

Hello and welcome to Digital worship from the East Solent and Downs Circuit of the Methodist Church in the south of England. I'm Bill Stillwell.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lord, your presence humbles us, your grace lifts us, your mercy challenges us, your truth inspires us, your Spirit enables us and your love amazes us.

Lord, your almighty power and sovereign presence call on us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: so we come with thankful hearts to worship you. **Amen**

HYMN How Great Thou Art (StF 82)

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| <p>1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:
<i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!</i></p> <p>2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:
<i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee . . .</i></p> | <p>3 And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin:
<i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee . . .</i></p> <p>4 When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home — what joy shall fill my heart;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:
<i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee . . .</i></p> |
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Title: 'How Great Thou Art'

By: Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)

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Performed by: Ruth and Joy Everingham (Everingham Music)

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vv. 1, 2, 4 based on O store Gud 1885 by Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)

PRAYERS OF PRAISE

Father, we believe that you care for all your creation; that there is nothing, and there is no-one, who is beyond your loving compassion.

We believe that you made the world to be good and that you have filled it with enough for everyone – if we love enough to share.

We believe that you gave us minds to think, choices to make, opportunities to respond to, others to care for, and gifts to give.

We believe that you made us for each other, to reflect your glory, to demonstrate your gracious loving concern and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

We believe that you are a great and wonderful God, that your compassion reaches from one end of eternity to the other: that you have made us responsible for each other and that one day you will ask why we did not care enough.

We believe that our words of thanks and praise, our hymns of adoration and our songs of joy, have a hollow sound without a life of daring selflessness and a deep, genuine concern for those sent empty away from our rich tables.

We believe that our affirmations of faith, our words of trust and our good intentions are meaningless to you – and to others – unless and until they are clothed with deeds of caring and sacrificial giving that truly honour your name.

Father, we believe – help us to display your glory, to make our praises live and our love for you real as we love all whom you send to us – no matter who, no matter where, no matter when. Praise be to you, our Lord and our God. **Amen**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We thank you, Lord, for the value you place on our worship; for the importance you give to our songs of praise; for the joy you have in our fellowship with you and the blessing that is yours through our fellowship with each other.

We thank you, Lord, for the value you place on our service: for the way you give meaning to our concern for the hungry and starving and the value you see in our seeking to witness to your great name as we pray for peace and justice for all.

We thank you, Lord, for the value you place upon ourselves; for the song of love that sings in your heart for all the human race and for the price you were willing to pay to restore each of us as a child of your grace; for the cross of Christ which declares your love which starts in the heart of the Father and reaches everyone, everywhere.

We thank you and praise you that the value you see in all your creatures, from the greatest to the least, never diminishes but glows with the fire of the Holy Spirit, bringing hope to all the world and glory to the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

CONFESSION

Lord, we find it's hard to like everyone, and to love them seems utterly impossible.

Christ told us that your love is for the whole world, yet our sights are set so much lower and we still fail to love our neighbour as ourselves.

We confess our indifference to others and our slavish concern for ourselves.

We've tried to break out of this self-centred imprisonment and open our eyes and our ears to the cry of the lost and despairing but, too often, we've failed.

We ask not simply for you to forgive our failures but that the power of your Spirit may empower us to be like mirrors of your love for the whole world. In the name of Christ. **Amen**

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is love, and through Christ our failures are forgiven. Let us then take hold of the Lord's forgiveness and live the new life of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

OUR 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**

HYMN Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father (*StF 51*)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.*

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!...

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!...

