

**Worship for 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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Morning to you all and welcome. For today's service Jeongsook has given us our pastoral letter, we will be listening to Malcolm as our preacher, we will have readers from Fenny Compton and Henley churches. So I give my thanks to these people and the technical team who stitch all the separate elements of a service together. I'm Nigel and am your worship leader for today.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

As our call to worship I would like us to consider the permanence of God.

The European Football Championship is over, Wimbledon has finished, the Olympic team are on their way home, things pass don't they? What does not pass is the God whom we gather to worship. The marvel of the God who came to us in Christ is that he is far greater than anything that he has made, yet we can relate to him. God is infinite and does not need us, yet we can give him joy by genuine worship. A core element of our faith in Christ is to care for those in need. Malcolm will be covering this when he talks to us which is why the first hymn for us today is 611 in Singing the Faith – Brother, sister, let me serve you.

Hymn: StF 611 – Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You

- 1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.**

- 2. We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.**
- 3. I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.**
- 4. I will weep when you are weeping;  
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
till we've seen this journey through.**
- 5. When we sing to God in heaven  
we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.**
- 6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.**

Richard A. M. Gillard (*b.* 1953)

Prayer of approach

Gracious God, we come before you, drawn by the power of your welcoming love. We come with our sorrows and joys. We come with our expectations & apprehensions. We come with what we have done. We come as who we are. In your love we find peace and hope.  
**Amen.**

Prayer of adoration

Lord, I lift up my heart to you in love and adoration, & praise you for your greatness. You are the great and mighty King & all glory belongs to you. Words cannot describe how awesome you are. There is no other god that can be compared to you & there is none above you. You are the Creator of heaven and earth, & everything belongs to you. We praise you because you are faithful and true, and we know that we can always trust in you.

**Amen.**

Prayer of confession

God of love, we are sorry that at times our love for you falters; that we have wrong priorities; that we overlook your guidance. O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. Loving Saviour, we are sorry that we disobey your commandments; that we fail to love; that we walk by on the other side. O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. Spirit of truth, we are sorry that we disregard your presence; that our thoughts and feelings are unrighteous; that we follow the world's way. O God, forgive us. O God, renew us. May your presence abiding in us lead us in the right way, in the name of Jesus.

**Amen**

Assurance of forgiveness

God is slow to anger and full of compassion. He forgives all who humbly repent and trust in his Son as Saviour and Lord. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Let us now join together in praying the Lord's Prayer with its emphasis on what it means to be

a forgiven people. I will use the traditional version for this service.

**Our Father who art in heaven**

**hallowed be thy name;**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the**

**glory,**

**for ever and ever.**

**Amen**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 111 (NIVUK)

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord.

I will extol the Lord with all my heart  
in the council of the upright and in the  
assembly.

<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the Lord;  
they are pondered by all who delight in them.

<sup>3</sup> Glorious and majestic are his deeds,  
and his righteousness endures for ever.

<sup>4</sup> He has caused his wonders to be remembered;  
the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

<sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant for ever.

<sup>6</sup> He has shown his people the power of his  
works,

giving them the lands of other nations.

<sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy.

<sup>8</sup> They are established for ever and ever,  
enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.

<sup>9</sup> He provided redemption for his people;

he ordained his covenant for ever –  
holy and awesome is his name.

<sup>10</sup>The fear of the Lord is the beginning of  
wisdom;

all who follow his precepts have good  
understanding.

To him belongs eternal praise.

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NIVUK)

<sup>15</sup>Be very careful, then, how you live – not as  
unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup>making the most of every  
opportunity, because the days are  
evil. <sup>17</sup>Therefore do not be foolish, but  
understand what the Lord's will is. <sup>18</sup>Do not get  
drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.  
Instead, be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to  
one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from  
the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart  
to the Lord, <sup>20</sup>always giving thanks to God the  
Father for everything, in the name of our Lord  
Jesus Christ.

John 6:51-58 (NIVUK)

<sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from  
heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for  
ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for  
the life of the world.'

<sup>52</sup>Then the Jews began to argue sharply among  
themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh  
to eat?'

<sup>53</sup>Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, unless  
you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his  
blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup>Whoever eats  
my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,  
and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>55</sup>For my  
flesh is real food and my blood is real  
drink. <sup>56</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my  
blood remains in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup>Just as the  
living Father sent me and I live because of the  
Father, so the one who feeds on me will live

because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came  
down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna  
and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will  
live for ever.'

