

Flesh of our flesh

A service for World AIDS Day

John Bell



We believe in life before death

Flesh of our flesh

Service

Worship begins with the extinguishing of the first of many candles.

Call to worship

Leader

In the beginning was the Word.

ALL

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Leader

The Word was with God; and the Word was God.

ALL

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Leader

All things were made through the Word; nothing was made without him.

ALL

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Leader

In the Word was life; life which was the light for humankind.

ALL

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Leader

God loved the world so much

ALL

THAT THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Hymn or song 1

Prayer

Leader

We bless you, God,

for your passion in creating this world

and your compassion in becoming part of its fabric –

flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone

in Jesus.

We bless you, God,

for our own creating –

the womb that bore us,

the people who parented us,

the communities that raised us,

the friends and lovers who cherish us.

We bless you, God,

for a gospel rooted in this life and this history,

for a faith which binds word to action,

and for a Church which, despite its tensions,

still seeks to embrace all your children.

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God beyond our understanding,
Christ within our reach,
Spirit present at all times,
we celebrate your love for us
and declare our praise for you,
now and forever.

AMEN.

ALL

New Testament reading

1 Corinthians 12:12-end

Reader 1

Reader 2

St Paul speaks of the Church as a living organism,
a body in which all parts are connected to each other
in such a way that what affects one part affects all.

That is why every minute this church is getting a little darker,
as the extinguishing of a candle reminds us of the death
throughout the world of six people per minute because of HIV.

Not all these people are Christians, but many are.
HIV does not discriminate on grounds of
age, gender, religion or nationality.

Reader 1

Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs,
which, many as they are, make up one body.

A body is not a single organ, but many.
If the whole body were a single organ,
it would not be a body at all.

The eye cannot say to the hand,
'I do not need you.'

Nor can the head say to the feet,
'I do not need you.'

Quite the contrary:
those parts of the body which seem to be more frail than
the others are indispensable.

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Reader 2 So, remember Abebe,
an Ethiopian man,
who was one of the first people in his parish
to speak openly about his HIV status.

Through speaking and teaching about HIV,
he wants to change people's views.
His bravery has helped to challenge stigma
within his community.
He is indispensable.

Reader 1 Those parts of the body which seem to be more frail than
the others are indispensable;
and God has combined the various parts of the body,
giving special honour to the humbler parts.

Reader 2 So, remember Elisabeth,
a woman in her mid-40s from Central America
who has had no option but to earn money as a sex worker
in order to support her four children and mother.

She is now part of an organisation which helps to
educate sex workers about the risks of HIV
in the face of those who deny its existence.
She is worthy of special honour.

Reader 1 God has combined the various parts of the body
giving special honour to the humbler parts;
and God has so organised the body that all its parts
might feel the same concern for one another.
If one part suffers, they all suffer together;
if one flourishes, they all rejoice together.

Now you are Christ's body:

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Reader 2 ... the Church of South India,
the Maronite Church in Lebanon
the Episcopal Church of the Philippines,
the Lutheran Church in Sweden,
the Coptic Church in Ethiopia.

Reader 1 And you are Christ's body:

Reader 2 ... the Methodist Central Hall,
the Congregational Chapel,
the Jesuit Retreat Centre,
the Quaker Meeting House,
St Mary's,
St Columba's,
Holy Trinity,
New Horizon Fellowship.

Reader 1 And you are Christ's body:

Reader 2 ... Kevin,
Maria,
Ashok,
Gwynneth,
Patrick,
Ulrike,
Swee Hong,
Rebecca.

Reader 1 And each of you is a limb or organ
of the Body of Christ.

Hymn or song 2

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Reader 1

The gospel

In the gospels, we find Jesus touching or allowing himself to be touched by those who were considered unclean and contagious, whether or not their disease was infectious. As evident in the story we are about to hear, Jesus does not see healing as only a matter of illness being removed. It also involves the community, sometimes in the person of the priest, welcoming the marginalised person back.

Reader 2

Luke 5:12-16

Sermon

Leader

Silence

We will now have two minutes' silence, during which time we remember all those living with or affected by HIV.

Chant

This song is sung regularly in South African churches. One such is the J L Zwane Church in Guguletu, where every week in Sunday worship a member of the congregation gives testimony of how they or one of their loved ones is living with or affected by HIV.

ALL

COME, BRING YOUR BURDENS TO GOD,
FOR JESUS WILL NEVER SAY NO.

