

No Sippy Love

Sunday 02 May 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 22

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

**The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.**

May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

**For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.**

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.

**Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.**

Crown him with many crowns

Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark! how the heav'nly anthem drowns
All music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity.

Crown Him the Virgin's Son,
The God Incarnate born,
Whose arm those crimson trophies won
Which now His brow adorn:
Fruit of the mystic Tree,
As of that Tree the Stem;
The Root whence flows Thy mercy free,
The Babe of Bethlehem.

Crown Him the Lord of Love:
Behold His hands and side;
Rich wounds yet visible above
In beauty glorified:
No angel in the sky
Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his burning eye
At mysteries so bright.

Crown Him the Lord of years,
The Potentate of time.
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.

[Reading](#) John 15:1-8

Jesus the True Vine

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

[Prayer of Adoration and Confession](#)

Creating God, imagining God, doing God. We are amazed at the vast array of your creation. When we think of events like thunderstorms and summer showers, heavy rain and drizzle we are reminded that everything is new and fresh every time. Gazing out into the gloom, safely warm and dry inside as the rain batters the windows we see the lightning and feel as much as hear the thunder. The vast, ranging clouds looming over us can seem they are unending,

a heavy, wet blanket that might enfold us forever. And in the midst of it all you place the rainbow, a reminder that it has an end, that reprieve will come and the sun will shine again. Your promises, O God, are true and you are faithful. Thankyou for continuing to see us, to hear us, to be with us.

It is amazing how often we become so caught up in our own experiences and dreams that we forget that you are the author of life, and the source of our hopes and dreams. We begin to think that it is all up to us, leaving you on the side-line, like the cheering parent at a school rugby match. Yet you long to be intimately involved in our lives, not only cheering, but participating in who we are becoming. Help us to see how we fit into everything you have designed for us. Teach us to lean into you rather than away. Remind us that in Jesus we are forgiven, loved and held close, always.

We bring our personal confessions to you now.

May the God of the thunderstorm and the light summer rain be your hope in time of trouble.

Amen

Reflection

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

- Find a word or phrase that resonates. Sit with it, let it roll around in your mind for a while.
- Listen for the word or phrase that God might be speaking to you. Ask, What? Why? Who? When? How?
- Listen again. How do you feel God may be asking you to respond? What will you DO about it?

Notices

The Peace

Ancient of Days

Blessing and Honour

Glory and Power

Be unto the Ancient of Days

From every nation

All of creation

Bow before the Ancient of Days

Every tongue in heaven and earth

Shall declare Your glory

Every knee shall bow at Your throne

In worship

You will be exalted, oh God

And Your kingdom shall not pass away

Oh Ancient of Days

Celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

He is risen, He is risen

And He lives forevermore

He is risen, He is risen

Come on and celebrate

The resurrection of our Lord

Reading 1 John 4:7-21

God Is Love

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his

Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Message No Sappy Love

Ah, romance.

Does anyone here consider themselves romantic? Roses and dinner by candlelight. I knew a guy who rented a hot air balloon to propose to his girlfriend. She said yes, thankfully. I was looking up romantic images for today and ended up looking at book covers. Do you notice anything about them? Aside from the ridiculous titles that is...

We all know the movies have romance down pat. There is a clear formula for what works. Boy meets girl, they fall in love, make plans, something from his past turns up, she takes off, he works through the issue and gets his girl back and they walk off into the sunset, hand in hand.

I do find this advertisement by the ASB quite cute. Many of you have probably seen it, but it bears another watch.

It's all quite, well, romantic.

Unfortunately, our culture has, in many instances, come to equate romance with love. We look in horror at cultures where families organise marriage partners, often sight unseen for either partner. How can such a thing possibly work if there is no love involved? Surely romance has to be involved if there is to be any hope of a future. One look at our divorce rate should be enough to tell us that there is more to the future than a bit of romance. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with a bit of sappiness here and there, but it doesn't, cannot form any kind of foundation for building something lasting. It's a little like trying to build on jelly. Nothing stays in one place and as soon as you put any weight on it everything else collapses.

In the end I guess I'm really preaching to the crowd in a way. A little bit of life experience tells us that sappy, romantic love might get the ball rolling, but it

takes a lot more than that to keep it rolling. It moves into give and take and hard graft, making space for your partner, often to your own immediate disadvantage. You have to invest in the other, take knocks for the other, comfort the other, be strong when they are weak, laugh and cry with them and all while not losing yourself in the process.

The problem is that even though our life experience can tell us that genuine love is hard work, in our heads we are still wired to think that love is a self-indulgent, sentimental, soppy exercise. Anyone who is in love is useless for anything else. Not only that, but men and women often have quite different responses to the word. Women find it a far friendlier concept and readily relate it to children and family while men tend to see it as a necessary evil. I know that I'm making ridiculous generalisations, but it's good for the story. What all this leads to is an unhealthy understanding of what love is all about. We have this single word that encompasses everything from, 'til death do us part, to, 'I love the All Blacks,' to, 'I love that colour on you.' All this leads us to huge confusion over what we mean when we say love.

