

Worship for Fifth Sunday of Easter (Vocations Sunday)
(complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Hello, welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit, my name is Michael.

And my name is Ann, together we will be reflecting with you on the theme of "God is Love"

We are grateful also to Rev Jemima and Rev Sam as well as student minister Tina Brooker for the readings today and to all the wonderful back office folk who make this online worship possible.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Instead of the usual pattern of our online worship, today's worship will feature a selection of short reflections, prayers and meditative music to help us think of God's great love and sacrifice for us. We start first with a prayer....

God is love

You call us to be people of love

This is love: not that we loved you, but that you loved us

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

Hymn: StF 274 – Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice

- 1. Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice,
you became nothing, poured out to death.
Many times I've wondered at your gift of
life,
and I'm in that place again.
And I'm in that place again.**

*And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.*

- 2. Now you are exalted to the highest place,
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.
But for now, I marvel at this saving grace,
and I'm full of praise once again.
I'm full of praise once again.**

*And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.*

**Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.
Thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross,
thank you for the cross, my Friend.**

*And once again I look upon
the cross where you died,
I'm humbled by your mercy
and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.*

Matt Redman (b 1974)

Prayer

Many of you will be aware that every morning at 10am there is an opportunity for folk in the circuit to come together on Zoom for a time of socialisation, prayer and reflection. Last week at this group we reflected on this song and the first verse of psalm 150 – “Praise God in his sanctuary.” We give thanks for these online Worship services and I pray they continue, but for many of us, we are starting to think about returning to our chapels and churches.

The song reflects on looking at the cross – we realised that although it is important to remember the cross, we felt also that at this time of the year, looking at the cross felt a bit like looking back... Remembering what was – when maybe Jesus is asking us to remember what is going to be. Our first reading today is 1 John 4: 7-21 a beautiful letter to an early church urging them to live in love because in so doing people around them will see the love of God in their actions – let us too be a church of love willing to reflect God in our actions.

Reading 1 John 4:7-21 (NRSVA)

God Is Love

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Reflective Music

Reflection:

Love one another because love comes from God.

God is Love and he showed us his love by sending Jesus that we might live.

The Message version makes the word ‘atoning’ that we heard in our reading, more understandable: the sacrifice of Jesus cleared away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.

He loved us first and so we respond by doing two things: love God and love one another, love our neighbour. Transformational, inclusive love is what makes us like Jesus in this world. We are to love the unlovely, the marginalised, those who are different from us and those we find difficult

or who make decisions we don't like or behave in ways we don't like.

John the author of this Epistle is almost certainly wrote the same person who wrote the Gospel of John. There he breaks down a sort of hierarchy of giving love even further: As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Then, 'Love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:9 – 14).

It is in John 15 that we find the great, familiar passage, 'Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'.

Dale Street Scouts and Guides put on a biennial Gang Show called Daley Sketches (though there is obviously currently a break in this). One year, I volunteered to take the service following the show as a thanksgiving and to reprise some of the numbers for the congregation. Church was very full of uniformed Young People and their leaders and parents. I pick up a theme and used it to preach. That year some of the songs were about friends, so I used this verse about Jesus laying down his life for his friends.

You may know that original Cub Scouting is based on Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book. For example, the Leader of the (wolf) Cub pack is called Akela. In the original Disney cartoon of Jungle Book, Mowgli and Baloo (who is protecting the man-cub) are attacked by Shere Khan the Tiger, who had killed Mowgli's father. He leaves Baloo for dead. Baloo had given his life for Mowgli. Four vultures with Beatles accents sit on a branch watching and one recites John 15:13. I showed that video clip to the point where Baloo opens one eye to show he is alive.

Then a Brownie read 'Greater love has no-one than this ...' in the 'real Bible'.

What I hadn't counted on was the effect on children and adults alike.

Amazing Love, O what sacrifice!

