

## Circuit worship resource for Sunday 29 August 2021, prepared by Jenny Dowding

### Welcome

Welcome to worship! We join our hearts together in many places and many ways, but each of us is in the presence of God, who loves us and takes joy in our worship!

### Call to worship:

We begin with verses of encouragement from the letter to the Colossians:

“The mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it’s out in the open.

God wanted everyone.... to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God’s glory.”

*Colossians 1: 26-27 (The Message)*

### StF 21 (H&P 286) – Born in song! God’s people have always been singing

1 Born in song!

God's people have always been singing.

Born in song!

Hearts and voices raised.

So today we worship together;

God alone is worthy to be praised.

2 Praise to God!

For he is the one who has made us.

Praise to God!

We his image bear.

Heaven and earth are full of his glory;

let creation praise him everywhere.

3 Christ is King!

He left all the glory of heaven.

Christ is King!

Born to share in our pain;

crucified, for sinners atoning,

risen, exalted, soon to come again.

4 Sing the song!

God's Spirit is poured out among us.

Sing the song!

He has made us anew.

Every member part of the Body;

given his power, his will to seek and do.

5 Tell the world!

All power to Jesus is given.

Tell the world!

He is with us always.

Spread the word, that all may receive him;

every tongue confess and sing his praise.

6 Then the end!

Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.

Then the end

of all earthly days.

Yet above the song will continue;

all his people still shall sing his praise.

*Brian Hoare (b. 1935)*

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## Prayer of adoration and confession

Let us pray.

Praise to you, O God, for heaven and earth are full of your glory,  
and all creation praises you!

You are the one who has made us, and we bear your image.

You created us in love and declared that everything you had made is good.

You alone are worthy to be praised.

We praise and thank you that you came to us in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord,  
who lived our life, died our death and was raised again to new life.

Whatever feelings, resentments, worries or burdens we bring with us today,  
we know that you are waiting with love and mercy to receive our song.

You are our faithful God and we give you our praise and thanksgiving.

As those who have been made in your image,

we know how far that image has been marred in us.

We confess our weakness, failures and wrongdoing,

knowing that you are a God of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Forgive us, we pray.

Renew your image in us, that we may reflect your glory.

We ask this in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## 1<sup>st</sup> reading

*Reader - as far as possible, please us an 'inclusive' translation (such as the NRSV, below) that speaks of God making humankind rather than 'man'.*

### Genesis 1: 26-31

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' <sup>29</sup> God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

## Reflection

If you have internet access, you will almost certainly have become very familiar with Zoom this past 18 months. Zoom and other similar services enable groups of people to meet 'face-to-face' so to speak, via a screen, on a computer or smart phone.

Some of you will be sharing in this service via Zoom.

Whilst it has limitations, it has been absolutely invaluable in enabling all kinds of work and social interaction to continue during the pandemic.

However, as well as appreciating the welcome sight of friendly faces, I'm disturbed by the not-so-welcome sight of my own face, staring back at me from the screen. Maybe I'm the only person who experiences this, but the image of me on the screen does not match the mental image of myself I have in my head!

Our contemporary world puts a high value on **image** –

especially the idealised and unrealistic images of physical beauty and youthfulness, that we are constantly bombarded with.

'Image' matters in the competitive climate in which we live.

We know that many young people suffer problems from thinking they need to conform to an artificial presentation of the perfect body image. Sadly, often young – and not-so-young – people will feel that their face and body are defective in some way, and that they're the only ones who are unattractive, and

therefore failures. But if we think rationally, we know that there's no such thing as a perfect body image, and that the representations that are thrust into our consciousness by the media, have usually been distorted and manipulated in order to give a false impression of what constitutes human attractiveness.

And, of course, we know that it's what's underneath that really matters.  
Beauty is only skin-deep.

The modern obsession with our physical appearance has nothing to do with the things that are important and really matter.

But what do we mean by 'image'?

The word image is used to mean much more than physical representation.

The physical image is often a symbol – conveying meaning, purpose, nature.

Among the many dictionary definitions is this one:

“The concept or character projected to the public, as by a person or institution, especially as interpreted by the mass media.”

The word image is connected to the words 'imagine' and 'imagination'.

So a person's *image* is about not only what they look like, but the kind of person they are, and what are imagined to be their qualities and characteristics.

### **Gen 1: 26-31 - Made in God's image**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Human beings are made in the image of God.

We are stamped with the characteristics of the nature of God the Creator.

