

Worship at Home 25 October 2020

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mary Armstrong

Gathering prayers

Come. Love the Lord your God, with all your heart,
with all your soul and with all your mind.

Let us thank God for each other
as we share in worship,
as we come to pray and praise.

Let us thank God for the witness of Jesus
and the gift of the Holy Spirit
to inspire and move us.

We bring ourselves to a moment of quiet,
to a place of peace, to our own place of safety and welcome.
We bring ourselves to cast off the cares of the world
and for a time to reflect on you, Lord God,
that our batteries may be recharged,
our direction be refocused and our energy renewed;
that we may let go of things that hamper us
and be free to care gently for those we share time with.
O God, we pray, renew us that we may renew others.
Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 611 – *Brother, sister, let me serve you.* ¹[Click to join in](#)

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| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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. |

A prayer of confession

Holy Spirit of God,
may our confessions and grief for what we have done wrong,
or what we have left undone,
be taken from us.

May our burdens be lifted
and our inner souls released to share afresh
the love we have known in you.

Holy Spirit of God,
forgive us and assure us that our sins are forgiven,
that our lives are renewed,
that we are loved, cherished and cared for.

Amen

Let us say **The Lord's Prayer** together

Epistle reading: 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 vs 1-8

Here, Paul and his companions are not trying to trick or take anything from the Christians of Thessalonica, but instead are eagerly sharing with them the good news about God and, because those Christians are precious to them, they are willing to offer all they have, including themselves.

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

¹You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not a failure. ²We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition. ³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Gospel reading: Matthew chapter 22 vs 3-46

After continual testing and questioning by the religious authorities, Jesus responds to a legal expert of the Pharisees with a question they are unable to answer.

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Whose Son Is the Christ?

⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied. ⁴³He 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.””

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

Hymn: Singing the Faith 503 – *Love divine, all loves excelling* ² [Click here to join in](#)

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art ;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive ;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy 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.
- 3 Finish then thy new creation,
pure 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 !

Reflection

Reflections on the readings There is a moment, early in the Lord of the Rings movies, where the wizard Gandalf is addressing the ageing hobbit, Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo, despite all the friendship, wisdom and council that Gandalf has offered him over many years, is becoming suspicious of the wizard's motives and believes he is trying to manipulate him.

Gandalf, finally fed up with the hobbit, bursts out. 'Bilbo Baggins - do not take me as a conjuror of cheap tricks. I am not trying to rob you... I'm trying to help you!'

It is a turning moment in the conversation, and Bilbo recognises something of his stupidity in mistrusting his old friend.

Perhaps this scene is well known to you, or perhaps not – but I expect you could recall a version of it from your own life or experience. So often, we find ourselves, like Bilbo, believing the worst even in people who only have our best interests at heart. Unlike Bilbo, we do not have the excuse that our judgement is being clouded by the presence of an evil magic ring... but perhaps we can relate to him.

Gandalf loves Bilbo and is trying to give him advice that probably saves his life. Yet, even after all the respect Bilbo has for his mentor and friend, he momentarily mistakes his loving advice for a cheap trick, or even a malicious attempt to rob him. Have you ever done something like this: mistaken well-intentioned love or advice for manipulation? Or momentarily lost your trust in a friend you ought to have kept your faith in? Have others done it to you?

In many ways, it is not surprising that we behave like that. Yes, we might not be influenced by an evil magic ring, but we are affected by the way we have been treated in the past, and by the society we live in. Sadly, many of us will have been manipulated by someone who professed to love us, or fallen for a scam or con that began by appealing to our better nature.

Sadly, not everyone who uses the word 'love', or even demonstrates a loving attitude towards us has our best interests at heart.

This seems to be exactly the attitude that Paul is warning against in today's reading – he is persuading the Thessalonians that his love for them and his desire to share God's love with them is not a clever trick. To put this verse into Gandalf's phrase, we might hear Paul saying: 'I'm not trying to trick you, I'm trying to love you.'

Love is at the beating heart of the Christian gospel. As we seek to follow Jesus and learn more about God's plans for our lives, we must come to accept that we are loved, and learn how to love others. For some of us, this is difficult, as we wrestle with the imperfect models of love by which we have been affected. Perhaps we can relate to the character of Anna in another film – the modern children's classic, Frozen. She thinks she is falling in love with a dashing, gentle, caring prince... only to discover that he is not what he seems.

Despite all this, despite the hurt we carry, despite the broken nature of human-love, we strive to know more of God's love – this 'love divine, all loves excelling'.

