

2nd October 2022 – Morning Service

Whom do we choose to love?

Rev Christine Watson

Call to Worship

God of vision, we come to worship. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit. As we share in worship, open our hearts and minds to receive a new vision of you. Fill us, renew us refresh us, send us out.

StF 351 – In Christ alone

- 1) In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
- 2) In Christ alone! who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
The gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The word of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.
- 3) There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine-
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.
- 4) No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend © 2001 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

Prayers

Loving God, we have come together to worship you, to meet here with Christ, not simply because we feel we should do, nor because it is expected of us, but because we want to praise you. Meet with us now we pray. We have come not merely to share fellowship with one another, not just to meet with friends, but to encounter you. Help us to bring our heartfelt worship; reflect on you and not ourselves, to think about your love rather than our problems, to seek your will for us rather than our expectations of you. Help us to draw close to you, rejoicing in your presence, receiving your love, reviving our faith.

Living God, there is so much in our lives that is not as it should be, not as it could be, and not as it would be if only we walked more closely with you. Forgive us the unkind words, thoughtless actions and unworthy thoughts that deny our faith Forgive us the self centred lifestyles, half hearted commitment and careless discipleship that undermine our witness. Forgive us our lack of devotion, lack of faith and lack of love that demean your name.

Living God we gather together in the name of Christ. Assure us as we worship you of the forgiveness the guidance the love and the life you offer through him. So may we worship you not just through words but in our lives, not merely now but always, not simply here but everywhere. To the glory of your name
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 636 – O love that wilt not let me go

- 1) O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
- 2) O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
- 3) O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.
- 4) O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson

Reading: James 2:10 & 14-17

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Reading: Mark 7:24-37

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

'First let the children eat all they want,' he told her, 'for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' 'Lord,' she replied, 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means 'Be opened!'). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'

StF 611 – Brother, sister let me serve you

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Richard A M Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song

CCL No. 515642

Sermon

When you prepare a meal or order in a cafe or restaurant how do you chose what to eat? Do you think I need to eat a mixture of proteins, carbohydrates and fats or do you chose those things which may not be good for you, but look good and tastes better. Sometimes at home preparing a meal for ourselves it's what is easy, what is quick and instantly satisfying.

Sometimes what we believe works the same way, we take bits and stories of the Bible , we take the teachings and doctrines that appeal to us, that we are comfortable with and keep those whilst discarding bits we don't like or which are difficult to come to terms with. We ignore the God of justice and vengeance portrayed in the Old Testament and stick with the meek and mild version that we think we see in the New Testament. How do we decide which parts of the Bible to read or what to believe? Is it just what appeals to us or do we consider whether it is true and right? We pick and choose.

Our first reading was from the letter of James found in the New Testament. It is generally thought to have been written by James the brother of Jesus and is a piece of early Christian writing deeply rooted in Jewish faith and practice. Chapter 2 of the letter is about favouritism, it's about who do we chose to love and respect. For the people James was addressing there was a problem about discrimination, about those who were welcomed into their meetings and those who were not made to feel welcomed. The warmth of their welcome depended on their apparent wealth and position in society. The questions James asks his audience, including us, is who do we chose to welcome, to love?

James refers to two groups - rich or poor. This was the main distinction for his readers, but it can be much more diverse; beautiful or ugly, young or old, those of the same ethnic background, disabled and able bodied, gay or straight. Who do you chose to love? We are very selective but God calls us to love all people to welcome all people. To love your neighbour as yourself. But do we?

Would you welcome everybody here; a gay couple, a drug addict or a drunken tramp or even someone with a different ethnic background. What about asylum seekers? There is a story told of a young man, scruffily dressed, slightly drunk who one Sunday morning found himself outside a traditional church building. It was raining heavily and so he decided to go to the service, mainly to get out of the rain. The very traditional church service had started and the middle class congregation were singing their way through the second hymn accompanied by the organ. The man weaved his way in and as the people were standing he couldn't find anywhere obvious to sit and no one was going to move up for him. He went to the front of the church and when the hymn finished and everyone was invited to be seated he sat cross legged on the floor looking up expectantly at the Presbyter.

