

**A service for 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 Easter 6 (StF)**

**Call to worship: 1 John chapter 4 verses 10 and 11**

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by Revd. Michael Saward in 1966 and was a favourite of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. Revd. Saward was a member of the Jubilate Group of writers. Hymn 319, 'Christ Triumphant, ever reigning,'*

**1. Christ triumphant, ever reigning,  
Saviour, Master, King,  
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,  
Hear us as we sing: *Chorus***

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
The High renown, the eternal name.*

**2. Word incarnate, truth revealing,  
Son of Man on earth!  
Power and majesty concealing  
By your humble birth: *Chorus***

**3. Suffering Servant, scorned, ill-treated,  
Victim crucified!  
Death is through the cross defeated,  
Sinners justified: *Chorus***

**4. Priestly King, enthroned for ever  
High in heaven above!  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
Stifle hymns of love: *Chorus***

**5. So, our hearts and voices raising  
Through the ages long,  
Ceaselessly upon you gazing,  
This shall be our song: *Chorus***

© Michael Saward / Jubilate Hymns

**Let us pray.**

Living God our heavenly Father, we come to worship and adore you, for you not only brought the universe to life, but sustain all living beings and, when you raised Jesus from the grave, you reconciled sinners like us to you and broke the power of death, offering us eternal life.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the loving Son who brought our salvation at Calvary, breaking the hold of Satan by atoning for the sins of the world. All honour and glory are yours, faithful Son of the Father.

Sacred Spirit, you are our guide, courage, strength and inspiration in our discipleship. Without you, we are helpless and hopeless. Come to lead us now and breathe new life into us.

Mighty Lord of life and love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all things are made new through the cross and empty tomb and so we come to praise and glorify your holy name this evening. Amen.

Almighty God, thank you for the many blessings we receive from you: for all the good things we enjoy; everyone who guides, loves and inspires us; for your undying

love. Forgive us when we are selfish and self-righteous, unforgiving and judgmental. Pardon us when our faith is weak and we have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our pride and loveless-ness. Renew and restore us, so our lives may reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death. Re-ignite the embers of our faith into a mighty flame, so we may build your kingdom here.

Loving God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only pardoned us, but invite us to walk with you once more. Hereafter, may we serve you and our neighbours gladly and faithfully, so our lives honour you in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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 next hymn was written in 1993 by Australian Darlene Zschech, a well-known as a singer, songwriter, worship leader and speaker. Over many years, she was involved in the worship and music publications of Hillsong Church, Sydney, the largest Pentecostal "mega-church" in Australia, with many branches around the world. Hymn number 363, 'My Jesus, my Saviour'.*

**My Jesus, my Saviour,  
Lord, there is none like you.  
All of my days I want to praise  
The wonders of your mighty love.**

**My comfort, my shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength,  
Let every breath, all that I am,**

**Never cease to worship you. Chorus:**

***Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing,***

***Power and majesty, praise to the King.***

***Mountains bow down and the seas will roar***

***At the sound of your name.***

***I sing for joy at the work of your hands***

***Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.***

***Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.***

© Darlene Zschech (born 1965)

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others.***

Loving God, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to heal our broken world and to offer everyone who would follow him sure hope of salvation and wholeness, even amidst the world's suffering. We believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to rectify the results of mankind's cruelty, exploitation, pride and indifference which result in so much suffering around the globe.

We pray for all churches in our area and the World Church. Teach us to set aside our divisions and differences, so that we learn to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission. May your Holy Spirit help us use our love, gifts and graces to reveal Jesus as the friend, Lord and Saviour of the world. May we bear the gospel light to this conflicted and sin-darkened world. Bring us safely through this pandemic and renew our calling.

Lord, as we reflect upon our environment and the serious issues it faces, such as pollution global warming and diminishing resources, we ask you to inspire and guide those who are striving to keeping earth habitable for future generations. We pray for people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to impoverished countries and we bring our concerns for those who are striving for our wellbeing, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers, as they try to bring us through this time of trial and anguish. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

Heavenly Father, reach out to those of us whose hearts are broken because of the COVID19 pandemic, all who are suffering from long-COVID, people who have endured loneliness, who are afraid or can see no way forward in their despair. In the name of the risen Lord Jesus, enfold us with your love, comfort and strengthen us. Renew our flagging spirits and bring us through this time of spiritual darkness into the light of your salvation. Lord, we remember before you people whose memories and faculties are diminishing because of a dementia and their families, friends and carers whose distress has been compounded because of this pandemic. Grant them the support and hope they need to keep going.

Have compassion on people whom we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; neighbours who are living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silence, we shall offer the names of people for whom we are especially concerned. .... Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but enfold them with your love, so they may find comfort, healing, courage and an enduring peace.

We offer a prayer for the victims of prejudice, oppression, injustice, terrorism and conflict. Gracious Lord, inspire and guide the leaders of nations and opposition groups in the way of peace. Teach them the futility of using violence to achieve their aims: instead may they seek to follow the way of justice and peace. Teach us also to act justly and to care for our neighbours, especially people whom we find it difficult to like. In Jesus' name, may the whole earth be transformed by mercy and rejoice in hope.

