

'CHANGE' – A REFLECTIVE SERVICE OF READINGS FOR AUTUMN

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Dear Friends

Welcome to this Local Arrangement service resource. The theme for this straightforward service of readings, prayers and hymns is "CHANGE" - A REFLECTIVE SERVICE OF READINGS FOR

Please feel free to 'customize' your service to your own congregation... e.g. The hymns are only suggestions - if your congregation knows others that fit in with the theme, especially any newer ones, feel free to use those. You will also need to prepare for the prayers of intercession, to reflect current concerns. This is your congregation's service of worship to God, so make it as individual as you think appropriate!

I have suggested that you use 2 leaders and 2 readers, but you can adjust this too.

Chris Odell (Sheasby)

'CHANGE' – A REFLECTIVE SERVICE OF READINGS FOR AUTUMN

Leader 1 - Call to Worship:

Come, God's people, let us worship the Living God,
The God of yesterday and tomorrow,
The God who makes the present moment holy
And crowns us, his people, with blessings.

HYMN: 'Through all the changing scenes of life'... *StF 638; H&P 441; StF 638; MP 702*

Introduction: Leader 1

Autumn is a time of change. The green leaves of spring and summer become a glorious display of browns and crimson and golds, as nature prepares the trees for the coming harshness of winter. The nights draw in, the heating has to go on. Young people are back at college or school. Church meetings start up again, with the start of the new church year. All is change. Some changes we welcome, some we regret. Often, for us, the word 'change' comes to mean 'challenge'. In our service we're going to be thinking about what change means to us as Christians who believe in a God who is the God of yesterday, today and all our tomorrows.

Prayer of Adoration: Leader 2

Let us pray, and during this prayer there will be times of silence, to reflect on our words –

God of the past, we adore you.
You inspired our mothers and fathers in the faith,
Sharing their sorrows and joys and giving them courage
And the story of our own lives is shaped by you.

SILENCE

God of the present, we adore you.
You have brought us together in this place.
You came in Jesus to share our human life with us
And you surround us with your saving love every day.

SILENCE

God of the future, we adore you.
Take from us all that separates us from you.
Show us your purpose for us, as individuals and as your church,
And help us all to walk in your Way
Into your Kingdom of Everlasting Love.

SILENCE

In Jesus's Name, Amen

Meditation: Reader 1 - 'Loving Now' by Peter Firth

Lord of this Autumn morning, like me the year is growing old
And I still haven't realised the urgency of loving *now*.

I know all the right thoughts and words - I say 'Amen'
To your command to love my neighbour as myself,
But in my heart I know I pay much lip-service to love.
It's something I keep promising to do tomorrow –
Because love is something you *do*, not just feel.
And I tell myself I've got enough to do already, looking after myself.
Yet in my heart I know this is not what you are saying to me.

Lord of this Autumn morning, you are saying
Now is the time to love,
Now is the time to call on someone who's ill, or old,

Now is the time to write a letter, to visit a neighbour with a gift,
To forgive someone, to ask for forgiveness;
Now is the time, today.
For love is known in action – love is something to be *done*.

Lord of these Autumn days,
Help me to bring some grit and caring into my idea of love.
I may even sometimes find that the one who gains most
From any love I can give will be me!

Prayer of Confession: Leader 2

In this prayer there is a response – ‘Forgive us, Lord’ **‘And help us’**.

Let us pray - Lord, we confess to you how hard we find it to live in the present moment.

Our thoughts dwell in memories of the past, in planning for the future,
And we forget to listen for you in the present moment.

‘Forgive us, Lord’ **‘And help us’**.

When we live in the past, imprisoned by memories of what once was,
Closing our eyes to the opportunities and needs of today.

‘Forgive us, Lord’ **‘And help us’**.

When we fail to ‘seize the day’ in our lives as your followers

Putting off till tomorrow what we should do today

‘Forgive us, Lord’ **‘And help us’**.

When we forget to trust in you for our future

And fear cripples our lives in you

‘Forgive us, Lord’ **‘And help us’**.

The Lord hears our prayer: **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

HYMN: Lord of all hopefulness... StF 526; H&P 552; StF 526; MP 882

Comment: Leader 1

The trees let go of their autumn leaves, and they fall to the ground. Change in our lives also means letting go - of the things that are past. God has something else in store for us for the present and the future. But this does not mean that we should lose sight of the past – we have much to remember with gratitude, and both happy and painful lessons to learn from it. The autumn leaves fall to the ground, but there they both protect and feed the new growth emerging in spring.

The people of Israel loved to remember the stories of God’s providential care for them – they gave them the faith and courage they needed to face the present and the future.

Psalm: Reader 2 Psalm 111 (or Leader 1 with congregation: StF 826; H&P 873 – Psalm 111)

Prayer of Thanksgiving: Leader 2

We now offer our thanks to God in prayer.