Title: 'Great is Thy Faithfulness'

By: Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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READING Psalm 46

God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. (So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence). There is a river that brings joy to the city of God, to the sacred house of the Most High. God is in that city, and it will never be destroyed; at early dawn he will come to its aid. Nations are terrified, kingdoms are shaken; God thunders, and the earth dissolves. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come and see what the LORD has done. See what amazing things he has done on earth. He stops wars all over the world; he breaks bows, destroys spears, and sets shields on fire. *"Stop fighting,"* he says, *"and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme over the world."* The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

READING 1 John 3 v11-24 (GNB)

The message you heard from the very beginning is this: we must love one another. We must not be like Cain; he belonged to the Evil One and murdered his own brother Abel. Why did Cain murder him? Because the things he himself did were wrong, and the things his brother did were right. So do not be surprised, my friends, if the people of the world hate you. We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love others. Those who do not love are still under the power of death. Those who hate others are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life in them. This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action. This, then, is how we will know that we belong to the truth; this is how we will be confident in God's presence. If our conscience condemns us, we know that God is greater than our conscience and that he knows everything. And so, my dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, we have courage in God's presence. We receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. What he commands is that we believe in his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as Christ commanded us. Those who obey God's commands live in union with God and God lives in union with them. And because of the Spirit that God has given us we know that God lives in union with us. *Thanks be to God*

REFLECTION

Over time, individual words tend to get devalued: they become less powerful and meaningful than they were originally intended to be. Take the word *'naughty'*, for example. At one time, if you were told that you were *'noughty'*, you were being told that you were a *'nought'* – a *'nothing'*; someone of no account. Over the years it's just come to mean that you're being mischievous.

Then there's the word *'literally'*. I grew up understanding that *'literally'* meant that the words being used were to be taken at face value. Nowadays it's most often used just to emphasise what's being said.

It seems to me that the same process has been applied to the word *'love'*. We tend to use it willy-nilly to express how committed we are to something. I really do feel, though, that advertisers are being a bit offensive when they tell me that the TV company they're advertising will provide *'The channels you love'*. As far as I'm concerned, TV channels are just pieces of technology to use or ignore, like the laptop or the phone. I have NO emotional attachment to them at all.

So, if that's what the word *'love'* has come to, where does that leave *Christian love*? Is it in the same category as a TV channel – something you can just turn off and on as the fancy takes you?

Mind you, it has to be admitted that *'love'* is incredibly difficult to define. For one thing, my own understanding of what love is has changed from the days of my youth, mainly because of the kaleidoscope of ways I've seen it expressed over the years.

The situation is complicated no end, though, by the fact that English has just the one word to express a whole myriad of thoughts and feelings. The Greeks, on the other hand, had three words. The one the New Testament writers use to talk of Christian love – *agape* – essentially meant having good relationships with other people. Christians expanded that to talk about people having good relationships with God.

Now we're getting into deep waters, thinking about what good, loving relationships with people and God really looks like. St Paul, in the 13 chapter of his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, has a pretty good stab at describing it. Even then, a fair bit of his description tells us what love *isn't* rather than what it *is*. He says

that it isn't jealous or conceited or proud; it's not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; it doesn't keep a record of wrongs; and it's not happy with evil.

We'll never fully define the meaning of Christian love. The word itself is too complex and, more to the point, our journey of discovery of all that it means will last a lifetime - in this world and the next. All we can do here is to explore a little more, through the eyes of John's letter, one or two things love may mean for us in our Christian lives.

For one thing, John does here what Paul does in his letter: he compares what love *is* with what love *isn't*. he says: (15) *Those who hate others are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life in them.* That sounds more than a little harsh, but it's an echo of an image Jesus uses when he talks about adultery. Jesus says: Matthew 5 v27-28 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart.* In other words: if you want to judge others because of what you see *them doing* – then you need to judge *yourself* for what you're *thinking* of doing.

You may say that you're full of Christian love but then hate or detest or reject other people. As John graphically puts it, you're murdering them in your hearts. Since it's all tied up in your feelings of anger and hurt, what can you do about it? Obviously, as a Christian, you can feel guilty about it, but that doesn't take your anger and hatred away. We need to keep on asking God's forgiveness for our guilt. We need to confront our own feelings and place them in the hands of Christ. We need to try to find ways of being reconciled with anyone we hate. And, finally, we need to let go of that anger and forgive ourselves as God forgives us. It may take a very long time to deal with that hatred and for us to find that freedom of forgiveness but, until we do, our claims to be *filled* with the love of God are holed.

