

Prayers for Community in a Time of Pandemic – Easter to Pentecost 2020

13 April 2020

Risen and reconciling God,
Your greeting after the grave
acknowledged the trauma and turmoil
of that time and our own.
The message of peace
was what your disciples needed to hear,
and what the world needs now.
When we are reunited
with those from whom we've been separated,
may our greetings, too, be of peace,
and may we see all division in the light
of your reconciliation
and all crises in the context
of your resurrection.
Amen.

14 April 2020

God of princes, God of nurses:
this disease is a great leveller.
It has humbled our rulers
and exalted your servants.
As a prime minister recovers,
because primary caregivers carried on,
let us note this abnormal way of being:
this proper appreciation of sanitation workers,
and grocery clerks, and childcare providers;
those in the field and those on the frontline,
the ones packaging food
and delivering medicine.
And may we remember this abnormal
is your normal
so we don't return to the way it was.
Amen.

15 April 2020

God who comforts, God who disturbs:
for some your Easter message
lands when spring is at its softest,
disrupting our anxiety
with the gift of needed peace.
For others, though,
this season grows harsh;

words of comfort become harder to hear.
May we who can now absorb
these rays of warming light
store them up for darker days to come.
And for those whose current climate
keeps comfort out of reach
may they find your presence in their midst,
and with it the returning promise
of a new and brighter day.
Amen.

16 April 2020

God of constant change,
God of steadfast love:
so much of what is familiar
is being put to rest,
perhaps for a spell,
perhaps for good.
May we who believe in life after death
have faith to lay aside tired ways
and to trust that what is true
and good and life-giving
will re-emerge
from this cocooning tomb, transformed
into the fuller embodiment
of what always was.
Amen.

17 April 2020

God of the fertile earth,
God of the scattered seed:
there are many lessons
that could take root right now.
We give thanks
that when and where conditions are right
the truth lands in good soil and sinks in.
Just yesterday a 100-year-old man,
a captain in a textbook war,
a sower of an ancient truth,
walked the length of his garden,
and on that path a long-held power
burst open for the world to see.
May his example produce a crop a hundred-fold
to wake a dormant spirit in us all.
Amen.

(with reference to Capt. Tom Moore, who has raised over £17 million for the NHS by walking the length of his garden 100 times before his 100th birthday.)

18 April 2020

God of rolling waters,
God of ever-flowing streams:
the skies do seem clearer,
and the air cleaner,
and the world less littered with our mess.
The earth looks more itself these days,
its resilience on fuller display.
But human nature is also more evident
and your warning rings loud in our ears:
what comes out of our mouths can defile;
what rots in our hearts can corrupt.
May justice and righteousness bathe us,
and wash out our self-serving sin.
Let us then resume our part in creation
and breathe out the joy we breathe in.
Amen.

21 April 2020

God of every living creature,
God of every creeping thing:
a bird came into our garden,
and we didn't know its name.
The common snipe, the internet said.
'Common,' which suggests
our grandparents would have known,
and their grandparents, too.
When did we forget it's normal
to see and hear nature on our doorstep,
and to appreciate the everyday?
Now that we've been stopped
by this common threat,
may we never let such knowledge,
or such birds, become so rare.
Amen.

22 April 2020

God of the earth,
God of each day:
we pray
that fifty years from now,

this crucial moment we are in
will be seen as the turning point
when the world began to work
not just to flatten the curve
but to address the growing crisis
that affects us all.

May this fifty-first Earth Day
be the first day of a new era
when the only enemy we meet
in the peoples of the earth
is our apathy.

Amen.

(With reference to Earth Day, first celebrated in 1970. It helped spur the modern environmental movement and featured the message: 'We have met the enemy, and he is us.')

23 April 2020

God of providence, God of surprise,
if this virus had struck 25 years ago,
who among us could have
teleconferenced with our grannies,
or homeschooled our children
in online classrooms?
Who would have dreamt of the conversations
we've had with the man who brings groceries
bought with the tap of a screen in our palm?
This is not to question the greed
that has birthed such convenience;
nor to ignore the suffering of those
who don't have the luxury of asking.
It is to give thanks
that your providence adapts
to the world we create,
allowing human connection to survive.
Amen.

