

Welcome & Call to Worship

Loving God, we are here in the name of Christ.

We come to bow our heads, to lift up our hearts, and to offer you our praise.

We come to confess Jesus Christ as Lord, to enthrone him in our lives, and to offer him our commitment.

We come to seek his will, to hear his word, and to receive his blessing. Help us to bear his name faithfully, and live out each day, to the glory of his name. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving

For the light of each new day, Lord of all, we thank you.

For the light of the sun, warming and sustaining, Lord of all, we thank you.

For the light of love, gladdening and enriching our lives in so many ways,

Lord of all, we thank you.

For the light of truth, combating evil, injustice, falsehood and corruption,

Lord of all, we thank you.

For the light of goodness and compassion, deeds great and small contributing to heal and help, restore and renew, Lord of all, we thank you.

For the light we have received, that is with us now, and that lies in store in you eternal kingdom, Lord of all, we thank you. **Amen.**

Prayers of Confession

If you have a pebble handy, you may like to hold it as you read this prayer:

Father God, we have done or said things this week, that we wish to lift to you.

Because we need to say sorry, for the impact they made, for the hurt they caused.

<Offer your own prayers, of heart and mind to God>.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that all who have belief in him, may have life eternal. God offers us forgiveness, for all that is past, so that we might live in the fullness of his love and glory. **Amen.**

Song – STF 249 – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

*Jesu, Jesu,
fill us with your love,
show us how to serve
the neighbours we have from you.*

1 Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
master who acts as a slave to them.

2 Neighbours are rich folk and poor,

neighbours are black folk and white,
neighbours are nearby and far away.

3 These are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love.
All these are neighbours to us and you.

4 Kneel at the feet of our friends,
silently washing their feet,
this is the way we should live with you.

North Ghanaian song

adapted by Tom Colvin (1925–2000)

Words adaptation and Music: © 1969 Hope Publishing Company

Bible Reading

1 Corinthians 15: 35 – 38, 42 – 50:

³⁵ But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is ^[a]from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will ^[b]also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, ^[c]is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Luke 6: - 27 – 38:

²⁷ 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. ^[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

Sermon

A man who had reached his 100th Birthday was being interviewed on East Midlands Today. *What are you most proud of, in your 100 years?* – The Reporter asked. *“Well, he said – I don't have an enemy in the world!”* *“What a beautiful Thought, how inspirational!”* – exclaimed the reporter. *“Yep, I outlived every last one of them!”* The Man cheerily ddded. The subject of our reading from Luke's Gospel this morning is our enemies. And in particular how we treat them or indeed, deal with them.

In our world: We go to war with them. We plan their demise. We rejoice in their failures, and we mourn their successes.

We tackle them by: Writing letters, making phone calls, sending emails. And mustering up support for our point of view, against the others in the world!

Quite simply, Jesus tells us, that he came to tell us to GIVE that way of being up. Once and for all, because of his life, death and resurrection, we are called to: **“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and pray for God's forgiveness”**.

The passage from Luke is part of a series of passages which give us a very clear template on how we should follow Jesus, and live out the new life that he lived, died and rose again for. This is echoed in Matthew's Gospel, in chapters 5, 6, and 7, but of course is exemplified across the whole of the Bible narrative.

When you see programmes like the X-Factor, Strictly Come Dancing, the Greatest Dancer or The Voice, I think at some point in the audition stages or near the beginning of the programme, one of the Judges / mentors will use the phrase “*Attitude is everything*”. And so it is in our passage from Luke. Jesus effectively says “our Attitude is everything”! The world and its expectations are upside down, topsy turvey, all over the place, if we follow Christ’s commands - **all will be well**.

These are words to live by, words to guide and shape a decent way of living, words to encourage us to not simply look within, but always outward. But in their simplicity – there is always the challenge, and for me the challenge is that this call to love, bless and pray for our enemies – is REALLY REALLY hard to live out consistently and with conviction. But this is about us getting our attitude to others, to ourselves and to God, in the right place, giving God the freedom to bless us immeasurably.

I think Loving our enemies – feels contrary to what feels right or even normal. Loving our enemies is a challenging thing to even think about, **let alone do**.

The word for love used in this passage is AGAPE – which means unconditional love. This means that we should show love to our enemies – no matter what – even if they remain our enemies for life. Understand this though – although we are called to do good to enemies, to bless those who persecute us and to pray for our enemies. Loving them, in my opinion, doesn’t mean we support them in what they do, I don’t think it means that we have to agree with them. And I don’t think it means we have to become best buddies or even casual friends or acquaintances.

However, what Christ is commanding us to do is this: Loving our enemies means that when they hate us, we love them in return. It means that the worldly cycle of hate, fear, retaliation and revenge, stops with us. We can be angry at someone, and still love them with our hearts and minds.

Just back in Chapter 4 of Luke’s Gospel - Jesus was very angry with the people of Jerusalem, when they ran him out of town, for speaking the truth. And yet he still shed tears over the city, on a number of occasions. What if this call to Love our Neighbours was not an aspiration, or something for us to achieve in the future, but was what we are able to achieve now, to live by now, to enact in this very moment, time and space? Loving, praying and forgiving – is our gift from God – we have to choose to grasp it, do it and live by it, if the kingdom of God is to be ours forever.

Jesus then is trying to teach us that keeping his law of Loving God and Loving Neighbour, is all an attitude of heart and mind. We are called to be of the world, but not from the world. We are called to be salt and light in a sin filled world. We are called to speak out boldly and prophetically, about Christ’s abundance of Love. And we are called to LIVE out that Love, by Loving, blessing and praying for our enemies.

In other words – We cannot NOT love our enemies, we cannot NOT do to others as we would have them do to us, we cannot NOT be merciful. We are asked to Forgive and Love, with every fibre of our bodies, minds and souls. And it is that kind of deep rooted, immeasurable love, that changes and transforms the world, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, saviour and redeemer.

In living out LOVE for our enemies, we come to reveal an attitude of love that only God can provide for us. Maybe your enemy is your spouse. Or another person here in church. Or a person on your street. Or your boss at work. **Or All of those and more**

Whether we are interacting with friends or enemies, Christians or non-Christians, our attitude toward other people should be to love them. None of us have problems loving the friends and family members we get along with. It’s the people, and even family members or other Christians who seem to hate us, and the people who are out to cause us harm, and the people who spread lies about us that we have trouble loving.

Whoever your enemy is, I doubt very much that you feel love toward them.
But Christ is going to give us things to do for them to help generate love. **We Bless and We pray for them.**
Because our love, is driven, empowered and shaped by the Cross, the outpouring of God's loving, for you,
for me and for all the world, in Jesus Christ. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession, Lords Prayer & Peace

Lord Hear our Prayer
Lord Graciously hear us.

Add your prayers For the World
Add your prayers For The Church
Add your prayers For the Community
Add your prayers For those close to our hearts and minds

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayers. Respond according to our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. So to you merciful God,
be glory and praise forever, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: -

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.

Song: - STF 303 – I know that my redeemer lives

1 I know that my Redeemer lives —
what joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
he lives, my everlasting Head!

2 He lives, to bless me with his love;
he lives, to plead for me above;
he lives, my hungry soul to feed;
he lives, to help in time of need.

3 He lives, and grants me daily breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives, my mansion to prepare;
he lives, to lead me safely there.

4 He lives, all glory to his name;
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

Blessing

May the world continue to surprise us, love continue to astonish us,
life continue to captivate us, and faith continue to sustain us.

And 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.**

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