

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 10 July 2022.

Call to worship

We are called to love the Lord our God

We are called to love with all our heart and soul

We are called to love the Lord our God

We are called to love with all our mind and strength

We are called to love the Lord our God

And we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Come, let us love our God

and share God's love in this time of worship!

Hymn Light of the world (here I am to praise you) MP 1086

Opening Prayer

Holy God, we come together to worship, a people who would like to think that we love you with all our hearts and souls, with all our might,

but there are so many other things in our lives that clamour for our attention that we often relegate you to only Sunday mornings and times when we need you to rescue us.

Most of us really do want you to be the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

We really do want to hear your voice above all of the other voices in our lives.

But we get bogged down in the daily routine.

We forget who you are. We forget what the church is supposed to be.

So here we are, standing before you today, with our human foibles and our short attention spans, asking that you would make yourself known to us, that you would help us to recognize the presence of the Holy, that you would continue to challenge us, inspire us, and make us into the people you want us to be. Amen

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and short reflection

What we have just heard is called the Shema. It is the daily prayer that was said morning and evening by the Ancient Israelites, like we say the Lord's Prayer regularly and I think it is still said daily by Jews today. This prayer has been one of the most influential traditions in Jewish history. The Shema has functioned both as the Jewish pledge of allegiance and a hymn of praise. The Shema gets its name from the first Hebrew word of the prayer in Deuteronomy 6:4 – 'Listen' but this opening line "Listen, O Israel" does not simply mean to let the sound waves enter your ears. Instead, the word "listen" means to allow the words to sink in, provide understanding, and generate a response. In other words, in Hebrew, "hearing" and "doing" are basically the same thing. But how should Israel respond to hearing that the Lord alone is their God? They should "Love the Lord your God." In this context, love isn't simply the emotional energy we feel when we like someone. In the Bible, love is action. You love someone when you act in loyalty and faithfulness. For Israel, to love meant faithful obedience to the terms of their covenant relationship with God. Obedience to these laws was never about legalism or trying to earn God's favour. Obedience in the Old

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Testament is about love and listening. If an Israelite loves God, it will make it easier to listen and absorb God's teachings and guidance. This is why the words "listen" and "love" are so tightly connected and repeated through the opening speeches of Deuteronomy. Remember this when we come to hear our gospel reading from Luke.

Jesus would have grown up saying this prayer and he drew on it in his own teaching and preaching as we will hear later. In Mark's gospel Jesus, says, "The first of all the commandments is, 'Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.

Hymn A new commandment MP 1 sung 3 times during which the offertory is received.

Offering

We are called to love the Lord our God
And we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves;
Accept these gifts that they may be used to help our neighbours
whoever and wherever they be and especially those people we would rather not think of as our neighbours; the ones we think of as undeserving, but You God love and include us all. Amen

Prayer - URC Prayer Handbook p49

Question before the readings

Bible readings: **Psalm 25:1-10**
 Luke 25-37

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most well-known stories of Jesus... Many countries even have Good Samaritan laws, so named to provide legal protections for those who act as "good Samaritans" such as most of America, the UK and Australia. (so much litigation, 1st-Aiders...) While in other countries, like most of Europe, the duty to rescue and help people is enshrined in the law – people can be prosecuted for not going to someone's aid. The good Samaritan has become the best-known example of going beyond our typical expectations of caring for others, even many non-Christians know the term and the concept even if they don't know the details of the Bible story. (Good Samaritan is a phrase often used in news stories of someone helping someone out, or rescuing someone. There are charities that use the name, and of course there is the Samaritans, I even found a pub in London called the Good Samaritan) So, we might think we know all there is to know about this parable, but by taking another look, I hope that we can see not only a powerful example for us to follow, but a renewed glimpse of the wide scope of God's love and mercy. God's inclusion is much wider than ours. God sees goodness in surprising

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people – in the people we might otherwise disregard. And the people we might expect to do good, to act on their love of God, like the priest and the Levite, don't. In fact, they go to the other side of the road to avoid helping the man who has been beaten up and is lying by the roadside.

