

DSW Written Service Sunday 9th January 2022
“Living in hope – I have called you Friends”

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Glory to the Father, the God of love, and to Christ our saviour, who continually preserves and sustains us; who has loved us with an everlasting love, and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us;
whose wisdom teaches us;
whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

Blessèd be God for ever.

To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be praise and glory for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn – STF 548 – Blessed Assurance

1 Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine:
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture burst on my sight;

angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love:

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love:

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Frances Jane van Alstyne
(Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)

Ministry of the Word

Romans 12: 1 – 2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^[b] worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[d]

John 15: 9 – 17:

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants^[d] any longer, because the servant^[e] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon

How was your family over the Christmas Period? It was lovely to see mine and Cora's families – but sometimes after longer periods together atmosphere's arrive and tempers frey. I think its human nature that at this time of year we come together, we enjoy each others company, but sometimes we do also get on each other's nerves. Or that may just be the Yarrien clan!

On this covenant Sunday, we are reminded again that we are called as Christ's family in this place, here in Dorset South and West Methodist Circuit. We are reminded that family living isn't always easy, but we are called to a community rooted in love, as Friends of the kingdom. John's gospel reminds us of a powerful and challengeing truth: *"I have called you friends, I chose you."*

We are united by something greater than our differences, we are united by Christ's friendship with each one of us. You have all chosen to be in community with each other, and by the power of the covenant we share later in the service, God chooses to be in relationship with each one of us.

I have called you friends . . . we are no longer our own

Lets begin with the thread of Love, that runs through our reading from John's Gospel this morning. Love is repeated eleven times in this reading, and I think Love is the way in which we should understand and interpret this whole passage. *This is my commandment, that you Love one another as I have loved you . . .*

This conversation between Jesus and his disciples, happens on the eve before his crucifixion – in a matter of hours Jesus is Arrested, Tried, Convicted and excecuted, as a enemy of the state. Jesus endures these things to demonstrate the he has for his disciples, and the profound love God has for the whole world. We see the depth and power of Christ's love made plain, as he challenges his disciples to abide in his love, but also to keep the Father's commandments. As in our Covenant prayer, we are called to be no longer our own, but God's, through the power of Love and our obeyance of Christ's command, to LOVE. The Love of Christ is not static, like our communities of faith are not static. So Abiding in this love, requires us to be ever moving, ever expanding our concept of who belongs to Christ, who we should love and value within the community. And importantly how we are loved and valued within the community. This is the love of Jesus Christ in which we are invited to abide. Love then, is wrapped together through Abiding with Christ, Loving one another and keeping God's commandments.

Part of abiding in God's Love, is the Methodist Creedal, that we should watch over one another in love. Sometimes that means that we simply come and worship, and we live by means of Christian Love. Other times, we are called to come alongside people, walking the journey of Faith and Life with them. That might mean being pushed out of our comfort zones, being faced with the realities of people's lives, we might imagine we would never have to encounter, but we are called to love people, of all walks of

love, just the same. Other times still, we are called to meet together, and watch over our spiritual discipleship, prayer and worship to God. In the early Class Meetings setup by Wesley the Methodist people, every single week were asked: “What have you done this week to flee the wrath to come?” And they were reminded to “Do No Harm, to “Do Good” and to “Love God”. I wonder how we would answer that question this morning?

Along with Love and watching over one another, Christ also offers us the challenge of bearing fruit for the kingdom, fruit that will last. One of the most wonderful elements of having a Fruit Tree in the Garden, is seeing it flower and then produce fruit which you can eat, later in the year. First of all you have the promise of the fruit, and then you have the opportunity to harvest and enjoy the fruit.

Positively, bearing fruit means making wise choices and decisions for the work of and on behalf of God. It means acting thoughtfully over a life time; discerning what thoughts, words, and actions best serve the intentions of a loving God in this world.

I have called you friends . . . we are no longer our own

Finally I want to highlight the powerful statement that Christ Makes – You have not chosen me, I have Chosen you. I do not call you servants, I call you Friends. Jesus’ offer of the intimacy of friendship, for me is overwhelming, because to know the Risen Lord, is to be invited into a deep and lasting friendship with God. A God with whom we will renew our covenant with, very shortly. That is not to be done glibly or lightly, but reverently, deeply and wholeheartedly.

Friends are people who can count on each other, who encourage and support one another. Are we a church of friends? If we are not always friendly, how in 2022 can we turn that around. We didn’t choose each other, much like we don’t choose our families – God drew us together, to fulfil his high purpose of building the kingdom, worshipping God and loving one another.

This world needs to know that we are Christians by our love. May we work to express it to one another and to all corners of creation. God Loves you, dwell in his love, share his love, and watch over one another in Love, that we might bear fruit for the kingdom. Fruit that will last. I don’t call you servants, I call you friends, we are no longer our own, but God’s. Amen.

The Covenant (which includes prayers of intercession):

God made a covenant with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law. The covenant was renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in his life, work, death and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power, and united in love and obedience. In this covenant God promises us new life in Christ. For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God. We meet, therefore, as generations have met before us, to renew the covenant which bound them and binds us to God.

Let us then seek forgiveness for the sin by which we have denied God’s claim upon us. Let us pray:

God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sins. For the sin that has made us slow to learn from Christ, reluctant to follow him, and afraid to bear the cross: Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has caused the poverty of our worship, the formality and selfishness of our prayers, our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace, and our hesitating witness for Christ: Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gifts; evade our responsibilities, and fail to be good stewards of your creation: Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

Silence

Have mercy on me, O God, in your constant love; in the fullness of your mercy blot out my offences. Wash away all my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your help again and strengthen me with a willing spirit.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore to all who truly repent this is his gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us again accept our place within this covenant which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples.

This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work. Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. In obedience we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you. We are no longer our own but yours.

I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace. Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession: -

As we have entered this covenant not for ourselves alone, but as God's servants and witnesses, let us pray for the Church and for the world:

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church: **make us all one, that the world may believe.** Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world: **establish justice and peace among all people.**

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief or trouble: **deliver them from their distress.**

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory: **bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.**

Silence

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace to make these prayers and you have promised through Christ our Lord that when two or three agree in his name you will grant what they ask. Answer now your servants' prayers according to their needs; in this world grant that we may truly know you, and in the world to come graciously give us eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

Go now and proclaim the gospel, Not just through words but deeds – Through what you say, What you do, And who you are. The Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Be with you, with those you love, and those you are called to Love, now in the name of Christ. **Amen**

CCL Licence Number 178041