

Newport and Lower Wye Circuit
Service at home: Sunday 4th February 2024
[You raise me up – Josh Groban.](#)

Preparation

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by our own struggles and those facing the world. War & conflict breaking out all over, climate change affecting millions every year and world leaders thinking more about the next election than what is good for the people. Those in power will not help us, we saw that in the Post Office Sub-Postmasters 25-year struggle for justice.

So, who can help us?

Don't you know, haven't you heard – the God of all creation will help you.

This written service will reflect on how trusting in God, especially through difficult times can raise us up to more than we can be. How this trust can bring a healing & wholeness into our lives that goes beyond all expectations.

Opening Request

Creator God, you were there before time began and have been at work in the universe ever since. You are in the past, the present and the future. We ask you to meet us here in this very moment and remain with us throughout the span of our lives.

May we wait patiently, trusting that you will raise us up on wings like eagles. Let us know and feel your presence with us always and in all situations. We pray for wholeness and healing for ourselves, for friends and family and for all people. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: [How great thou art](#)

YouTube hymn, no lyrics but a great version

Psalms 147 celebrates how God has the power to rescue us from even the most hopeless of situations. This psalm praises God for rescuing

the exiled Jews from Babylon but carries an eternal message of God's ability and desire to heal us and make us whole. *The text is from The Message translation.*

Psalm 147 (Selah – take a pause, breathe, and reflect)

¹Hallelujah!

It's a good thing to sing praise to our God;
praise is beautiful, praise is fitting.

²⁻⁶ God's the one who rebuilds Jerusalem,
who regathers Israel's scattered exiles.

He heals the heartbroken
and bandages their wounds.

He counts the stars
and assigns each a name.

Our Lord is great, with limitless strength;
we'll never comprehend what he knows and does.

God puts the fallen on their feet again
and pushes the wicked into the ditch.

⁷⁻¹¹ Sing to God a thanksgiving hymn,
play music on your instruments to God,
Who fills the sky with clouds,
preparing rain for the earth,

Then turning the mountains green with grass,
feeding both cattle and crows.

He's not impressed with horsepower;
the size of our muscles means little to him.

Those who fear God get God's attention;
they can depend on his strength.

Prayer

Almighty God, how great thou art. You hold creation in the palm of your hands. You are the great cause without a cause, not constrained by time or tradition. Despite our mortal lives being like a drop in the ocean, you make space for us in your kingdom.

You assure us that whatever difficulties we face in this life on earth, trusting you will bring us a joy and peace that we cannot imagine. So, when we forget your promise to heal us and make us whole, we are sorry.

For those times when we feel you have abandoned us, turning to distractions or despair; we are sorry.

For those times when we abandon you for the fleeting pleasures of the world; we are sorry.

For those times when we have abandoned others, being too wrapped up in our own comforts or concerns; we are sorry.

May the willingness of Jesus to give up everything to save us show us that your love will never leave us. Through the horrors of the cross, may we see that through your grace, we can always turn to you and receive your forgiveness. Amen.

READING: [Isaiah 40:21-31](#)

Hymn: [Strength will rise](#)

YouTube hymn – Chris Tomlin

READING: [Mark 1:29-39](#)

Reflection

When you are told you have an incurable disease it is easy to lose hope and imagine the worst outcome for your life. I am fortunate that I have my faith and I pray almost daily that I am healed, and my MS will not progress further. I pray that a cure will be found and that the damage already done can be reversed. But after seven years I am wondering whether my prayers will ever be answered. **Is my situation hopeless?**

I am sure the people of Israel after many years of exile in Babylon felt hopeless. They were not only exiled in a foreign land, but their homes, their temple and everything that made them a nation had been destroyed. There was nothing to go back to, even if they were released.

Hopeless.

There are millions around the world today who have reasons to feel just as hopeless. Those who have been made homeless by war or conflict, their homes and livelihoods in ruins. Not only have they lost their cultural home, but they are being turned away from countries that could help. We hear the news and feel helpless; **the refugees and those still trapped in a war zone must feel utterly hopeless.**

God's message to me, to the ancient Israelites and to refugees is not to lose hope, but to trust and wait. **But how do you do that when you need it now?** How do you do that in the context of war and conflict when you see your friends and family being killed in front of you? Telling people who are suffering to trust in God, will often feel trite and more of a platitude than a real help.

What we really want is the kind of healing we read about in our gospel reading today. Jesus is told about Simon's mother-in-law who had a fever. Jesus **'went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left and she served them.'** He then healed many others who were brought to Simon's house.

So, maybe I am doing something wrong.

Well, what I do know is that despite my condition I have never felt more blessed and at peace. I can only put that down to knowing Jesus and truly believing that God will raise me up on wings like eagles. The Isaiah passage has become one of my favourite pieces of scripture, especially verse 31 **'but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will fly up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary.'** For someone who now struggles to walk this verse brings me so much comfort and even joy.

It feels like the scales have fallen from my eyes and I can see more clearly how nothing that

happens to me will stop me being part of God's creation. It is like my enforced slowness has given God time to be present in more of my life.

I more intimately relate to Paul's assertion that nothing can separate me from God's love ...
'And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Romans 8:38,39

If God knows the name of all the stars in the sky and adorns the lilies more impressively than Solomon in all his glory, how much more will God take care of what we need. I believe that having a faith & trust in God allows us to hold lament in tension with hope. **It means I can accept that sometimes healing is not about removing the physical affliction, but about God giving us the ability to cope and live with it.**

It also means when I have days where frustration and discomfort make me tired and weary, I don't worry that my faith has slipped. Instead, I keep the faith that before long God will raise me up again. I relate to and have personal experience of the assurance we sang of earlier – **'strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord'**. It means that the blessings and joy from knowing Jesus and trusting God will return.

If you will forgive me a slight over-reading of the gospel text, then I also think that this passage refers to physical healing and spiritual healing. **³⁴ He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him.'** For me this

brings together healing and wholeness. It describes how for some Jesus brought about physical healing, like curing the fever of Simon's mother-in-law. But for others he cast out demons, bringing about spiritual healing which is aligned to mind and soul. It is the mind and soul that determines how we react to physical suffering. When the demons get the upper hand, life becomes hopeless. **When Jesus casts out the demons our hope returns.**

I have no idea whether I will ever be physically healed, but my personal experience makes me wonder whether the most important thing is wholeness - spiritual healing, acceptance, faith and hope. It is this that has caused me to live life believing that Isaiah 40:31 is true. **It is this that has led me to take up wheelchair racing where I truly feel raised up on wings like eagles.**

I pray that if anyone reading this is feeling hopeless about your situation today, that your strength will rise as you wait on the Lord. That despite your difficult days you always know that God never tires or grows weary of loving you until you are feeling blessed again. **Amen.**

Prayer

Creator God, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all people.

Help us become a community that shares each other's burdens. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world.

For all those that are living through hopeless situations, suffering death and destruction because of war, conflict, or natural disaster. For those who have recently lost a loved one or who have had a difficult health diagnosis. For anyone feeling hopeless, bring them healing or wholeness and may they always know your presence.

Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God. Amen.

Hymn: [Abide with me – Matt Maher](#)

Hymn: [Abide with me - traditional](#)

YouTube hymn

Blessing

May God surround you.

May Jesus hold you.

May the Spirit fill you.

Try this ... breathe the blessing taking slow deliberate breaths.

Inbreath – God, *outbreath* – surround me.

Inbreath – Jesus, *outbreath* – hold me.

Inbreath – Spirit, *outbreath* – fill me.

Service sheet prepared by Paul Burke

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