Sermon

The theme of my sermon today is caring and  
sharing although my first question for you may  
sound a little odd. The question is "how would  
you like to be a lifeboat volunteer?" I'm not  
going to elaborate at this point, but I'll come  
back to it later on.

Moving on to my next question though, when it  
comes to what is acceptable just where do we  
draw the line and when we have done so how  
strictly do we stick to it? Well at some stage  
most of us have reached the limit of our patience  
or our tolerance when someone is trying to  
persuade us to shift our position. How often  
have we said something like 'I'll go so far but I'm  
not going any further - I'll have to draw the line  
at that.'

More recently we've heard our politicians in the  
infamous Brexit negotiations declaring that this  
point or the other was one that they called a red  
line position so no more compromises or giving  
way. In the UK politicians case it was things like  
fishing rights or not being bound by the  
European court of justice that were declared as  
red lines.

But let's take a look at some other lines that  
have been drawn. One that has been rumbling  
on for some time has been the matter of cuts to  
the foreign aid budget. Yes we can say that  
charity begins at home, not a bad mantra, but  
where is home? Is it just our families or does it  
extend to our close friends, or our own church  
community, our town, our county, or our  
country? Maybe it might be the UK as a whole or  
the commonwealth or heaven forbid include

Europe too? But then what about elsewhere in the big wide world? In truth though home is where anyone should be able to feel safe, secure and loved with a supply of food, drink and the basic necessities of life.

Now we're talking, because when it comes to charity and aid then surely it has to go wherever it is most needed in proportion to that need.

In God's eyes we are all part of the same human race. Despite the ravages and consequences of Covid we live in a wealthy country (just over half way down the world top ten list) and yet whilst we must be prudent in government spending do we really need to hit the most needy by chopping £4billion off our aid budget.

At best our target was only just over half a penny in every pound that the country earns. But that was only the **target!** Before the cut back and despite a commitment to restore aid back to that level once the country's books are balanced, it's going to be at least three to four years before that can even be considered. I wonder what Jesus would think about that?

But moving on from that and partly picking up on my first question this morning, I am sure that all of us admire the work of life boat volunteers and the RNLI. How distressing then to read headlines a couple of weeks ago where crews were being abused even as they mobilised for duty.

The main reason for this abuse was seemingly that these brave people were risking their own lives to save makeshift boats overflowing with so-called illegal immigrants. Their accusers wanted them to decide who was worth saving or not, even turning round boats of unwelcome people and sending them back whence they came.

What a distressing attitude some have towards immigrants as if God intended us to draw lines on the map and only let those cross the line who would bring us more wealth or prosperity into this country or maybe do jobs that none of us would lower ourselves to do. Have you ever heard comments like 'Send them back to their own countries; they're not part of our nation; why don't the French deal with them? We can't afford to support people like that. They'll only bring trouble and terrorism to our shores; I pay my taxes I'll bet they won't.

What is it though that drives people to flee from one side of the world to the other risking their own and their families lives. Leaving their own culture and few personal possessions behind never knowing whether or not they will return to see their old friends and relatives again. Are they really driven by the thought of easy living and more money in the wealthy west, or are they driven by desperation and life preservation for themselves and their families fleeing war torn or famine ridden countries or refugee camps?

By now you might say stop there Malcolm we've heard enough. So I will but not before I've drawn your attention to this morning's passage from John's Gospel. These last couple of weeks we've heard much about Jesus being the bread of life but in today's passage his words become more compelling and even shocking. Look at verse 52 when someone asks 'how can this man give us his flesh to eat'!

Of course for us today with the benefit of the gospels and other biblical writings we understand how this was fulfilled by Jesus own bodily sacrifice of himself on the cross. We also have our own acts of Holy Communion where we symbolically consume Jesus body and blood in remembrance of this.

But I believe that Jesus was adding further purpose over and above an act of remembrance. By asking his followers to consume his body and blood he was offering his all. Jesus was and is asking us to absorb everything that he had; his body on the cross; his holy spirit too in our lives as a whole and not just at the altar; to soak up the very essence of him into ourselves. To become as him. His ultimate act of caring and sharing his body, blood, mind and spirit with the whole of mankind.

In our communion services we share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. And this is the key. Whenever we break the bread or take the cup so do millions of other Christian followers around the world. This grace is available in equal measure to any member of mankind who chooses to follow Jesus including those who have not yet found him or have lost their way. Jesus loves and cares equally for all mankind and shares his grace in the same way too. There are no lines drawn red or otherwise; there are no boundaries or quotas; there is no negotiation because Jesus simply gave his all without conditions.

