

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort & strength that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Call to Worship: Psalm 1: 1-2

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Prayer Lord God of all, I set aside this time and space to be in your presence. Help me to open my heart, mind and will to you, in order that I may receive everything that you have prepared for me. Amen

Hymn StF 372 Come down, O love divine

1 Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

3 Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler
part,
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.

4 And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Prayers

Living God, we give you thanks and praise, for you have made us and given us life,
You have redeemed us and set us free.

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise, for you have found us and made us your own,
Named us and called us 'Beloved'.

Accompanying God, we give you thanks and praise, for you have promised to be with us always
And nothing can separate us from your love.

God, our God, we love and adore you. Amen

God of mercy, your love for us is strong but our love for you is weak.

You call us to follow Jesus, but we are slow to obey.

You care for all that you have made, but we ignore the needs of others and misuse your creation.

We are sorry for our sins.

Forgive us, and help us to please you and honour you by the way we live.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God is love and forgives our sins through Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Readings Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18

The Lord said to Moses, ² “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.

“Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour’s life. I am the Lord.

“Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.

Matthew 22: 34-46

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” they replied.

⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

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

⁴⁵ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Reflection

We have rules in our society for a very good reason; to prevent chaos and enable us to live together in community in such a way that largely benefits people. That said, there are many flaws in human society!!

The Jewish people lived by the Law given to Moses; given by God to teach the people how to be the people of God, how to be a holy nation. The book of Leviticus lays out many details of how the people were to be holy, by the way that they lived and at the conclusion of today’s passage come the familiar words, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’.

However, over generations of leadership, the letter of the Law became more important than the spirit of the Law; being holy became directly related to how strictly one kept the Law. Many were not able to keep the Law as required by the religious authorities and so became alienated, pushed to the edges of society. The Law had become required actions which did not touch or involve peoples’ hearts. Jesus changed that interpretation of being holy, with his own life of word and action, loving God and others, not only with his heart but with his whole being.

In Matthew’s gospel, to try and challenge Jesus, to trap him, the Pharisees come with a question. But such an easy question! What is the greatest commandment?

It’s a question a child would have been able to answer. It is part of the Shema, meaning in Hebrew, ‘to hear and to obey’.

This is the first prayer a Jewish child learns and the prayer that Jews still pray every day. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind'.

But what Jesus does is tie the greatest commandment- loving God with heart, mind and strength, with loving one's neighbour, directions for which are laid out in Leviticus. That is how love for God is shown, not just by following the minutiae of the Law, which is what the Pharisees were very keen on but having a heart of compassion for others and acting for their well-being.

The questioning Pharisee seems satisfied with Jesus' answer but Jesus extends the conversation. There is more that Jesus wants to bring into the open, and he asks the Pharisees a question, 'Whose son is the Messiah?' knowing full well what their answer would be...'David's Son'.

The Jews believed that the Messiah would come from the Davidic line, royal ancestry. He would be a new king, overthrowing Israel's oppressors, Rome, an earthly conqueror and the one to herald in God's Kingdom....in which the Jews believed that they would be restored to their rightful place of power and authority.

Jesus reveals that there is much more to the Messiah as he quotes words from Psalm 110, a recognised messianic text. Jesus was more than just of royal descent, of David's line. David's son could only be David's Lord if he was the Messiah!

Jesus has already been proclaimed Son of David by the crowd. Now, Jesus declares his identity as Messiah, Son of God...he is David's Lord, not just of David's descent. Jesus' Messianic identity was going to look very different to that that most people were expecting. The Messiah dying on a cross was not on anyone's radar at that time.

BUT It is only as Son of God, that Jesus' death and resurrection can be understood as his supreme love and sacrifice for all creation. This is Jesus' ultimate demonstration of fulfilling God's command to love God and neighbour, with a love so powerful that it can change peoples' hearts and lives.

The command to love God and to love our neighbour involves cost to ourselves, in time, energy, commitment, material resources, letting go of prejudice, regarding others needs before our own.

The source of our love comes from God, through our relationship with Jesus...it is God's love that flows through us, out to others and it would be impossible for us to show that kind of love without a relationship with Jesus. Jesus needs to be central to our life, in everything we do, everything we say.

In Leviticus, the call to God's people was to be holy. Our holiness comes from God through faith in Jesus' actions on the cross. Our gratitude, together with power of the Holy Spirit, enables us to love God with heart, mind, soul and strength and our neighbour as ourselves.

Holiness stems from the heart and Jesus has the power to renew our hearts, to be more like him. It doesn't happen all at once, otherwise we would all have perfect loving hearts; we need to keep turning to Jesus, asking him in his grace and mercy to help us change and so renew us.

We are each a work in progress and each time our hearts are renewed, the flow of mercy, love and justice increases, enabling us to love God more, as we love our neighbour more.

Prayer – *I invite you to draw a heart shape in the space at the end of this service. Within it, write the name of someone you love and want to pray for. Next write the name of someone whom you find it hard to love or even get on with, outside the first heart. Finally, draw a second heart shape around the first, encompassing the name/s, asking God to enlarge your heart and strengthen your love to include all the people inside your drawing.*

Lord our God, give us grace both to hear and to act on the great commandments of your kingdom, that we may love you with all our heart, and love our neighbour as ourselves –today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

Hymn StF 717

1 We do not hope to ease our minds
by simple answers, shifted blame,
while Christ is homeless, hungry, poor,
and we are rich who bear his name.
As long as justice is a dream
and human dignity denied,
we stand with Christ; disturb us still
till every need is satisfied.

2 We cannot ask to live at peace
in comfort and security
while Christ is tried in Pilate's hall
and drags his cross to Calvary.

As long as hatred stifles truth
and freedom is betrayed by fear,
we stand with Christ; give us no peace
till his peace reigns in triumph here.

3 We will not pray to be preserved
from any depths of agony
while Christ's despairing cry rings out:
God, why have you abandoned me?
As long as we have hope to share
of life renewed beyond the pain,
we stand with Christ all through the night
till Easter morning dawns again.

Marnie Barrell

Prayers of Intercession: *headlines with space to pray*

We pray for peace in the world: peace between nations, amongst communities and within families...

We pray for wisdom & integrity for all those who serve in positions of authority & leadership....

We pray for those who are victims of discrimination for any reason....

We pray for all who suffer, for those who live in fear....

We pray for all those who are displaced from their homes, fleeing from danger.....

We pray that wherever, whenever and however possible, we would be people who love our neighbours,
thus showing our love for God.

In the name of Christ, we pray.

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.

Blessing

Holy God, sustain and empower us in the coming days.

Help us to live in ways that reflect our holy calling as your children.

Bless us in Jesus' name. Amen.