

20th February 2022 – Morning Service

Making a stand for the love of God

Rev Alan Combes

Call to Worship

Lord our God, you have known us from before we were born, and we come to lay our lives before you now. We come as your family in this place to hear you speak to us. Lead us on. Stretch out your hand and touch our mouths that we might praise you and speak for you, through Jesus our redeemer. **Amen.**

StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

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| 1) Jesus calls us here to meet him
As, through word and song and prayer,
We affirm God's promised presence
Where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
Praise the Son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit who, among us,
To our hopes and fears attends. | 3) Jesus calls us to each other,
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth. |
| 2) Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness,
Saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
Tell his tales that all may hear;
Tell the world that Christ in glory
Came to earth to meet us here. | 4) Jesus calls us to his table
Rooted firm in time and space,
Where the Church in earth and heaven
Finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
Share the love of which we sing;
Share the feast for saints and sinners
Hosted by our Lord and King. |

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Opening prayers

Glorious God whose very being is love, from your love flowed the beauty and wonder and diversity of all creation - where the Holy Spirit breathed into us the very breath of life. Through your love we have been saved by Christ - stretching out his arms and giving his all that we might be made right with you. In your love we live as children of God bringing the light of Christ to the world

This morning we bring you our lives and ask you to fill us with your love again. Your love for us is so complete that nothing we do can make you love us more, and nothing we do can make you love us less. Enable us to be confident of your love for us, for you welcome us as we are and call us to take your love to the people we meet. Glory be to God - creator, saviour and sustainer - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reflection & Meditation

We are thinking this morning about making a stand for the love of God. Spend some time thinking on these questions:

- Can you think of a time when you have stood up for something or someone?
- What was it like?
- What things make it easy to be popular or hard to be true to your convictions?

Lord, we know that many people find your words hard to bear. Open our ears to your message, to its challenge and its demand, even when that message may be hard for us to hear. Many people want to throw you out of their lives, including us. We do not want to hear you. We do not want to take up our cross and follow you. We fear its public weight. We fear its pain. We fear its truth. We like our quiet lives, our cosy churches, our agendas and rotas, where we can hide from you.

And so we pray for ourselves, along with all those who reject you. We pray for courage to obey, and take a stand for your love, even if that means people may reject us. Take us to that cliff-top, Lord, to the very edge of our faith, to the very edge of our lives. Only then can we discover who you are; only then will we discover who we are. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession

God calls us to live and grow in sacrificial love. Let us confess our lack of love and our need of grace.

When we lose patience, speaking or acting harshly, without thinking what effect it will have

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

When we are unkind, dismissing, belittling or mocking someone,

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

When we are envious, forgetting that you have given us more than we desire or deserve,

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

When we are rude or proud, putting ourselves and our desires before others,

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

When we are selfish or irritable, thinking only of our own interests,

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

When we will not forgive, forgetting the limitless grace you have given to us, Lord, have mercy on us,

Gracious God forgive us and change us.

May God, our rock of refuge to whom we can always come, rescue and deliver us, give us confidence in knowing our sins are forgiven in Christ's name. May we live in hope and in righteousness. **Amen.**

StF 161 – Speak O Lord as we come to you

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Reading: Luke 6:27-38

‘But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

Sermon

In recent weeks, the Lectionary has taken us on a journey through the chapters of Luke 4-6 which are underpinned by Christ’s new way of Love – fulfilling the old Covenant of the Law in a new way. In my experience some of the most astute observers of what love is like are children. I heard one say the other day: "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on after-shave and then they go out and smell each other."

Our first passage is one of the most famous chapters in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 13 has been read at countless weddings over the years perhaps even your own! The apostle Paul’s famous words about love have been described as a poetic masterpiece, a great work of literature that can moisten the eye and stir the heart. But it is also a deeper, more challenging passage than it may first appear so it’s good that we take some time to explore it outside of the context of weddings!

Today love is often presented as being all about romantic (Eros) love - how each other smells, how each other looks, how each other kisses, ultimately how we “feel” about each other. But in 1 Cor 13 God calls us to love - but not the way the world sometimes loves, with its fragile, fickle focus on feelings! God call us to love each other the way God loves us and if we look closely, we may just see that God’s model of love is rooted in who I am / who you are, and who we may become.

Notice that in 1 Cor 13 there is almost no discussion of love as emotion; Love is patient, kind, does not envy, or boast, is not proud, does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking or easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, rejoices in truth, protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. Love never fails. These aren't feelings, these are aspects of CHARACTER - who we really are on the inside or, at the very least, who we aspire to be. These attributes reflect God's very nature. The passage as a whole is clear that Love is the absolute top priority – at the very heart of it all. For example, Verse 1 emphasises that who we are and what we may do counts for nothing – if we are not motivated by and filled with love. What I find exciting and powerful is when we read again about Christ's early actions and preaching – at the beginning of his ministry in Luke – viewed through the lens of this new and deeper understanding of the nature of God's love.

