

# Sunday between June 26 and July 2

## **Prayer**

God who stays with us  
in questions we cannot settle, be near.

When stories disturb us,  
do not let us turn away too quickly.  
When grief feels old and still alive,  
receive our “How long?”  
When small acts of kindness seem too slight,  
remind us how much love can hold.

Keep us from making faith a shield against honesty.  
Keep us from calling harm holy.  
Keep us close to your truth,  
close to your care,  
close to the neighbour in front of us.

Where the way seems too large,  
teach us the holiness of the next small thing –  
a cup of water,  
a word of welcome,  
a burden shared,  
a life turned again towards love.

## Honest Lament, Ordinary Kindness

Some weeks do not resolve neatly. These readings hold difficult questions, deep longing, and the call to live differently. There is anguish here, and there is trust. There are old patterns of deathly living, and the invitation into something freer. There is also a surprisingly simple image at the end of the Gospel – the gift of a cup of cold water. The week moves between the weightiest questions and the smallest acts of care, reminding us that faith is both honest and practical.

### Threads to explore

- Trust without pretending
- Lament that speaks plainly
- Turning from old patterns towards life
- Small acts of welcome and care

### Context

Genesis tells the troubling story of Abraham and Isaac on the mountain – a story of testing, fear, and interruption, where harm is finally stopped and another way is given. Psalm 13 is a brief but piercing lament, crying out in the tension between abandonment and trust. In Romans, Paul urges believers not to let sin shape their lives, but to offer themselves to God as people being drawn into life and freedom. In Matthew, Jesus speaks of receiving those who come in his name, and ends with the striking promise that even the smallest act of kindness – a cup of cold water – is noticed.

### Connections

These readings meet around the tension between what is weighty and what is faithful. They do not flatten the realities of fear, grief, testing, or the

struggle to live differently. But neither do they leave people there without a path. Psalm 13 gives permission to speak pain aloud. Romans names the possibility of living differently. Matthew draws attention to welcome that is practical and immediate. Even alongside the disturbing mountain story in Genesis, the week keeps pressing towards a God who does not delight in harm, who receives lament, and who calls people into life-giving ways of being.

## **Deepening the Word**

Genesis 22 must be approached with care. It is one of those passages that can easily do harm if handled simplistically. It should not be used to glorify obedience without question, to sanctify abuse, or to suggest that God desires cruelty as proof of faith. What the story does show is a moment of terrible tension in which the path of death is interrupted. The God revealed here is not one who finally demands a child's life, but one who stops the violence and provides another way. For communities attentive to justice and safety, that matters.

Psalm 13 gives language for another kind of testing – the drawn-out ache of not knowing where God is. “How long?” is not a failure of faith. It is part of faith's honesty. It is the cry of people who refuse to pretend all is well when it is not. That same honesty continues in Romans, where Paul names the pull of old ways of living and the slow work of becoming people shaped by grace. Faith here is not magic. It is embodied, daily, and resistant. It involves turning, again and again, from what diminishes life towards what nurtures it.

Then Matthew places something small in our hands: welcome, recognition, a cup of cold water. After difficult texts and large questions, this feels deliberate. The life of faith is not only wrestled out in dramatic moments. It is practised in attention, hospitality, and care. In everyday life, that may mean offering rest instead of pressure, practical support instead of vague concern, a safer space instead of polite exclusion, attentiveness instead of

easy answers. These readings suggest that faithful living is not measured by grandiosity, but by whether love becomes real.

Be especially mindful with Genesis 22. Some people will hear it through the lens of abuse, coercion, family trauma, or harmful religious teaching. Do not rush to make it comforting. Let it stay difficult, and be clear that God is not honoured by harm. Hold close the themes of interruption, lament, mercy, and the call to life-giving action.

## Discussion

### *Matthew 10:40–42*

After speaking about cost and courage, Jesus ends this part of his teaching with welcome and small acts of care. The receiving of another person matters. Hospitality matters. A cup of cold water matters. The passage suggests that the life of faith is not only about what we believe or declare, but also about how we treat those who come to us, especially those who are easily pushed aside.

### *Questions:*

- What feels most important in Jesus' emphasis on welcome?
- Why do you think a cup of cold water is given such importance?
- Where do you recognise small acts of care making a real difference?
- How do Psalm 13 and Genesis 22 affect the way you hear this Gospel passage?
- What old patterns or habits might Romans be inviting us to turn away from?
- What might practical welcome mean in your setting this week?

## Call to Worship

Bring your questions.  
 Bring your tiredness.  
 Bring the truths you have not known how to say.

God is not frightened by lament.  
 Christ still welcomes those pushed aside.  
 The Spirit still leads us towards life.