Song: Complete Mission Praise 476 - Amazing Love (My Lord what love is this)

**My Lord, what love is this
That pays so dearly
That I, the guilty one
May go free!**

***Amazing love, O what sacrifice
The Son of God given for me
My debt he pays, and my death he dies
That I might live, that I might live
(Last time only) That I might live!***

**And so they watched him die
Despised, rejected
But oh, the blood he shed
Flowed for me!**

**And now, this love of Christ
Shall flow like rivers
Come wash your guilt away
Live again!**

Graham Kendrick

Prayer of Confession

Let us pray

My Lord – What love is this? That pays so dearly.
That I the guilty one may go free?

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Lord God – we come to you in this time of confession, confessing that we are not perfect, confessing we have done wrong. We have been impatient, we have wanted more, we have put our own needs ahead of others. As a church we have turned our backs to those who have needed our love, we have valued establishment

and wealth and comfort above the needs of the hurting. We have failed to be inclusive, we have failed to be generous.

But we come to you now, not in fear, but in love and we whisper softly, Father, we have done bad, we're sorry, we could have done better. And as we do that, we know that you smile, you wrap your arms of love around us, and you say – My child, I know, but I still love you and I will not hold this against you – you are forgiven – you are loved.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and forever
Amen**

Song: You Are My King (Amazing Love)

**I'm forgiven
Because you were forsaken
and I'm accepted
you were condemned
I am alive and well
Your Spirit is within me.
Because you died and rose again.**

**I'm forgiven
Because you were forsaken
and I'm accepted
you were condemned**

**I am alive and well
Your Spirit is within me.
Because you died and rose again.**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king
would die for me.
Amazing love I know it's true
it's my joy to honour you
In all I do.
I honour you.**

**I'm forgiven
Because you were forsaken
I'm accepted
you were condemned
I am alive and well
Your Spirit is within me.
Because you died and rose again.**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king
would die for me.
Amazing love I know it's true
now it's my joy to honour you**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king
would die for me.
Amazing love I know it's true
it's my joy to honour you
In all I do.
I honour you.**

**You are my King
You are my King
You are my King
You are my King.**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king
would die for me.
Amazing love I know it's true
it's my joy to honour you**

**Amazing love, how can it be?
That you, my king
would die for me.
Amazing love I know it's true
it's my joy to honour you
In all I do.
I honour you.**

**You are my King
You are my King
You are my King
You are my King.
you are my King**

Songwriter: Billy J. Foote

Reading Galatians 5:22 – 26 (NRSVA)

The Fruit of the Spirit

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Reflection

John 15, the chapter with Greater love has no one than this, comes between two chapters on the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:7 Jesus said, 'But I tell you the truth: it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.' Counsellor is a Bible word for the Holy Spirit.

God had been walking among us on Earth as Jesus, but he had to go, so that God as Holy Spirit could come and fill us with right living, not just to live with us but to live in us, to enable us to love with agape, God's love.

In the passage that comes just before our second reading, Paul talks about Life by the Spirit. He really answers our question, 'But, how? How can I love everyone? Even those it's hard to love?'

By the power of the Holy Spirit, who helps us live the right way. Jesus said that without me, you can do nothing. We need God's help to always react and respond the right way.

Earlier in Galatians, he says something like John did in the first reading: God loved me and gave himself for me and now Christ lives in me, by the Holy Spirit.

With the power of the Holy Spirit, we are like a garden bearing good fruit. What kind of fruit?

The fruit of the Spirit is Love.

Song: Fruit of the Spirit

*I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit*

*I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit*

Love, joy, peace,
(Love, joy, peace,)
patience, kindness, goodness
(patience, kindness, goodness)
faithfulness, (faithfulness)
gentleness, (gentleness)
self-control, (self-control)

I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit

I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit

Love, joy, peace,
(Love, joy, peace,)
patience, kindness, goodness
(patience, kindness, goodness)
faithfulness, (faithfulness)
gentleness,(gentleness)
self-control, (self-control)

Fruit grows in gardens
fruit grows on trees
but the fruit of the Spirit
grows inside of me.

