



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life.

Amen

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

If you had to choose three words to sum up what discipleship means for you, what would you pick, and why?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise – Psalm 100 (StF 822)

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.

Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of renewal and transformation, hope and change,
we come before you knowing there is much in our lives,
and in the life of the world you create and sustain,
in need of your redemption and renewal,
which we bring to you now in prayer:

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of all goodness and blessings,
thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and equip us to be your disciples. **Amen**

Reading Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

Sermon

A few weeks ago, I found myself having a fascinating conversation, over a rather nice cup of coffee with a friend I had not seen for some time, about what helped to sustain us during the various lockdowns. For me, one oasis of hope was art, and music in particular, because somehow it gave voice to the sadness and trials of what ministering in those days was like, yet it allowed rays of light and hope to break through amid the darkness, and it was like a balm for the soul. Being from a Methodist tradition which has long known the power of music

to point to the divine and to help make God's love real to us is a gift, one we have shared with the wider Church. Many of us have known the way singing a particular hymn can generate powerful emotions, uplifting us when we are struggling or moving us to tears of sadness or joy or gratitude. One of the toughest aspects to adapt to as things began to open up, and public worship was allowed once again, was not being permitted to sing during services; something important yet not always easy to articulate was lost, which illustrates the essential place music has in our lives as a source for good.

However, like any gift, music can be dangerous as well as lifegiving. In 2017, there was an excellent documentary series shown on BBC Four called *Tunes for Tyrants*. Written and presented by Suzy Klein, it explores ways in which the emotive power of music has been used and misused for political ends. As she argues, music's potential was harnessed in the dark 1930s, during which "the soundtracks to Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were exploited to forge national identity and prop up violent ideologies". As it may function as "an instrument of repression and resistance", "every piece became a battleground", and this ambiguity leads Klein to consider whether "music itself" has a "moral case to answer". What makes it simultaneously "incredibly powerful and potentially incredibly dangerous" is "its uncanny ability to stir us up, and to calm us down, to express every possible human emotion; it bypasses language and reason and aims instead directly for our soul". For her, the piece that most encapsulates this dilemma is *O Fortuna* from *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff. Composed in 1935, and remaining popular today, the Nazi Party newspaper hailed it as the 'clear, stormy, yet disciplined music our time requires'.

For Klein, the "hypnotic rhythms" of *Carmina Burana* seek to appeal to our most primitive instincts and "chimed brilliantly with the frenetic atmosphere of Nazi Germany" where it "swept crowds off their feet". It cannot be escaped, forcing us to "enjoy and feel the tension" until, at the "right moment", we reach its big release as drums and chorus

combine in a "cliché of macho apocalyptic glory". Having witnessed it performed, it still has the power to generate an electricity that sets the hairs on the back of one's neck on edge, but is there "something inherently fascist about the bombastic, unreflective emotions written into its very notes?". Klein argues that we cannot neatly separate it from the "dark and distant politics of a terrible time"; for her, *Carmina Burana* remains "the ultimate piece of empty music, a load of sound and fury, signifying nothing". Orff's work "pushes our buttons, and it tries to provoke our basest emotions", so that Klein "cannot help but hear the hate-filled ideology it grew out of" in its thundering rhythms. Hence, "our willingness today to still submit to its power carries with it a real health warning – that when we embrace music like this, we also have to recognise that it came out of a profoundly evil regime".

Now, while debates will continue as to how far one can separate the art from the artist, the ambiguity of gifts, which can be both lifegiving and destructive, is a theme running throughout the Bible. In our text for this week, we see Jesus commissioning the Twelve who formed the core group of his disciples, giving them instructions to undertake the same ministry highlighted by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus himself (4:17) – to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God breaking in, to heal the sick and raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, and to cast out demons (10:7 – 8). This would all be possible for that flawed group of people (10:2 – 4) only because Jesus gifted them his authority (10:1). They were called to use their power – and it was undoubtedly a form of power – to do good, to minister to those lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6) for whom Jesus had showed compassion (9:36). This gift was meant for good, and we are called to follow in their footsteps as we seek to fulfil the Great Commission, given by the risen Jesus, to make disciples out of all nations (28:18). However, the Church has a tragic history of exploiting that authority, and not just through repressive institutions such as the inquisitions. We need only ask our Jewish siblings to see this all too clearly...

As we grapple with what it means to follow Jesus and to be disciples in twenty-first century Britain, we find ourselves doing thus within an increasingly febrile and dangerous environment. We are living amid a context which has seen great restriction of the democratic right to protest in any meaningful form within the public square, the othering of groups who do not have a platform to be properly heard such as refugees and trans people, the legal suppression of the free speech of people who dare to challenge the powerful within universities and other institutions. Scariest of all, we have seen serving government ministers addressing organisations such as National Conservatism, and hence following in the footsteps of Viktor Orbán, and Alexander Lukashenko. They have embraced people open about opposition to movements across the world seeking equality for women and LGBT people, the pushing of a form of Britishness aligned with the agenda espoused by the US Religious Right and various Far-Right regimes, and are promoting notions of cultural purification. So, when we hear many survivors of the horrors of the Nazis warning that Gary Lineker had a point, when he spotted the same rhetoric being utilised by the Home Secretary as was heard in 1930s Germany, we need to wake up and listen, however uncomfortable that makes us feel.

We can use the gifts we have been given by God to do good, to set others free to flourish and to break down those walls which separate and segregate, or we can be complicit in the smashing up of human rights across the world, in the names of Fundamentalist Christianity and white nationalism, as seen in places as far apart as Florida and Uganda. The choices we make and the people we venerate are not neutral in any time; they matter especially when the spectre of right-wing populism, and even fascism, is casting its dark shadow across the world. When our Prime Minister freely embraces an unashamed fascist as Sunak did with Giorgia Meloni recently, it should alarm us all. After all, the culture wars being promoted resonate with much of the nationalist rhetoric used in the Germany of the 1920s and 1930s

even as classical music is not now the preferred instrument. What's more, sources from that time illustrate how many were willing to look the other way at the deepening repression and stripping away of the freedoms of Jewish people, either because they found its resurgent nationalism inspiring, or because they too were antisemitic. Indeed, lest we think we were better and did not "muck up" (quoting Douglas Murray at the recent National Conservatism conference), opposition to Jewish refugees being allowed to come to the UK was vehement, and Mosley's fascist Blackshirts were praised by the Daily Mail, and others, throughout the 1930s.

Friends, let us make a choice to follow the way of Jesus which forms the path of costly and self-giving love, if we value our fellow humans as also made in the image of God and infinitely valuable. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Alister McGrath's 2018 book *Mere Discipleship* argues that being a disciple means growing in wisdom and hope, shaping how we view the world and act accordingly.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray:

God of transformation and hope,
we bring to you our prayers for your world.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those living in places blighted by war and conflict and all those displaced by hostility and hatred.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are working in hospitals and social care at this time of unprecedented pressures.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for schools, colleges and universities,
and for all who learn and teach within them.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for local communities, thinking especially for any
people we know who are feeling lonely, isolated or afraid.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your Church throughout the world and
especially for those communities of which we are a part.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those people we know who are suffering
in body, mind or spirit today.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those bereaved or struggling with other losses,
especially those without the support they need.
God of love, **hear our prayer.**

Lord's Prayer

Blessing