

14th February 2021 – Morning Service

My First Love

Rev Helen Croft

In this service, we will be sharing together in a love feast. You might want to wish to get a biscuit or cracker and a glass of water or squash or other similar elements in preparation for this before reading on.....

Call to Worship - 1 John 4:16

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them

StF 503 – Love Divine

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.

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.

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!

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to look to you who showed us love in action – a love that stays true and trusts, hopes and perseveres in all the things - and help us truly to realise that, without such love, all our words, faith and religion count for nothing. **Amen.**

The 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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading: Revelations 2:1-7

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.'

Sermon

Background - Ephesus was the financial centre and capital city of the Roman province of Asia Minor and its largest city with a population of 250,000 people. As a seaport city on the Mediterranean Sea, it was a centre for idol worship in Asia, hosting the temple of Diana, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The church in Ephesus had been established by Paul on his 3rd missionary journey around AD53 and he stayed there for three years. Timothy took over from Paul for about 10 years and then in around AD65 John became its primary leader before being imprisoned on the island of Patmos. John (who also wrote Revelation) moved to Ephesus and it's likely he took Mary, Jesus' mother with him. John, on hearing the words of Jesus for the church in Ephesus, must have had his heart leap into his mouth. Especially as he told him that he had this against the church – they had lost their first love – and John is the one who wrote about love in his gospel and referred to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Chapters 2 & 3 gives the church of today, tremendous insight into what the Holy Spirit wants us paying attention to and in these first few verses, we are encouraged to *return to our first love*. We are encouraged to *set our heart to love him sincerely and grace will multiply in our life* (Eph 6:24 – Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity). When you set your heart to love Him sincerely and grace will multiply in your life, what I mean by that is that you will be more inspired. Our love diminishes automatically if we do not reset it and rest it. Love does not increase automatically, we have to make the effort. The pressures that ganged up against the Ephesus church – and pressures that can gang up against us, when we try to keep programmes going or juggling life, is we can lose our first love – not we've not gone away from Jesus but he is not walking in our midst like he should. Jesus values and affirms the Ephesus church, just like he values and affirms us but he wants to be involved with His churches – he wants to be right at the centre but sometimes we push him to the side. And it's because he wants to be in the midst of them, that he encourages them and tells them how they can return to their first love – remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first (Rev 2:5)

Remember – they were to recall how they used to love and spend time with Jesus. We are to recall His goodness and our past devotion for Him. They (Ephesus) left their first love, but not their hatred for evil. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus when you first heard the call to extravagant devotion? The Spirit will help us return to the freshness of our first love

Repent – they were to repent of this negligence by changing their life vision, priorities and lifestyle choices (the way they spent time and money) to pursue loving Jesus as the primary dream of their heart.

Act – they were to do the works or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was fresh and strong. Mary (sister of Martha) 'chose' the good part by being at the feet of Jesus and staying in his presence instead of running around sorting out food or other household chores. We must choose it to be at the feet of Jesus. It was being in his presence that sustained her throughout life.

You get this right, and you set the trajectory for all the other things to be right. You get this wrong, you set the trajectory for everything else to get off. If we get our trajectory of loving Jesus first right, we'll be overcomers and victorious over the world.

In this time of our churches when our churches are shut, it is a good place to be at the feet of Jesus, returning to our first love instead of getting caught up in this event or that event, this meeting or that meeting. By focusing on Jesus, when we start to reopen our buildings our heart will be longing and crying out for his Spirit to show us what to do, or say, or act to become effective for God's Kingdom again.

So let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to his church. Amen

Song – My first love

- 1) My first love is a blazing fire,
I feel His powerful love in me;
For He has kindled a flame of passion,
And I will let it grow in me.
And in the night I will sing Your praise, my love.
And in the morning I'll seek Your face, my love.
- 2) My first love is a rushing river,
A waterfall that will never cease;
And in the torrent of tears and laughter,
I feel a healing power released.
And I will draw from Your well of life, my love,
And in Your grace I'll be satisfied, my love.
- Ch) *And like a child I will dance in Your presence,
Oh, let the joy of heaven pour down on me.
I still remember the first day I met You,
And I don't ever want to lose that fire,
My first love.*
- 3) Restore the years of the church's slumber,
Revive the fire that has grown so dim;
Renew the love of those first encounters,
That we may come alive again.
And we will rise like the dawn throughout
the earth,
Until the trumpet announces Your return.

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Love Feast

Love feast or Agape meal as it is sometimes known is a Christian fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with his disciples during his ministry and expressing the koinonia (community, sharing, fellowship) enjoyed by the family of Christ. Whilst at this time we are not a meeting together, we are still an interconnected community so we participate together in this love feast expressing koinonia within the body of Christ

Dear friends, let us love one another; for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. This is love not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Since God so loved us we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another and God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

As we hold our biscuit/cracker we pause to remember those that we love...

As we take our glass of liquid we pause to remember those are less fortunate than ourselves...

Eternal God, in Christ you make yourself a guest.

Amid all our cares and concerns, make us attentive to your voice and alert to your presence, that we may know your love surpasses all else, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Thank you, Lord, for making us and for loving us; for putting us into the world with so many other people. We know that life need never be dull and no one need ever be lonely so long as we love one another.

We thank you, Lord, for making each of us so very different, so that we might learn that your love is not just for ourselves.

We thank you, Lord, for sending your son, Jesus Christ. He shared all that it means for us to live in our world, so that we might begin to know what it can mean to walk in your love.

We praise you that he was ready to share our pain, our loneliness, our weakness, our failures and our defeats. We thank you that through his death and resurrection, he has promised us that we can enter into his victory of love.

So,...

O God, we pray this day for all those hearts are heavy and sad, for people who don't feel like singing – Lord carry all our hurts

O God, we pray for all whose hearts are full with worry or fear and for everyone who lives somewhere in danger – Lord carry all our fears

O God, we pray for those who are sick and for those who look after them - Lord carry all our pain

O God, we pray for people who are hungry and people who need to find work – Lord carry all our need

O God, we pray for our families, for things that have gone wrong and things we'd like to set right. Help us tell each other of the love in our hearts. Lord carry all our love.

In Jesus name – **Amen**

StF 409 – Let us build a house

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| <p>1) Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:</p> | <p>3) Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:</p> |
| <p><i>Ch) All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.</i></p> | <p>4) Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:</p> |
| <p>2) Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:</p> | <p>5) Let us a build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:</p> |

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Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. **Amen**