So let us worship  
 with honest hearts and steady hope.

## Adoration

God of mercy and truth,  
 we turn towards you with honesty and praise.

You are not absent from the hard question  
 or the aching heart.  
 You receive our lament,  
 you stay with us in difficulty,  
 and you do not turn away.

You are the One who does not ask us to fake joy,  
 who interrupts harm,  
 who keeps drawing life  
 out of what seems tight and barren.

And in Jesus you show us holiness  
 in ordinary kindness –  
 welcome offered,  
 thirst met,  
 small kindness honoured,  
 love made practical.

So with gratitude deeper than easy words,  
we turn towards you,  
steady in compassion, patient in truth,  
and generous in love.

## **Confession**

God who knows us,  
there are ways we still live as though fear,  
resentment, and self-protection will save us.

We repeat what harms.  
We excuse what diminishes life.  
We tell ourselves that small acts do not matter,  
that kindness can wait,  
that welcome is someone else's work.

We confess the habits that keep us  
turned in on ourselves –  
the sharp word,  
the closed hand,  
the tired indifference,  
the reluctance to change.

Turn us again.  
Release what closes down in us.  
Teach us a more life-giving faithfulness –  
one that protects life, tells the truth,  
and grows love in ordinary ways.

## **Intercessions**

*Optional response*

God of life,

**lead us towards love.**

How long, O God,  
for those waiting in pain,  
for those frightened,  
for those worn down?

For people living with grief, depression,  
anxiety, or long uncertainty –  
be nearer than despair,  
and let good help reach them.

For children and adults made unsafe  
by violence, coercion, neglect, or control –  
interrupt harm,  
strengthen those who protect,  
and make ways towards safety.

For all who feel forgotten, unreceived,  
or treated as though they do not matter –  
in systems, in families, in communities, in churches –  
restore dignity,  
and raise up people  
who will offer practical welcome.

For those trying to live differently –  
leaving old habits, harmful patterns,  
or destructive ways behind –  
give perseverance, courage,  
and companions for the work of change.

For places where a small act of kindness  
could change the day –  
a glass of water, a meal,  
a lift, a caption,  
a text, a listening presence –  
show us what love can do.

God of life,  
lead us towards love.

## **Thanksgiving**

God of generous love,  
we turn towards you with thankfulness  
for the kindnesses that keep people going.

For water given,  
for doors opened,  
for names remembered,  
for tasks shared,  
for gentleness that arrives on time.

We thank you for prayers that can still be prayed  
even when they begin with “How long?”  
and for grace that does not wait  
until we are stronger or clearer.

We thank you for every sign  
that life can turn –  
for harmful patterns resisted,  
for truth spoken carefully,  
for courage that is quiet,  
for help received without shame.

And we thank you that Christ honours  
what the world calls small,  
and receives love when it takes ordinary form.

Receive our thanks,  
and keep teaching us the life-giving way of love.

## Blessing

Go with your questions held in God's care.

Go with your lament received,  
not hurried or explained away.

Go ready

for the small kindness love asks of you:

a cup of water,  
a word of welcome,  
a burden shared,  
a space made safer.

Do not underestimate

what love can carry.

Go in peace.

## Visual

- Place a simple glass or jug of water beside a plain cup, as a sign of ordinary kindness and the Gospel's small acts of care.
- Display or speak clearly the words: "How long?" and, elsewhere in the space, "A cup of cold water," holding lament and kindness together.
- Create a simple focal point with a stone, a cloth, and a branch, suggesting the mountain story while keeping it restrained and non-dramatic.

## Creative

- **Cup of Water Prayers:** Offer paper cup shapes on which people can write, draw, dictate, or choose one small act of care they could offer this week.

- **How Long Lament Cards:** Provide cards where people can write, draw, dictate, or silently name something unfinished, painful, or longed for, and place them quietly in a basket.
- **Welcome in Practice:** Invite people to suggest one practical change that would make the church or gathering more accessible and more hospitable.
- **Turn Towards Life:** Offer paper arrows or simple cards where people can write, draw, dictate, or choose one old habit to leave and one life-giving practice to begin.
- **Quiet Receiving:** Give each person a small token – stone, paper droplet, or card – as a reminder that small things can carry deep grace.
- **Shared Water:** Place a bowl or jug centrally and invite people, if appropriate, to pour a small amount of water into it, or simply watch, as a sign that small acts together become something larger.

## Meditation

*Based on Psalm 13; Matthew 10:40–42*

Settle yourself in whatever way helps.

Let your body be supported.

Let the chair, the floor,  
do its work.

You do not need to make yourself calm or settled.

Simply acknowledge that you are here.

There are times when prayer begins

not with certainty

but with ache.

