

Worship for 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

A very warm welcome to all of you joining us in worship today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Let us bring ourselves to God, whatever our age and gifts.

Let us prepare to share in worship, giving thanks for all that God shares with us.

Let us open our hearts and minds to know more of God's unconditional love and care, and be ready to share it with others.

Introduction

The theme of our service today is "Love is the key to life."

Do you remember the cartoon comic strip "Love is ..." which began in the 1960's?

How would **you** complete the phrase "Love is..."? "Love is..." statements are not new. 1Corinthians chapter 13 v.4 begins: "Love is patient. Love is kind."

In his talk, Russell will be exploring what "Love is the key to life" means and how our lives can be changed in the light of our love for God, for ourselves and for our neighbours.

We begin with a hymn of praise.

Hymn: StF 65 – Sing of the Lord's Goodness

- 1. Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.**

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

- 2. Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.**

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

- 3. Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.**

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

- 4. Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,**

praise God till the end of days.
Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.

Ernest Sands (b. 1949)

Opening Prayers

God of love, you call us to come before with love
in our hearts.

We all have our own ideas and experiences of
what love is.

From the human to the divine.

From the smallest flicker to the greatest flame.

We offer ourselves to you now, seeking to learn
more about the depth and breadth of your
amazing love. We need to know how to put that
love into action, share that great warmth with
our neighbour,

every day of our lives.

Still us before you now and enable us to receive.

Amen.

God of love, you are so much more than
anything we could ever imagine.

Abundant love flows from your very being.

We know your love is the greatest of all.

We bask now in that love, making our small
offering in return.

We love you with all our heart, all our
understanding, and all our strength – and always
will.

Amen.

Lord God, we confess that we struggle to love
others. Sometimes we don't even recognise who
our neighbour is, never mind knowing how to
love them.

Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.

We confess that we don't always realise that to
show love to others, first we have to learn to
love ourselves. Sometimes we haven't a clue
how to do that.

We may have an ideal in our head of what love
is, then get cross with ourselves when we fall
short.

Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.

We confess that we have the idea that love is
this great dramatic gesture or action,
when sometimes it can be as small as a touch of
a fingertip.

Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.

Amen.

The God of all heaven and earth looks upon us
now with love.

He wraps us tightly in his arms.

His love pardons us, enfolds us, emboldens us to
accept that our sins are forgiven,
and we can go into the world to reveal his love.

Praise be to God.

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

Hymn: StF 615 – Let love be real

- 1. Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely
known.
Give me your hand, along the desert
pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:
with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***
- 2. Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us
free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might
be.
Give me your strength when all my words
are weakness;
give me your love in spite of all you know.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:
with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***
- 3. Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and
disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings
show.
*As God loves us, so let us love each
other:
with no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.***

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 146 (NRSVA)

Praise for God's Help

¹Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

²I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.

⁴When their breath departs, they return to the
earth;

on that very day their plans perish.

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,

⁶who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith for ever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.

⁹The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

Mark 12:28-34 (NRSVA)

The First Commandment

²⁸One of the scribes came near and heard them
disputing with one another, and seeing that he
answered them well, he asked him, 'Which
commandment is the first of all?' ²⁹Jesus
answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord
our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”³¹The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’³²Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”;³³and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Sermon

Love is the key

What is the most memorable advice you have ever had? I recall my boss on one occasion giving me advice on how to look at other people’s lives in relation to my own. I can picture the room now and his remarks have stuck with me.

In our Gospel passage we hear about a genuinely puzzled scribe asking for advice. In fact a teacher of the law, sympathetic to Jesus, knowing that earlier Jesus had answered well some deliberately tricky questions. The Rabbis at the time of Jesus’ ministry were often asked to advise on what was the most fundamental commandment. No wonder. There were more than 600 to choose from. This man gets truly memorable advice.

Jesus replies: ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’. But Jesus goes on to say: ‘The second is this:

Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’

Was it new teaching? In one way, no. The first commandment, known as the Shema, comes from Deuteronomy chapter 6 and the second, called the Royal Law in James’ epistle, from Leviticus chapter 19. Indeed, it is not clear whether Jesus was the first teacher to link them. However it is significant that Jesus sees them as the heart and fulfilment of the law, not just a reinforcement of the rest. Love is the key to life. Love of God and love of neighbour.

Notice the contrast with the 10 commandments and many other rules in the Old Testament. Jesus’ commandments are just two and both are positive things to do, not negative prohibitions.

This conversation with the scribe takes place in the Temple courtyards – a place full of negative boundary rules for non-Jews and women. Psalm 146 says that God loves the righteous. Jesus is saying that love has no bounds.

So what is love? Pam mentioned earlier the popular cartoons ‘Love is...’ Isn’t love full of care and concern for the other?

Paul puts it this way in his first letter to the Corinthians, who lived in a proud trading city of hard bargainers:

‘Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.’