In Luke 4 we read of what is often called the Jesus manifesto - Jesus' first sermon after he has been baptised, filled with the Holy Spirit and equipped for ministry and tested in the desert. Here he presents the good news of his coming in the broad context of a good, right, society showing the loving values of the Kingdom, where there is good news for the poor, release for those captive to so many things in life, healing, freedom from oppression and forgiveness (year of the Lord's favour). And he continues in Luke 6 with this critical word for today: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you". Jesus doesn't say these words lightly - he knows how hard this command really is. But the truth is that a Christian response to war and hate can never be war and hate. We reap what we sow and only Love, modelled on God's nature, can bring real change.

I wonder how many remember the amazing sermon preached by Rev Michael Curry, an American Anglican Bishop and special guest at Harry and Meghan's wedding? He captured God's way of love wonderfully when he said, "There's power in love. Don't underestimate it. Don't over-sentimentalize it. There's power, power in love – for the source of love is God – who is the source of all our lives."

Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in human history, a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world, a movement mandating people to live that love, and in so doing to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself. Just stop and imagine for a moment of a world where genuine love is the way in all things...

- Imagine our homes and families where love is the way.
- Imagine neighbourhoods and communities where love is the way.
- Imagine governments and nations and business and where this love is the way.
- Imagine this tired old world where love is the way.

Unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive. When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.

Bishop Michael Curry shared an incredible re-expression of Jesus' words and actions in these early chapters of Luke (Luke 4). This is powerful radical love, lived out in the nature of society and expressed in how we treat one another and the world around us. Jesus sets our faith in an interconnected context - where we are called to proclaim justice, healing, freedom and forgiveness, where we cannot claim to be fully Christian and at the same time ignore the needs of our neighbour, the needs of our community and of the world. And if we find this Godly task overwhelming do not despair says St Paul: 1Cor 13:8 says - Love never ends. When all the powers and institutions of this world have come to an end, love will still be here, love will endure, for the greatest of all is love. So let us not fear. Let us instead pick up the baton of love, God's love. Let us grow in character to reflect God's love, protecting, trusting, hoping, persevering. And as we do – may we pass the baton of God's love on – to those around us, to our enemies even and to those who come after us, challenging and changing our small patch of history. **Amen**

StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

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| 1) Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
Streaming to me and to you:
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above. | 3) Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
Why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above. |
| 2) Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
Joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost,
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost. | 4) Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
Come and abide,
Lifting my life, till it rises above
Envy and falsehood and pride,
Seeking to be
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee. |

Robert Walmsley

CCL No. 515642

Affirmation of our faith

Together we affirm our faith;

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, who has created the universe?

We believe and trust in God the Father

Do you believe and trust in Jesus, the son of God, who has redeemed the world?

We believe and trust in God the Son.

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God.

We believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit.

Prayers for the world

Loving God, we know you are the giver of every good and perfect gift.

For the people who have helped us on our way, patiently guiding and training throughout our childhood, helping us to follow you, **Lord, we thank you.**

For the church family here who help and support us, enabling us to know your love, for every one here however they serve, from the young to the old, **Lord, we thank you.**

For all to whom we give and from whom we receive love and affection, for the joy, hope and confidence they bring us, **Lord, we thank you.**

And as we give thanks so we pray for the world, the church and ourselves...

Loving God, make our church a loving family, where the younger members respect and show understanding for the older, and the older members respect and show understanding for the younger.

May this church be a place where everyone feels valued as a much-loved child of God.

L: Lord of love **R: hear our prayer**

May each one of us recognise with confidence your call in our lives. Make us open to your will and brave to obey. Give us courage to speak out for you in all situations.

L: Lord of love **R: hear our prayer**

May we be a people who wait in humility for your guidance. Make us patient and obedient to your will for our lives and for our church.

L: Lord of love **R: hear our prayer**

May we be a church that serves where you send us, ready to go to the needy wherever they are. Make us more aware of how we can serve those in distress in this community and in the nations of the world.

L: Lord of love **R: hear our prayer**

May we be a church ready to take your healing love to those who are sick or sad. Make us a blessing to those amongst whom we live, that you may touch and heal them at their place of need.

L: Lord of love **R: hear our prayer**

Loving God, we long to grow to maturity in Christ but often feel that we are slow learners. Help us to become confident of our identity in you that we may grow in love and service, fulfilling your plan for our lives and our church. We ask this in the name of Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. **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.**

StF 59 – Lord the light of your love is shining

- 1) Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me.
- 2) Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,
From the shadows into Your radiance;
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.
- Ch) *Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;
Send forth Your word, Lord,
And let there be light.*
- 3) As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

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Blessing

Loving God, may we recognise that your kingdom will only begin to come when we live by your law of love. So as we leave this place, may we follow you - the source of all love - and love our neighbours as ourselves **Amen.**