

Deception and Destruction



Call to Worship

Deception and lies often hide behind the sweetness of good manners. Honesty and truth on the other hand can hardly use that cover, for a raging fire is too powerful to conceal. We gather here today, to worship the God of honesty and truth.

Hymn: All People that on earth do dwell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhUiRonlza>

Q

Verse 1

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice
Him serve with fear His praise forth tell
Come ye before Him and rejoice

Verse 2

The Lord ye know is God indeed
Without our aid He did us make
We are His flock He doth us feed
And for His sheep He doth us take

Verse 3

O enter then His gates with praise
Approach with joy His courts unto
Praise laud and bless His name always
For it is seemly so to do

Verse 4

For why the Lord our God is good
His mercy is forever sure
His truth at all times firmly stood
And shall from age to age endure

CCLI Song # 82096, Louis Bourgeois | William Kethe © Words: Public Domain

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Living God, forever the same, always and ever, today we take stock of the relationship we have with you. It is special; it is unique; it is comfortable; it is directive. There is nothing disingenuous about the way you

extend kindness and generous love towards your people.

Although theology, and scripture's narrative can be for us, at times complicated and deep, when we break it down your commitment to us, and all the world, is simple and straightforward: you love us, you care for us, you are present for us!

Sometimes in our other relationships we are not as clear or as straightforward as we should be. We perhaps do not set out to be deceitful or conniving, yet so often that is what our human relationships become.

Ulterior motives, unconscious biases, selfish objectives, unhealthy influences can all lead to the underlying loss of genuine integrity in our interactions. We are sorry for any intended, or unintended, deceit that creeps into our relationships: within family, with friends, and with strangers. We are sorry too for the times when we deceive ourselves. Trends or patterns that mean we lose a true sense of who we really are.

Let us be given a clear sense of who we are: our behaviour, our lifestyle, our actions - that we might see ourselves as you see us;

not the image we have developed of ourselves, that can sometimes be a deception, but the truth of who we are.

Merciful God, forgive us and, in your mercy, lead us to relationships with others and with you that are more genuine and more like the attitude and truth of your relationship towards us. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading: Judges 16:4 – 6, 17 – 20.

Sometime later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." So, Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued" ... So he told her everything. "No razor has ever been used on my head," he said, "because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man." When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, "Come back once more; he has told me everything." So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

Reflection: Deception and destruction

Again, this week, we ask why is this man - Samson is held up in the Hebrew faith as such a hero. Not only is he easily deceived; in the story, as strength returns, he uses his power for taking out as many people as possible. We are enjoined not to give 'deception' a foothold in one's relationship with God and other people or relationships in family, church or

community. Of course, we cannot avoid the rawness, reality, abuse, trickery and abuse that stand out in this story. In fact there is a way this story warns about the folly of such selfish and self-centred actions.

We are also reminded that evil motives of any nature, evil intentions, like pride, precede one's fall. God will find us useful and usable, if we hand our lives over to Him and allow Him to use for His will and purposes. God will use **ALL** He chooses to use. You and I are in good company if we think you are not good enough to serve God:

- Moses murdered an Egyptian and run for his life. He was also not a good public speaker. Yet God used him, powerfully to deliver the whole nation of Israel from slavery to freedom.
- Paul was at first a Christian-killer who was relentless in his persecution of those who followed Christ. Later on, he would become the man who would say, *"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."* (1 Corinthians 11:1)
- Peter is a great example to many of us of a man who is rash and impulsive. He denied Christ three times. later on, we read that in just one of his sermons, 3,000 made a decision to follow Jesus. How's that for a turnaround?

God is in the business of using men and women to carry out His plans and fulfil His purposes. Many of us want to be like the good guys in the Bible or in the life of the church. I have amazing stories of people here, past and present, who've lived saintly lives and who've made a marked difference in the life and work of our church. We give thanks to God for them. Yet one thing that many of us forget is that, no matter what they have done for God, no matter how much He has used them, **they were and are human being just like us**: flawed, imperfect, and with a lot of room for improvement.

God still used them, God still uses them, and God wants to continue using us in His plans and purposes – to build His kingdom here – for His glory. When He extends that hand of friendship and fellowship to us – inviting us to love and serve alongside Him – My prayer is that our answer will not be – Oh No, I am not strong good enough, or I have done my part – But we shall say – 'Here I am, use me Lord use me – Not my will but your will be done – in and through me, Amen.

Prayer for others

Rev Dr Marjory MacLean, convener of the Committee on Chaplains to Her Majesty's Forces, has written us a prayer for Afghanistan as we remember the sufferings of the people of that land and the sacrifices of our military personnel.

All-loving God, Your hands have fashioned every lovely corner of this treasured planet, and the beautiful land of Afghanistan is as precious as every other place Your children call 'home'. By its rivers and mountains, its fields and gardens, its busy towns and ancient villages, it is the heart's desire of its people and the place where their lives and loves are nurtured.

We grieve today with those who grieve over Afghanistan, the people who call it home indeed, the people exiled or suddenly having to leave, and the men and women from other countries who have made sacrifices in recent years in the cause of that country's future.

We remember with renewed sadness the loss of lives of military personnel during the years of this country's

involvement in Afghanistan, conscious of the questions that must today be troubling the minds of those in our community who were bereaved, those who were wounded on operations, and those who were forever changed by experiences suffered there

We pray for peace, dignity, freedom and confidence for the men, women and children of Afghanistan; for courage, vision and generosity within the international community responding to such need; and for tranquillity of mind amongst our own Service community and its wider family. In the name of Jesus Christ, the peace-giver, we pray, Amen.

'Creator God – You are there'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDpxFMBw55E>

Hymn: Lord for the years (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkTrFQLy6js>

Verse 1

Lord for the years
Your love has kept and guided
Urged and inspired us cheered us on our way
Sought us and saved us pardoned and provided
Lord of the years
We bring our thanks today

Verse 2

Lord for that word
The word of life which fires us
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze
Teaches and trains rebukes us and inspires us
Lord of the word
Receive Your people's praise

Verse 3

Lord for our land
In this our generation
Spirits oppressed by pleasure wealth and care
For young and old for commonwealth and nation
Lord of our land
Be pleased to hear our prayer

Verse 4

Lord for our world
When we disown and doubt Him
Loveless in strength and comfortless in pain
Hungry and helpless lost indeed without Him
Lord of the world
We pray that Christ may reign

Verse 5

Lord for ourselves
In living power remake us
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne
Past put behind us for the future take us
Lord of our lives
To live for Christ alone

CCLI Song # 224957, Michael Alfred Baughen | Timothy Dudley-Smith© Words: 1976 Dudley-Smith, Timothy (Admin. by Oxford University Press), CCLI License # 1198082

Sending

Let us go together
into our neighbourhoods and parish
as the Body of Christ
and be the Good News,
the Love of God,
the hope of the world
in every place we find ourselves