Blessed Saviour, our hearts go out to countries like India and Brazil, where many, many people are suffering with and dying from coronavirus and where the health systems cannot cope. May countries that can offer support do so swiftly, to bring the situation under control.

Abba, Father God, bless us all, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us to lead Christ-centred lives by sharing your abundant love with all-comers, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, to whom be glory and honour for evermore. Amen.

*We continue with hymn number 242, 'A new commandment I give unto you'.*

**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*

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 15 verses 9 to 17**

“I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. This, then, is what I command you: love one another.” Amen.

*Our next hymn was written by Revd. Thomas Colvin, a Church of Scotland minister who became a missionary in Malawi and Ghana. He wrote this hymn to a Northern Ghanaian love song during a day training course for evangelists at Chereponi in around 1968. 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} – based on a song from northern Ghana

**Sermon: “My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you.” John 15:12**

Years ago, when I first wore an ichthus badge on my jacket, my mother decided to have fish brooch for when she worshipped at Birmingham Cathedral. Naturally, she wanted a more ornate badge than mine, so she and dad visited a high-class shop in Birmingham Jewellery Quarter. The assistant was keen to make a sale, but was at a loss when mom simply asked for a ‘fish brooch’, rather than an ichthus badge, though I don’t suppose

she'd have known what an ichthus badge was, anyway. After a brief search, she replied that the shop had no fish badge, but then added, 'We do have a lovely parrot brooch!' Mom had to settle for a simple ichthus like mine!

This anecdote highlights a more serious issue: how can you tell somebody is a Christian? Certainly, there are few traditions, dietary customs, or costumes to mark Christians out, whereas practising Jews wear a kippah, a tallit and tefillin to worship, moslems wear a prayer cap & shalwar kameeze, while many Sikhs wear turbans and the Kirpan, a sword, though usually Sikhs in Britain use a symbolic kirpan). Although some Christians wear a cross, or ichthus, many don't, for we don't need costumes or symbols if we obey Christ's command to his disciples, "Love each other." It sounds simple, to be identifiable because of our outstanding love for one another: no badges, or costumes, just letting Jesus' love shine through, yet in reality it is a real challenge.

A friend once said how difficult for us to love one another in reality, because even friends and families fall out. When I said Jesus' command really means we must love everybody, because he loves them, my friend was incredulous. She asked if it means we should love criminals, or dishonest politicians, or elements within our Media whose criminality has seriously undermined public faith in those institutions? Can we love terrorists or despotic rulers like President Assad of Syria? As hard as it must seem, we are indeed called to love even them, but it doesn't necessarily mean we must like them, for loving means to be willing to care if they need help, to care enough to bring them the love of Jesus. Let me explain.

The great parable about this kind of boundless love is The Good Samaritan, because for five hundred years Jews and Samaritans had hated each other more bitterly than even Rwandan Tootsies and Hootsies, or Bosnian Serbs and Moslems in the 1990s. Despite the enmity between the two main characters, Jesus made the Samaritan the 'good neighbour', by stopping to help the injured Jew, cleaning and binding his wounds, then taking him to an inn where he paid for the victim's care until he'd recovered. Significantly, at no stage in the parable does Jesus say the Samaritan and Jew were reconciled, or even liked one another. The Samaritan was moved by compassion, or loving-kindness. Though there's no mention of Jewish traveller's gratitude towards the man who saved him, it is likely he'd have been so moved by the Samaritan's grace, his prejudices would have been shaken and his future behaviour modified.

In his ministry, Jesus reached out to people in need, including Samaritans and occupying Romans, people despised as sinners and those abandoned by society. He set aside prejudices, offering peace and restoration to all who responded to him. As Twenty-First Century disciples, we're called to be as warm-hearted. May our love be a light that guides our neighbours to the side of he who is its source. Amen.

*We close our worship with a hymn by Rev. John Bode, who was Rector at Castle Camps, Cambridge. His daughter and two sons attended confirmation classes, so that they could make their vows together in 1866. The poetic Rector decided that such a special occasion deserved a special hymn which is not only a dedication of oneself to Christ, but recognises that the path of discipleship is not an easy one. It is an appeal to Jesus to guide us through life. Hymn number 563, 'O Jesus, I have promised'.*

**1. O Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end;  
Be thou for ever near me,**

**My Master and my Friend:  
I shall not fear the battle  
If thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If thou wilt be my Guide.**

**2. O let me feel thee near me:  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
And shield my soul from sin.**

**3. O let me hear thee speaking  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will;  
O speak to reassure me,  
To hasten or control;  
O speak and make me listen,  
Thou guardian of my soul.**

**4. O Jesus, thou hast promised  
To all who follow Thee,  
That where thou art in glory  
There shall thy servant be;  
And Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow  
My Master and my Friend!**

© *J.E. Bode {1816 – 1874}*

***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forevermore. Amen.**