

Opening Prayer

Merciful God – we pause to praise you.

To state for the record that your goodness and mercy is without end and your justice and gentleness is without comparison.

Merciful God – we pause to confess.

To state for the record that our goodness and mercy is life-threateningly scarce and our justice and gentleness barely tips the scale.

Merciful God, the words of scripture declare that we are born in your image but our own words and deeds make it difficult to prove this is so. Our ways are not your ways although with great confidence, we are in the habit of attaching your name to the things we do and say.

You speak and there is light, but our speech hugs the shadows.

You trust that freedom flowers from the truth while we think it is a product of ever increasing power.

You hammer swords into ploughshares knowing that permanent security is achieved when everyone has a full stomach but we convert ploughshares and into weapons to be able to keep the hungry in their place.

You rejoice at seeing how many different nationalities can fit around a table together while we seek out places to live and work and socialise and worship with people who look and speak just like us.

You come to serve and we do all we can to be served.

You approach us with basin and towel and we come to you with wood and nails.

Your daily practice is forgiveness, ours is vengeance.

You walk in love, we tread in fear.

Our ways are not your ways. We are not you, though we like to think we have long replaced you. There is a world of difference between us. And yet you have carved us on your hand with a love that will not let us go. An unmeasurable distance separates us. And yet at this time we are reminded again that your name is Emanuel – God with us – and that nothing can separate us from your love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we confess who we are may you never forget who you are Merciful God. For our difference from you threatens to drown us in despair, yet your difference from us restores our life with hope.

Merciful God, in the midst of our pause to praise and confess, we pray with the psalmist (1) of old that you restore us. Let your face to shine on us that we may be healed and released. Give us life as we call on your name. Give us life as we call on your name. Amen.

(1) Psalm 80