24 April 2020

God of our daily bread,
God of the crescent moon:
as many on earth begin to observe
a month of fasting and prayer,
we all enter another month
like none that have come before.
In these irregular times,
we will not break fast together,
or commune around the same table.

But we pray that you would unite us
in our shared humanity,
and that we would resolve to break our bread
with those who are most in need,
so that our chronic disease of division
leads us not into a famine of compassion.
Amen.

25 April 2020

God of rivals, God of scapegoats:
we are quick to find someone to blame,
even when no one deserves it.
We look for ways to take care of our own,
while ignoring those highest at risk.
We manage to indulge in just enough empathy
to make ourselves feel a lot better,
but we rarely choose to sacrifice
the idols we truly value.
Scapegoated saviour, as we muddle along
in this mess of being human,
allow us to see ourselves in the ones
we accuse or neglect,
and your grace in the place of judgement.
Amen.

God of those in plenty,
God of those in want:
this disease separates us
one from another.
It also exposes an underlying division
that has been there all along:
the difference between the haves
and the have-nots.
May the chasm finally close between
those who will wait this pandemic out
with stockpiles of reserves
and the luxury of rest,
and those who have been waiting too long
for a voice at the table,
a seat at the banquet,
a prayer that isn't filled with pleas.
Amen.

29 April 2020

God at the bedside, God at the graveside:

in care homes and hospices,
in hospital wards,
your spirit remains present
when family cannot be near.
With a comforting word or silent prayer,
in the final minutes of breath,
you have spoken a message of peace
through nurses and doctors,
chaplains and priests:
a Samaritan response at this roadside.
We give thanks that even if a disease
would rob us, through separation,
of a healing moment at death,
you appear at our side, time and again
with embodied, miraculous life.
Amen.

30 April 2020

God of tumult, God of peace:
more will change
in the weeks and months to come.
Further landscapes of our normal
will be shaken to the ground.
Gradual movements will accelerate,
market trends will shift,
and they will sweep away
much of what we know.
And so we pray for what we need:
the reassurance of your strength
in the midst of our community;
and the life that returns
in fuller resurrection
after what we love is laid to rest.
Amen

1 May 2020

God of the humbled, God of the hopeful:
as the first nations emerge from lockdown,
they present a vision of a future
of people in parks
and restaurants and schools.
They also remind us of a reluctance
to adopt the measures they took.
Those who have learned respect
for what humans cannot control were ready:
stockpiled with equipment;

trained in procedures.
Those who relied too much on the myth
of our own invincibility were ill-prepared.
And so, as we work to join others in recovery,
may we meet them in understanding
the limits of humanity's power,
and the hope that comes from humility.
Amen.

2 May 2020

God of the weary,
God of the burdened:
after six straight weeks,
it would be stranger
if fatigue didn't set it,
not only for those
who fight for breath,
or are working countless shifts,
but for all those whose minds
are occupied with stress and worry,
laden with concerns for the future.
Turn our ear to your invitation
to come and rest a while.
Give us again what we struggle to hold:
the strength to let go of control.
Amen.

4 May 2020

God of the world we create,
God of the world you reveal:
may our way be not of escape,
but of further connection.
May our life be not for ourselves
but for you and others still.
May our truth be not
what we shape it to be.
Instead may we accept
the stranger and more glorious truth
of what already is:
a greater world available
through your divine and selfless love.
Amen.

God of the banquet
God of the

5 May 2020

God of those on the frontline,
God of the ones they must leave behind:
this separation is hard enough as we're kept
from normal routines,
and interactions with friends,
the freedom to do as we please.
Especially for those who go to work
to be at risk, and stay away,
may your spirit provide what phones cannot,
what screens only attempt to project
and what pixels fail to capture.
May your spirit be known in our flesh today,
so that an earthly father
might be present with his son,
and the mother on the ward
can hold tight to her child.
Amen.

6 May 2020

God of the blossoming tree,
God of the laurels of spring:
some should be branching out right now,
embarking on first careers.
What a time to be told
this time is 'yours.'
As we hold this rising generation,
we know there is a type of grief
for a life we thought we'd have.
And so we pray especially for those
looking to step out on their own.
May our communities support their reach;
may their ventures grow more certain;
and may their prospects be evergreen.
Amen.