God creates - and God made us to be creators.

God rested - and created us to rest one day in seven.

God cares for his creation - and made us in his image that we might care for Creation.

God loves, and is in relationship with us - and has made us to be relational beings.

God looked at everything he made and declared it good.

This knowledge that we are made in God's image, has inspired the work of poets and hymn-writers, for example these words by Isaac Watts:

The saints are lovely in his sight,  
he views his children with delight;  
**he sees their hope, he knows their fear,  
and looks, and loves his image there.**

(Isaac Watts, StF 115 – Praise ye the Lord! 'Tis good to raise, v. 5)

Each one of us, each human being, is deeply loved by God, who made us in his image.

The well-known physicist, Professor Brian Cox, has rejected the label atheist but has stated he has "no personal faith". He explained that he cannot be sure there is no God and that science cannot answer every question.

However, recently, when talking about not knowing whether or not life exists elsewhere in the universe, he said:

**“We may be indescribably rare, and therefore, precious.”**

I believe those words are far more true than Brian Cox realised.

**You are precious** – God loves his image in you. Don't ever forget that!

Yes, of course that image is marred.

Our sinful nature has disfigured and spoiled God's image in us.

But that image still lies at the heart of how we were created and who we are.

You probably remember that in the Ten Commandments, God prohibits the making of images. One writer suggests that “the reason why we should not create images, is that God already has created an image. It’s not that we look like God or have divine powers, but that we represent God in creation—as male and female.”

This has implications for how we think about ourselves, *and* how we see others. Being image bearers of God is at the heart of how we see other people. Because they, too, are made in God’s image, we will treat them with dignity, regardless of race, age, gender, social or economic status.

Every human being is made in God’s image and so we should treat them well.

But you and I know that there are some people in whom it seems impossible to see God’s image. You can think of people notorious for the evil they perpetrate, or people whose every word and action runs counter to what we know of our Creator God. How can we see God’s image in them?

I recently came across a piece about a twentieth-century English mystic called Caryl Houselander (1901–1954). She wrote an account of how an ordinary underground train journey in London transformed into a vision that changed her life. She wrote:

“All sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging—workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in every one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them—but because He was in them, and because they were here, the whole world was here too . . . all those people who had lived in the past, and all those yet to come.

“I saw too the reverence that everyone must have for a sinner; instead of condoning his [or her] sin, which is in reality [their] utmost sorrow, one must comfort Christ who is suffering in [them]. And this reverence must be paid even to those sinners whose souls seem to be dead, because it is Christ, who is the life of the soul, who is dead in them; they are His tombs, and Christ in the tomb is potentially the risen Christ. . . .”

There is a famous ancient Celtic prayer called St Patrick’s Breastplate, which has been paraphrased by many people. One lovely setting is in the Northumbria Community form of Daily Prayer, which I use much of the time. It includes the lovely words:

This day be within and without me,  
lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.  
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;  
in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.

*from Celtic Daily Prayer, Daily Office: Morning Prayer*

Before I offer one more brief reflection on this theme of ‘image’, we have a hymn.

For those using Singing the Faith, I recommend StF 101 – *Before the world began*, a lovely hymn from the Iona Community, which starts:

Before the world began, one Word was there;  
grounded in God he was, rooted in care;  
by him all things were made;  
in him was love displayed,  
through him God spoke and said,  
'I am for you.'

**[StF 101 – Before the world began \(I am for you\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h2n8kqmiQ)**  
(or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h2n8kqmiQ>)

1. Before the world began, one Word was there;  
grounded in God he was, rooted in care;  
by him all things were made;  
in him was love displayed,  
through him God spoke and said,  
'I am for you.'

2. Life found in him its source, death found its end;  
light found in him its course, darkness its friend.  
For neither death nor doubt  
nor darkness can put out  
the glow of God, the shout,  
'I am for you.'

3. The Word was in the world which from him came;  
unrecognized he was, unknown by name;  
one with all humankind,  
with the unloved aligned,  
convincing sight and mind,  
'I am for you.'

4. All who received the Word by God were blessed;  
sisters and brothers they of earth's fond guest.  
So did the Word of grace  
proclaim in time and space  
and with a human face,  
'I am for you.'

John L. Bell (b.1949)  
and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

CCLI 1037466

alternative hymn: **H&P 482 – Your words to me are life and health**

**2<sup>nd</sup> reading** – Colossians 1: 15-20

(Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup>for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

### **Reflection part 2**

I have to confess this reading from the letter to the Colossians is one of my favourites.