The Steward on duty, an elderly man but sprightly, started down the aisle towards the young man. Some of the congregation nudged each other and waited eagerly to see how the young man was going to be dealt with and how much fuss would ensue when he was asked to leave. To everyone's surprise when he reached him the steward eased himself down next to the young man and said in a loud stage whisper, "Welcome - I've often wondered what it would be like from this angle?" The Presbyterian turned and said that his planned sermon had been about welcoming strangers but he felt reluctant to deliver it as they had all just witnessed a sermon in action.

Would your church have done the same? John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him won't perish but have everlasting life". James says that we should not show favouritism to people by loving and welcoming some and not others nor should we show favouritism to God's law. We cannot obey some parts and not others for all are equally as important. In the reading from Mark's Gospel Jesus heals the daughter of a Syro Phoenician woman, a Gentile and the Deaf and Dumb man from the same area may well have also been a Gentile.

Jesus extends God's love to the Gentiles to the strangers as well as to the Jews. There had just been a long discourse between Jesus and religious leaders about what made a person impure or unclean. Jesus had said that the impurity came from within not without, that it was about motivation not birth, not status, not washing and eating in certain ways. He then ventures into lands and areas where different non-Jewish people, or Gentiles lived and this is where he met the Syro Phoenician woman and the deaf mute. This is where he touched an unclean Gentile and cured him and where he talked to a woman alone. These people were not considered suitable for God's kingdom, not the right sort, their faces, their life style did not fit.

We all want to be included. How many times have you felt hurt, upset over something which has happened at church, or in a church or Circuit meeting and nobody had thought to tell you. Maybe you were away or ill but for whatever reason you weren't in the know. We all want to belong, to be a part of something but we often feel left out, not part of the group, not in the know. God invites us all to be a part of his kingdom. He is no respecter of status, of wealth, of position. He doesn't care what you have or have not done in the past, he doesn't care if you are young or old, sprightly or infirm. Ethnic origins mean even less. All he wants is for us to obey his command to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself." Amen

StF 249 – Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

*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.

North Ghanaian Song Adapted by Tom Colvin Adaptation © 1969 Hope Publishing Company

CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Concern

Let us bring our prayers to God, knowing he loves us and longs to hear us.

Let us pray for the Body of Christ, the Church of God throughout the world. May all Christian communities be centres of hope and healing in a broken world. We pray for this church and all who worship here and for all who serve here. May we know your guidance as we respond to your call.

Light of the world: Shine in us

We pray for the nations of the world, for governments and leaders. May all who hold positions of authority be moved to seek justice and peace and to serve those they lead with integrity and care. We pray for our own country and government, that party politics and individual ambition would never be an excuse for failing to serve the good of society.

Light of the world: Shine in us

Let us pray for countries and communities damaged or destroyed by war. May all who are in positions of leadership be courageous enough to seek peaceful and just solutions. We remember all who suffer as a result of war or natural or man-made disasters.

Light of the world: Shine in us

Let us pray for those who are ill in mind or body, especially those we know and love. We pray for those whose days are filled with pain and we pray for those who care for loved ones who are suffering. Almighty God, you long to hear our prayers and concerns. We bring these our prayers to you, trusting in your grace. Fill us afresh to serve you in the world, that we might reflect the light of Jesus.

Light of the world: Shine in us. Amen

StF 398 – There's a spirit in the air

- 1) There's a spirit in the air,
Telling Christians everywhere:
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world
- 2) Lose your shyness, find your tongue;
Tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow's life today.
- 3) When believers break the bread,
When a hungry child is fed,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.
- 4) Still his Spirit leads the fight,
Seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow's life today.
- 5) When a stranger's not alone,
Where the homeless find a home,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.
- 6) May his Spirit fill our praise,
Guide our thoughts and change our ways:
God in Christ has come to stay;
Live tomorrow's life today.
- 7) There's a Spirit in the air,
Calling people everywhere:
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.

Brian Wren © 1969, 1995 Stainer & Bell Ltd CCL No. 515642

Blessing

Go and reflect the light of Jesus. In the name of God the Father, God, the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
Amen