

Morning Praise @ Home 17th March 2024

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

cf Psalm 51

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Readings

Exodus 7:8-24

Ephesians 4:1-16

Reflection from John

Called Together

How many of you remember the child's board game – MOUSE TRAP.

I loved it. You had to collect plastic levers, chutes, stands and cogs then assemble them on the board so that when an unsuspecting plastic mouse landed under the suspended cage, you could operate the crank and – kapow! The mouse was nabbed... Except, quite often that *didn't* happen because the cogs and levers didn't quite operate as they should, or the force of activating it made the whole edifice topple over because pieces hadn't been securely connected together...

There was a common aim shared by all the players – to trap the mouse – but it didn't always work together as it should. And *then*, of course, there was always the possibility of upset, frustration, accusation... Our experience of **Christian community** can be a bit like that – officially, we share the same objective, we are all gathered around the same board, (The same Lord) but glitches happen and we don't always play our part effectively with one another.

Isn't that OK? To be accepted as 'just part of human nature'?

NO says Paul in Ephesians 4:1-2. YES WE ARE HUMAN BUT WE ARE ALSO GOD'S FAMILY.

We are journeying to a higher calling than being just human, and we can't afford either to fall out badly or fail to play our part. God knows that living out our Christian calling in a hostile culture is a tough gig, and we cannot do it without others, **just as no footballer can win a match without having a team around them.**

Today's society is hugely individualistic, OUR choices front and centre. Yet, as Paul has already made clear, to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus: our **loyalty** to what *He* wants taking **precedence** over every other aspect of our lives..

As the Message translation puts it: *You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly.*

Not only are we to travel in the same direction together, but we need to remember that we share the **same DNA**. Look at verses 4-6.

We all have the same divine Father, we have all received the same Holy Spirit, God's plan for every one of us is to become like His perfect Son. We are all equally called to be God's light-bearers, Holy Spirit activists, all **hallmarked** by Christ. That's how we need to see each other, as **all equally precious** to the God who died for each one of us.

On our sideboard at home is an old silver tea-service. Although every piece has the same hallmark, each part comes in a different shape for its individual purpose. Christians are called to be united, but that doesn't mean being *uniform*.

Now, it is easy for people to appreciate those similar to them, but much harder when we are bound together with those **uncomfortably dis-similar**. That's why Paul reminds us in **v.15** that we need to unite around the **truth** to which we have committed our lives, and the **love** which has embraced us.

- Holding on to the **same truths about Jesus** is important so that we don't get diverted down wacky byways or distracted by contemporary fads. Furthermore, being securely boundaried by the truth of God's Word and revealed will, actually sets us free to operate with **confidence**.

Truth & love go together: **Truth becomes hard if not softened by love; Love becomes soft if not strengthened by truth.** The Holy Spirit is working, through each of us, to keep the two in tension.

HOW DOES THIS LOVE PLAY OUT IN PRACTICE?

In our Christian fellowship, love involves **encouraging** each individual, rather than being affronted by their differentness to us; it is the **opposite of** our culture's '**me 1st**' attitude, Paul instead commending that we '***pour ourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences***' as **the Message** puts it.

And no one said it would be easy! But we are **not left on our own** to rely on personal reserves of 'niceness' – **good news, given that we all probably know someone whose reserves are somewhat low!** No – God has commissioned the **Holy Spirit to produce fruit** in our lives which means love can flourish.

How does Paul describe the outworking of love first mentioned in **v.2**?

- **We are to be humble.** In other words, we need to stop thinking that *our* opinion is always correct, that the way *we* want things done should take precedence. *Does that sound familiar to you?*
- **We need to be gentle,** tender towards others in the way that we would want them to be kind to us. **I naturally have a long stride, which means I easily outstrip walking companions. But rather than dragging along others, I need to be gentle with those who can't help being slower, unless I am to end up walking in isolation.**
- **We are called to be patient.** When others are slow to see or do what seems so blindingly obvious to us, let's just get a perspective on how patient the infinite God of all-knowing has been with *us* over the years, with our limited understanding and dozy responses to His prompting! *Do you need to do that?* We need to ask the HS to help us **accommodate the experiences** of others, to understand where they are coming from even if we don't share their perspective. *Do you need that help?* After all,

All these attributes are needed for us to truly **love** one another and to function as the team God has called us to be. This is the essence of a healthy Church and from such a base we move out together to serve the Living God in every part of life.

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession led by Ron

Prayer for 5th Sunday in Lent.

Everlasting God, your son chose twelve disciples to work together to spread the good news of the gospel, help us as we work together for the common good. May we delight in sharing spiritual gifts and helping others to make their own contributions. May we always be ready to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do YOUR will.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Father God, we thank you for all those who help our community to run smoothly because of their jobs, voluntary work or neighbourliness. Help us to be supportive and encouraging and to step in to situations where we can serve. Bless our neighbours and strengthen those who are working in your name in order to bring healing and comfort to those in need.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Creator God, we pray for all who work for justice and solidarity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war and violence - injustice and inequality - disease and prejudice - poverty and hopelessness - and bring healing to the world. We pray especially for Ukraine, the Holy Land and Peace for the Holy city of Jerusalem.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Merciful God, we raise before you this morning all those who are sick, sad or lonely and those who are brave and patient when things are going wrong. We pray that they may be aware of your comforting presence and know that in your hands they are safe and loved. We especially pray for friends, relatives and those from our Parish . . . as we name them in our hearts so let them feel your love in their lives.

Loving God, be with the bereaved in their loneliness and give them the faith to look beyond their present troubles to your Son Jesus Christ who died and rose again and who lives forevermore.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**