

Bull in a China Shop

Sunday 06 June 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

We give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

**The LORD will fulfill his purpose for us;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.**

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Rejoice the Lord is King

Rejoice, the Lord is King,
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks and sing
And triumph evermore:

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.

Jesus, the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love:
When He had purged our stains
He took His seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail;
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n:

Rejoice in Glorious Hope,
Jesus the Judge shall come;
And take his Servants up
To their Eternal Home:

We soon shall hear th' Archangel's Voice,
The Trump of GOD shall sound, Rejoice.

Reading 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

The Gift of Love

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

What is it about us that you take an interest in us God?

Yes, we are your creation, yet that seems little enough reason.

When a potter throws a pot and is unhappy with the outcome, they start again.

When an artist begins a work but is unhappy with where it is going, they begin again.

When a building is past its use by date, it is torn down and replaced.

Yet you persist with us. Broken, misguided creatures, constantly pulling at the reins in an attempt to go our own way, no matter the consequences. We are amazed at your love, astounded by your mercy.

Forgive us for the moments we forget your love and ignore your mercy. Help us to live passionately for you, giving our lives for each other as Jesus gave his life for us.

We bring our private confessions before you.

Merciful God who forgives and forgives and forgives, seventy times seven and more, we receive your forgiveness in the love with which you give it.

Amen

Reflection



If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

- 1 What about this image or text grips your imagination?
- 2 What stories from the Scriptures or from the Church does it bring to mind?
- 3 How might it apply to you personally? What will you do about it?

Notices

The Peace

Take a moment to reflect on one way that God has touched your life this week.

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

Amazing Love

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken

I'm accepted, You were condemned

I am alive and well, Your spirit is within me

Because You died and rose again

Amazing love, how can it be?

That You, my King would die for me?

Amazing love, I know its true

It's my joy to honour You

In all I do, I honour You

You are my King

Reading 1 John 4:7-21

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 Savior 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 Bull in a China Shop

As we come to explore your word this morning, God, we ask that you would let us be fertile soil so the seeds you cast upon us might take root and have life. Amen.

I'm sure you will have heard of the famous, 'Running of the Bulls,' in Pamplona, Spain. I'm not sure, but it seems to me to be an exercise in sheer stupidity, particularly when you see some of what happens on this clip. Why on earth a sane person would do this is quite beyond me, and that's without giving any consideration to how the bulls feel about it all.

Watching this gave me a bit of a feel for the saying, 'Bull in a China Shop.' I had always thought of it as someone charging around deliberately making a mess. But as I watched this clip I realised that is not what it is about at all. When we see the bulls running here there's no sense that they are on a rampage. They are simply going from one place to another, and the fact that there is a constant stream of idiots in the way has very little to do with how they will get

there. If you put a bull in a china shop it doesn't care about the china. It is probably not even aware of anything other than the fact that there is no grass, and there are no cows. So when it moves about, likely attempting to get to one or both of those, most likely both if it can manage it, the mess that it makes has no relevance to its day or its life. It's a bit like me walking through a park and taking no care for the grass I crush on the way – it has no relevance to what I am doing. In other words, the bull in a china shop saying is not about deliberate damage, but lack of awareness. When I'm doing my thing and it really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or doesn't think, I am the perfect bull in a china shop.

I rather think that we are often bulls in the china shop when it comes to life. We blunder about, either unaware or uncaring of what is around us, simply trying to find our way to the nearest grass and free cows. There are some who may think I am being uncharitable or unkind. That is not my intention. It is my observation that as a general rule, and yes, there are always exceptions, human beings are not very aware of their surroundings. I will never forget visiting Aoraki Mt Cook and walking slowly along a path. I paused to look at some flowers along the way, and after a few moments some small birds appeared, coming right up close to me. Every so often a walker would come marching past, aiming to get from one place to another. Each time I would know they were coming before I saw them because the birds would disappear. Then a few moments after the walkers had passed, back they would come. It was a magical place to be as I realised what I would have missed if I had rushed on through as everyone else appeared to be doing. I'm not making myself out to be special – I frequently dash from one place to another, barely pausing to catch my breath, let alone take in my surroundings. I have simply begun to realise just how much I might be missing along the way.

Which leads me into our readings today. I invite you to read with me the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Maybe it's just me, but it rings of bulls in china shops. Let's look at the list of things I could be doing without love.

- ✚ Speaking in tongues of mortals and angels
- ✚ Prophetic powers
- ✚ Understanding mysteries
- ✚ Knowledge
- ✚ Faith to remove mountains
- ✚ Give away all my possessions
- ✚ Hand over my body so I may boast

Now aren't those a wonderful list of things that the church would want to see in action? Even to manage just one or two would be pretty amazing. Imagine a church in which all of these were active and alive. It would be vibrant and alive with a growing and maturing community. People would be meeting Jesus wherever they turned and the excitement would be infectious. It would be like Pentecost all over again. Or at least it would momentarily. Because without love it would very quickly crash and burn. Without love it becomes noisy gongs and clanging cymbals, it becomes nothing, it gains nothing. It is like a bull in the middle of beauty but not understanding that beauty or even caring about it. All the bull cares about is getting what it wants – more grass and a few cows.

Our reading from 1 John jumps right into it like this: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The point he is making is that love is central to any of these things, indeed, any action we take as Christians, having lasting value.

Listen to the sound of this gong. Tell me if you notice anything about it. Honestly, as I was looking for a suitable gong sound I was amazed at the depth of sound a gong could make. From deep rumbles to ethereal, other-worldly sounds they are an amazing instrument. I had never realized quite what they could do. But every one of them, in the end, comes to nothing. Unless you keep banging away at them they eventually run out of sound and you quickly forget what it sounded like until you hit it again. Sure, the sound gets your attention in the beginning. It may even hold your attention for a time. But that sound needs the percussionist, the person who hits the gong, for it to continue. It doesn't have a life of its own.