When the lawyer, and here that means an expert in the Jewish religious law – a religious leader, asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus turns the question back on him and asks what the law says. The lawyer correctly responds with the Shema that we heard earlier and adds from the law in Leviticus which says, you should love your neighbour as yourself. The lawyer should have been content when Jesus says, you are right, do that, but he wants to 'justify' himself and so he asks Jesus who his neighbour is. Justify here means to show himself as righteous, acceptable to God. He is a religious leader, he wants to be seen to be doing above and beyond what is simply required by the law, what everyone does. But is he also hoping to limit the category of "neighbour" in some way? Doing so would certainly make it easier to keep the commandment, as the smaller the circle of people included as "neighbours," presumably the easier it is to act in love toward them. And so, Jesus tells his parable. Luke's audience, as well as Jesus' listeners, would have soon begun to feel the surprise of the story. The priest and Levite are the anticipated "good guys" of the story, while a Samaritan would hardly be expected to stop and help a Jewish person in trouble given the past conflicts and tension between their peoples.

Jesus outlines in great detail the Samaritan's acts of kindness for the man in trouble: attending to his wounds, bringing him to an inn, and paying for at least two months of care at the inn (that is what two denarii would have bought back then). These actions are the authentic signs of what real neighbours do. Jesus' final question turns on its head the earlier question, "who is my neighbour?" Jesus instead asks which of the three characters in the story fulfilled the role of "neighbour". By being so concerned about who qualified as his neighbour, the legal expert had neglected to consider whether he himself was acting like a "neighbour." Jesus ends with, "Go and do likewise". Those who follow Jesus are to take on the role of neighbour to others, especially those in need.

Now, we all know (at least I hope we do) from years of Sunday school and sermons that we are supposed to act like the Good Samaritan and that we are to consider everyone as our 'neighbour', but this story in Luke emphasises how God's hospitality really includes everyone and includes people we might not want to include. By making the Samaritan, the outsider, rather than the respected Jewish leader, the hero of the story, Jesus shines a light on our prejudices and stereotypes. No one hearing the parable then would have expected the Samaritan to be the hero. If we think of nowadays, who might we expect to do good –

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Christians, church members, church elders? And who often surprises us by doing good when we least expect it – released prisoners, an addict, someone living on the streets, a rap artist, an immigrant, a Muslim? We all know the story and we know what we should do – go and do likewise, but it is good to reflect on who really is our neighbour – not only in terms of who we would choose to help, but in terms of who we would be willing to receive help from.

Hymn When I needed a neighbour, were you there

LORD'S SUPPER

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us, to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

This is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

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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

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

God of love, give us a deep love for you,
so that we can see the world as you see it,
feel the compassion you feel,
and be a people whose lives mediate your love to others.
Open our eyes that we might see what the Good Samaritan saw.
Grant us the insight to see the need in others,
the wisdom to know what to do, and the will to do it.

And so we pray for all those, who in many and various ways,
have been stripped, beaten and left for dead.
We pray for children who must grow up
in the most awful of circumstances,
especially for those starved of love, or food, or shelter or security.
And for those who worry about climate change and what the world of their future will be like.
May they receive the future you have planned for them.

We pray for those we might cross the road to avoid helping others.
Those who have been excluded socially because of their race,
their financial status, or their history.
May the dignity that is theirs, created in Your image, be restored to them.

We pray for those whose need we would rather not face up to,
because it requires action of us,
those who suffer atrocities because of war, unjust trade rules,
or oppressive governments.
May the world receive a true picture of their suffering
and the factors that cause it, that justice may be done.

Open our eyes, that we might not cross the road from human need.
Give us a deep love for you, that we might see your love at work in this world,
and that we might Go and do likewise.

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In the silence, prayers for current events and those known to us...

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn We sing a love (tune *Woodlands* MP 631)

We sing a love that sets all people free,
that blows like wind, that burns like scorching flame,
enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear:
come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,
a love that, yielding, finds itself made new:
come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid
to be itself, despite another's wrath,
a love that stands alone and undismayed:
come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that, wandering, will not rest
until it finds its way, its home, its source,
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed:
come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a burning, fiery, Holy Ghost
that seeks out shades of ancient bitterness,
transfiguring these, as Christ in every heart:
come, joyful love, live in our hearts today.

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Blessing

Hear this: the Lord our God is the one and only Lord.
Therefore go out into the world
and love the Lord your God
with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,
and love others as you love yourself.

And may God give you justice and freedom;
May Christ Jesus set you free for love;
and may the Holy Spirit go where you go
and protect you on your way.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing.

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