The letter was written, as all New Testament letters were, in the context of a great power – the Roman Empire.

Paul's letters - such as this one, and the letter to the church in Rome - contained many allusions to the all-pervasive nature of Empire. Many of the allusions were not spelt out in the letters, because those first readers would immediately have understood what was being referred to.

We, however, can easily miss them.

Scholars describe how all empires must maintain their sovereignty not only by establishing a monopoly of markets, political structures and military might, but also by monopolising the *imagination* of their subjects. The Roman Empire was especially skilled at shaping the imagination. Images of the emperor were as pervasive in the first century as corporate logos are in the twenty-first century. The image of Caesar and other symbols of Roman power were literally everywhere – in the market, on coins, in the gymnasium, at the gladiatorial games, on jewellery, goblets, lamps and paintings. (*Walsh & Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed*)

Image was everything – and 'everything' was Caesar, and Caesar's power and Caesar's sovereignty over everyone and everything in the Empire.

So, when Paul writes: "Christ is the image of the invisible God", he is immediately challenging the overwhelming power of empire.

This writing is provocative and radical. It's subversive stuff!

Caesar was lauded as the son of God, and the world was full of images that proclaimed that belief. Pax Romana was the imperial peace that was *imposed* – sometimes through the capital punishment of crucifixion. Into this world, Paul's poem comes as nothing less than treasonous. Paul subverts every major

claim of the empire, turning it all upside-down, and proclaims Christ to be the Creator, Redeemer and Lord of all of creation, including the empire.

We, too, live in a world of images – powerful forces that seek to capture our imaginations.

There are the corporate slogans and logos, designed to create a particular image of a product, which might insidiously creep into the subconscious, encouraging us to buy more.

There are governments and institutions, channelled through our all-pervasive media, seeking to influence and mould our imaginations. These powerful words of Colossians speak to *us* as well, of how Christ, the image of God, subverts *all* earthly powers and images.

A few verses later, Paul wrote the words with which we started our service:

<sup>27</sup>To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (*Colossians 1: 27, NRSV*)

The hope of glory therefore is a hope in which the Colossian Christians will once again be full image-bearers of God.

As those who know we are made in the image of God, Christians are summoned to reflect God's care for the world of creation and for human community.

The mystery, as it is described, is that Christ is in us.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together. ... and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Jesus is *the* human being as God intended all human beings to be “in the beginning,” a perfect representation of God to the cosmos

To him be all the glory.

Amen.

### **Prayers of concern and Lord's Prayer**

*As always, this service is being prepared for circulation early in the week. At the time of writing, national and world events are changing fast daily.*

You are invited, in a period of quietness, to reflect on the past week as you have experienced it, and to offer the recollections and concerns to God.

You may have pressing personal matters you need to pray for; there may be family members and friends who have particular needs. You may also want to think about your church, your neighbourhood and our country, as you remember news and events you have heard about or seen. Finally, the news is full of situations across the world of enormous human pain. You may want to reflect on these in God's presence, seeking his peace and his justice.

*Silence*

Gracious God, whose image is at the heart of each person you created, we offer these prayers, trusting that you hear our words and our hearts. We trust you because we pray in the name of the One who is your perfect image, and who taught his friends to pray:

Our Father .....

**StF 403/H&P 220 – God is love: his the care**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Giju\\_BKA1PE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Giju_BKA1PE)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VERBUINLdvo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOjT5zU3qlo> (music only - fast)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVj1rjDAEUo> (music only – slower)

1 God is love: his the care,  
tending each, everywhere,  
God is love, all is there!  
Jesus came to show him,  
that we all might know him:

*Refrain:*

*Sing aloud, loud, loud!*

*sing aloud, loud, loud!*

*God is good! God is truth!*

*God is beauty! Praise him!*

2 None can see God above;  
neighbours here we can love;  
thus may we Godward move,  
finding him in others,  
sisters all, and brothers: [Refrain]

3 Jesus came, lived and died,  
for our sake, crucified,  
rose again, glorified;,  
he was born to save us  
by the truth he gave us: [Refrain]

4 To our Lord praise we sing -  
light and life, friend and King,  
coming down, love to bring,  
pattern for our duty,  
showing God in beauty: [Refrain]

*Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)*

**Blessing**

May you know that you are precious in the sight of your Creator,  
May you know that Christ is in you, the hope of glory,  
May God's Spirit strengthen you to walk in faith, hope and love.  
Amen.