
Be with me
A week of prayer for all those affected by prison
Prisons Week 2010
21st – 27th November 2010
prisonsweek.org

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The Gospel Reading for the Sunday in Prisons Week takes us to the Cross where we see entwined the horror of a broken world being overcome by the wonder of the love of God. In a place where isolation and division seemed dominant, we hear the words of Jesus to the penitent thief: "You will be with me in Paradise", words that brought hope to an isolated and broken person. The challenge of the theme of 'Be with me' is to pray and work for all affected by prisons, and for all who seek to bring this hope, that all may respond to the call of God and know the blessing of being with Him.

Then He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23.42-43

The Prisons Week prayer

Lord, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in His strength and in His Spirit, now and every day. Amen.

"I hope and pray that this year's Prisons Week will help us all to connect with the Jesus who waits for us in prison, and that those undergoing imprisonment will confident that they are accompanied in prayer and compassion by the Lord and his servants."
+ Rowan Cantuar, Archbishop of Canterbury

"I am delighted to support Prisons Week once again and I strongly encourage Christians to think about, pray for, and act for all those affected by prisons during this special week in November."
The Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

"As we focus our prayers on those who find their lives confined by law or by outcomes of lawlessness and for those committed to bring help and care, we pray that God's presence and resources of love, mercy and justice would bring hope." Elizabeth A Matear (Commissioner), Moderator of the Free Churches Group

Day 1 - Be with victims

We often hear from victims of crime the questions "Why did it happen to me?" and "What have I done to deserve this?" echoing some of the cries of Job. Victims can so easily experience isolation and brokenness, and need the sensitive care and support of family and friends, and victim support groups, who are with them in their pain and struggle as a real sign of the presence of God, to bring the healing that restores.

I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29.11

Prayer of a victim

Lord, you heal us in every way and give us the strength we need to forgive those who we cannot forgive by ourselves. We pray that those who have been wronged, those who are suffering from the actions of others, can find new hope in you and can let go of their hurts, that through you they can triumph over fear, hate and guilt to live in peace.
Lord, in your mercy, be with all victims.

Day 2 - Be with prisoners

Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated the Israelites' lengthy wanderings in the wilderness, when God led them on their way, housed them in booths and gave them water to drink from the rock. Many people today are in a wilderness as a result of their upbringing, their own mistakes or what has been done to them. Jesus speaks as the rock that in His dying would be struck to produce the life-giving water of God's Spirit. He invites us in our thirst, tiredness and anxiety to come and drink, to take into ourselves the life that brings satisfaction, energy and hope.

If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. John 7.37

Prayer of a young offender

Dear God our Father, we pray for people who struggle, or are in pain and suffering, people who need you most and need a helping hand. We pray for people in prisons across the world, that they learn from their mistakes in the crimes they have committed, and believe that they can be a better person. We pray for everyone who has no one, no family, no friends, for they may be finding it hard to cope and we pray that you will guide them in a direction where they will feel loved and comforted. We pray for families who have been torn apart through imprisonment and need your love and guidance to survive. We pray for everyone, that we may all have a brighter future and love everyone as we want to be loved.
Lord, in your mercy, be with all who are imprisoned.

Day 3 - Be with families

It is often said that families of prisoners serve the 'silent sentence' for they are immediately affected by the imprisonment of a loved one even though they may not have been involved in the crime. There are obvious practical issues such as being a single parent, but families are also often isolated from their community, people may look the other way, and their children sometimes can face the worst reaction from other children. The support and care of a friend, neighbour or work colleague can mean so much in the same way that Jesus showed care to those who were ostracised in their community.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11.28

Prayer from a person whose brother is in prison

Dear Lord, sometimes families hurt so much. They wonder why the person they loved did something so wrong that resulted in a prison sentence, and whether they could have prevented the crime. It can often be isolating, shaming and helpless being the family of a prisoner.
Lord in your mercy; be with those who have a relative in prison.

