Gospel may be preceded by an acclamatio

Gospel Reading

Luke 10:25-37

Hymn

Sermon / Homily

Followed by a moment of silence or a hymn.

Affirmation of Love

(verses from 1 Corinthians 13)

Read antiphonally, with one half of the congregation reading the first part of each stanza and the other half reading the second.

- I If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- II And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- I If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
- II Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
- I It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
- II It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.
- I It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- II Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.
- I For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

II And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;

ALL And the greatest of these is love.

Hymn

This moment can also be used as an opportunity to gather the offering.

Prayers of Intercession

Leader We have been called to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. As we renew our commitment to this calling, may love strengthen our unity as Christians.

Reader God of boundless love, we pray that all people may come to know your unlimited mercy and your infinite love.

Assembly **Fill us with your love. Make us one in you.**

Reader God, our shepherd, we who are scattered ask you to gather us into one fold.

Assembly **Fill us with your love. Make us one in you.**

Reader God of mission, enliven us by your Spirit and send us again to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Assembly **Fill us with your love. Make us one in you.**

Reader God of our journey, in our weakness and fear we often

pass by on the other side. Grant us grace to risk embracing the stranger in need, tending their wounds of body, mind and spirit.

Assembly **Fill us with your love. Make us one in you.**

Reader God of communion, we pray that we may work together for your greater glory and spread the Good News of salvation for all.

Assembly **Fill us with your love. Make us one in you.**

The Lord's Prayer

Leader **We join our prayers to that of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say**

Assembly **Our Father...** *(according to local custom)*

Hymn

Closing Prayer

(from the Daily Prayer for Christian Unity of the Chemin Neuf Community).

Assembly **Lord Jesus, who prayed that all might be one, we pray to you for the unity of all Christians, according to your will, according to your means. May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division, to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.**

Sending and Blessing

(during which the bowl of water may be lifted up or referenced in some way)

Leader You have been refreshed by the water of life, united in Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit: go forth to love God, and your neighbour as yourself.
And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always.

Assembly **Amen! Thanks be to God!**

Hymn



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Appendix

Footnotes from the introduction to the theme

¹ Further information about CCN:

The Chemin Neuf Community (CNN) is a Catholic community with an ecumenical vocation, born in Lyon in 1973 and now established across five continents. Inspired, like so many new communities, by the dynamics of Vatican II, it is rooted in both the Ignatian tradition and the experience of Charismatic Renewal – i.e. life in the Holy Spirit. Couples, consecrated brothers and sisters, women and men, from different countries and different cultures have chosen the adventure of community life following Christ. Living in the same area or under the same roof, they experience daily that sharing actually increases what they have. Sharing who they are makes them more truly brothers and sisters. On this humble path of shared daily life, they experience how much the meeting of their differences is a richness, especially as it experiences the challenge of reconciliation. From this communion spring the joy and celebration which are at the centre of the community.

2,400 people are members of CCN, present in 30 countries, in 80 dioceses; among them are 400 consecrated celibates, including 120 priests. The founder of the community is Père Laurent Fabre. He was succeeded as leader of the community in 2016 by Père François Michon. In Burkina Faso, CCN has about seventy committed members, mainly married couples, but including also priests and consecrated sisters. (For more information, see: <https://www.chemin-neuf.fr> or <http://bf.chemin-neuf.org>.)

The Chemin Neuf community has an ecumenical vocation: “That they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). “We dare to believe in the visible unity of the Church, and we have received a call to work for that unity with all our strength” (Constitutions, p.20). Jesus was the first to pray for unity, and members of CCN desire to make this prayer their own. “Anything we can do together, let’s do it.” Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Orthodox and Anglicans, they share their daily life and carry out their missions together. They do this in order to bear witness together to the love of the Father for all his children. On this journey, they offer various ecumenical formations and desire to involve their respective churches with them, forging strong bonds with those around them.

² The Mossi people make up the largest ethnic group in Burkina Faso.

DAY 4

When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (Lk 10:31)

May we never turn away from those in need

Additional scripture passages

Isaiah 58:4-8a

Psalms 34:15-22

Commentary

The priest and Levite who walked by on the other side may have had religious reasons for not helping. The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation always to do good.

The prophet Isaiah gives us this same encouragement in chapter 58; it is better to do good than just to look good. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond good conventions? Sometimes these seemingly trivial conventions can become dominant, distracting us from what really matters. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness, pulling the rug

from under our routines. But many of us, if we're honest, may have returned to those routines.

This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. We do not learn what is good and holy only from those who share our confessional or religious worldview, but often from those who are different from us. Light and love are embodied in our enemy too. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect. When we open our eyes to see how God's love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn closer to them and so are drawn into deeper union with them.