Fruit grows in gardens
fruit grows on trees
but the fruit of the Spirit
grows inside of me.

I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit

I wanna know (know)
I wanna grow (grow)
the fruit of the Spirit,
The fruit of the Spirit

By NewSpring Worship

The Love for one another that John was talking
about in 1 John 4:7, Paul puts into practice in
Galatians ~

6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way
you will fulfil the love of Christ

6:9 Let us not be weary in doing good.

Intercessions

We come now once more to God in prayer – let
us pray

Loving, merciful, creator God, as we have been
thinking today about your love – your love for
each and every one of us, we pause, we take a
breath, we let that love soak in, we allow

ourselves a moment to feel that love, to feel you
near.

(Silence)

We thank you for that love, the love of Jesus who
was prepared to sacrifice all for us, who suffered
shame and punishment in our place. We thank
you for the gift of the Holy Spirit given at
Pentecost and still living in us today.

You call us to love and in that pursuit of love we
bring to mind situations and conflicts around the
world asking for your healing touch:

We pray for Northern Ireland,
for Burma,
for Afghanistan
we pray for the European Union
and all peoples of the world

We pray for the united states of America trying
to get to grips with age old problems of race and
violence – we pray for peace and love to sweep
that nation.

We pray for Mexico and India and all the many
other countries struggling to cope with this Covid
19 pandemic – we pray that vaccines and
treatments can pave the way for a better future.

We pray now for our chapels and churches, for
those who worship you in those buildings, for
those who have fond memories of past
involvement. We pray for the many groups and
activities that use these buildings from children's
groups to knitting groups – for all who receive a
welcome in your temple. We pray for
Homewood and all MHA homes, for their
residents, volunteers and staff.

We draw to mind all those who are unwell at this
time, in body mind and soul – for those
struggling with the stresses and uncertainties of
life, for those facing major illnesses and for those
recovering from treatment. Father we place
them in your hands, asking for your healing
touch.

Finally Father God, we ask for your blessing on ourselves, give us strength and courage for each new day, equip us to be the people you call us to be – loved people who radiate your love into the world be with us this day and every day,

In Jesus name

Amen

Offering Prayer

Lord God – you give us more than we can ever comprehend – from the beauty of your creation to the sacrifice of your son, for each new day that you bless us – how can we ever thank you?

In humility and grace, Lord God, accept now our offerings – our offerings of money given by direct debit, our offerings of our time and skills given in service, accept our love given in gratitude for all that you are

Amen

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13: 8 – 13 (NRSVA)

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Reflection

The Greatest of these is Love (agape)

It might almost be better to leave this reading without comment.

This great chapter is often chosen to be read at weddings; it is seen as a great piece of literature, or as a poem to describe romantic love. Good as they are, none of those are its original purpose. It is actually placed between two chapters that deal with communal living and shared worship.

As we re-open our church buildings, and as we get excited about new opportunities, about what living and worshipping as a church now looks like, we need to remember to do good to all people, to the community we reach out to, but especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10). All those things which matter so much now will pass. All those necessary arrangements to reduce risk; all those emails and committee meetings on Zoom to discuss and approve the details – yes, they matter; of course they do. But in the end, what will remain is faith, hope and love.

But the greatest is love.

Love one another because God is Love.

Hymn: StF 503 - Love divine all loves excelling

- 1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.**
- 2. Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.**

**3. Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

THE DISMISSAL

Prayer & blessing

God loves you (Makaton)

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Amazing Love (My Lord what love is this)

Graham Kendrick

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StF 274 – Jesus Christ I think upon your sacrifice

Matt Redman (b 1974)

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You Are My King (Amazing Love)

Songwriter: Billy J. Foote

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Fruit of the Spirit

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StF 503 - Love divine all loves excelling

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

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