How long?  
How long will this grief stay?  
How long will this fear return?  
How long until something changes?

If those words fit,  
let them be yours for a moment.  
If they do not, simply sit near them.

If breath language is helpful,  
become aware of your breathing.  
No need to change it.  
Just let it come and go.  
If not, rest your attention on what supports you here.

And into the middle of whatever feels large,  
let Christ draw attention to something small:  
a person received,  
a smile noticed,  
a cup of cold water.

Not because pain is small.  
Not because questions disappear.  
But because love often arrives  
in forms we may not expect.

A hand that passes the glass.  
A text that says,  
“I remembered.”  
A voice that says,  
“You can sit here.”  
A door held open.  
A burden shared.  
A safer space made possible.

Stay with one small act of kindness  
you have received or could offer.

Breathe in, or pause quietly: "Hold me in love."

Breathe out, or pause again: "Lead me in love."

When you are ready, return gently  
with this truth:

God receives your lament.

Christ honours small kindness.

And love is never wasted.

## **Performance**

*A single voice piece: "Small Things"*

I used to think faithfulness  
would probably be dramatic.

Big courage.

Big sacrifice.

Big clarity.

A life that obviously mattered.

But then I noticed how often  
the Gospel points somewhere smaller.

A welcome.

A name.

A table place.

A cup of cold water.

Not nothing.

Not sentimental.

Not an afterthought.

A real thing, given to a real person,  
in a real moment of need.

And maybe that is why  
it matters so much.

Because most of us do not live  
in dramatic moments all the time.

We live in ordinary decisions.  
We live in tired conversations.  
We live in whether we pay attention.  
We live in whether we respond.  
We live in whether we make life  
a little lighter or a little harder  
for the people around us.

Even Psalm 13 knows this.  
It does not pretend life is simple.  
It begins in pain.  
It asks, "How long?"  
It tells the truth.

And perhaps that is faithful too.

To tell the truth about what hurts.  
To refuse false comfort.  
And then, still,  
to let kindness matter.

Perhaps holiness is not always  
in the grand gesture.

Perhaps sometimes it is in the honest prayer  
and the cup of water.

## **Practice**

*A small kindness practice*

Choose one ordinary moment each day this week that already belongs to your routine. It might be when you fill a kettle, pour a drink, wash your hands, sit at your desk, or lock the front door.

Pause briefly. Name one thing that feels heavy, unfinished, or in need of prayer. You do not need to solve it. Just name it honestly. Then ask yourself: What is one small act of care I can offer today?

Keep it simple and doable. It might be sending a message, making someone a drink, checking on a neighbour, speaking more gently, making a space easier to use, or giving yourself permission to ask for help.

If it helps, use this short prayer: “Receive my truth. Lead me in love.”

At the end of the day, remember what small kindness was given or received, and let that be enough.

## Digital

- Post a simple question: “What small act of kindness has stayed with you recently?”
- Share a text-on-image line, with alt text or the same words in the caption: “Love is never wasted.”
- Invite people to name one word they associate with welcome, kindness, or truth.
- Post a short reflection: “Faith is often practised in small acts that make life lighter for someone else.”
- Share a community prompt: “What is one practical way we can make our space more welcoming this week?”

## Explore

These readings include one very difficult story, so it is important to be clear and gentle with people who are new to faith. The Bible does not hide painful and disturbing material. But that does not mean everything that happens in Scripture is endorsed. It can help to say that this week's readings hold together honest lament, the struggle to live differently, and the importance of ordinary kindness. God is not glorified by harm. God is met in truth, care, and the choosing of life.

## Discover

- Genesis tells a troubling story on a mountain, where harm is finally interrupted and another way is provided.
- Psalm 13 is a prayer that asks, "How long?" and speaks honestly from pain.
- Romans speaks about leaving old ways behind and learning a new life shaped by grace.
- Jesus says that even the smallest act of welcome, like a cup of cold water, matters.
- Together, these readings suggest that faith includes honesty, change, and practical care.

## Reflect

Sometimes faith is not about certainty or comfort. Sometimes it is about telling the truth, refusing what harms, and turning towards what gives life. These readings remind us that small acts of care are not trivial. They are part of how love becomes real.

### **Connect**

You might recognise this in everyday life when someone responds to your need without making a fuss, when a person chooses kindness instead of sharpness, or when a group makes one practical change so more people can belong. Those moments can carry more grace than we realise.

### **Think**

- Why do small acts of welcome matter so much?
- What old pattern or habit might need to loosen its grip in your life?

### **Do**

Offer one small kindness today without making a show of it. Give someone time, attention, a drink, encouragement, clearer information, or a more welcoming space. Afterwards, pause and reflect on how even a small kindness can change the atmosphere around you.