7 May 2020

God who speaks from out of the whirlwind,
and hears sighs that are too deep for words:
as we come to terms
with what we do not know –
a timeline for return,
a safe social distance –
as we struggle

to make sense of the world around us
and imagine what life will be like,
ground us in our kindness.
May a gracious word
begin our next encounter,
a patient thought
accompany our coming breath,
so that with little left in our control,
we may control ourselves
with grace and faith and compassion.
Amen.

8 May 2020

God of our greatest generation,
God of our rising generation:
may this moment,
this hinge in history
this date to give thanks
and take courage
see an heroic spirit of sacrifice
and can-do confidence
join a growing passion for justice.
Strengthen our determination to
meet again some sunny day
with a fuller of sense of 'we'
so that our reunions will not be
simply the end of separation,
but the start of reconciliation
with those who have not gained
from our victories.
Amen.

9 May 2020

God of our finite selves,
God of our inward life:
unable to venture out,
our worlds could grow much smaller.
And yet
our path with you
can also lead
deep into our inmost parts,
to knitted secrets
we have not yet unwound,
to hidden thoughts
that you have loved.
Give us courage to explore

these darker, personal realms,
so that the broader peace
we hope to build
might rest upon a peace within.
Amen.

11 May 2020

God of the common ground
God of the space between:
a renewed spirit of community
has been at work these many weeks.
We rejoice in this even as we know
that conflict remains part
of what it means to be human.
As we arrive at honest disagreement,
may we not seek
blindly to impose
our solutions upon others
(even if we know we're right).
Instead, may we listen and learn
from those we oppose
and look for more of
your answer
in the ground we give way.
Amen.

12 May 2020

God of this latest moment,
God of this lifelong path:
we are meandering through
unbounded time
without clarity of an endpoint.
Like Samuel in the night,
or Mary in the garden,
we remain lost until we know
the voice of the one calling our name;
the voice of one with an end in sight,
the one who tells us that life has won.
Take our fear and confusion.
Give us purpose and peace.
Replace anxiety with joy.
Place us again in a world that you love
so this moment can reopen our eyes.
Amen.

13 May 2020

God of our hearts and minds,
God of our nervous systems,
as our eyes and ears try to take in
another day of news,
our little bodies absorb the shock
of the biggest event of our lives.
Help us make sense
of what we honestly feel.
Fear. Loneliness. Exhaustion. Anger.
And in naming what lives in
our most inner selves,
may we grow more human
with each other:
warm-blooded and social,
communicative and relational,
present to nurse, eager to soothe
the people we more fully can be.
Amen.

14 May 2020

God of the spoken and unspoken,
may this separation
cause us to crave
the joy of human closeness.
May our face-to-face
on-screen meetings remind us
that no-one is fully realised
in two dimensions.
May our careful, scheduled
encounters that relay
only the necessary materials
lead us to appreciate
the power of unplanned
togetherness,
those conversations that drifted,
the pauses that linger
for another round.
Amen.

15 May 2020

God with us
and God within us:
just because
we're all going through it
doesn't mean this is normal.

Every body's a little stressed out,
'out of our comfort zone.'
So we need to find a reserve of patience
with ourselves and everyone else.
We all could use a bit more compassion,
and the time to take a deep breath.

Help us draw out our more tolerant selves,
the ones who can cope with this mess.
Give us the space to centre ourselves
and find you. At peace. In our midst.
Amen.

18 May 2020

God who searches;
God who finds:
the ninety-nine
may have wondered where you went
when you sought the one alone.
Did they feel lost themselves
without you there?
Or did they know that you remain
right where you always are:
with each and all of those you love,
wherever they may be.
If we should feel your absence
may we sense it as
a movement towards
the others who belong,
so that one's assurance of being safe
is tied to the whole's recovery.
Amen.

19 May 2020

God of hidden roots,
God of deeper wells:
how marvellous to see
the blossoms, not just of this spring,
but those of seeds
planted years ago.
Friends have rung and reconnected
not just because there's time,
but because friendship
and community have been revalued
in this economy.
We give you thanks

for experiences that were never
isolated, but shared, and which have grown
through intervening years to silently provide
an ecosystem in which to live,
fertile soil in which to thrive.
Amen.

