

Prisoners Week Worship Resources — Hope Within (2017)

1. Intro

Prisoners Week is an initiative of the Churches that aims to stimulate discussion, highlight concerns and share hope in prisons and communities across Scotland. It takes place in the third week of November, liturgically a month for remembering. The invitation is, in the words of the author to the letter of the Hebrews, to “*remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them*” (Hebrews 13:3, Good News Bible) together with all who are affected by imprisonment and crime.

Each year a different theme is chosen. The theme for 2017 is Hope Within - hope within prisons, hope within our communities, hope within ourselves. We don't have to look far to find hope. Think of the gifts or the talents each individual has. Sometimes it's locked away and not recognised but each human being has enormous potential. Catch a glimpse of that, and imagine what resources could be untapped. Jesus said “No one will say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ because the Kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21, Good News Translation).

Chaplaincy Teams, Prison Visitors Centres, and others arrange for both prison and community events during Prisoners Week and a wide range of events are organised. Many local community and prison events celebrate the week, ranging from Quiz Nights to Concerts, Discussion Groups to Worship Services, Inter-Faith visits to Coffee Mornings, art competitions to sports.

More details about Prisoners Week are available on the website www.prisonersweek.org.uk The website includes Prisoners Week information, a calendar of events, details of organisations that offer help and advice, discussion ideas, reflections, and worship resources which include prayers from the Christian and Islamic Faiths.

The Prisoners Week Planning Group includes Prison Chaplains and representatives of the Churches, The Society of Friends, Families Outside, The National Prison Visitor Centres' Steering Group and Prison Fellowship. Prisoners Week Trust is a charity, registered in Scotland, No: SC043431

Although Prisoners Week lasts but seven days the hope is that these concerns carry forward through the year ahead and offer our communities and people affected by imprisonment and crime opportunities to reflect on developing the support that's needed as people pick up the pieces again.

2. Scripture Passages Overview

Luke 17:20-30

No one will say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ because the Kingdom of God is within you” Luke 17:21 (Good News Translation).

Prior to this discussion Luke relays a healing story, typically with a twist that expands the horizons of his readers. Jesus is in the border country between Samaria and Galilee, at the edges of different communities. Of the ten healed from a dreaded skin disease only one returns to say ‘thank you’. He is a Samaritan, which is in part the purpose of this episode, for like Jesus, Luke wants to be clear that the good news of God's presence reaches out to all. The outsider's thankful joy raises questions about the ingratitude of those who never questioned they belonged. Next we find Jesus talking with the Pharisees, asking him about when and where the kingdom of God would come.

No one will say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is! because the Kingdom of God is within you.” The Kingdom of God is the perennial theme of Jesus' preaching, he announces that the Kingdom is both present and coming, through parables and sayings, sermons and the miracles which are in effect signs of the Kingdom. Jesus suggests it would be unbelievable for anyone to say the Kingdom can be found here in this place or there in that place because the Kingdom is within us.

looking for it' (v 23) because to do so would be to miss the realm of God, his presence with us, in the moment that is now.

The text that follows accesses that kind of biblical literature which looks forward to the day when God's Kingdom will be complete. Talk of suffering, of the Son of Man and others, finds its meaning in the coming of a new age, the labour pangs that herald the new creation where the former things will be no more, when every one of humanity's foes will be defeated and all tears will be wiped away. The repetition of the phrase "Everybody kept on eating and drinking" (v27 & v 28) with reference first to the people who in Noah's time learnt of the imminent flood but did nothing and then to the people in the time of Lot, serves as a reminder about the importance of making the best of each moment.

Matthew 11:4-6

The discussion with the Pharisees is reminiscent of that time when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus asking if Jesus was the one or should they seek another. Were they blind to the signs? What were they looking for? Did they not see what was happening on their doorstep? Jesus replied saying, "Go back and tell John what you are hearing and seeing: the blind can see, the lame can walk, those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are brought back to life, and the Good News is preached to the poor." (Matthew 11:4-5, Good News Bible)

1 Peter 1: 3-9

Peter's living hope comes from his witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the refreshing of his faith through fellowship with the risen Lord. Arguably the resurrection of Jesus was the central message of the early Church and it is to this that Peter points the scattered disciples of the northern part of Asia Minor in his first letter. They love Jesus, though they have not seen him, they believe in him though they do not now see him, and their joy is glorious (v 8).