In the same way, speaking in tongues or prophecy or knowledge or faith do not hold a life of their own. They need something else to sustain them, to keep them going. All of those things will fade away or worse, go sour and rotten

unless they are motivated by love. The church will go sour and rotten unless it is motivated by love. We go sour and rotten unless we are motivated by love. And let me be clear here, I am talking about a particular kind of love. I'm not talking about love for a brother or a partner or a child. I'm not talking about love for a friend or for yourself. I am talking about agape love, authentic, universal love. It is the same kind of love that led to God sending Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Again, 1 Corinthians 13 gives us some insight into what that love is like: it is patient and kind, it rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, it never ends. Not only that, but 1 John tells us that perfect love casts out fear. This is the kind of love that gives life and sustenance to every kind of activity we might engage in, whether it is amazing acts of faith or giving, quietly teaching the children in Sunday School, or preparing food and drink for strangers.

Quick side note. Who remembers the litmus tests that we all used to do at school? You were given a strip of paper that changed colour depending on whether you had an acid or a base. It's from that simple chemical reaction that we get the idea of something being a litmus test – that it shows what it really is. The litmus test for getting your driver's license is the driving test. If you pass the test you get your license because you have proven your competence.

So here is a question. What might be the litmus test for how we live and behave as a church? According to Paul it is clearly not speaking in tongues or prophecy or understanding mysteries or knowledge or faith or giving everything away. The answer is love. And how can we tell if love is in action? How about seeing patience and kindness in action? Rejoicing in the truth. Bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, never running out. Does that mean having a laissez faire, anything goes attitude to everything that goes on? Not at all. It does require approaching everything with genuine, agape love. Love that is patient and kind in the first instance.

So I leave you with this question. How do you fare on the litmus test of love? The truth, if we are honest with ourselves, will likely be, 'I do ok in some areas, need work in others.' Which in the end means we all have some work to do. And in love we look for ways to rejoice in that truth and patiently and kindly bear with each other while we work on the bits that could be better. Let's pause for a few moments to think about what that might look like this week and beyond.

We Pray

God of love, who beckons to us all, who invites us into a relationship that is founded in Agape love we still ourselves in your presence. We know that we are created in your image, yet we so easily live without the love you share with us so abundantly. Help us to learn how to be people of Agape love, motivated and encouraged to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things and never run out, to be patient and kind and rejoice in the truth. Help us to be aware when we become overbearing, unkind or impatient and enable us in those moments to turn to you and seek out your love. Teach us to become the people who are known by their love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Just Let Me Say

Just let me say how much I love You
Let me speak of Your mercy and grace
Just let me live in the shadow of Your beauty
Let me see You face to face
And the earth will shake as Your Word goes forth
And the heavens can tremble and fall
But let me say how much I love You
O my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Just let me hear Your finest whispers
As You gently call my name
And let me see Your power and Your glory
Let me feel Your Spirit's flame
Let me find You in the desert
'Til this sand is holy ground
And I am found completely surrendered
To You, my Lord and friend

So let me say how much I love You
With all my heart I long for You
For I am caught in this passion of knowing
This endless love I've found in you
And the depth of grace and forgiveness found
To be called a child of God
Just makes me say how much I love You
Oh my Saviour, my Lord and friend

Offering

Holy and forgiving God, it is easy for our lives to become singularly focused on our families, yet you call us to a broader understanding of family. We prioritize our money around the needs of our families and especially our children, and you challenge us to a global view of family and to look at all children with the love we look on those who live under our roof. As we give to you, open our eyes to see the wider family; our ears to hear the cries of hurting, hungry children; our hearts to experience the extravagantly generous love you pour down on us. We pray in the name of your son, our brother, Jesus. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Some words from: <http://worldinprayer.org/>

We pray for the new government of Samoa as supporters of the old regime lock the Parliament building, in the face of the Prime minister elect, Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, when she arrived with Judges.

*How long will you
keep judging unfairly
and favouring evil people? (Ps. 82:2)*

We pray for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo near the particularly dangerous Nyiragongo volcano where much of its early warning system has been lost due to withdrawal of funding following complaints of corruption.

*How long will the wicked
celebrate and be glad? (Ps. 94:3)*

Lord, as we bring these countries before you each one sparks the thought of another country, another lack of justice and mercy – how long, O Lord, how long?

*You are merciful, Lord!
You are kind and patient
and always loving.
You are good to everyone,
and you take care
of all your creation. (Ps. 145:8-9)*

We pray for the many New Zealanders affected by the community outbreak of the pandemic in Victoria. We pray too for the people who bear the burden of keeping us safe from the pandemic, from the border staff, to the workers in the MIQ, to the planning and strategy people and those who present the public face of the work, like Dr Bloomfield and Chris Hipkins.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me. (Ps. 23:4)*

We pray for ourselves and our loved ones, bringing those near and far with their hopes and dreams, needs and wants into your presence.

*Blessed be the LORD,
for he has heard the sound of my pleadings.
The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts;
so I am helped, and my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him. (Ps.28:6-7)*

All these things we bring in the wonderful name of 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

O Perfect love, all human thought transcending

O perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne,
that theirs may be the love which knows no ending,
whom thou in sacred vow dost join in one.

O perfect Life, be thou their full assurance
of tender charity and steadfast faith,
of patient hope and quiet, brave endurance,
with childlike trust that fears no pain or death.

Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow;
grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife;
grant them the vision of the glorious morrow
that will reveal eternal love and life.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here into the week may we look for ways to rejoice in the truth and patiently and kindly bear with each other while we work on the bits that could be better. May we be your community of 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.