It is believed that the Inuit have upwards of 50 words for what we call snow. They will never be confused about whether it is wet snow or dry powder or hard snow or melting snow. There is a word for each thing. The ancient Greek language had 7 words for love, that I know of at least.

Eros: romantic, passionate love

Philia: intimate, authentic friendship

Ludus: playful, flirtatious love

Storge: unconditional, familial love

Philautia: self-love

Pragma: committed, companionate love

Agápe: empathetic, universal love

Eros is the word we would most closely associate with the soppy love of the movies and books. Storge is the love of a parent for their children or of a child for their parents. Philia the love for a close friend. I'm not sure where we might fit the idea of loving the All Blacks or that shade of blue on you.

But it is the last, Agape, that I want to focus on now. An authentic, universal love that shares the burdens, laughs and weeps with you, looks for the very best in you. This agape love is not the love of the movies or the romantic novels. It is not a love that plays for a while then walks away. It is a love that remains embedded in everything you do. It doesn't overlook that failings, but searches for ways to grow and develop through those failings. It celebrates

success and commiserates with loss. It is the love that sits by the bed when you are ill. The love that travels the length of the country and across oceans when it is needed. It stays up at night and makes cups of tea and brings cold compresses. It challenges wrongdoing and disciplines where necessary. It provides and supports where it can and looks for solutions when problems come along. It is unswerving and focussed on the best for the other.

This is no soppy love. It requires strength and stamina on the one hand and gentleness and kindness on the other. It doesn't give up when the going gets hard, but presses in and works even harder than before.

When Jesus calls us to abide in the vine it is in the knowledge that without this agape love we will never manage it. Because even if we don't like to admit it, there are people here we don't much like. And if we go further out, into the wider church, there are people we downright dislike. It may be their tone or their theology or their music, whatever. And God calls us to love them. Not soppy love. Agape love. We are called as followers of Jesus to be love to God's family.

There's a song by DC Talk called, 'Luv is a Verb.' The point of the song is that you can't just say, 'I love the poor,' or 'I love the homeless,' then leave it at that. Agape love won't allow us to sit idly by as another person fails.

I want to take a moment to focus on something that I think is a bit of an issue for men, particularly men in New Zealand. We learn from an early age that emotions are not to be displayed. And we equate love with emotion. There's the Eros coming through again. We men are supposed to be staunch, solid, not allowing our emotions, our love to be seen. No wearing our hearts on our sleeves. That's for the flamboyant, often equated with the LGBTQI community. And so we stuff our feelings down and never let them out. Now there is an entire series of counselling sessions on that. We're not going there. Where we do need to go is that men love too. I'm not talking, 'Hey Bro,' stuff here. I'm talking agape love that does all that agape stuff I've been talking about. And if it feels weird and you don't like it. Tough. It's what God expects of us. After all, Jesus did it, and if agape love is good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us too.

Anyway, kind of a sidenote, but I think it needs to be said, probably more than once, but I won't inflict it on you again today.

Back on track. Jesus says in John 15:5, 'Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.' Who can remember the Fruit of the Spirit from Sunday School days? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness

and self-control. Notice that love comes first in the list. And Paul reminds the Corinthians that faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is...love. Can you see the hint of a theme coming through? The first fruit, the greatest fruit in a sense, is love. Not love for a mate, or a wife or a child or a sport or the colour blue. Empathic, universal agape love. Costly love.

You might think I'm banging on about it a bit but you've not heard the best of it yet. Because I want to talk about what it might look like if we saw this agape love in action in the church. I don't know about you, but I can get a little despondent about how numbers are dwindling in churches, ages are rising and young people seem uninterested in the Gospel message. I want to suggest that one of the central elements of the decline in the church can be found in our losing the ability to love with agape love. We have all, to a greater or lesser degree focussed our love on ourselves. At the slightest hint of attack we circle the wagons and fight to keep the attackers out. The attack might come from the music team wanting to introduce new music. It might come from the mission team wanting to invite strange people into our midst. It could be someone wanting to change the seating, or move the cross, or feed the hungry. Whatever it is that threatens our sense of comfort causes us to fight back. And thought of responding in love is quickly overcome by our desire to retain those things that make us feel good.

And that is exactly why I think we have lost our agape love. It is just so hard. It's hard to be constantly giving up what makes me feel good in order to make others feel good. But I want to try a little exercise in imagination. You can close your eyes or not, though it may help.

I want you to imagine visiting a new place. It's a place that is not very comfortable. The smells are strange, everybody else there seems to know each other. People keep doing things that don't make much sense, standing up, sitting down, saying things together out loud. It all seems as though it is in another language. So you leave. And you never go back.

Then you go to another new place. It's still not very comfortable. But someone meets you at the door and asks whether you would like tea or coffee. They find you a place to sit that lets you watch without feeling watched. Then they sit with you and explain what is going on. They ask what kind of music you like and a few minutes later a familiar tune is playing. Someone invites you around to their place for a meal. Someone else pops by during the week and sees that your garden is a bit of a mess and offers to help out any time you would like. People remember your name when you go back the next week. Another

familiar tune is playing. You look around and figure that it's probably not the favourite music for the majority – it must be just for you. Someone remembers that you like tea with milk and brings you a cup as you sit down. They sit down and chat with you. You tell them you're a recent arrival and they offer to take you around and show you the lay of the town. During the week someone drops off a bag of carrots and a dozen eggs.

You think you might go back.

Can you see where I'm going with this? Agape love in action isn't about making me feel good. It's about making the other feel welcome and loved. Not because of who they are, but because they are. And to be honest there are very few churches these days who are good at this. We like our particular friends and the people we know. It's too hard to push off our seat and take time and effort to invest in people we don't know. So we make excuses. And we decline. Little by little the church fades away because it has forgotten how to love.

So to anyone who hasn't tuned me out by now, what can we do to arrest the decline? We get rid of our ill-defined concepts of sappy love and take on the challenge of agape love in its place. No sappy love around here.

Tell me what you think. Is it possible to live like that? Is it possible to be a church that behaves like that? Could we do it?

We Pray

Loving God, I confess that often I confuse sappy love for the love you have for me, for all of us. And I stop loving people as you do because it can seem too hard. Please help me, please help all of us to rediscover what it means to live in agape love. To love unconditionally and to put others first. Not because it makes us feel good, but because in doing so we are behaving like Jesus. We want to live as part of the vine, abiding in Jesus, in love. Grant us the courage and the strength to put aside our own desires and make agape love the measure of our actions in all we do.

In the loving name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Do something beautiful

We are a shining light

City on a hill that can't be hidden

A shining light

And this shining light

Is the life of Jesus in us, Oh what a light

The fire of his Spirit burns
With justice, joy and peace
And works through our hands and feet

Go do something beautiful
In the name of Jesus
Do something beautiful
Go do something Jesus would
Do something beautiful
Do something beautiful

We are the salt of the earth
Here to purify and flavour, salt of the earth
Sent through all the earth
To love God and love our neighbour, salt of the Earth
As freely as we received
So freely we must give
And we are his hands and feet

Let your light so shine
Before the world
That all may see
The good you do
And give their praise
To God our Father

Offering

God of the far-flung universe and God who is closer than our own heartbeat: we long to dwell in your closeness, abiding in you and you abiding in us. However, the call to abide in other places is strong: to abide in the world of popularity and acceptance or in the world of increasing wealth and power centred around our own wants and desires. As we offer our gifts and ourselves to you, help us turn away from other calls and abide in that place of heart's deepest desire: in your Son, Jesus, and he in us. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We bring our prayers for ourselves and others
Around the world temperatures are inexorably rising, ice is melting, weather is changing and people are becoming Climate Refugees. Homes are inundated with water, burnt to the ground by out of control fires or made untenable

because water is too hard to come by. Entire nations find themselves having to plan to leave their homes behind and plant themselves in strange lands. Here in New Zealand we are just beginning to add up the cost of rising sea levels and changing rain patterns as they challenge long held assumptions about who and how we are. We bring our prayers for those vitally affected today and for those who will be deeply affected in the coming years. Help us to consider how we might help to mitigate the damage done by the thoughtless use of carbon emitting processes.

The Covid-19 situation in India is dire and getting worse. As countries around the world begin to send supplies and help to this overwhelmed nation we pray for those with least access to hospitals and experienced medical care. Those in rural areas, far from help. Those in slums who have never seen the inside of a hospital and hold little hope of ever seeing one. God, we pray for those whose only hope is in you. Lord of miracles, work miracles for these people and be their light in the darkness.

There are so many parents in New Zealand unable to provide their children with the basics of life for whatever reason – poverty, lost in alcohol and drugs, violence, fear, mental health. The reasons are many and often interwoven over generations. Forgive us, Lord, for how often we sit in judgement without any idea of what has brought people to the point they now find themselves. We bring our prayers for the poor of our nation.

We bring our prayers, too for the people of St Paul's here in Oamaru. We pray for their young people as they return to school after the holidays and for those of their youth who are studying away from Oamaru in universities and polytechnics. For the work of the Oamaru Pacific Island Community Group, who work out of the St Paul's church building, seeking to help people in the community in areas of education, health and employment. For their Parish Council in their planning and visioning.

And our own, Lord. Those we know, those we love. The sick, be it physical or mental, those facing deep loss, those who are wrestling with change, those who are far away from the ones they love. Those who have no relationship with you. We bring our prayers.

All this we bring in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus who taught us how to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Joy to the world

Joy to the world, the Lord has come

Let earth receive her King

Let every heart prepare Him room

And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing

And heaven, and heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns

Let men their songs employ

While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains

Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love

And wonders, wonders of His love

Benediction and Grace

As we go out from here may we learn to chafe at the bonds of comfort and security, of sappy love, and find our fulfilment in loving as Jesus loves us, fully and without condition. Agape love.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.