20 May 2020

God of the heavens above,
God of the earth below:
a killer whale
stopped traffic when
its dorsal fin was spotted
cutting through the startled waves
of our strong and stranger fjord.
It pointed to the realms that we
humans float between:
the anxious world we occupy,
and the murkier depths of meaning
that we navigate with you.
As it gulps air then dives below,
reappearing to surprise,
may we learn to emerge, as well,
as those who join our deepest faith
with the matters of this earth.
Amen.

With reference to the sighting of orcas in Strangford Lough, 15 May 2020;
additional inspiration from a sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick

21 May 2020

God of hopeful signs and careful plans:
as our initial panic subsides
and the itch to get back to normal
replaces a fear of spiking fevers,
keep us wary and alert.
May we carry a parcel of humility
to remind us we are human.
We are still not immune to the dangers
of overconfidence and impatience.
We are just as susceptible now to
the invisible sway of hubris,
and the make-believe of thinking
that we've done all we can do.
May your enduring presence
provide the stamina we lack

so our confidence can increase
with grounded joy.
Amen.

22 May 2020

God of David, God of Ruth:
the heroes you chose
from among the people
were time and again the ones
pushed past the margins or forgotten
or forced to prove their own worth.
We pause to remember
the frontline workers who
gave their lives for the national health:
Tariq and Afua and Onyenachi,
Jennie and Norman and Lill; and
all those whose families now grieve.
And we pray in this silence
that our sense of family and
hero and nation extends
beyond our inherited traits.
Amen.

23 May 2020

God of our earthly tents,
God of our guiding light:
you led your people through a desert
and resisted a permanent home.
You knew that a life made together
is a life on the move,
on roads we'd rather not choose.
Follow me, you said.
Come and see, you said.
Be with me, my people forever.
As we travel along through this
'land of unlikeness,'
a terrain of unsettling truths,
your city of reunion awaits.
May the strangeness we face
and the people who change us
assure us we're on the right path.
Amen.

25 May 2020

God who gives life,
God of all who give life to others,
we are never alone in our sorrows,
and never alone in our joy.
Being human means to know
a tethered link to one another.
The pretty world we look upon
remains an empty vessel
if we do not fill our landscapes
with the memory of each other.
And so we give you thanks
that even in separation
and past the final cut of death
we remain your co-creators,
making life with those we love.
Amen.

26 May 2020

God of justice, God of mercy:
outrage at a smug politician
can be satisfying;
shining a light
on the powerful when
one assumes the rules don't apply
can clarify what is just and unjust.
But keep us from turning
our search for fairness
into a hunt for a villain.
Remind us that outrage
will not comfort the mourning,
and can't cure a mindless disease.
Our kindness will serve as the
best equaliser,
offered to both the great
and the good.
Amen.

27 May 2020

God of daily bread,
God of simple pleasures:
we ask for enough for today.
Help us give ourselves
the very thing we need:
a walk to clear the head,

a phone call that draws a familiar voice,
a brief exchange with a passer-by,
a gentle word of encouragement.
These little things and their significance
can be easily dismissed,
but it is often the non-grand gesture,
or an everyday routine,
or an in-the-moment whim
that reminds us that our God
was always there.
Amen.

28 May 2020

God of the lilies,
God of the ravens:
the wildflowers are having
an absolute field day;
the rabbits can't believe their luck.
Left to do what she does best,
nature certainly shows off.
We, too, may see
which root emotion
will rise and come to flower.
We pray that instead
of the worry the world
has tried to plant,
it may be the hope
you sow inside.
Amen.

29 May 2020

God of refining fire,
God of softer light:
there is a harshness in the news,
stories of acute pain and grief;
anecdotes of increasing hardship.
And beneath the headlines
there grows a realisation
of deep systemic brokenness:
original sins of division on lines
of race and class and power.
As the sun rises on a gentle
May morning, may we remember
its burning heat, which should
consume this hateful mess,

but also that it shines with
the light and warmth we need
to face our broken world.
Amen.

30-31 May 2020

God of descending fire,
God of Pentecostal streets:
transform us into your people.
May we listen to those who speak
in the global language of protest --
shouts that are mistaken as foreign.
Their tongues/our tongues
tell of pain and fear
in words we all know by heart.
Send us out from our hiding
to speak about love,
to demonstrate the power of justice.
And may we see
the new community you make
in the admission
and forgiveness
of sin.
Amen.

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