

Call to worship: Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Edward Russell Smith, “Tedd” to his friends. He was born and raised in Ontario, Canada, but became an American citizen and served as pianist for Billy Graham’s Crusades for more than thirty-five years, travelling the world as a result. We shall sing hymn number 36, ‘There’s a quiet understanding’.

**1. There’s a quiet understanding
When we’re gathered in the Spirit,
It’s a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.
There’s a love we feel in Jesus,
There’s a manna that he feeds us,
It’s a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.**

**2. And we know when we’re together,
Sharing love and understanding,
That our brothers and our sisters
Feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
For the way you love and feed us,
For the many ways you lead us;
Thank you, thank you, Lord;
Thank you, thank you, Lord.**

© Tedd Smith (b. 1927)

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we are gathered in the Spirit to praise and worship you, for you are the King of heaven, Creator and maintainer of all life throughout the universe, the one true God whose power and wisdom are far beyond our understanding. You are not only holy, but faithful, compassionate, just, merciful, glorious, lovely and truly worthy of our adoration. Hear and accept our heartfelt worship today.

Thank you, Lord, for all that you give us and do for us, for we know how you have blessed us from our earliest days. Thank you, too, for coming as Jesus Christ, as our Saviour, guide and friend. He came to live among us, so we might know your holy will and purpose, died for the sins of the whole world and was raised to grant us everlasting life through faith in him.

Whilst you are holy, we recognize how short we fall from what you would have us be, for we don’t always love and serve you wholeheartedly and, all too often, fail to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. We still speak and act in ways that hurt our neighbours and grieve you. Merciful Lord, help us change our ways and forgive us in the beautiful name of Jesus.

Loving God, you hear our prayers and we believe that you have forgiven us and call us to follow you, once more, free from the burden of our guilt. May our response to your grace be to serve you and our neighbours with warm, caring hearts, so that our lives bring honour to your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we say:

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.

We continue with a hymn written by Rt. Revd. Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff. Bishop Timothy had served as a Chaplain to the forces during the Great War and was awarded the Military Cross. He wrote this hymn at the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire in 1922. We shall sing hymn number 103, 'God is Love: let heaven adore him;'

**1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love.**

**2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp he holdeth
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God.**

**3. God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts the souls of men,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides them even then.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love: so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign.**

© Timothy Rees (1874 – 1939)

In our prayers of intercession, we remember neighbours near-by and far away. When I say 'Lord, in your mercy', please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'.

Almighty God, the world you created ought to allow humankind to flourish in its abundance, but it has been broken by our foolishness, disobedience, selfishness, cruelty and indifference to our neighbours. Jesus calls us to serve you and our neighbours, so we ask for the skills, courage and compassion we need to answer Christ's call. Where the best we can offer is inadequate, or in situations far beyond our

scope, we ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people with power and influence who can really make a difference to the world, for to you nothing is impossible.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Heavenly Father, Jesus came as the Prince of Peace, so it is an affront to him that so many wars are being waged across the planet. We pray that you will teach national leaders to govern with mercy and justice, seeking peaceful resolutions to disputes, rather than taking up arms and lead them in the ways of integrity, so they seek the well-being of everyone, rather than their own vested interests.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Lord, bring an end to the conflicts in the Holy Land, Lebanon, Iran and Yemen, Ukraine, Congo, Sudan and Somalia and help the victims of warfare, prejudice and terrorism to rebuild their lives through the support and compassion of people who are able to offer them help and hope.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Lord of creation, we confess that we have failed our collective responsibility to be stewards of our planet and the evidence of failure is evident, with prolonged heatwaves, droughts and wildfires on one hand and melting glaciers, floods, depleted resources and increasingly strong storms on the other. Help us do what we can to help the environment by changing our lifestyles and by supporting people whose lives are affected by extreme weather.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Lord of shalom, of healing and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, loneliness, need or trouble, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we pray for people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them.....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and may you enfold them with your love, bringing them healing, courage, hope, strength and transcending peace.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Gracious God, hear our prayer for our church, the churches in our district and, indeed, the World Church. Grant us all the spiritual strength, courage and vision to lead where you want the Church to go. May we serve Christ boldly and bear the gospel light to our community.

‘Lord, in your mercy’ **‘Hear our prayer’.**

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and guide us to lead Christ-centred lives, sharing the abundance of your love with all-comers. In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn, possibly by Ray Crabtree, though some hymnals attribute it to an unknown author. We shall sing it through twice. Hymn number 242, ‘A new commandment’

A new commandment

I give unto you:

That you love one another

As I have loved you,

That you love one another

As I have loved you.

By this shall all know

**That you are my disciples
If you have love one for another.
By this shall all know
That you are my disciples
If you have love one for another.**

Anonymous / Ray Crabtree

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 22 verses 34 to 46

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together, and one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question.

“Teacher,” he asked, “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus answered,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself.’ The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

When some Pharisees gathered together, Jesus asked them,

“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant is he?”

“He is David’s descendant,” they answered.

“Why, then,” Jesus asked, “did the Spirit inspire David to call him ‘Lord’? David said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here on my right until I put your enemies under your feet.’ If, then, David called him ‘Lord’, how can the Messiah be David’s descendant?”

No one was able to give Jesus any answer, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. Amen.