Leader

Prayer

Pray, my sisters and brothers,
for all living with HIV,
so that they feel included, valued and supported.

And pray for those
who are afraid to be tested for HIV,
that they might walk in the light of the truth.

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All COME, BRING YOUR BURDENS TO GOD,
FOR JESUS WILL NEVER SAY NO.

Leader Pray, my sisters and brothers, for communities
where poverty and sex work go together,
that such places and their people might be supported
rather than condemned.

And pray for those whose engagement with drugs
leads to illness and crime,
that they might be delivered.

All COME, BRING YOUR BURDENS TO GOD,
FOR JESUS WILL NEVER SAY NO.

Leader Pray, my sisters and brothers, for churches
which protest, 'This is none of our business!'
that they might share the pain of the Body.

And pray for governments
which deny the devastating power of HIV,
that God may cure their short-sightedness.

All COME, BRING YOUR BURDENS TO GOD,
FOR JESUS WILL NEVER SAY NO.

Leader And let us pray
for those who seek a cure for HIV,
or care for those living with or affected by HIV,
or raise public awareness
or protest against indifference –
that their work may be noted in heaven
and honoured on earth.

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And give to us all, living God,
not shallow optimism, but lively hope
grounded in Christ who, in the flesh, healed our diseases,
and in his dying, revealed the depth of your love,
and in rising again made redemption possible
and heaven open to all who trust and love him.
We pray in his glorious name.
AMEN.

ALL

Offering

Affirmation (Extinguished candles are to be relit during the affirmation)

Leader

Though many across the world still live with HIV,
we are not without hope.
Education, affirmation and self-awareness have enabled
the rate of infection to decline in some places.

And because we believe
that goodness is stronger than evil,
light is stronger than darkness,
love is stronger than hate;
and because we believe that with Christ, all things are possible;
we kindle the flames which have been extinguished
as a sign that all will be well.

And in these words let us affirm what we believe:

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ALL We believe in God,
who inhabits eternity
and made the world and its creatures out of love.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.
He came in the body
that every life and all flesh might be sanctified.
He touched those who felt untouchable,
loved those who felt unloveable,
and endured slander, rejection and death
in order that, through suffering love,
God's kingdom might come on earth.

He rose from the grave as living proof
that what is laid down in faith
will be raised in glory.
He ascended to heaven
that he might be present everywhere on earth.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who leads us always towards the truth,
who inspires us to reach out to one another
and to undertake scientific research,
who gives gifts to all people
for the healing of every nation.
We celebrate the witness of the Church,
the life in our bodies,
the yearning in our souls,
the promise of good things for those
who love the Lord.

Concluding hymn or song

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Blessing

Leader

Before we leave, let us stand in silence and value our souls, our minds and our bodies, on which we will ask God's blessing.

(silence)

Let the Body of Christ join hands.

(all join hands)

May God bless us,
in our bodies with health,
in our minds with understanding,
in our souls with the company of the Holy Spirit,
that together we may produce a harvest of light
to the glory of our Creator,
whose image we share,
whose body we are.

ALL

AMEN.

Abebe from Ethiopia

'When I learnt that I was living with HIV, I was very shocked. I was disappointed and upset. I started to wonder what my future could be. How could I live with the stigma? When people were whispering I thought they were talking about me. Thanks to God, after I met Girma, I changed my situation.'

Abebe was discriminated against when he first discovered he was HIV-positive. His family were frightened and thought they may be infected because they had come to his house. He has received a lot of support from his neighbours and from the development branch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC-DICAC), an organisation supported by Christian Aid. Girma is a trained counsellor with the EOC-DICAC and has supported Abebe since he first told people about his diagnosis.

'Girma tells me I can work, I can live a normal life like anyone else, I can support myself. He also tells me about the kinds of food I should eat. He has a schedule showing me what I should eat on certain days.

'When I speak at church, I tell people how I acquired the virus. I tell them the means of transmission. I tell them they don't get HIV from simply shaking hands with someone living with the virus.

'My congregation were all very sorry when they heard I was [HIV-] positive. They were very worried because they knew that people do not accept HIV-positive people. They were worried for me. How could I live here with so much stigma? But those who were friendly, those who knew me, came to comfort me. They told me not to worry – to keep teaching. They said to me "if you keep teaching there will be a change." This made me happy.'