Reflection

Down that road
on the other side
you'll find sacred dirt
holy ditches
where light is incarnate

embodied in our enemies
like a gift presented
blinded to what's inside
unwrapped, we find our neighbour.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
may our eyes not look away,
but be wide open to the world
around us.
As we travel through life,
may we stop and reach out,
bind up the wounded
and in so doing experience your
presence in them.
Give us a renewed commitment
to journey with you towards unity.
Amen.

Questions

Personal: What gets in the way of you doing good?

Local: Who are the people who behave like the Good Samaritan in your community?

Global: How can you widen your vision of being a good neighbour globally?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Reflect on your own circle of relationships and their geography. Choose today to walk through another part of town. What do you see and who do you notice?

Local: Seek out a project in a local community near you that supports people often not seen. Look for ways in which you can support and encourage their work.

Global: Take some time to research the conflict in Burkina Faso and the challenges facing the Church there.

DAY 5

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. (Lk 10:34)

Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope

Additional scripture passages

Joel 2:23-27

Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

Commentary

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured oil and wine and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. The Samaritan went further still by promising to pay for the man's care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbour. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God's work of healing a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world through insecurity, fear, distrust and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. Though we celebrate sacraments or other rituals of healing, reconciliation and

consolation (often using oil and wine), we persist in behaviours that cause division, wounding the Body of Christ. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

In this process of healing, we have to recognise our own vulnerability – how will others know how to engage in a journey of healing if we are unwilling to bare our wounds? How do we empower such courageous behaviour, recognising there is a cost?

Reflection

The bread lies broken
crumbs spilled from the table
trampled underfoot.
Wine stains bled through linen
where cups overflowed.
The lingering taste of stories shared
grows stale in the mouth.

Indelible marks,
evidence of where we sat together
for a time,
but what now?

Others need their share –
wine to gladden soul
oil to anoint and heal
bread to strengthen.

We need to reset our tables
to find an unfamiliar seat,
and when the music stops
what will it have cost?

Prayer

Gracious God,
You who are the source of all love
and goodness:
enable us to recognise the needs of
our neighbour.
Help us to be honest about our need
for healing.

Change us, so that we can love all.
Help us to overcome the obstacles
of division,
that we might build a world of peace
for the common good.
Thank you for your renewing work
in creation
and for leading us to a future which
is full of hope:
you who are Lord of all, yesterday,
today and forever. Amen.

Questions

Personal: What wounds do
you see?

Local: Where are you recognising
signs of hope in your community?

Global: What can we give, so that
we can be part of God's work of
healing a broken world?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: What areas of difference or tension in your communities
might you meaningfully seek deeper understanding around? Begin a
compassionate and generous conversation with some others about this.

Local: What groups already exist in your area that are actively involved in
healing in some way? Explore meaningful ways of engaging with them.

Global: Take time as a church group to tend to the earth and be part of
healing a broken world ("renew the face of the ground" Ps: 104). As you do
this consider the impact of your lifestyle on other parts of the world.

DAY 6

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Lk 10:34)

Lord, turn our churches into 'inns', welcoming those in need

Additional scripture passages

Genesis 18:4-5

Psalm 5:11-12

Commentary

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan confronted his own fear and prejudice and moved beyond it. He saw a stranger in need and brought him to an inn. "The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend'" (Lk 10:35).

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, migrants and all people without a home. Such hospitality can require sacrifice, but it is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. When faced with insecurity, suspicion and sometimes violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours and extending and

accepting hospitality becomes more difficult.

Welcoming 'the other', and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue and practice. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns, open and inviting spaces where our neighbours can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all.

When we, as followers of Christ, move beyond our traditions and choose to practise ecumenical hospitality, we stop being strangers and start being good neighbours.

Reflection

What stops me from action?
What silences our unity?
Clinging to familiarity.
Paralysed by fear of change,
rejection and judgement.

Or simply a lack of time.
Justifying a choice to keep on
walking.
To discard a treasure.

Where is Christ in the face of
the other?
Rescuing, welcoming, accepting me.
Joining me in prayer, worship
and witness.
Seeing me as I look into the eyes of
those in need.
The unexpected jewel reflecting
something of the face of God.

Prayer

God of unity
In Jesus, you showed us the
meaning of hospitality,
by caring for our fragile humanity.
Help us to become a community

that generously welcomes those
who feel abandoned and lost,
together building an inn where all
are welcomed and loved.

May we become closer to each
other as we flaunt your
unconditional love in the unity of
the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Questions

Personal: When have you seen
Christ in someone who was not like
you?