Day 4 - Be with prison staff

It is all too easy in a materialistic and increasingly secular society to become discouraged in the task of communicating the good news of Christ. Prisons are places where the issues of God, humanity, sin, judgment, forgiveness and salvation come alive as people realise that they share common human insights and a common human predicament. In Athens, faced with a sceptical pagan audience, Paul found common ground in their culture before going on to set out the good news of Jesus as the Judge and Saviour of all people. Christians who work and witness in prisons need to find both common ground to make contact with others and space to interpret the Gospel of Christ in ways that connect with people's search for meaning and hope.

For "in him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring". Acts 17.28

Prayer of a prison chaplain

For the staff in our prisons, grant them the courage, patience and time to treat and listen to all prisoners with humanity and dignity.
Lord, in your mercy, be with all those who work in our prisons.

Day 5 - Be with our communities

St Francis of Assisi is reported to have told his friars, "Preach the Gospel, using words if necessary." The churches can often be preoccupied with words, but it is love in action that authenticates the reality of God. People who have suffered, both offenders and victims, are rightly suspicious of empty words unaccompanied by effective action, which is too often their experience of officials and institutions. The name of God that Jesus makes known is manifested in love – 'the Word became flesh'. Christians are called to love everyone who is involved in prisons and the criminal justice system according to their needs, with discerning, persevering and sacrificial service – just as Jesus made known God's love in His life and death. Christian care and advocacy is a sign of God's great purpose of bringing good out of evil and hope out of despair.

A new command I give you: Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13.34-35

Prayer of a young man released from prison now in the community

Dear God, thanks so much for all you have done in my life since I have been out. I want to thank you for being with me for the twelve months since I have been out. I pray that you would be with my family and that you would give me strength to overcome temptation.
Lord, in your mercy, be with all ex-offenders and those who work with them.

Day 6 - Be with those in our criminal justice system

It is impossible for Christians to work in the criminal justice system for long without feeling the contradiction between the basic criminal justice ethos of condemning, suspecting and controlling, and the ethos of the Gospel – forgiving, trusting and liberating. It was for the purpose of empowering his disciples to endure in hostile environments and to live in accordance with his commandments that Jesus promised that the Spirit would come to abide, or dwell, with them. Only through being with Christ in the Spirit can anyone understand the truth of the Gospel and work out its implications for everyday living. Following that path will lead to controversy and conflict, in which the Spirit is our advocate alongside, advising and sustaining us.

Jesus said, "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and will be in you." John 14.17

Prayer of a judge

Lord, be with us all in court today, that those who seek justice are not disappointed, those who must meet justice receive it, those who witness justice are satisfied that justice is done and those who administer it do so with fairness and fortitude, compassion and humility. Lord, guide us all through this day so that what is done is Your will.
Lord, in your mercy, be with all judges, magistrates, police and probation officers and give them wisdom and patience.

Conclusion

It is easy to give up on people, including people in prison, but God never gives up on anyone. Our faith in Christ and our awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit enables us to know, like the penitent thief, that we are not alone and that change does and can happen in the lives of us all. This is God's word, a truth reflected in Revelation 21.5 where we read "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28.30

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks that your love shown on the Cross means that we can never be separated from you and your renewing grace, and we pray for all affected by the reality of prisons. We pray that your love may overcome all isolation and division and bring healing and wholeness to us all. Help us to live our lives as those who really know your presence to heal. Lord in your mercy, be with us all.

Prisons Week was formed to pray for and raise awareness of the needs of prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all those who care. It consists of representatives of Christian denominations and Christian organisations.

Please pray each day during Prisons Week, but also ask yourself whether there is one thing that you as an individual or as a church can do to assist in any of the above.

For suggestions as to how you can help, to make a donation or to order larger quantities of these prayer leaflets/posters, please visit our website at www.prisonsweek.org where you will also find additional materials including prayers, worship resources, ideas, useful contacts, books and more.

You may also write to: The Secretary, Prisons Week, PO Box 2733, Lichfield, WS13 6GZ

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