Jesus is saying that love of God and love of neighbour should be pervasive, be all enveloping, be underpinning all of our lives. But are they the same thing?

Certainly the two are so closely related that they form a circle. So only as we love our neighbour

do we know what it is to love God. And only if we love God are we truly able to love our neighbour.

We get a glimpse into this in the Indian greeting 'Namaste'. The action is hard to translate into English but has the sense of 'The image of God in me bows to the image of God in you'. There is an acknowledgement here that we and the neighbour are both children of God and deserve recognition, respect – and love.

Martin Luther was much taken with St Augustine's thought that if you loved God you could do as you please. Great! But the point is that if you truly love God, you are no longer a free agent. Love for God will run through your life and influence all you do to God's creation – neighbours, planet and all.

Do you like to eat seaside rock bars? The kind that have a name running through the rock so that wherever you break it off the resort name is visible.

That reminds me of Jesus' life, but the word running through the centre isn't Nazareth. It is love. At whatever point you look at Jesus' life you see love of God and neighbour.

The scribe talking to Jesus got the message about love being the key to life. And looking around him realised that the Temple offerings and sacrifices were not important. Rather, they kind of got in the way of love. Is there a similar danger for us too? What if we were told that pretty much all we do in church is not important and is getting in the way of love? Do we do loving deeds but are slow to have loving feelings?

People who knew the priest Teilhard de Chardin in China said of him: 'Just to hear him speak made you feel better. You knew he was listening

and understood. His own faith was in the invincible power of love.' He loved God with all his heart and soul – and his mind too as he engaged with the neighbours around him.

What might it really mean in practice to love our neighbour? We don't usually choose them do we? Now, there still might be room within love for disagreement. Jesus did not always like what his chosen band were doing. Remember Peter being told off for his tempting advice or the disciples arguing about leadership on the road. Jesus experienced his Nazareth neighbours planning to kill him after he spoke at the synagogue. Yet Jesus loved them. Samuel Crossman's hymn 'My song is love unknown' talks of 'Love to the loveless shown'.

Loving loveless neighbours is hard. That includes all the people:

- Who wind us up by complaints or thoughtless actions like noise or car parking;
- Who do unspeakably cruel things to others.

Can our personal happiness grow when we give love away like that? When we know better our strengths and weaknesses and are at peace with who we are? We are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. Not more than ourselves, but not less than ourselves.

We do not know how the scribe went away to love his Jerusalem neighbours as himself. We guess he had a simpler way of thinking.

When a newly married couple asked for simple advice on how to maintain their love, a wise person suggested that they love other things together. Remember that circle of love? Does not our love for God grow stronger as together

with God we love the neighbours he has created?

Keeping these commandments of love is the key to true happiness. That way we can reply to Joachim Lange's hymn question 'O God what offering shall I give' with his desire 'O source of life, live dwell and move in me, till all my life be love'.

As Julie Andrews sang: 'Wouldn't that be lovely'! Namaste

Let us join in the hymn:

'Love divine, all loves excelling,
.... pure unbounded love thou art'

Hymn: StF 503 – Love Divine

- 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 RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Lord God, thank you that we are all caught up in your love.

When it spills out from you, there is more than enough for everyone.

It gushes like a waterfall, springs like a fountain, rushes like a wave.

It floods over us, then continues on, bringing blessing to whoever receives it.

Thank you, Lord, for allowing us to be part of all this wonder.

Amen.

We pray for all who feel that no one listens to them:

those who live on the streets and are passed by, day after day;

those who try to speak out against injustice in places of corruption;

those who are starving in places that no longer make the news;

those who find it hard to express themselves;

those who are different, and feel that their lives don't matter.

Open our ears to hear their cries of the heart, and use us to meet their needs.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Offering & prayer

Gracious God, we give you praise for your goodness to us. Take all our gifts of time, money and talents, and use them in the ongoing transformation of the world, in the name of all that is good, and right, and just and loving.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 76 – Give me Joy in my Heart

- 1. Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
give me joy in my heart, I pray;
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
keep me praising till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***
- 2. Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,
give me peace in my heart, I pray;
give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,
keep me loving till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***
- 3. Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
give me love in my heart, I pray;
give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
keep me serving till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***

Anonymous
*adapted by A. Servison
and others*

Notices

Before our closing prayer I would like to thank everyone who helped to prepare this worship. Our preacher was Russell Blackwell, the readings were from members of Wellesbourne and Warwick churches and the service was put together by the talented technical team. My name is Pam Weston.

Prayer & blessing

May the word of God dwell in our hearts, in our minds and in our actions, every day of our lives. And let us pray for one another, saying together:
**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now, every day and evermore.
Amen.**

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StF 65 – Sing of the Lord's Goodness

Ernest Sands (*b.* 1949)

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StF 615 – Let love be real

Michael Forster (*b.* 1946)

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Bible Verses

NRSV & NRSVA

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