

15th May 2022 – Morning Service

Love your neighbour as yourself

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship

At the Last Supper Jesus said 'I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you' - and these words are spoken to us in today's Gospel reading.

StF 137 – New every morning is the love

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| 1) New every morning is the love
Our waking and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life, and power, and thought. | 4) Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and care. |
| 2) New mercies each returning day
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven. | 5) The trivial round, the common task
Will furnish all we ought to ask:
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God. |
| 3) If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice. | 6) Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
For perfect rest with you above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray. |

John Keble CCL No. 515642

Opening prayers

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning to worship and to praise you. We thank you for the priceless gift that we call life, for the time to live it and the space to explore it, for dreams that lift us and hopes that encourage us. Thank you for those who journey with us and offer to hold our hand and share the mystery, the wonder and the pain of every step. Lord we thank you for moments of great activity and times of stillness - for times of success as well as those that appear to be failure, for opportunities to serve and to be served, for the things we are able to do and the times you call us to be content just to be.

Lord we thank you for Jesus and for his total understanding of what it means not only to be human but what it means to be me. Thank you that each day contains another opportunity to discover new ways in which he transforms what we are into what he always meant us to be.

Jesus commanded us to 'Love one another as I have love you'. We thank you loving Lord for your great example of love and service to all whom you met in your life on earth. We thank you for giving us life with all its powers. Help us to learn that the best use of our gifts is in service to you and our fellow men. Help us to see all people as you see them, and be ready to live our lives in the service of others.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for calling us to be your servants. Help us gladly to respond to your call and obey your will. Make us ready for every demand you make upon our lives that we may serve you faithfully and show forth your love to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Father, we know that we have not always behaved in a way that is pleasing to you. Please forgive us for those times when we have been insensitive, inconsiderate, sinful and un-Christlike in the treatment of other people. Help us always to see people as being made in your image, unique, special and of immeasurable value. Help us to reflect that truth in the way we behave to others, the way that we act in society, and the way we use our time, our energy and our possessions. **Amen.**

StF 249 – Jesu, Jesu

Ch) *Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,
Show us how to serve
The neighbours we have from you.*

1) Kneels at the feet of his friends,
Silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.

2) Neighbours are rich folk and poor,
Neighbours are black folk and white,
Neighbours are nearby and far away.

3) These are the ones we should serve,
These are the ones we should love.
All these are neighbours to us and you.

4) Kneel at the feet of our friends,
Silently washing their feet,
This is the way we should live with you.

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Reading: John 13:31-35

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Reflection

At the time of Jesus the list consisted of some 613 commandments. What happened was that over time they surrounded the Ten Commandments with lots of other commandments - which became almost as important. 613 is a lot of commandments - many of us find ten too many. The question as to which commandment was greatest was often discussed by the rabbis - and Jesus was asked to name one - but in fact he named two. This is how he replied - from the Old Testament - Deuteronomy ch 6 vv 4 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' and the second is like it - from Leviticus ch 19 v 18 'Love your neighbour as yourself' - 'All the law and all the prophets hang on these two commandments'. Jesus brought the two commandments together and made them of equal importance. No rabbi had done this previously and so we are meant to see them together as Jesus taught us - not separate them - but in practice we often do.

In the early centuries of Christianity thousands of people became monks and went to live in the desert. In the desert they lived very strict lives - fasting - praying - and doing very strict penances. Once there was an abbot by the name of Moses who had a great reputation for holiness. Easter was approaching so the monks met to discuss what they should do to prepare for it and they decided to fast the whole of Holy Week. Having come to this decision each monk went off to his cell to fast and pray. About the middle of the week, two itinerant monks came to visit Abbot Moses. Seeing that they were starving he cooked them a little vegetable stew and to make them feel at ease, he took a little of it himself. The other monks saw the smoke rising from the abbot's cell. This could only mean one thing. He had lit a fire to cook some food which meant he had broken the solemn fast. They were shocked and went together to confront him. Seeing the look on their faces he asked, 'What crime have I committed that makes you look at me like this?' 'You have broken the solemn fast' they answered. 'So I have' he replied 'I have broken the commandment of men - but in sharing my food with these brothers of ours I have kept the commandment of God that we should love one another.' On hearing this the monks grew silent - and went away humbled but wiser.

And that makes me think particularly of the government at the moment who are failing to help needy families when they, themselves, have far more than enough to live on. In fact some of them could feed the whole country and still have money left over.