In this prayer there is a response – ‘For your loving faithfulness’ **‘We thank you, God of our lives’**

Let us pray - God of the past, we remember how you called creation into being,
Giving humankind life, a home, and one another to love:

‘For your loving faithfulness’ **‘We thank you, God of our lives’**

God of the past, we remember how you cared for and rescued your people,
Sending them prophets to call them back to your way of justice, love and peace.

‘For your loving faithfulness’ **‘We thank you, God of our lives’**

God of the past, we remember how you came to us in Jesus,
To share our human life, so we could share eternal life with you.

‘For your loving faithfulness’ **‘We thank you, God of our lives’**

God of the past, we remember how you have blessed our former days,
With people we have loved and those who have pointed us to you,
With joyful times spent meeting and worshipping you in this church
And with the fellowship and friendship we have known here.

'For your loving faithfulness' **'We thank you, God of our lives'**

Lord, take our joyful memories of life with you, and use them to give us wisdom for present days and faith and trust for the future. In Jesus's Name, **Amen**.

HYMN: Lord, for the years.... *StF 470; MP 428*

Comment: Leader 1

One name for God in the Old Testament was YAHWEH (*pronounced 'yahway'*), which means 'I am what I am'. Not 'I was what I was' or 'I will be what I will be', but 'I am what I am'. He is the God of the present moment, and that is where we find him.

Gospel Reading: Reader 1 - Matthew 19: 16 - 26

Comment: Leader 1

We can be afraid of change, and make excuses for putting it off. But this lesson reminds us that if we don't respond to God's call in the present moment, we may miss out on what he has to offer us! As the leaves fall, we may be so caught up mourning the end of the summer, or so preoccupied worrying about the coming winter, that we do not notice how beautiful the autumn days are!

The Offering: &

Offering Prayer: Leader 2 Let us pray:

Loving God, this is what we offer you today,
Our money, our obedience and our lives,
In thankfulness for all that you have done and continue to do for us.
Take them all and use them, we pray in the name of Jesus. **Amen**.

Prayer of commitment: Leader 2

In this prayer there is a response –

'We'll praise him for all that is past': **'And trust him for all that's to come'**.

Let us pray: We have heard God's call, we have decided to follow Jesus,
And be faithful to him until our journey's end.
'We'll praise him for all that is past': **'And trust him for all that's to come'**.
We have met God in the everyday moments of our lives
And know Jesus as our Saviour, Brother and Friend
'We'll praise him for all that is past': **'And trust him for all that's to come'**.
We know that God will speak to us and guide us safely
Through all the changes and challenges of our lives
'We'll praise him for all that is past': **'And trust him for all that's to come'**.
In the name of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life for us today, **Amen**.

HYMN: This, this is the God we adore...*StF 67; H&P 277*

Comment: Leader 1

God is God of the past, God of the present, and lastly, God of the future. Looking to the future is where we see change most clearly, and it can alarm us. But because of our faith as Christians, we have been given a sure hope for the future, amidst all the change and upheaval of our daily lives.

Epistle Readings: Reader 2 - Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12; 12:1-2

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God's approval.

It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.

It was faith that made Abraham able to become a father, even though he was too old and Sarah herself could not have children. He trusted God to keep his promise. It was faith that made Abraham obey when God called him to go out to a country which God had promised to give him. He left his own country without knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as a foreigner in the country that God had promised him. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who received the same promise from God. For Abraham was waiting for the city which God has designed and built, the city with permanent foundations. Though Abraham was practically dead, from this one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, as many as the numberless grains of sand on the seashore.

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses round us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne.

Prayers of Intercession: Leader 2 Let us pray –

God of our past, our present and our future,

We pray for the world, where nothing stays the same:

Governments come and go; wars are fought and peace treaties signed;

Rains fail, the earth quakes, mountains erupt, rivers flood. (We think of)

We pray for the world that is always changing, asking that in the midst of change

Humankind might find you, the unchanging God, at work,

And find reasons for hope and joy.

God of our past, our present and our future,

We pray for the church, where nothing stays the same:

Ways of worshipping come and go; beliefs are challenged by new ways of thinking;

The Spirit constantly renews your people; we learn to live and share together. (We think of....)

We pray for the church that is always changing, asking that in the midst of change

Christians might find you, the unchanging God, at work,

And find reasons for hope and joy.

God of our past, our present and our future,

We pray for our lives, where nothing stays the same:

Happiness comes and goes; we experience and learn and grow

Unexpected events alter everything; we suffer illness and loss. (We think of....)

We pray for our lives that are always changing, asking that in the midst of change

We might find you, the unchanging God, at work,

And find reasons for hope and joy.

In the name of Jesus, who came to change the world, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer:

HYMN: One more step along the world...StF 476; H&P 746

Blessing: Leader 1

Through all the changing scenes of life,

May the blessing of the God of love encircle each one of us

Now and evermore. **Amen.**