Local: Are there churches or spaces
that act as an 'inn' near you?

Global: Is your country welcoming
of those in need, or not?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Find out about the life of a Christian from another tradition who has been a 'good neighbour'. What did they do and what can you learn from this experience?

Local: What ecumenical 'treasure' can be found in your area? Find out what Christians are doing together and get involved.

Global: Consider your neighbours in a different part of the world. Join the World Council of Churches Prayer Cycle and commit to praying regularly for your neighbours and understanding them better.

DAY 7

Jesus said: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?”
(Lk 10:36)

Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour

Additional scripture passages

Philippians 2.1-5
Psalm 10:17-18

Commentary

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbour to the man who was robbed? The lawyer replied “the one who showed him mercy”. He does not say “the Samaritan” and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover our neighbours in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today’s world, where polarised politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to transgress borders and walls of separation.

Like the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to do mercy.

Reflection

Them,
those people,
people like that,
you know...

But you don’t know,
that’s the point,
because you don’t want to know.
They’re not important,
as long as they know their place.

Thanks be to you, dear God,
that your interfering mercy
has put us in our place
for those others.

Prayer

Holy God,
your Son Jesus Christ came
among us
to show us the way of compassion.
Help us by your Spirit to follow
his example,
to serve the needs of all your
children,
and so witness together as
Christians to your ways of love
and mercy.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions

Personal: How can you 'do mercy' today?

Local: What borders and walls of separation need to be transgressed in your locality?

Global: How should the Church share the gift of mercy with the world?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Learn some basic phrases in the language of a group of people new to your area, and use them.

Local: Think of ways in which your church or group of churches can receive from the people they help.

Global: Discover the ways Christians, churches and people of other faiths have been merciful to those who would have least expected it.

DAY 8

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise”. (Lk 10:37)

Lord, may our mercy be a sign of your Kingdom

Additional scripture passages

Romans 12:9-13

Psalm 41:1-2

Commentary

Through these words – “Go and do likewise” – Jesus sends each of us, and our churches, to live out His commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be “other Christs”, reaching out to a suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, rather cultivating a culture of proximity and goodwill - actively seeking out and moving towards opportunities to be hospitable, to welcome and to share - in our common task to bring to fruition the dream of God.

In considering how Jesus’ invitation to “Go and do likewise” speaks to our own lives, we must not lose sight of the need for compassion and mercy in places we may not be willing to go, or have no direct connection with, such as areas like the Sahel region affected by inter-communal conflict. To truly be neighbours, our horizons must expand beyond that which does not cost us anything, encompassing the whole world, as we intentionally strive for justice and unity, learning how Christ’s love can visit us through the welcoming of others.

Striving together for merciful unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace. As mutual trust and confidence increase, we become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, in the hope that Christ’s love may visit and heal us through each other’s love and care.

Reflection

After the cacophony was over,
there was painful stillness.
Moments of lucidness punctuated
with nothing.

Breathless
in the dirt
I pray.

Selah

A hand upon my body
different from before.
The intention of the touch - mindful of
the pain still present -
is to tend,
not to harm.

Selah

The smell of wine poured to soothe
bittersweet tannin in my mouth.
The feeling of oil running down
my skin
the wounds of the body the meeting
place for pain and peace
a balm for mind, body and soul.

Selah

Blurred figures linger as I move
weightless in unknown surroundings
yet the familiar touch of compassion.
Faint murmurs in unfamiliar tongues
promise care.

This time, as I open my eyes,
having never seen you before
I recognise your mercy.

Prayer

Mothering God,
who holds the world in loving embrace,
may we care for each other as you do,
each and every soul.

Holy Spirit,
giver of life, open us to each other
and strengthen our bonds of
communion and grow us in
mutual affection.

Prince of Peace,
give us the resolve to live out the
Gospel faithfully
that we may be radical welcomers
and reconcilers.

Questions

Personal: What does this call of Christ imply for your relationships with members of other churches?

Local: What is it that people recognise in the flavour of what we do (together) as the Church that is meaningful?

Global: What does/might merciful unity look like on a global scale?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Reflect on how you have experienced 'other Christ's' and been Christ to others, then share some stories about this with others, and pray for more opportunities.

Local: Where is God already at work in your community? Map out where you live highlighting the places where you notice something happening that may be God's dream for your communities. Explore how you might join in and go and do likewise.

Global: 'Go and do likewise' does not mean we have to go to places such as the Sahel region to have an impact. Explore ways of connecting with churches and partner organisations in Burkina Faso and other places that seem far away and actively seek deeper connection and understanding of situations/context.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024



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