

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Gathering

God of new life, God of risen hope, as we gather separately in our homes today, may we know your resurrection power in our lives. May our spirits be renewed. May our bodies be restored. May our hope be re-kindled. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 689 Summoned by the God who made us

Delores Dufner

Summoned by the God who made us
Rich in our diversity,
Gathered in the name of Jesus,
Richer still in unity:

Trust the goodness of creation;
Trust the Spirit strong within.
Dare to dream the vision promised
Sprung from seed of what has been.

Chorus:

*Let us bring the gifts that differ
And, in splendid, varied ways,
Sing a new church into being,
One of faith and love and praise*

Chorus

Bring the hopes of every nation;
Bring the art of every race.
Weave a song of peace and justice:
Let it sound through time and space.

Chorus

Radiant risen from the water;
Robed in holiness and light,
Male and female in God's image
Male and female God's delight:

Draw together at one table
All the human family;
Shape a circle ever wider
And a people ever free.

Chorus

Prayer

Holy God, Creator of all life, your ways are the ways of love; and we have been created in your image.

Your love endures forever.

It is with and through your love that you sustain the living, send healing to the sick, lift the fallen and give hope to the captive.

Your love endures forever.

Throughout the millennia, you have kept faith with us, not because of our worthiness, but because of your abiding love.

Your love endures forever.

God of righteousness,
through scripture, spoken word and prophecy,
you have reached out to your children and taught us how you would have us live.

Your love endures forever.

God of salvation,
you have loved us so much that you came to us in human flesh,
to teach us how to love one another and to be agents of your reconciliation.

Your love endures forever.

Loving God,
help us each to recognise that your kingdom will only begin to come when we live by your law of love – loving our neighbours as ourselves, and loving you, the source of all love.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, your love incarnate. Amen.

Hymn StF 652 Lord we come to ask your healing

Lord, we come to ask your healing,
teach us of love;
all unspoken shame revealing,
teach us of love.
Take our selfish thoughts and actions,
petty feuds, divisive factions,
hear us now to you appealing,
teach us of love.

Soothe away our pain and **SORROW**,
hold us in love;
grace we cannot buy or borrow,
hold us in love.
Though we see but dark and danger,
though we spurn both friend and stranger,
though we often dread tomorrow,
hold us in love.

When the bread is raised and broken,
fill us with love;
words of consecration spoken,
fill us with love.
As our grateful prayers continue,
make the faith that we have in you
more than just an empty token,
fill us with love.

Help us live for one another, bind us in love;
stranger, neighbour, father, mother -
bind us in love.
All are equal at your table,
through your Spirit make us able
to embrace as sister, brother,
bind us in love.

Jean Holloway
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StF 652

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 **The Gift of Love**

In scripture there are three words for love, Eros,(romantic/sexual) Philia (non-romantic but deep) and Agape (selfless, sacrificial) and it's agape we're thinking about today, from Chapter 13 of Paul's letter to Corinthians.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Reflection: I'm sure many of us have heard 1 Corinthians 13 more times than we could count but that should not detract from the fact that it is a beautiful piece of writing.

Let's for a moment return to the reason for Paul writing this letter in the first place....The Corinthian Church was not a comfortable gathering, where people fell into step with each other because they shared fundamentally similar lives, values, and experiences. Quite the contrary. There was great social and cultural diversity which frequently dissolved into disputes between different factions, particularly over the status and use of various spiritual gifts. This was a community fragmented, rather than enriched, by difference.

First Paul teaches that although there are many different Gifts, they all result from the same Spirit of God and are given to build up the church, not as a mark of reward to the recipient. Paul then teaches them that all the members of the church are like the members of a body which work together in unity under their head which is Jesus; each person valuable and necessary to the body of Christ, regardless of gifting or anything else.

Paul's "poetic ode to love" was not written to celebrate the unifying love already existing in the community, because it wasn't there. It is against a background of dispute that Paul introduces his call to action, the 'most excellent way', the most important characteristic of the church's life together.....Love. The gifts and roles within the church, although significant, are not the most important thing. In fact Paul says that without love, and a particular kind of love at that, agape love, all of it is pointless, worthless. In the face of disagreement, dispute, difference of opinion, love is what is needed most. Not passionate, romantic love, not primarily the love we think of that binds family and friends but the costly, self-sacrificial love that was manifest in the life of Jesus.

This is what Paul wants his readers to grasp...the enduring power and effectiveness of loving like Jesus. We are so used to hearing this reading at weddings where the context is the beginning of a new chapter in a couple's life together, full of loving potential, that we forget that that is not the context in which Paul's letter was written and in the forgetting, we lose some of the power of the message.

Paul's hymn of love was written, not for a couple who have no doubts in declaring their love for one another, but for people who had fallen out with one another, who were struggling to work out the right way to live out their new identity as followers of Jesus.

What do we envisage when these words are read? Is our image sometimes rather fluffy or rose-tinted? A bit like the Kim cartoons?

Paul understands the human position of being unable to grasp fully what this kind of love that he describes, fully means; we see through a mirror dimly he says.

Corinth was a city where mirrors were made, not of glass but polished metal, so the image they produced was blurred & imperfect.

Paul looks forward to Specsavers heaven, when all will be made clear as we stand in the presence of God, able to fully comprehend the love that is God; we will know to the same degree that we are already known.

We can hear echoes from the passage from Psalm 139 about the awesomeness of being known by God but also the re-assurance that we are held in God's love and protection.

Ultimately we will know and be known by love and, as Paul tells his readers in Romans 8, nothing will be able to separate us from that love made known in Jesus.

But what happens now? What does this mean for us when we wake up each morning? How should we live as disciples of Jesus?

I believe we have a choice each day in every situation and with God's help we can choose the way of love as Paul described, as Jesus lived and died. It's not easy and sometimes will cost us much. Or we can choose another way.

The highest purposes of God are manifest in sharing God's love with others, not just those who are like us but with those we find it hard to get on with, who have different perspectives from us; that's when loving like Jesus costs us, possibly very deeply.

But the love that is born of faith and trust in Jesus and the Holy Spirit working within, endures all things, hopes all things; that kind of love never ends.

Prayers of intercession

Love is patient.....

We pray for situations, near & far, where patience is what's needed to fulfil your loving purposes.

We pray for your guiding hand on the painstaking procedures of good research in all kinds of fields, that new ways may be discovered which make the world a better place for all to live.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Love is kind.....

We pray that kindness would be the watchword for all humanity. Inspire us with your kindness when we find it difficult to love like this.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Love is not envious or boastful.....

We pray for all for whom interaction on social media damages their sense of well-being, leading to harm of many kinds.

Help us to be vigilant, non-judgemental and caring towards all.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Love does not insist on its own way.....

We pray for your guidance in all negotiations, personal, national, global, which try to find a way for people to live together in justice and peace & prosperity for all.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Love bears all things.....

We pray for all who are ill, homeless, in poverty, suffering in any way and those who care for them. May they receive strength, courage, assurance and hope which comes from such a love.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

Love never ends.....

We pray for those who have died and trust in your promise that your love is everlasting. May the hope of eternal life comfort those who mourn or who approach the gateway of death.

Lord in your mercy.....**Hear our prayer**

We gather all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, saying, **Our Father.....**

Hymn StF 503 Love divine Charles Wesley

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.

Jesus, 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 they 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;
true 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.

Blessing & sending

Let the pure light of God's love shine through you as you worship God in all that you do this coming week. And the blessing of God, Father, son and Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen