

Call to worship (based on Psalm 105)

Give thanks to the Lord,
call on God's name.
Make known God's deeds among the peoples.
Sing praises to the Holy One;
and tell of all God's wonderful works.
Glory in God's holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek God rejoice!

Hymn God is love, his the care R&S 274

God is love: his the care,
tending each, everywhere,
God is love, all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
that we all might know him!

Refrain:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good! God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

Jesus came, lived and died
for our sake, crucified,
rose again, glorified

he was born to save us
by the truth he gave us. [Refrain]

None can see God above;
Jesus shows how to love;
thus may we Godward move,
joined as sisters, brothers,
finding him in others. [Refrain]

To our Lord praise we sing,
light and life, friend and King,
coming down, love to bring,
pattern for our duty,
showing God in beauty. [Refrain]

Percy Dearmer

Children's Time

Gifts

God, just as You called Moses so long ago,
so You call each one of us to speak and act on Your behalf in our world today.
Forgive us when we are hesitant to follow:
when we question Your call or make excuses for our abilities;
when we complain about our lack of time or hoard our resources.
Give us courage to step out in faith, to follow where You lead without hesitation or fear,
trusting that Your presence goes with us, and that You will provide all that we need.
Holy One, receive our gifts of money and ourselves.
Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit
to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

Ask the children leave for Sunday Club, we sing:

Hymn A new commandment R&S 745

Opening Prayer: God of fire, you are a force beyond human understanding,
with the power to sear through the veins of creation
with passion and vigour, or to extinguish life in consuming flame.
Your presence is dangerous for there is no predicting where you might burn,
and yet comforting for the light and warmth offer an invitation to draw closer.
Redeeming God, out of the flames of your creation, your voice calls, marking us as your own.
Yet there are times when we choose to ignore your voice,
and listen instead to our own needs and desires
and those from within the world that challenge our faith.
Forgive us for those times; when we have ignored the needs of others;
when we have failed to place our feet upon your path;
when we allow the earthly voice to distract us from your call. *Silence*

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Compassionate God, in your forgiveness
you offer again your invitation to know your love,
to be loved, and to respond to your call.
In hearing your voice may we find our place within your creation. Amen

Hymn The God of Abraham praise R&S 121 omit v3

The God of Abraham praise,
who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of Everlasting Days,
and God of Love;
Jehovah, great I AM!
by earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name
forever blest.

The God of Abraham praise,
at whose supreme command
from earth I rise and seek the joys
at his right hand:
I all on earth forsake,
its wisdom, fame and power;
and him my only portion make,
my shield and tower.

The God who reigns on high
the great archangels sing,
and "Holy, holy, holy!" cry
"Almighty King!

Who was, and is, the same,
and evermore shall be:
Jehovah, Lord, the great I AM,
we worship thee!"

Before the Saviour's face
the ransomed nations bow;
o'erwhelmed at his almighty grace
for ever new.

He shows his prints of love,
they kindle to a flame,
and sound through all the worlds above
the slaughtered Lamb.

The whole triumphant host
give thanks to God on high:
Hail Father, Son and Holy Ghost
they ever cry:
Hail Abraham's God and mine!
I join the heavenly lays
all might and majesty are thine
and endless praise.

Thomas Olivers

Bible reading: Exodus 3:1-15

I don't often go on about it, but when I am preparing worship, I try to avoid using male pronouns for God. Sometimes I do say 'he' because it sounds too odd to keep saying God or Holy One and I think, I hope, that we all understand that in previous times, and in some of the languages of the Bible, the male pronoun was understood to mean everyone and not only men – though any feminists among you may not be very happy with that. Occasionally I might slip a 'she' in, but I don't do it often because I don't want my use of pronouns to distract from the message. I also tend to limit the use of God as father – while Jesus taught us to pray to Our Father, and for those of us who had good fathers, myself included, father is a nice image, for the many people who have never known their father for whatever reason, or for those whose fathers abused or mistreated them, associating God with a fatherly image is not helpful and can be counterproductive, putting them off the idea of church and religion completely.

We heard earlier how Jews use at least two plural terms to refer to God, Adonai and Elohim. And in Genesis God is both singular and plural – "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness", so there are those who argue that we should use plural pronouns for God – 'they', which is neither male or female, but personally I think that can

get a bit confusing, as we know there is only one God, so implying they are plural isn't helpful either.

Perhaps we just focus far too much on pronouns. We heard in our reading from Exodus, from God's own lips, that God isn't even a noun. God is a verb. God is I Am who I Am – "this is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." We don't seem to remember that when we reduce God to just a 'he'. We sang in our first hymn that God is love, and in our next hymn we will be using many names for God – shelter, light, wisdom, shepherd, dove, comfort. Muslims have 99 names for God, and neither they nor us, however many names we come up with can ever fully describe God, for God is so big, amazing, deep, profound and above all loving, to ever be described by human tongues.

One of the devotions I read this week, was by a university chaplain, who said that 'all you have to do to be beloved [by God] is to be.' The God who named himself (I couldn't come up with an alternative that wasn't awkward) I am, the verb to be, only demands that we be to receive God's love and grace. The God who is love, only asks that we too love, not only our friends and families, or our fellow Christians, but our enemies too – which we will hear more about after our second Bible reading...

Hymn Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud (Tune Aberystwyth at R&S 332)

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,
Fortress, Fountain,
Shelter, Light, Judge,
Defender, Mercy, Might,
Life whose life all life all endowed:

Word and Wisdom, Root and Vine,
Shepherd, Savior, Servant,
Lamb, Well and Water, Bread and Wine,
Way who leads us to the I AM:
Refrain

Refrain:
May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth that feeds them all
is the God whom we proclaim.

Storm and Stillness, Breath
and Dove, Thunder, Tempest,
Whirlwind, Fire, Comfort, Counselor,
Presence Love, Energies that never Tire.
Refrain

Thomas H. Troeger

Bible Reading: Romans 12:9-21

With our reading from Exodus, we've been instructed on how to address and think of God, now Paul in his letter to the Romans pretty much sums up what Christian life should be. In fact, one writer has described these verses as the 'basic demands of Christian living'. A blueprint, if you will, for how we should live our lives – let your love be genuine, extend hospitality to strangers, bless those who persecute you, associate with the lowly, do not repay evil with evil and as far as it is possible, 'live peaceably with all' – to name just a few of the directions.

My mum chose this as one of the readings to be read at her service of thanksgiving – some of what I will say is inspired by what Revd Nigel Uden said on that occasion.

The letter to the Romans is a fairly long theological document setting out Paul's doctrine, often in quite complicated terms, for why we need God's grace and why Jesus is the manifestation of God's grace. In the verses we heard today, Paul suggests what our response to God providing for our needs through Christ might be. It is not complicated, it is straightforward language. They are easy to follow directions or commands on how we should live our lives as a response to God's love. That doesn't mean that following them is necessarily easy! These verses are not about clever philosophical ideas, as Paul often writes in other parts of the letter, but rather they are about the nature of our living and our Christian loving. He wants us to be sure that our love is genuine. Greek has at least three words for love – English is sadly lacking by comparison. Paul is not talking about romantic love, or love of family, but the love of John 3:16 – the love with which God so loved the world that God gave their only Son. It is love for the sake of the other, love for the common good; love that keeps on giving and forgiving.

Paul is careful to ensure that in this genuine love we do not only love our fellow Christians, or those who look and act like we do, but we should love all humanity, even those who hate and persecute us, even our enemies. I find it interesting that Paul doesn't think we should just blithely turn the other cheek and let people take advantage of us. But he says, we are not to take vengeance – that is God's job. Though it does make me smile a little that he says feed your enemies, for by so doing you 'heap burning coals on their heads' – which sounds like, don't feed them because you're a nice Christian person, but do it so that they will feel bad, ashamed and perhaps remorseful, which doesn't sound quite so "Christian" though perhaps is more realistic of human nature!

While Paul's is the voice through which the message comes to us, this blueprint for Christian living is not his plan, but God's. It is God's greatest gift to us. God enables us to love like this, or at least try to, because God loved us first. God is love, we sang – God's best name is love. God so loved us that God gave their only Son, not to condemn the world, but to save us. To save us from ourselves. To save us from being hypocritical rather than genuine, for being haughty rather than humble, from only loving the people we like, from getting our own back instead of leaving vengeance to God. Jesus says, the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ' ...And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" And who is your neighbour? Even your enemies. Paul takes this commandment and expands it;

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spells it out, so there will be no doubt. We could do worse than to read Romans chapter 12 daily and try our best to take it to heart and act on it.

Hymn Make me a channel of your peace R&S 629

Prayers of intercession Today we will use a gender neutral version of the Lord's Prayer (screen)

Gracious God, in love You created us, and in love You sustain us, day after day.
So it is with confidence that we bring our prayers to You, knowing that You hear us, and will respond.

We pray for the world around us,
for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help:
 for those without enough to eat;
 for those caught up in violence and political uprisings;
 for those picking up the pieces after a natural disaster;
 for those desperate to find work to support their families.
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

We also pray for family and friends who are suffering:
 those struggling physically or emotionally,
 those working to overcome mental illness;
 those facing challenges at home or at work;
 those grieving the death of a loved one.
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

God, You have called us to pray for our enemies;
to bless, rather than curse those who deliberately seek to harm us.
We bring their names before You now -
 those who have hurt us, physically or emotionally;
 those who have stolen from us, or cheated us of what was rightfully ours;
 those who have spread rumours about us or turned our friends against us.
We ask You to bless them.
Open our hearts so that we may see them as You see them,
and be able to respond to them with Your love.
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

We pray for Your church around the world,
that it would be a living demonstration of Your coming kingdom:
 offering hospitality to all,
 ready to help in times of need,
 showing love to friends and enemies alike,
 seeking to live in peace with all.
Gracious God, hear our prayer, **and in Your love, answer.**

God, we praise You for Your faithful love, and for the mercy You have shown toward us.
Open our eyes to recognise Your presence in our lives.
Give us grace to hear Your call, and courage to follow without hesitation,
knowing that Your way is the only way that leads to life.
We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us when we pray to say:

Lord's Prayer (next page)

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Our Parent, who is among us, blessed be your Creation.
May your reign be a reality here on earth.
May we become more interested in building your kin-dom here and now
than in waiting for it to come down from above.
Let us share our bread with those who hunger.
Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness.
Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil.
For ours are the eternal blessings that you pour upon the earth. **Amen**

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“if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink”...

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?

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

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

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

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 Carter

Blessing (based on Romans 12:9-21)
Go now and follow Jesus in the way of the cross.
Rejoice in hope, hold fast to what is good, persevere in prayer.
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
As far as is possible, live peaceably with all.

And may God hear your cries and deliver you;
May Christ Jesus repay you with fullness of life;
And may the Holy Spirit be with you always nourishing you in love and hope. Amen

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