Thomas Colvin, who trained as a missionary at Handsworth Theological College, wrote our next hymn during a day training course for evangelists at Chereponi, Ghana in the mid-1960s. He set his words to a Ghanaian love song. Hymn number 249, ‘Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,’

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: *Chorus*

2. Neighbours are rich folk and poor,

Neighbours are black folk and white,

Neighbours are nearby and far away: *Chorus*

3. These are the ones we should serve,

These are the ones we should love.

All these are neighbours to us and you: *Chorus*

4. Kneel at the feet of our friends,

Silently washing their feet,

This is the way we should live with you: *Chorus*

© T.S. Colvin {born 1925}

Address: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Matthew 22:36.

At the time of Jesus an intense and sometimes bitter debate was running about the greatest Commandment of all, with arguments about ‘hard’ and ‘easy’, or ‘major’ and

‘minor’ rules. In Luke’s account, the scribe was genuinely keen to hear Jesus’ view, but in our reading today, the Pharisaic expert in Torah was trying to trap Jesus into publicly declaring some commandments were less important than others, for he could then be accused of ‘annulling the Law’. Whilst Scribes and Pharisees debated in private, both groups taught that all commandments are wholly binding!

Jesus’ answer was incisive and indisputable. He quoted the Shema, incidentally adding ‘mind’ to demand intellectual allegiance and then added *Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18*: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ By choosing these quotations, Christ covered all the commandments, for the commandment to love God addressed the first table of Mosaic Law whilst loving our neighbour covers the second. As Jesus said, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Paul echoed this in Romans chapter 13, when he wrote, ‘The law says, “You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not want to take your neighbour’s things.” All these commands and all others are really only one rule: “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Love never hurts a neighbour, so loving is obeying all the law.’

For the past month the Lectionary readings have been about challenges to Jesus’ authority after he arrived in Jerusalem prior to his passion and death, as well as his efforts to identify himself as the Messiah to opponents. His parables about the Two Sons, Evil Vineyard Tenants, God’s Banquet and paying of Tribute to Caesar or God are centred on Christ’s response to his opponents. Today’s lectionary reading shows Jesus pointing out to the Messiah being both human and divine, not just a descendant of King David who was only human. After all, in Psalm 110, King David declared, ‘The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’ Thus, Jesus’ question of how David could call his son, ‘Lord’ was unanswerable, unless Pharisees conceded the Messiah was God in man, not simply a human descendant of David.

Although his opponents declined to answer Jesus’ question, it is clear they wouldn’t move towards accepting him, so they fulfilled the teaching in last month’s parables, for whilst they professed obedience to God, they lacked love in its full sense. They were more preoccupied by the minutiae of their 613 rules of Law than the command to love God, whilst their concept of ‘neighbour’ had contracted to fellow-Hebrews, rather than all human beings.

The Greatest Commandment challenges each of us to ask whether or not our love for God and other people is wholehearted, or do we hold back from offering what the Lord would like from us? No act of kindness is too trivial for God to notice and bless it; nobody is beyond the reach of God’s grace, however base their lives may appear. My service as MHA chaplain opened my eyes to the brokenness of the care system in this country, not only for older people, but youngsters in care, too. Successive Prime Ministers proclaimed they would mend the system, but have failed and their failure’s been compounded by this week’s report from the COVID Enquiry, when the Johnson Government’s claim that it had put a ‘protective ring’ around care homes was exposed as a grave untruth. The current Prime Minister has made the formation of a National Care Service a priority, so whilst acknowledging it will be expensive, I fervently pray he has courage and integrity to honour his commitment, for without effective social care and step-down facilities, the NHS will still face long waiting-lists and corridor care for the foreseeable future.

When I retired as a MHA chaplain, Carol and I served tea, coffee and biscuits at some Citizens’ Advice sessions at Brierley Hill Methodist Church and we were heart-

broken by numbers of people who were at their wits' end. Many clients weren't unemployed, or long-term sick, but people who held down two, or occasionally three jobs, yet couldn't make ends meet. I understand, too, the Black Country Foodbank, is often running on 'empty' because of growing demands, especially fuel costs for their vans.

I know this church and many others already reach out to the community, with coffee mornings, luncheon clubs, toddlers and various other support groups including knit and natter, but is there more we can do, however small it may be? Look around and we can see many people are in need of support at present. We can't deal with all of these issues on our own, but we can seek to address one or more, either ourselves, or as a church – or a collaboration between churches! Sometimes, a cup of tea or coffee, a listening ear and a kind word can transform someone's day. **A single simple act of kindness won't change the world, but if every follower of Jesus does an act of kindness every day, we can start a revolution of love that will bring change. Our aim should be to help our neighbours, not to fill more seats in our churches. That may come, God-willing, but our caring for neighbours should be our motivation in response to his redemptive grace. Amen.**

Our closing hymn was written in 1745 by William Williams, who is considered to have played as important a part in the spiritual awakening of Wales as the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield did in England. William Williams wrote many hymns, eight hundred in all, but his were mainly in Welsh, for he was determined to speak to his flock in their own tongue. He was known as 'The Sweet Singer of Pantycelyn'. Hymn number 465, 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,'

1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.

2. Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.

3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.

© William Williams (1717 – 1791) trans. by P. Williams (1722 – 1796)

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.