There is something wrong with the lives of those who claim to love God - but don't feel the need to love other people. They have only got half of Jesus' message. And then there are others who go to the opposite extreme. They exhaust themselves in working for a better world but never think of God or pray to him. Jesus taught us how to live the total Gospel - that is - how to love God and love our neighbour as well. He didn't say they were the same thing but we can't have one without the other and so we can see why the emphasis on love became so important for Christians.

I would suggest though - that it is the second commandment that causes us the most trouble - 'You must love your neighbour as yourself'. Only when we love ourselves will we be able to love other people as Jesus commanded us to do. Those who are unhappy with their own lot and who don't like themselves very much - and there are many such people around - I'm not sure that I like myself all the time - are not going to be able to love others. It is so easy to project our own negative feelings on to other people.

An old man was sitting on a bench at the edge of town when a stranger approached. 'What are the people in this town like?' the stranger asked. 'What were they like in your last town' replied the old man. 'They were kind and generous. They would do anything to help you if you were in trouble,' came the reply. 'Well I think you will find them much the same in this town' said the old man. Some time later a second stranger approached the old man and asked the same question, 'What are the people like in this town?' And the old man replied 'What were they like in the town you have just come from?' 'It was a terrible place,' came the answer 'To tell you the truth - I was glad to get out of it. The people there were cruel and mean. They wouldn't lift a finger to help you if you were in trouble.' 'I'm afraid' said the old man 'You will find them much the same in this town.'

The point of this little story is that we see other people, not as they are, but as we are. I remember many years ago, when I was doing my teacher training, reading in a book about how to deal with a class of students - particularly when they were out of sorts and being difficult. It said that it all depended on the students frame of mind and the phrase quoted was - - - 'If I'm alright - then you are alright' - 'but if I'm not alright - then you are not alright' - - - It seemed a very strange thing to say - but after a lot of thought I realised just what was meant by it - and I have since applied it to so many situations.

An easy one to think about is when a child is tired. They are crotchety and out of sorts and you personally can't say anything right. I know that we sometimes used to have that with our little granddaughter. It's not that there is anything wrong with you - it is their frame of mind. And I used to think about it with my Auntie Ena and with Roy's Auntie Ida, both of whom passed away several years ago. If they were grumpy it was not really that they were out of sorts with us but because they were unhappy with their lot.

A loving person lives in a loving world - A hostile person lives in a hostile world - Everyone you meet is really your own mirror. Those who are filled with goodness gaze upon the world and see what is good in humanity. Those who look upon the world with the eyes of a cynic find only the image of themselves. If we see people in a bad light it is a sign that we are ill at ease with ourselves. A person who is not at ease with themselves spreads a feeling of conflict around them which can be very catching. We can't offer warmth to others if our own fireplace is cold. We can only love with the amount of love that is in us. Whether we are conscious of it or not we do love others precisely as we love ourselves.

It is very important then to have a healthy love and respect for ourselves. This is where love starts but it is not meant to end there. We can then have love for others just as Jesus told us we must. To separate the two great commandments goes contrary to the Gospel, yet unfortunately this often happens. Those who have faith often have no love, and those who love often have no faith and so the Gospel has been torn in two. Jesus spoke of two great commandments. The first - that we should love God. The second - that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. But who is my neighbour? Is it the person sitting next to you in church? The person who lives next door or over the road? We are probably familiar with the story Jesus told to get this point over; a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him and beat him leaving him half dead - - - The story of The Good Samaritan. Our neighbour is not simply the person next door - our neighbour is the whole of humankind.

Prayer

Lord open our hearts when they are closed, soften them when they are hard, warm them when they are cold, fill them when they are empty, heal them when they are wounded and mend them when they are broken, so that we, your disciples, may bear the fruit of love. **Amen.**

StF 256 – When I needed a neighbour

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| 1) When I needed a neighbour
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour were you there? | 4) When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there? |
| Ch) <i>And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
Were you there?</i> | 5) When I needed a healer
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer were you there? |
| 2) I was hungry and thirsty
Were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty were you there? | 6) Wherever you travel
I'll be there, I'll be there
Wherever you travel I'll be there |
| 3) I was cold I was naked
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold I was naked were you there? | E) <i>And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
I'll be there</i> |

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Reading: Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Reflection

Love one another as I have loved you! Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends - You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you. Words spoken by Jesus to his disciples.