And we hear that clearly in Jesus' words today. In wrestling with the question of what is the 'greatest commandment', or the 'most important life advice', Jesus returns to two instructions, both of which centre on love.

Firstly, he echoes what his Jewish listeners would recognise from the Hebrew scriptures, this ancient instruction which Jews would have committed to memory and say regularly – 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind'.

It is this instruction to love God that helps us see beyond the way the world loves. It helps us move beyond the stories we have that compare with Anna in Frozen or Bilbo in The Lord of the Rings, where we are suspicious of love. In loving God, we come to see more of God's nature, God's love for us.

How do we express that love, or show that love? I would suggest that prayer is key. And I don't necessarily mean lots of flowery words. As Mother Teresa famously said when questioned about what she said when she prayed: 'I mostly listen'. And when the response came, what does God say to you in prayer, she replied: 'he mostly listens.' Perhaps it is this divine listening, this holy listening, this deep listening that we need to practice to come to know God more, to show our love for the divine.

How are you going to listen for God this week? Some people prefer – or need – silence. Some of us cannot bear silence and find it difficult, perhaps we need music, or to be out in nature listening to the sounds of the world. Try to find a moment to listen each day this week.

And if we show this love for God then, as Jesus reminds us, we will come to love our neighbours as ourselves. We will discover that this big love, this divine love, wants to be shared, wants to touch other people's lives, wants to help heal the world.

It won't be easy. As we've explored already today, love is rarely easy. When you offer love, some people will think you are manipulating them, or out to rob them, or have other, worldly intentions in mind. But that is a reason to keep loving, to keep seeking to heal the world.

And, when you are feeling tired, or burnt out, come back to the first commandment, come back to listening, come back to your loving relationship with your creator. Draw strength from that – strength for the next neighbour who needs your love.

It is worth ending with an aside that regularly accompanies interpretations of this passage. When Jesus says ‘neighbour’, we sometimes translate it in our minds to mean the person who lives either side of me, those in my street or – at most – my local community. But Jesus’ vision of neighbourliness is much bigger and broader than that. Of course, we are to show love to our actual, literal neighbour – but the call does not end there. This is an invitation into a global neighbourhood, where we recognise all people and indeed all of creation as part of God’s big village.

Can we love across borders? Across the boundaries of race, wealth, class, gender, language, background, sexuality and religion? That, truly, is a love divine, all loves excelling.

To love is to get hurt, to get bruised. We will feel people’s pain with them, and we will feel pain when they reject us, let us down, or seek to manipulate our love for their own ends.

But we will dust ourselves off. We will nurse our wounds. And we go again.

Our world is crying out for more love, for a better kind of love. As the church of Jesus Christ, let us show them what the word means. All we need is love.

Amen

Prayers of intercession – congregation’s response in bold

Living God, we come to you, the church of 2020 as we worship together.
We come to invite you to show us how to be your people today.
In a world that regards the church as irrelevant or outdated,
Show us how to love, **guide us by your Spirit.**

Living God, we hear the cry of injustice all around us: poverty, disease, the various impacts of Covid-19, homelessness, illness, pain, and suffering affect so many.
In a deeply unequal, unfair world,
show us how to love, **guide us by your Spirit.**

Living God, show us how to be a church that responds to the issues of our time. So often, we can be seen as detached, aloof or out of touch with the fast-paced world around us.
As we continue to show God’s love in the twenty-first century,
Show us how to love, **guide us by your Spirit.**

Living God, help us to turn to you to find our strength. Help us to see in the life, death and resurrection stories of Christ an opportunity to transform the way we live and rebuild our society founded in love.
Show us how to love, **guide us by your Spirit.**

Living God, we have no mission but to serve you – we recognise our calling in your invitation to love one another. May we be the answers to prayers around this community and this world in the days and weeks to come.
As we seek to be sharers of liberation,
Show us how to love, **guide us by your Spirit.** Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith 545 – *Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart* ³ [Click here to join in](#)

NB The video clip does not include verse 4.

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art ;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be ;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight ;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might ;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower :
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise :
be thou mine inheritance now and always ;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart :
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won ;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Blessing

Father, go with us on the journey of life,
and may the peace of Christ
and the power of his Spirit go with us.
Amen

1. Richard A M Gillard (b. 1953) Words and Music © 1977, Scripture in Song
2. Charles Wesley (1707-1788)
3. Irish, 8th century, translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931), versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860-1935)
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