3. Sermon Ideas

'Assets' is a phrase that's often associated with property or finance. Many organisations will have an inventory of their assets and a regular review of these often makes for a healthier organisation! 'Capital' is another word that's like it, most often used to refer to money. But sometimes reference is made to such things as 'social capital' and 'personal assets', phrases which invite us to consider what communities can offer and what gifts or talents a person may have. Typically assets-based approaches look at the positives, they are not focused on deficits or needs but on the gifts and talents a person or community may have. It's a glass half-full perspective that asks how a person may be supported to more fully realise their gifts and to flourish.

In prisons there are many courses and activities offered to people in custody through learning centres, psychology, offending behaviour programmes, health centres, recovery cafes and chaplaincy, to name a few, ranging from formal learning to offence related work to psychological and spiritual support. Many of these course are followed by the presentation of a certificate which may mark a person's attendance or contribution and in some cases the certificate may also be a qualification that is recognised 'on the outside' and may assist the person returning to a community to find some work. What is always surprising are the number of people who are moved - sometimes to tears - because this is the first time they have ever received any kind of certificate in their lives. So it is that people begin to acquire a new perspective about themselves and about others.

This year's theme for Prisoners Week – Hope Within – invites people to look at the hopes they have for themselves, for people in prison and all affected by imprisonment and crime and for our communities. It's an invitation firstly to make contact with hope. Hope is sometimes in short supply for those who became caught up and involved in crime and who now find themselves in custody. People are easily overwhelmed - by anxiety, the multiple challenges that face them, the losses they experience and, often, the remorse they feel. If people can get in touch with the positives and stay focused on them there is hope of new beginning. The presence of people who care and increased levels of support, in prisons and in communities, enable people to believe that change

might be possible. Such care can point to the presence of the One whose light always shines, and which the darkness can never overcome.

Jesus had that ability to unlock potential and enable people to see themselves and others in a different way. We don't have to look far to find hope. Think of the gifts or the talents each individual has. Sometimes it's locked away and not recognised but each human being has enormous potential. Catch a glimpse of that, and imagine what resources could be untapped. Today's readings point to a living and active God who is at work in all places and in every situation to bring hope, healing and transformation. Hope is within us all, we just have to get in touch with it sometimes. It is not elusive, never-to-be found, but a present reality right where we happen to be. Even when that place is uncomfortable and not one we would have chosen. Jesus suggested it was absurd to go looking for hope: "No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

Hope is on your doorstep, it is with you wherever you are. Hope is the gift of the risen Lord who has promised to be with us always.

You might like to try the exercise and identify the hopes you have. You can download a PDF or enter your hopes on-line at www.prisonersweek.org.uk or via twitter at hashtag #hopewithin17. Maybe you might like to use the material for a discussion group in your Church?

4. Time with Children

Hold an apple in your hands and invite those present to guess the number of seeds there could be inside the apple.

Then open it, count the seeds and offer a prize to the one who got it right – maybe another apple!

Now hold just one tiny seed between your fingers and ask the question: 'how many apples are inside the seed?'

We can see what amazing possibilities there are for a tiny seed. Imagine what possibilities there are within each and every person! Think of the good things they could do, the gifts people might have, the tasks they can complete, the hopes and dreams they have.

We see Jesus as someone who is good at seeing what possibilities there are within each and every person he meets. Jesus never has nothing to do with people others turn their back on because he can see their gifts and what they could be. Some of these people become his followers, people like Peter. Peter makes mistakes – quit a lot! He knows even when he gets it wrong Jesus helps him see the good that can be in the time to come. Peter spoke about the living hope Jesus brings and told many people about that.

You might like to offer time to for the children and young people to think about the hopes they have for themselves and the world.

