

Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service 21st April 2024 by Revd Steph Jenner

Call to worship

Jesus said: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. (John 10 v 11 & 14)

Hymn StF 480

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnishèd
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling place shall be.

The Scottish Psalter, 1929

Opening Prayers

Loving God, we come before you, knowing all that you are to us, in awe of your love for us, and we cannot help but praise and worship you in our humility. In this third week since Jesus' resurrection, whilst he is still in the world before his Ascension, help us to appreciate his appearances to his disciples, as we seek reassurance. Help us to witness to his teachings, as we benefit from the words of comfort and challenge. Help us to do all the good we can, within our limited human means, as we emulate his compassion and healing.

Gracious God, our helper and guide, our saviour and redeemer, bless us as we search for you in the everyday, in the people that surround us, and inside ourselves. In the name of Jesus Christ who forgives us when we repent and ask to be forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ who forgave Peter his denials and Judas his betrayal, who forgave the crowd as they turned against him, and the soldiers who crucified him on Roman orders with priestly persuasion. Who forgave the disciples who left, those that did not recognise him on his return, and those who doubted. When we remember God's great mercy, we give ourselves into God's hands and ask that we might be forgiven, so that we can forgive others. Amen.

Lord's Prayer



Readings – the set (lectionary) readings for today include Psalm 23, which we have sung and John 10: 11 – 18 which is where Jesus says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’ But the letter (epistle) for today is 1 John 3: 16 – 24, as below. The chapter begins talking about being children of God, and how sin, hate, and murder are in the world:

We know love by this, that he (Jesus) laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God, and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

On this day, almighty God, we bring our thanks for love. The love that you gave in giving your Son to the world; the love that Jesus showed in his life and death, the love that we are commanded to show to one another, as the disciples were instructed too.

A love that is unconditional, a love that sees beyond faults and foibles, a love that surrounds us and cares for us, without smothering or stifling us. We thank you that ‘love one another’ comes with no caveats, no exceptions, just a never-ending certainty of love that does not end with death, ours or anyone else’s. Help us to be worthy of this love, by sharing it to all your children, known and unknown, that the whole world can abide in it. Amen.

Hymn StF 242

A new commandment I give unto you:
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

The Byble in Englyshe 1540

Reflection

In this passage, we find the commandment that Jesus lived and died for – love one another. ‘Love one another’ appears at least 23 times in the Gospels and is often preceded by ‘this is my commandment’ and followed by ‘as I have loved you’.

It is a simple phrase, but a whole difficult action. We are told in the passage that speaking it is not enough, but we must show it in ‘deed and action’ passively and dynamically. It, love, should consume our whole being and be obvious in our dealings with others, our speaking of the truth, our attitudes and our encouragements.

But love is not easy, always. We may have family that we automatically love, we feel it when we see them, often when we first see them, and we love them whoever they turn out to be and whatever they do. We may not always like it, but we love them. Friends too, the family that we choose, can be easy to love, because our friends tend to be like us, enjoying the same things, having the same humour, liking the same places. But beyond that it can be a bit tricky. The people we work with, or volunteer with, our neighbours next door or up our street, the people that we see day by day, even our church fellowship, do we actually love them?

If you can answer a resounding 'yes' that's wonderful, if 'perhaps' or 'depends' or even 'no' then we need to do some work.

As I said above, we don't always have to like to love, so that may help us. If we love someone, we want the best for them, even if we can't provide it. If we love someone, we want them to have the things that make life liveable, for example, food, shelter, medical care, gainful employment, purpose. If we love someone, we don't want them harmed in body, mind or spirit, we want them to be safe. If we love someone, we want them to know that they are loved.

Showing someone they are loved can be achieved in many ways. Telling them is an obvious way, but that is meaningless unless it is backed up by actions. A gesture such as a card or gift, can be a good way, or giving them food, like a meal, as we may do for friends. Making sure they have somewhere to stay and warm clothing, as we do for our children and grandchildren. Giving to charity, a shoe box at Christmas, a foodbank when we do our own shopping, a disaster relief fund, or buying our clothes at a charity shop, all shows love. And sometimes giving of yourself, your time, your experience, your expertise, can be an expression of love.

And Jesus used some of these ways too. He often fed not only his disciples, but up to five thousand others at a time. He made sure people were safe and comfortable by healing them and allowing them to go home. He gave of himself, his time, and his expertise to try and help people, to comfort them, to encourage them. He gently guided people, especially his disciples, but admonishing them as necessary, and showing them the right way. He sighed over them when he could see that they did not get it, and he brought people together so that they could help one another.

Love is something that we can feel, and feel the loss of, which is why we grieve, but it is also something that we do, and then something that we are. If all of Jesus's teachings and commandments are followed, if we abide in him and allow him to abide in us, then we can be love in all our words and deeds, and our thoughts.

But at the moment, when terrible things happen in the world, and people spew hate, and then truth is twisted and 'fake news' encourages people to turn against each other, allowing rage to build up, it seems that love is pushed out, and may never be regained.

So we have to try harder to engender love in each other, to show what can be achieved in cooperation and understanding, find our similarities and discuss our differences, without prejudice. Then maybe, just maybe, that echo will become louder, and 'love one another' becomes the way forward.

We can but hope, and pray, that our Good Shepherd returns to guide us, and merciful peace and goodness breaks out again into the world. But until then we strive, in our best way, to love one another, as Jesus taught us.

Hymn StF 615

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 brace 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 manipulations,
no secret wis to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me you hope through dreams and
disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings show.
Michael Forster

Prayers of Intercession

By faith in God we pray:

for those of us who are feeling lost and alone, we remember that one sheep that was sort and returned to the ninety-nine;
for those of us who are feeling vulnerable and afraid, we remember that Jesus is the gate to the pen where his flock are sheltered, and will protect us from predators and other harms;
for those of us who are feeling disorientated and doubting, we remember that we need to listen for the Shepherd's voices, to recognising it and return to the Way;
for those of us who are feeling harassed and helpless, we remember our Shepherd, our Good Shepherd, and the peace and comfort that he brings.
In faith we pray for our sisters and brothers, who are also in sore need of a guiding hand, a place of safety, a champion for their rights, a bringer of justice.
And ask all these, and the prayers of our hearts, through our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn StF 661

Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build thy house again;
thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
and all my simple soul devour.

I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone:
to spend, and to be spent, for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
into thy blessed hands receive;
and let me live to preach thy word,
and let me to thy glory live;
my every sacred moment spend
in publishing the sinners' friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
with boundless charity divine:
so shall I all my strength exert,
and love them with a zeal like thine;
and lead them to thy open side,
the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.
Charles Wesley

Blessing from the Iona Community

May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
whom death could not contain,
lives to disturb and heal us,
bless us with power to go forth
and proclaim the Gospel. Amen.