

Call to worship

Jesus offers a new-old commandment,
that we should love each other.
With the incredible power and the unfathomable depth
of God's love for us, we can, we must
love one another.
And it is in this - our love for one another
that the world will know whom and what we worship.
Come, children of God,
let us love one another; and worship God!

written by Katherine Hawker

Hymn Judge Eternal, throned in splendour R&S 626

Judge eternal, throned in splendour,
Lord of lords and King of kings,
with your living fire of judgement
purge this realm of bitter things;
comfort all its wide dominion
with the healing of your wings.

Still the weary folk are pining
for the hour that brings release,
and the city's crowded clamour
cries aloud for sin to cease;
and the homesteads and the woodlands
plead in silence for their peace.

Crown, O God, your own endeavour,
cleave our darkness with your sword,
feed the faithless and the hungry
with the richness of your word;
cleanse the body of this nation
through the glory of the Lord.

H. Scott Holland

Children's Time Sandy

Offertory

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

Hymn A new commandment R&S 745 **Sing twice**

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.

Children leave for Sunday Club. Say the Grace

Opening Prayer (Christian Aid Week)

Creator, Son and Spirit, we gather together,
here in your church, or online, to seek Your presence in our time of worship.
WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOU

Meet us at our point of deepest need. Connect us with the needs of others.
Equip us to join in your creative work. Transform us more into your likeness.
WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Christ Church, 15 May 2022, preacher Revd. John Proctor

We gather with our partner church in Budiriro and other communities in Zimbabwe
May their stories make us hungry for justice and even more impatient for change.
WE ARE HUNGRY FOR YOUR JUSTICE

We gather with all of creation; with the mountains and the hills.
We shall burst into song, with the trees of the field we will clap our hands.
WE ARE HUNGRY TO PRAISE YOU. Amen

Hymn When we assume... (inspired by Leviticus 19)

When we assume that true neighbours are like us –
cosy, safe friends from the culture we share –
tell us once more how the priest and the Levite
failed, but that stranger showed kindness and care.

Should we still feel that each stranger's a danger,
nursing distrust underneath our veneer,
shame us with care and surprise us with kindness
from some Samaritan we thought to fear.

God, who yourself came a stranger among us,
unrecognised, spat upon and ignored,
you died to make all your enemies neighbours,
make strangers friends who are loved and adored.

We need you now to infect us with kindness,
changing our hearts, overcoming our fear,
'til we embrace ev'ry stranger as neighbour,
sharing your love with the world, far and near.

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Bible readings: **Leviticus 19:9-18**
 John 13:31-35

Sermon – Revd John Proctor – Love your neighbour as yourself

Have you ever found yourself in an unfamiliar place – a distant town, a holiday venue – and then unexpectedly run into an old friend or a neighbour from home? 'I didn't expect to see you here.' But as you talk for a few minutes, you are quite likely to learn a little more about the place and about the friend. It could even be, 'This is my home town. I began life here.'

So here. In Leviticus, perhaps the strangest book of the Bible, a line that is very familiar: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Surely an old friend of a text. Hard to do sometimes, but a regular reminder about the Christian life. 'I thought Jesus said it,' you might be thinking. He did. But he wasn't the first to say it. He quoted it, as the second-greatest command in Israel's ancient law. He read it, he reckoned with it, he rated it, and so should we. So what can we learn about this old friend from finding it here, where it seems to have begun its life?

First a brief aside about why pick this text today. Several reasons. It's in the lectionary, the church's calendar of readings, as a reserve text for today; that put me in mind of it. It's Christian Aid week. We'll think about that as we go along; it fits. And some of us will look this afternoon at the Letter of James. James the brother of Jesus. James who recycles and hands on a good deal of his brother's

teaching. James rated this command – loving your neighbour as yourself. We'll see this when we look at James. But it also looks as if James read the verses of Leviticus we read today, and that he would have been able to join the train of thought that we're going to take. So we'll start to get into the mind of James – as well as thinking afresh about an old friend, and about our own living.

First thing about loving your neighbour as yourself. It's part of the imprint of God on the world, part of how we can declare the goodness of God, by our actions. Did you notice how each paragraph in our reading ended, 'I am the Lord'? Do these things because God is, God is good, God is great, God is involved in the world, and God is involved in your life. Neighbour love doesn't start with you. It's not a parcel you're putting together, wrapping up and posting. It's a parcel you're passing on. We love because God loves us, we give love because we have received it, we are a loving people because we are a loved people. We live with open hearts and hands because the heart and hands of God have been opened to us – not least on the cross of Jesus. Love people, and that's one of the ways you make known that God is real.

So how do we do it? Let's track the verses that lead up to this text, Love your neighbour as yourself. They let us see something about loving a neighbour might involve. There will be three short snippets.

First, 'At harvest time, don't reap your fields to the very edge. Leave something for the poor and the refugee to come and pick up.' What, on earth? Perhaps you haven't got a field, maybe not even an allotment. What is this about? It's about who eats and who doesn't. It's about not always wanting the very maximum for me, but getting into the habit of noticing other people's needs and situations. It might be about putting something into our basket at the supermarket that we don't need, and then leaving it in the box for the local foodbank that sits at the exit. It might be about Christian Aid week, and what we in one of the world's richest countries can manage to share with some of the world's poorest. It might be about a local church finding helpful and respectful ways to contribute to the well-being of the local community, in tough and fearful times. Not literally about being careless with the vegetable bed. Not literally about leaving apples on the tree. Not literally about letting food fall off the corner of our dining table. But a reminder that those who do know where the next meal is coming from should be aware of the many in our world who don't. Part of loving our neighbour is sharing. If you do that, God rejoices. That's one way you print the truth of God onto the story of this world.

