

World Day of Prayer 2020, Sawston, Cambridge

hosted by St Mary's Mothers' Union

Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk

Looking back to earlier in the year, our members were happy to have been able to plan and host this year's World Day of Prayer service which took place on 1 March before lockdown was announced. We were very pleased to welcome our friends from Our Lady of Lourdes, the United Reformed Church and Christ Church, and we thank them for taking part so enthusiastically. This year's service was compiled by Christian women in Zimbabwe and, through readings, music, prayer and meditation, we learned much about both the challenges facing this country and the positive values of which Zimbabwe is proud, such as a high regard for community and strong family bonds. The service began with the lighting of three coloured candles (red to represent love, white to represent peace, yellow to represent reconciliation) and these colours and themes recurred through the service. The candles were placed on the "altar" along with a sisal mat. The title of the service was *Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk* and focused on the passage from John's Gospel, chapter 5, in which Jesus heals a sick man at a pool by the Sheep Gate, giving him the command 'Stand up, take your mat and walk'.

John 5: 2–9a (excluding verse 4)

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

We meditated on Jesus' question to the sick man 'Do you want to be made well?' and on the man's excuses. We thought about the areas in our own lives and in our community where we needed to hear this life-changing question and about the obstacles that hinder our own transformation. We then wrote down our own commitments to

support our community with actions of love, peace and reconciliation. The papers on which the commitments had been written were collected with the offertory. The plan was that all those present would meet again after a couple of weeks to discuss our commitments further and to consider what progress we had made in carrying them out. A date was set for this meeting but, sadly, we were overtaken by events and it was not possible to meet. However, a summary of our responses to the meditation and the commitments made during the service are printed below and perhaps, whether we were present at the service or not, we might take some time to consider them now. At the end of the service, all participants were given a sisal plaited bookmark, tied with red, white and yellow thread, to remind us of the healed man's transformation as he picked up his mat, and of the themes of love, peace and reconciliation. Many thanks to Barbara Hylton who made the bookmarks so beautifully, and thanks to all who took part or contributed in any way, including those who could not attend but loaned some beautiful artefacts from Zimbabwe for our display.

Mary Richmond

Commitments and responses to the meditation on John 5: 2–9a

Where in our lives do we need to hear Jesus' life-changing question, 'Do you want to be made well?'

In our community/family.

In our family life and the life of our communities, we need to act in Jesus' love.

What are the obstacles or excuses that hinder our transformation?

Fear of change – what God might ask us to do.

Our own weakness and human nature, often not allowing ourselves to come out of our comfort zones.

Bearing grudges.

Fear of rejection.

Lack of time/problems.

Thinking that being a good person is enough.

What does 'Rise! Take your mat and walk' mean for us?

Be able to move forward and let go of past events which may have

been hurtful.

Move forward and forgive.

Don't bear grudges.

Go and do what God has given us to do.

Follow God's call and do His will.

We have to believe that change is possible.

Take the love you feel for Jesus into your daily life and into your community.

You can only truly find 'wellness' in finding salvation in Christ.

Our commitments to support our communities with actions of love, peace and reconciliation.

Prayer commitments:

Continue to pray for reconciliation throughout the world.

Pray for those who are disadvantaged, lonely, sad and for those on the sidelines of society, addicts and broken families.

Pray for people who need Jesus' love.

'I will commit to praying for my grandchildren ...'

'To pray more and to believe my prayers will be answered, whether or not in the way I expect but what God feels is best for me.'

Spiritual, practical and social commitments:

Action through faith.

Hope for the future.

Reconciliation:

Overcome antipathy towards others, and attempt to behave peacefully when antagonised by others.

Be prepared to make the first move in apologising and mending broken relationships.

Love those I find difficult to love.

Bring peace to my family and community.

Treat those I meet with respect.

Be reconciled to God and to those around me in this season of Lent.

Be less judgemental and less sensitive when feeling excluded.

We have to forgive and come together and understand.

Not to continue to bear grudges, but to say sorry and forget it.

Be able to help people who need reconciliation and peace.

Listening:

Be a good listening ear.

More listening – intentional conversations – less busyness.

Treat all with confidentiality.

Be aware of those who, for whatever reason, need help and support – listening.

Reaching out:

Help people more.

To be more generous and kind to others.

Go out beyond the walls that surround us, whether these be church, house or life in general. Interact with the community and join with those working to bring love, peace and reconciliation.

Offer a hand to those who feel or are vulnerable, through social circumstances/health.

Be aware of all people in need around us, seen or unseen.

Give our time and talents and share what we have.

Be aware of what is happening in our community.

Not to be too busy or afraid to reach out – especially in current quarantine climate (March 2020).

Visit the sick, elderly, housebound.

‘I will visit a sick friend regularly.’

‘God calls me to be aware of my elderly neighbours who need support and friendship.’

‘To support neighbours when I have an opportunity.’

To support the churches’ initiatives to reach out to those in need.

Promote ‘Churches Together’.

Keep going into the village High Street, supporting the local businesses and connecting with people, rather than taking the convenient option of only online shopping.

‘Always greet the carers/mothers at T4Tots with a smile of welcome, however tired I am.’

‘Find somewhere to volunteer – for example Arthur Rank.’