Elisabeth from El Salvador

‘When I first started, I didn’t know about condoms and I was surprised if a man produced them. I used to have contraceptive injections. Flor de Piedra changed all that, and I learned that condoms were important because of HIV. Now I refuse sex without a condom, even if I’m offered more money.’

Elisabeth is a sex worker in San Salvador and a member of Flor de Piedra, an organisation supported by Christian Aid. Thanks to them, she has learnt new sewing skills to help give her a different form of income, and she has also learnt how to share information about HIV with others.

‘I didn’t start as a sex worker until I was 34. I’ve been doing it for ten years, working in a square. I don’t work with a business. I don’t have to pay anyone anything – men pay for the room directly. My four children and my mother all depend on what I earn. Most sex workers are single mothers.

‘We’re exposed to a lot of danger because we don’t know anything about the men who want our services. If we ask them to use a condom some will agree, others walk away, and some will agree at first and then force the woman not to use it. Men don’t believe they can catch HIV or else they say: “So what? I’m going to die of something anyway.” And around half of them are drunk.

‘There are times when there’s no work. It picks up between October and December because men have more money before Christmas and it’s possible to save some money then before the school year starts. I only work in the daytime. I’m happier now I’m with Flor de Piedra and the projects they offer.’

Woza Nomthwalo (Come bring your burdens)

Words and melody: Traditional South African chant

(no) Come, bring your bur - dens, oh,

Wo - za nom - thwa - lo wa - kho, wo - za nom -

Come, bring your bur - dens to God, come, bring your

4 come, bring your bur - dens, oh, come, bring your bur - dens,

thwa - lo wa - kho, wo - za nom - thwa - lo wa - kho, u

bur - dens to God, come, bring your bur - dens to God, for

7 Je - sus will ne - ver say

Je - su aka so za thi hay.

Je - sus will ne - ver say no.



Traditional South African chant, from the singing of Mooiplaas congregation; arrangement Welile Segabi, transcribed by Martine Stermerick, Mairi Munro and Barbara Clark.

Visit www.surefish.co.uk/worlddaidsday to hear a recording of the chant.

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Notes

- Seating:** It is best that the congregation sit in close proximity. This may be helped by ushering people to their seats and/or cordoning portions of the church or worship space. The congregation should be invited to stand for the call to worship, the three hymns and the affirmation, or according to local practice.
- Leaders:** The leadership team should ideally comprise a leader, preacher, two readers, one person to extinguish and light the candles, and the musicians.
- Props:** If possible, between 30 and 60 candles should be lit in an area that is visible to all before worship begins. A designated person should extinguish the candles, one per minute, preferably with a snuffer, and relight them during the affirmation.
- Offering:** If an offering is to be uplifted, it should take place between the prayers and the affirmation. Recorded music from other cultures would be appropriate at this time.
- Music:** Because the nature of this service is different from a 'normal' Sunday morning service, this might best be indicated by not beginning with an organ voluntary or praise-band medley. Recorded music from non-western cultures, sounds of drumming or silence may be used.

Hymns and songs:

Try to resist the temptation to sing only one kind of song – be that traditional hymnody or contemporary praise songs. The following suggestions come from across the spectrum and around the world:

1) Songs of the incarnate life of Jesus

Beautiful Saviour (All of my days)
Fairest Lord Jesus
How deep the Father's love for us
Jesus calls us here to meet him
Son of God, eternal Saviour
There is a Redeemer
To the name of our salvation

2) Songs that reflect the unity of the church

Christ be our Light
For everyone born, a place at the table
Gracious Spirit, hear our pleading
Here in this place, new light is shining
Holy Spirit, ever living
In Christ there is no east or west
We sing a love that sets all people free

3) Songs of commitment

At the name of Jesus
Father, hear the prayer we offer
Great God of every shining constellation
I, the Lord of sea and sky
Sent by the Lord am I
When we are living, we are in the Lord
Will you come and follow me

Sermon:

A short sermon which opens up the gospel text may be offered, or a visitor who has knowledge of working with people affected by HIV may speak. Alternatively, Christian Aid can supply a monologue of the leper cured by Jesus, which takes around four minutes to read. Download from www.surefish.co.uk/worldaidsday

Front cover image: Landiswa Buda is just one of hundreds of women supported by Christian Aid partner organisation Wola Nani in South Africa. By being open about her HIV-positive status, Landiswa is helping to overcome the silence and stigma that often surround the virus

Photo credit: Christian Aid/Guy Tillim

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