A second part of loving our neighbour is being straightforward. 'Don't steal, or deal falsely, or lie, or speak ill of people, or show bias when you relate to others.' Who was the work colleague that everyone trusted, because you never heard them speak ill of other people who were out of the room, and you knew they wouldn't gossip about you when your back was turned? Who was the schoolteacher you respected, because you could learn with them for a whole year without ever feeling they had favourites in the class, or that they would criticise you unfairly? Who was the sports captain who picked people on merit, not just because they were personal friends – or the sports coach who didn't always favour their own or their friends' sons and daughters? Or the employer who

dealt equally with each person, whatever your background, gender, skin colour, or personal situation? If that was you, if that is you, God rejoices. That sort of attitude writes the truth of God into the story of this world.

Another part of loving our neighbour is about safety and support. 'Don't oppress your neighbour, or curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block in the way of the blind.' There are always people, in every group or community, who need a bit of extra consideration. There are always people who can't stand up for themselves in the way that some others can. Not that such people are passengers. Often they have many gifts and much wisdom to contribute to the common good. But they make their contribution best, if others help to shape a world in which they can make it. So part of loving our neighbour is making our community a safe and supportive place for people of all sorts of abilities and circumstances; setting the world up so that people can be confident, so that people don't get pushed to the edges or elbowed aside or ignored. Who is there around you who can't do all the things you can do? And what can you do to take obstacles out of their path? What can you do to help that person feel safe, confident and included, to help them be an active member of the community? If you're doing that, God rejoices. You're helping to cover the earth with signs of the truth of God.

Loving our neighbour? An old friend of a text, met today on unfamiliar ground. But actually this is where it came from, and here we've found some guidelines, some detail, about what it might mean in practice. Sharing the basics of life, straightforward speech and attitudes, and safety and support in the way we set up our life together. In a way this won't be news to you. I see many URC churches that are doing so much of this. But in a way this is good news, gospel, because it inscribes the love of God on the life of this world. So keep on doing it, grow in love for neighbour, show love for neighbour, and as you do, remember that you are passing on the love of God, given above all in the open heart and open hands of the crucified Jesus.

Hymn Put peace into each other's hands R&S 635

Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it;
protect it like a candle flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation.

Put peace into each other's hands,
like bread we break for sharing;

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look people warmly in the eye:
our life is meant for caring.

As at communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle;
the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table.

Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure;
in love make peace, give peace a chance
and share it like a treasure

Lord's Supper

As we come to the Lord's table, the feast of abundance of Christ, we confess our sins against our brothers and sisters and in the neglect of God's creation using a prayer for Christian Aid Week:

Christ Church, 15 May 2022, preacher Revd. John Proctor

Good God of creation, we sing praise to you.

But even as we raise our voices we know we have faltered and failed.

Walking on paths that turned our hearts inward,
sitting with those who scoffed at the cries of the poor,
mocking those on the margins, denying the earth in her distress.

Too often our leaves have withered, our branches are barren.

We have failed to be pruned and the axe is now poised.

Poised to cut down the excesses that crucify all creation,
the systems that impoverish all people, the privileges that diminish our faith.

But even now it is not too late.

For in the face of judgment comes the offer of grace and the hope that deadwood can spring to life
Where we have failed to bear good fruit and share your abundance for the earth

GOD HAVE MERCY

When our actions and intentions have been as chaff for the winds of heaven

GOD HAVE MERCY

Forgive us. Restore us.

Inspire us now to delight in your purposes, to embrace your possibilities,
to inhabit your promises, to flourish as fruit for the world you
so love and bring healing for all nations. Amen

Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must,
but because you may.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,
and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,
and we may be ready to live for you
and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. Amen

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it
and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me. In the same way
he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as
you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you
proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Prayer after communion

Gracious God, we have heard your commandment to love one another,
to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Grant us the strength, wisdom and humility to keep that commandment

May the fruits of our lives be food for the hungry, bread

clothing, shelter, fire, water, Word

May we love as you love.

God of justice, remove the barriers

of our lives that keep us from one another, barriers we construct
based on skin colour, religion, or gender

May we hear, and follow, graciously. May we love as you love.

Loving God, take this day our fears,

our worries, our distractions, and

turn them into grace and mercy,

so we may love as you love. Amen

Prayers of intercession (inspired by John 13: 31-35)

Loving, listening God, ever-attentive to the voices of those in need,
we call on your name so that we might live.

Now hear our prayer:

For the church that bears Christ's name,
that the world may know we are his disciples
by the love that we have for one another.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For leaders of nations and all persons in positions of authority,
that their lives may be marked by Christ-like service and love.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For all who are oppressed and living in captivity,
that they may escape from evil and death
to find the land of freedom you have promised.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are hungry and thirsty this day
and for those who have too much,
that we may learn to share your generous gifts, O God.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are dealing with loss or facing death,
that the presence of Christ may bless and keep them.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

...*prayers from this week.... Silence...* in Jesus' name we pray.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn When I needed a neighbour Red folder 107

When I needed a neighbour,
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?
*And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty,
Were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
Refrain

I was cold, I was naked,
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
Refrain

When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there?
Refrain

When I needed a healer,
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
Refrain

Wherever you travel,
I'll be there, I'll be there.
Wherever you travel, I'll be there.
*And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
I'll be there.*

Sydney Bertram Carter

Blessing (Christian Aid Week)

In the name of God who plants the seed of justice: Be hungry.
In the name of Christ who hangs on the tree of love: Be fruitful.
And in the name of the Spirit who inspires God's will in our hearts and our lives: Be celebrated.
You are Christ's people, here and throughout the world now and forever. Amen.