On May Day Bank Holiday Monday Roy and I went to the Peak District. We love the Derbyshire countryside and go there quite often as it’s only about an hour and a half drive from where we live. As it’s not far we decided to go and take another look at the village of Eyam - or ‘The Plague Village’ as it is known. The history of the plague in the village began in 1665 when a flea-infested bundle of cloth arrived from London for Alexander Hadfield, the local tailor. Within a week, his assistant George Vicars, noticing the bundle was damp, had opened it up, dried it out and released the fleas into the surrounding air. Before long he was dead and more began dying in the household soon after. As the disease spread the villagers turned for leadership to their Rector, the Rev William Mompesson, and the former Puritan minister Rev Thomas Stanley. They introduced a number of precautions to slow the spread of the illness. The measures included the arrangement that families were to bury their own dead and the relocation of church services to outdoor worship in a valley called Cucklett Delph, allowing villagers to separate themselves and so reducing the risk of infection. Perhaps the best-known decision was to quarantine the entire village to prevent further spread of the disease.

Merchants from surrounding villages sent supplies that they would leave on marked rocks. The villagers then made holes there which they would fill with vinegar to disinfect the money left as payment. The plague ran its course over 14 months and one account states that it killed at least 260 villagers, with only 83 surviving out of a population of 350. That figure has been challenged with alternative figures of 430 survivors from a population of around 800 being given. The church in Eyam has a record of 273 individuals who were victims of the plague. Survival among those affected appeared random as many who remained alive had close contact with those who died but never caught the disease. For example, Elizabeth Hancock was uninfected despite burying six children and her husband in eight days.

The graves are known as the Riley graves after the farm where they lived. The unofficial village grave-digger, Marshall Howe, also survived despite handling many infected bodies. In the village church of St Lawrence there is a memorial to those who died from the plague and written across the top of it are the words - 'Greater love has no-one than this - that he lay down his life for his friends'. The villagers knew exactly what they were risking by doing as they did. They were laying down their lives for their friends.

Does all of this sound familiar? Over the past two years the reality of this story was brought back to us with the advent of Corona Virus. We were told not to leave our homes except for one hour's exercise each day, to stay two metres apart from anyone with whom we came into contact, to wash our hands, to use sanitiser but despite all of this thousands of people lost their lives in this country alone and many more thousands world-wide. Hospital staff laid down their lives in order to save the lives of their patients - Greater love hath no-one than this.

A lot of the Book of Revelation is difficult to understand but the words of our second reading come into my mind when I think of the people of Eyam; people actually caring about each other, giving their life for their neighbour. Is this the new heaven and the new earth? Those who are going the extra mile to help the people of Ukraine. Does it take some tragedy like this to make us aware of our neighbours?

We ask that God will help us to carry out the commands of Jesus to love one another as he has loved us and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Those who opt for love open themselves to great happiness. To begin to love is to begin to live. While faith makes all things possible, love makes all things easy. Love heals everyone, both those who receive it and those who give it. It has been said that if you do a good deed, but have an ulterior motive, it would be better not to do it at all. Even though it is not as good as doing it with a pure motive it is still a good deed and benefits the other person no matter what your motive.

Prayer

Merciful Father, you have called us to be a caring Church, reflecting in our lives your infinite care for us, your children. Help us to fulfil our calling and to care for one another in an unselfish fellowship of love; and to care for the world around us by sharing with them the good news of your love and serving those who suffer from poverty, hunger and disease, or where family life has met with adversity. We ask it in the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 663 – I the Lord of sea and sky

1) I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry;
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Ch) *Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
If You lead me;
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

2) I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3) I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

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Prayers of Intercession

As we bring our needs before God we are mindful of the two great commandments of love and of how much we need God's grace to be faithful to them.

For Christians - that they might live out in their lives the two commandments of love

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For the world in which we live - that love and peace may prevail over hatred and violence - and we think especially today of the situation in Ukraine

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For the work of Christian Aid, for the poor and needy - that through our love they may know that God cares about them

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For refugees, strangers and aliens - that they may find hospitality among us

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For this community - that our worship may deepen our love of God and our love for one another

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For our deceased relatives and friends - that the Lord may keep them safe in his love

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

For our own special needs and for the needs of those known to us

L: Let us pray to the Lord **R: Lord hear us in your love**

All loving God, grant that we make love the foundation of our lives. May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good to others. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**
God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God.

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.**

It is easy to love people who are far away, but not always easy to love those who are close at hand, yet these are the people Christ asks us to love and that is where our love must begin, but, of course, it shouldn't end there. We ask that the Lord will open our hearts when they are closed, and warm them when they are cold, so that we may produce the fruit of love, and the world will know that we are his disciples.

StF 503 – Love divine

- 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!

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Blessing

May the Lord help you grow in love for one another, so that you may be good witnesses of his love in the sight of the people. May the God who has called us to eternal glory in Christ strengthen and support you with his grace And may the peace of God, who brought Jesus back from the dead, be with us all, now and for evermore. **Amen.**