

Prisoners Week 2021

Worship Resources



Ephesians 4

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The letters of the New Testament constantly use metaphors for the Body of Christ. There is a clear theme throughout that we are not simply in a vertical relationship with our God, but that we together form a community.

Jim Wallis, in his seminal treatise, *The Call to Conversion* puts it thus:

“Community is the great assumption of the New Testament. From the calling of the disciples to the inauguration of the church at Pentecost, the gospel of the kingdom drives the believers to community. The new order becomes real in the context of a shared life.”

It matters what happens to the parts of the body. (1 Cor 12)

Whilst this is true spiritually, it also holds that we care for each other physically, (and mentally) too.

There has always been a school of thought that prison should be harsh, punitive and a “lesson” to the wrong do-er.

Equally, there are those who see prison as an opportunity to change and develop new ways of being for the convicted.

The themes of Retribution and Restoration run deep in the history of criminal justice.

Which represents a “mature body” showing the love of Christ?

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Listen to Martin Forrest as he speaks about the impact of the Sycamore Tree course which runs in several Scottish Prisons <https://www.prisonersweek.org.uk/blog/watch-sycamore-tree-course-at-hmp-low-moss>
- Find out more about Restorative Justice by exploring the resources in the June Focus in our Resources section <https://www.prisonersweek.org.uk/2021>

Ezekiel 37 - can these bones live?

37 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³ He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ ⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath^[a] enter you, and

you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸ I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

⁹ Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

¹¹ Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’” ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”

The story of transformation and new life resurrected from the dust is well-known and well-loved because it echoes the hope of Christianity and preaches a message of being born again.

There are many stories of re-birth and second chances within the experience of ex-prisoners. You might want to check out tough-talk.com

The group tell stories of their own personal journeys into faith, from addiction and violence. They are regular visitors to prisons across the world, sharing their stories.

Are there personal stories of re-birth to be celebrated in your fellowship?

1 Cor 12 - one body

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal

concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

During the economic slump of the naughties then Prime Minister, David Cameron told the nation that “we were all in this together.”

Ironically, the shared experience of economic collapse produced an ever widening gap between rich and poor and indices of poverty rocketed in the areas of the country where jobs disappeared and benefits became harder to access.

Paul’s famous passage suggesting that the Community of Christ were “all in this together” has produced similar results!

This is clearly seen in the population of the prisons across the UK. A Postcode map of the most deprived areas will almost perfectly match up with a postcode map of where the prison population comes from.

How do we build the Body of Christ together when we allow massive inconsistencies and gaps to appear in care provision in our own society, never mind the rest of the global family of God?

[Crossreach](#) have been active in helping provide care to families visiting prisons and also trying to provide better childcare and education for vulnerable families.

Prison Fellowship Scotland run the [Angel Tree Christmas Gift programme](#) for the children of men and women in prison and [Adventure holidays](#) for children affected by imprisonment.

[Stirling Interfaith Community Justice Group](#), representing churches in the Stirling area, provide volunteers to run the Family Visit Centres and HMP Cornton Vale and HMP Glenochil.

What can we do in our own communities to reflect that “we are all in this together?”

John 11 vs17-37

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles^[b] from Jerusalem, ¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” ²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When

the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Loss and restoration lie at the heart of this gospel story. The grief reactions of the two sisters reflect what we know of their personalities from the story of the "domestic" over a woman's role (Luke 10 38-42). Martha is out meeting Jesus and her plain speaking is once again front and centre! Mary is gutted and grieving in the house.

They both reproach Jesus for not being there. They knew that his presence would have changed the outcome. They believed that he was God's Messiah with the power over life and death.

And yet. Their beloved brother was dead.

We know that the happy ending is nigh. However, lost in pain and grief and loss the sisters are angry that this could have happened. That Jesus let this happen.

Does this have echoes of our feelings and prayers when something bad happens to us?

Prison is often a moment of great loss for family. Income, relationships, home and status are all threatened and often devastated. To learn more about the impact on families why not look at the [August Focus on Families](#) on our website.

Where do we place our faith at such times? How do we deal with forgiveness and the effect on victims alongside the sense of loss within families? How do we hold together when all is breaking apart?

Suggested hymns:

Bind us together Lord	Mission Praise 54
Blest be the tie that binds	Mission Praise 60
For I'm building a people of power	Mission Praise 151
Praise you Lord	Mission Praise 565
Let us build a house	CH4 198
Brother sister let me serve you	CH4 694
For your generous providing	CH4 655

Help us forgive CH4 693

Jesus puts this song in our hearts CH4 692

Prayers

Call to Worship:

L: Christ is our peace

All: He has broken down the hostility between us

L: There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female

All: We are all one in Christ Jesus

L: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself

All: and has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation

L: We are the body of Christ

All: We are members of one another.

L: We are all part of the community of God's people

All: We are called to be witnesses of God's love

(Corrymeela Community)

Prayer of approach

God, who goes before us, how many times have we looked for you and not found you?

How often have we felt alone and lamented your distance from us?

Yet, Lord, you have always been there, and you are here now.

Help us to recognise you when you show yourself but we are too blind to notice.

Give us the confidence to believe that at turning points, beginnings and endings, you watch over us, but just out of sight.

For you are God, and at no-one's beck and call.

Yet as we gather to worship, you are in our midst.

Glory be to you, O Lord

Confession

Merciful God, before we can know your renewing grace, we seek your forgiveness.

We are sorry for the times someone stretched out a hand and we pretended not to notice;

for the times someone wasn't beautiful to us and we looked away;

for the times truth was on our tongues and we swallowed it instead of speaking it;

for the times love was in our hearts and we were too embarrassed to express it;

for the times we were prey to fears and we didn't trust you with them;

for the times a stranger asked us for something and we pretended not to realise what was needed;

for the times we haven't loved enough and for the times we have loved with only part of ourselves;

have mercy upon us, O Lord.

Declaration of Forgiveness

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

I declare to you who have confessed your sin to God that God in his love freely forgives you, absolves you of all your sin, and offers you the grace and strength of his Holy Spirit.

Together as his gathered people, we pray as he taught us saying,

Our Father...

Prayers of intercession

God of Abraham and Sarah,
Jacob, Moses, and Aaron,
who through your prophets
raised the eyes of your people
to seek a better country
where justice prevailed
and peace reclaimed the streets;
we pray for the peoples of our time
that their lives be not shaped
by the stories only of their past,
but that they may discover,
in the traditions of their faith
and in the encounter with those
who are different from themselves,
a future in which there is room
for the gifts of all.

Silence.....

Hear our prayers also on this day for those who risk all to worship,
Christian communities who are suffering persecution at this time,
who flee the violence or continue to live in the ruins,
who fear reprisal, kidnap, and the destruction of buildings.

We pray for world bodies uniting to meet this threat,
bodies who bring aid or monitor injustice,
journalists who bring the reality home,
local churches as they seek what they can offer;

and we pray that the whole church with even greater urgency
will seek ways of making known the promise of reconciliation
raised before all humankind in the Cross of Christ.

As an Easter people, we remember before you now
Those whom we know who have lost hope..
Those who live in bitterness and hate....
Those who fear for their future....
Those whose lives are defined by pain....
May we as your body bring healing and peace.

Renew our commitment to being your body.
Give us compassion for the isolated ones.
Forgiveness for the ones who have hurt themselves and others
Energy and imagination to tell your story and share your love.

Together, we pray the prisoners' week prayer...

Amen

Benediction

Go in peace to be the people of God

Take strength in the knowledge God loves you.
Take hope in the power of the resurrected Christ
Take courage from the presence of the Holy Spirit.
Today and always, Amen.