I say that because of what else John says: (14) *We know that we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love others.* In Christ, love and new life belong together. If we truly have Christ's love and new life within us then we'll show it in the way we love everyone, everywhere, no matter how difficult we may find some people and however much we feel hurt by them.

John roots it all in the death of Christ himself. Did he hate Pilate or Herod? Does he hate us because we make such a mess of things? Does he reject us because of the way we treat him? Sometimes the way we behave makes it seem as if it's *us* at the foot of the cross when he looks down and says to us; *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'* With that image in our minds, it's not surprising that John says: (16) *'This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us.'*

We'll never define the meaning of love in words. The only *complete* definition of love is Christ's self-sacrifice to forgive us and set us free.

If we know nothing else that God's love demands of us, we do know this: that he calls us to do two things. The first is to face up to, and deal with, our hatred, anger, resentment and rejection of other people: to lay it all at his feet and receive his forgiveness. The second is to demonstrate to ourselves and the world that, as John puts it, *'we have left death and come over into life; we know it because we love others'.*

HYMN Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You (*StF 611*)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.2 We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4 I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.5 When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.6 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too. |
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Title: 'Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You'

By: Richard A. M. Gillard (b. 1953)

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Performed by: Jo Banbury

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INTERCESSIONS

Response: May the love of Christ *All:* **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those in need of love;
For those left empty and afraid to reach out to others;
For those who have faced painful rejection at every turn;
For those who have never known what it means to be loved unconditionally
and find it hard to offer love to others, or to receive it themselves.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those who love destructive things;
For those who so love the things of this world
that they're unable to give a thought for the world to come;
For those who treasure their assumed riches of wealth and possessions,
of status and influence with others, of passing pleasure and addiction, yet are poor in the sight of God;
For those who have everything that ultimately means nothing and nothing that counts for eternity.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those whose love for their neighbour takes our breath away;
For those who are prepared to risk everything to care for the sick and the dying, the lost and the
broken, the hungry and the starving;
For those whose love for others is a reflection of their love for you;
For those whose love for others makes them blind to the price they pay.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those who have yet to discover the depth and the wonder of your love for us all;
Those for whom you are just a word, or a term of abuse;
For those who, each day, are crushed by their sense of aloneness;
For those who are beginning to hear the whisper of your voice and the sound of your love in their lives.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those who have lost everything and from whom the storms and disasters of life
have robbed them of someone to love and someone to love them;
For those filled with anger and bitterness and for whom hope and love, peace and joy,
are now things of the past;
For those overwhelmed with regret and remorse for what has happened,
a disabling uncertainty as they face what is to come and a deep sense of being unloved and unwanted today.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we pray for those who long to feel the healing touch of love, to know the reality of your hand
upon their lives and to experience a joy deep within that is untouched and untarnished by the
pressures of life or the difficulties of the world.
We pray for ourselves and for those we name in the silence of our hearts . . .

- Silence -

We pray that we may enter into a deep knowledge of that love that will never let us go, never let us off
and never let us down.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

Father, we give you thanks that this love is the fruit of the Spirit, not something to be won, achieved or deserved.
Your love conquers all things and brings healing and wholeness to those who are touched by your grace.

May the love of Christ

All: **bring them healing and hope.**

In the name of Christ who is the reflection of the love in our Father's heart. **Amen**

HYMN When we Walk with the Lord (Trust and Obey)

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
But is blessed if we trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows, for the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet.
Or we'll walk by His side in the way.
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

Title: 'Trust and Obey'

By: Author: John H. Sammis

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DISMISSAL AND BLESSING

Go, because the world is waiting.
Go, because of your neighbour's need.
Go, because Christ came.
Go, because He goes with you.
Go, and go in the name of Christ

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Digital Church is taking a short Summer break. That means that the next service will be available for the week beginning Sunday 21st August.

If you'd like to know more about the churches and people of the East Solent and Downs Circuit, you'll find contact details at the end of this programme.

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PLEASE NOTE: We are having a short Summer break!

The next Printed Order of Service for Digital Church
will be available for week beginning **Sunday 21st August 2022.**

Following that the next one
will be available for Sunday **4th September 2022**

Thank you

David (Arnott)