But as we share in one body and blood of Jesus Christ so we too are called to share his love and grace with our fellow man without fear or favour, without discrimination or prejudice.

As Jesus said 'whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.' Jesus is within us - so why not share his grace and let it show to the whole world!

Oh yes, what about that lifeboat volunteer question? Well the one that I was talking about is not only to be found on the water but could be just anywhere in life. Its name is 'Care and Share'. My lifeboat has Jesus at the helm but he needs a crew. People to help him rescue any and

every one in difficulty or distress from wherever they come or wherever they are going.

I too have been rescued by that boat from time to time – have you? I too would like to join that crew -wouldn't you?

AMEN

Affirmation of Faith

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission

The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love

The Church exists to help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care

The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice

The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ

**We are disciples of Christ and in fulfilment of our calling we live out our faith in public worship and praise of God and through mission in the world at large bringing Christ's redeeming love to all who have not found him especially those in need or suffering injustice.**

Hymn: StF 272 – From Heaven You Came, Helpless Babe

- 1. From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled, not to be served but to serve, and give your life that we might live.**

***This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

- 2. There in the garden of tears  
my heavy load he chose to bear;  
his heart with sorrow was torn,  
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.  
*This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***
- 3. Come see his hands and his feet,  
the scars that speak of sacrifice,  
hands that flung stars into space  
to cruel nails surrendered.  
*This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***
- 4. So let us learn how to serve  
and in our lives enthrone him,  
each other's needs to prefer,  
for it is Christ we're serving.  
*This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.***

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

#### THE RESPONSE

Prayers of praise and thanksgiving

Loving God, you make yourself known to us, and you are present in our lives even though we do not always recognise or acknowledge you. For all that you are, we thank you.

You do not leave us orphaned, but embrace us with parental love that encourages and comforts us. You ensure that we are not alone by filling us with your Spirit of truth, that inspires and empowers us. For all that you are, we thank you, loving God.

Thank you, Father, for your presence, your love and your encouragement.

Prayers of intercession

Dear Father God, It saddens our hearts to see the great suffering of your beloved children in the world.

We bring to mind all those in our locality who find themselves in a hard place. We especially pray for those who suffer physically with illness or mentally with depression or anxiety.

Lord, come breathe on these people by your Holy Spirit and bring great love, hope and joy through us your church.

Help us to minister to others in the strength of your Spirit and to work in unity together.

May we shine your glorious light into the darkness and remain steadfast and true to you.

Lord, it disturbs us when we see world leaders embracing division instead of unity, pursuing wealth instead of justice, and concealing the truth by speaking lies.

We lift all those in significant leadership to you. Come guide their thoughts, cover their actions and renew their minds.

Protect them from the influence of the realms of darkness and sweep away any corruption.

We pray that you would lay out new paths of righteousness in troubled nations and lands.

Father, it is disturbing to see the difference between rich and poor widening. Our own nation has made cuts to our foreign aid budget and is criminalising the most desperate and disadvantaged who risk their lives to come to this country.

We lift all those in poverty to you.

Come bring miracles of provision, healing and restoration.

Speak into our lives so that we might play our part in changing the world. We ask all this in the

wonderful name of Jesus.

**Amen**

The Offering & prayer

God of grace, we hear your call to generous giving in the way you meet our needs each day, and in the peace you give which passes understanding.

Having received so much, help us to offer all we have, in terms of our time, talents and money.

Bless these gifts for the work of your church.

**Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

Our final hymn continues the theme of caring & sharing. It bids us to deeper commitment & to really walk the talk as followers of Jesus. It is. 566 in Singing the Faith – Take my life, and let it be.

Hymn: StF 566 – Take My Life, And Let It Be

- 1. Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**
- 2. Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love;  
take my feet, and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.**
- 3. Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King;  
take my lips, and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.**
- 4. Take my silver and my gold,  
not a mite would I withhold;  
take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.**
- 5. Take my will, and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine;**

**take my heart — it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.**

- 6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure-store;  
take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.**

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

Prayer & blessing

Eternal God & Father, by whose power we are created and by whose love we are redeemed, guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may give ourselves to your service in the days and weeks ahead.

Help us to have more love for you and for one another.

We ask for your blessing on us in the name of Jesus Christ your Son and our Lord.

**Amen.**

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StF 272 – From Heaven You Came, Helpless Babe

Graham Kendrick (*b.* 1950)

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Hymn: StF 566 – Take My Life, And Let It Be

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

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StF 611 – Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You

Richard A. M. Gillard (*b.* 1953)

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