5. Prayers

Call to Worship

“What the Lord requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God” Micah 6:8 (Good News Bible).

Approach to God

Gracious and loving God, it is our joy and delight to meet in your presence. We remember the promise that wherever two or three gather in your name there you also are. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, One God, you are the perfect community of love, and your presence draws us together. As we meet here, we remember those who worship today in places different to our surroundings, people:

praying in hospitals,
praising in the open air,
worshipping in far-away places
gathered in fellowship at work
praying in prisons,
and in many kinds of settings.

Through your Spirit, we ask you to join ours to the worship of all your people on earth and in heaven and as part of a great company may we praise your glory.

Thanksgiving

Many are the gifts given and we thank you the Giver, who loves us as we are and sees all we can be. For the wonder of creation, with its seasons that promise the fruits of the earth from tiny seeds hidden in the soil. How marvellously you have made so many varieties of life and human beings to know and enjoy you for ever. Your love is so great that we are called God’s children, and so in fact we are!

Confession

God of new beginnings who brought from the dead our Saviour Jesus to life, your love gives us the confidence to name those things that we have done that we wish we had not or those actions we did not take which we wish we had.

Lord you reach out to lift those who have fallen;
those who are lost hear you calling us by name;
when we cannot see you open our eyes to new horizons,
and when we have sinned you meet us with forgiveness.

Now, in the strength of your Spirit and as forgiven people may we so live that hope may touch the lives of many, to the glory of your name.

Intercession

There is a brief line of response for some of our prayers of intercession. When you hear the words ‘Lord in your mercy’ you are invited to pray saying ‘Hear our prayer’. These will follow moments for quiet reflection and we are invited to say together the Prisoners Week Prayer and The Lord’s Prayer.

We recall that many brought people to Jesus that he might lay his hands upon them and bless them. As then, so now, in our prayers we bring others to Jesus that they may be blessed by his presence.

In moments of quiet we bring to mind those whom we love and think of often.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We bring also those whom we find it hard to love and don't think of often.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray also for the world in which you have placed us, for what is just, for compassion and humility.

Silence

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Today, in Prisoners Week we pray together with the words of the Prisoners Week Prayer:

Lord, you offer freedom to all people.

We pray for those who are held in prison.

Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist.

**Support with your love: prisoners, their families and friends,
prison staff, chaplains and all who care.**

**Heal those who have been wounded by the activities of others,
especially the victims of crime.**

**Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, to love mercy,
and walk humbly together with Christ**

**in his strength and in his Spirit,
now and every day.**

And in the words Jesus taught his disciples we draw together all our prayers, those spoken or said quietly within, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,**

**Your kingdom come,
your will be done,**

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin
against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.**

Amen.

6. Musical Suggestions

All songs are from Church Hymnary 4th Edition, Canterbury Press Norwich, unless otherwise stated.

727 In the bulb there is a flower – to the tune ‘Hymn of Promise’ this hymn is about realising potential.

279 Make way, make way v2 speaks about healing broken hearts and setting prisoners free.

737 Will your anchor hold. The ‘Boy’s Brigade’ hymn brings to mind the hope that is sure and steadfast, an anchor for the soul (Hebrews 6.9).

237 Look forward in faith – the positive direction is undeniable! There’s a line that says ‘Look forward in hope’.

396 And can it be – v4 is especially relevant for Prisoners Week – ‘Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound...’

250 Sent by the Lord am I – a song that invites each worshipper to play their part in creating a world of love, justice and peace. It’s not long and could be sung twice.

575 Over my head – the refrain hints at hope: “There must be a God somewhere.”

259 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair – this song is wide-ranging in its concerns and represents an appeal for compassion.

694 Brother, sister, let me serve you – people in custody connect with the desire to restore, to do something to help others.

749 Soon and very soon – a lively song of hope, the new creation in the Kingdom complete.

721 We lay our broken world – a song of contrition and hope of healing – ‘find in us love, and hope and trust, and lift us up to you.’

77, Songs of God’s People Many are the lightbeams – a song about gifts and assets!

132, Common Ground Till all the jails are empty – a song about hope for a new society.