

Sunday 25th October 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Call to worship

Wherever we worship, whether alone or with others; whether in chapel, at home or elsewhere; whether we are full of joy or overwhelmed by fear and despair; we are thankful that we worship together as a community of Christ. Amen.

Hymn 503 (StF): Love divine

Sing/ read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/sw5ZCZeS32M>

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.

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.

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)

Prayers of adoration, thanks and confession

We pray together

Holy God,
creator of all things and source of all holiness,
we praise you for all that you provide for us materially and spiritually;
we give thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who showed to us that perfect example of human love;
we praise you for your Holy Spirit, who empowers us to share that love with others.

We give thanks for our local Christian communities and the worldwide church to which we belong; may we praise you with one voice.

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
accept our praise and adoration. Amen.

We confess our sins to God.

Silence

We confess that we have not loved you with heart, soul and mind. We have failed to love our neighbours as ourselves. Help us to become the loving people you want us to be. Amen.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is his gracious word:

“Your sins are forgiven.”

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Today’s Reading from the Old Testament: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

² Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

¹⁵ You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer^[a] among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood^[b] of your neighbour: I am the LORD.

¹⁷ You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Today’s Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered

together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: “‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² ‘What do you think of the Messiah?^[a] Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ ⁴³ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit^[b] calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’”?

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’ ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Time to Reflect

The BBC’s Question Time, for me, is compulsive viewing, even though I often find it infuriating when the politicians avoid answering questions by skirting round the issue or answering a question that wasn’t asked. I’m sure I’m not alone in my frustration!

Many questions have been on our minds throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Would fewer lives have been lost if lockdown measures were introduced sooner? Were care homes, including MHA facilities, dealt with properly? Could more lives have

been saved if...? All of these are difficult to answer. One slip of the tongue from a politician could lead to political trouble. No wonder they are reluctant to give a straight answer! In no way do I defend politicians, but concede that journalists' questions are often loaded to trip them up. This is nothing new. In the gospel reading, Jesus is asked a loaded question in similarly politically-charged times, not by a journalist but a lawyer.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" *Matt. 22:36*

This question is dynamite. Jesus is being asked to make a judgement on which of God's commandments, written in the laws of Moses, is greatest. This is like asking a politician which law of the land is the most important. Imagine the field day the tabloid press would have!

I dare say that the lawyer was very pleased with his question, certain he had Jesus trapped. There was no answer he could give that would not land him in deep trouble.

How wrong could he be? Rather than picking out two of the laws, Jesus expertly sums up the whole of God's law: love God and neighbour. This answer silences the lawyer and the pharisees, as there is nothing for them to argue with.

We may argue over points of doctrine and practice within Methodism and across denominations. It would be so much better if our primary motivation was always to simply love God and neighbour. The church and the world would certainly be better places and, as Charles Wesley writes, 'the joy of heaven' would 'to earth come down'.

Forget the difficult questions, focus instead on Christ's simple answer – love! Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself. Amen.

Take a time to sit quietly

Prayers of intercession

Loving God,
as we mediate on Christ's commandment to love,
we pray for the church throughout the world;
for justice and peace between and within nations;
for political leaders and all in authority;
for the communities in which we live;
for people who suffer in any way;
and for all those on our minds today.

Silence

May the presence of your love be felt in every situation.

We give thanks for those who have died, especially those who have lived in the love of Christ.

May we be united with them in your eternal kingdom. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father...

Hymn 615 (StF): Let love be real, in giving and receiving. Listen to it here:

<https://youtu.be/SkBxZw5NxU>

or read the words

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.

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.

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.

Michael Forster (b. 1946)

A prayer of blessing

May everything we do be guided by the
law of Christ's love; and now may the
blessing of God: the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit, be with us this day and
forevermore. Amen.

Original Materials by Tom Ferguson

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