

Tamworth and Lichfield Circuit
Worship at Home : Easter 6 Sunday 9th May 2021

This resource has been prepared for us by Dawn Turton

As you come to worship today, come in the quietness, realising that you are not alone. Others are also worshipping and God is there in the stillness.

Hymn STF : 18 Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am God

I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust
In you, O Lord, I put my trust
In you, O Lord, I put my trust

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for all that you have done to bring us home. You have always had a plan of salvation to make us your children through new birth in your love.

We praise you that Jesus died in our place and rose again to open for us the door of the kingdom. In Jesus we have a Saviour to praise and a debt of forgiveness we can never repay. We remember He was Sovereign before time began.

We thank you that although you are King of Kings and Lord of Lords you call us to be your friend if we obey your commands. Such grace is so much more than we deserve.

Eternal, holy God of glory and power, accept our worship and adoration. Amen.

Continue in prayer thanking God for any particular way He has blessed you this past week.

Hymn STF : 322 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
And drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

O Jesus, shepherd, guardian, friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,

My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

How weak the effort of my heart,
How cold my warmest thought;
But when I see you as you are,
I'll praise you as I ought.

Till then I would your love proclaim
With every fleeting breath;
And may the music of your name
Refresh my soul in death.

Reading : John 15 : 9 – 17

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, would you forgive us for the times we have let you down as our friend and when we have not reflected the image of God in showing love for each other. Please forgive our hurtful attitudes and words. When we have taken the easy way out instead of taking action that might cost us in time or energy, please forgive and cleanse us. We pray in the precious name of Jesus, who gave his all for us. Amen.

The Lord assures us of his promise of forgiveness when we confess and repent of our sin.

Sermon

I wonder what kinds of friendship you have. Maybe you are very friendly with neighbours or have friends in groups you belong to such as choirs, Keep Fit classes, craft clubs etc. Or you might have friends on Facebook or in a Whats App group. I have 2 friends from school I still keep in touch with although we have not seen each other for over a year for obvious reasons. Perhaps you are keeping in touch with friends by a weekly telephone call or email or meeting up somewhere for a coffee. Some friendships are deep and long lasting, others come and go as our lives change.

In the reading, Jesus is giving his final teaching to his disciples before his death and resurrection. He is trying to impart as much information as possible in the limited time he has left on earth. He loves his disciples in the same way as his Father loves him - the greatest love possible. How amazing! However, they need to obey his commands to remain in that love. His command is to "Love each other as he loved them". Can love be commanded we ask? This love is "agape" or self-sacrificial, unselfish love. It is not romantic, "fluffy" love or having a warm feeling, but more about actions. It is not even being nice to people.

We can only do this by remaining in him which he told the disciples to do earlier in the chapter. There will be occasions when we neither feel love or show it. It is at those times that we need to let the Holy Spirit pour God's love through us and let Him use us to show His love to that other person.

Obedience to God brings joy, which is not the same as happiness. Hebrews 12: 2 tells us that Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus does not call Christians to a boring life of being hated by the world, obeying commands and waiting to go to heaven. He offers fullness of joy. Nothing else in the world offers us the joy that we find in serving, abiding in and obeying Christ.

Is that your experience?

Before I became a Christian, I felt my life had no special purpose. I was married, had 2 children and found myself asking what was next? When I came to know Jesus, I experienced joy, fulfilment and a new purpose in life.

Jesus is going to die for his friends - they will be his friends as long as they obey what he tells them. What a challenge for us! We learn that friendship with Jesus involves love **and** obedience. This was true of Abraham who was God's friend because he obeyed and had faith in God. Exodus 33 : 11 says "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend".

We can be as close to God as we choose to be. It is a question of choice or an act of will. We may not have to die for our friends but we can practice sacrificial love in other ways; by **listening**, rather than interrupting in a conversation, helping in a practical way, encouraging, giving or spending time in prayer for them.

Sometimes we may find it easier to show love for friends rather than to receive it.

I remember an occasion when my children were quite small. I was suffering from a virus that left me devoid of any energy. A Christian friend arrived unexpectedly and declared she was going to clean the house which had been neglected for some weeks. After my initial protestations that she was busy, I relented. The house was clean again and she stayed to pray for me and my family. It was a lesson for me in realising that Christian love works in ways of giving **and** receiving and being humble enough to receive love.

Jesus considered his disciples to be friends not his servants, as he had told them everything his Father had told him. Jesus shows his trust in them to receive the same instructions he had received and then to pass on the same information i.e. the gospel to others. He had chosen them for that specific task.

We are so privileged to be a friend of Jesus, chosen by him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight [Ephesians 1:4].

When we gossip, criticize or complain about others we behave as the world does.

How will you show your obedience to Jesus, your friend this week?

The next hymn was written by Joseph Scriven who experienced great sadness in his life when he became engaged to be married and his fiancée died on the day before his wedding. He was later engaged again and again his fiancée died. He spent his life helping the poor in Canada and later returned to his native Ireland, poorly dressed and received much abuse for his appearance. Yet he wrote the hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus".

STF : 531 What a friend we have in Jesus.

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray for those who have lost friends and loved ones in the pandemic. We name those known to us

We pray for those who are suffering with Covid 19, that they would be healed.

We lift to you all who are working for the NHS, in whatever capacity, that they would be refreshed and receive the necessary energy to carry out their work.

We pray for all friends of Jesus, around the world, persecuted just for loving Him.

Give them courage to stand and strength to love their enemies.

We pray for the Staff in our Circuit and all who you have called to serve you in whatever role that may be.

May they carry out their responsibilities in the power of the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit that will last.

We lift to God all who are ill in the Circuit, praying for their healing and recovery.

The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God.** We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord`s Prayer - in whichever version you prefer.

STF : 544 As the deer pants for the water

As the deer pants for the water
So my soul longs after You
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You

I want you more than gold or silver,
Only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver,
And the apple of my eye.

*You alone are my strength, my shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.*

You're my friend and You are my brother
Even though You are a King
I love You more than any other
So much more than anything.

Blessing

Lord Jesus, we rejoice that you have chosen us to be your friends.

Help us to be a friend to you by obeying your commands.

As we go out into your world, help us to live a life that reflects your love, by being a friend to others. Amen.

May you know the deep love of God and his continued presence with you in this coming week. Amen.

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