

No Bull

Sunday 13 June 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 20

The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!

The name of the God of Jacob protect you!

**May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.**

May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfil all your plans.

**May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.**

Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,

but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God.

Blessed Assurance

Fanny Crosby

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect communion, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.

Angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest.

I in my Saviour am happy and bless'd,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

Reading Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Julie Gvillo - <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/05/29/sunday-prayer-to-live-life-anew/>

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, we are mystified by your existence,
by the way you work in us and through us and around us,
and by the ways in which you respond to our cries for mercy.

We look, O God,
but far too often, we do not see you.
Our hearts are wrenched by terminal illnesses
and terrible injuries
and tragedies we cannot fathom,
the moments of our ordinary days shattered
by life-altering diagnoses and unforeseen incidents.

Show yourself to us, we pray.
Make your presence so tangible
we can reach out and touch you.
Your people need to know that you are with us
in the depths of our grief,
in the day to day struggles to function.

Heal our hearts, we pray,
and reconcile our spirits with yours
and with one another
that we may live each day to the fullest,
rejoicing in your love.

Creator God,
we celebrate your revelation to us
in all of your majestic order.
We give thanks for all that is

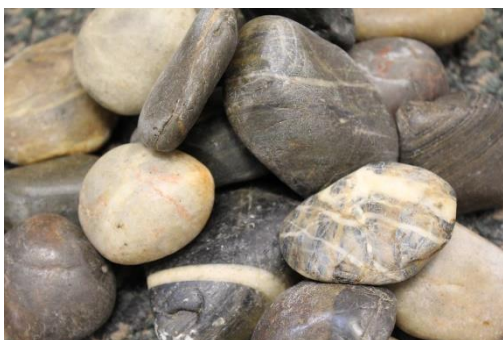
and for the way it displays your vast imagination
for it gives us hope that there is space for creative reimagination
to find measures that will heal all that is.

Christ, our Redeemer,
we give thanks for that through you,
every moment of our lives can be redeemed,
every sin forgiven,
every weapon turned to plow share,
every desperate cry turned to hope.

Holy Spirit,
ignite in us a passion
to live life anew
in the mystery that is the Triune God
that the lives we live in your name may be a legacy
for those who come after.

Reflection

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. *Romans 8:2 (The Message)*



Take the stone that was on your seat or in the pocket of the seat in front of you. Run your fingers over it. Feel its shape, where it is smooth, or rough, how it fits in your hand. Look at it closely. What colours does it have? What might be unique about that particular stone.

Holding the stone in your hand, how well adjusted are you to your culture. Are you a perfect fit?

How do you think God might want you to stand out from the ordinary?

What will it look like as God brings out the best in you?

How does it feel to have God creating a well-formed maturity in you?

Notices

The Peace

Pause a moment to appreciate the person in front of you before going on to the next person.

Lord, I lift your name on high

Lord I lift your name on high
Lord I love to sing your praises
I'm so glad you're in my life
I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay
From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord I lift your name on high

Way Maker

You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, working in this place
I worship You, I worship You

You are
Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper
Light in the darkness, my God
That is who You are

You are here, touching every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, healing every heart
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, turning lives around
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, mending every heart
I worship You, I worship You

That is who You are

Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working

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 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 Bull

Living God, who sees our hearts and knows our thoughts before we have thought them, meet us here today as we delve into your word. Touch our hearts, transform our thoughts so that we might be Jesus more fully to a fallen and broken world.

Last week we talked about the Bull in the China Shop. It was a not-so-subtle dig at how we can get excited over all sorts of 'Christian' activities that, unless they are motivated by love, are at best pointless and at their worst incredibly damaging. This week I want to start to unpack some of the practical aspects of living with Agape love. It is really more of an overview at this point – it seems to me that more attention we give to the topic, the more there is to discover.

I've called the message, 'No Bull,' in the hope that as we go we might begin to see some of the ways God teaches us to become more aware of how to live out Agape. Perhaps we will become a little less like the Bull in the China Shop. Our focus is going to be on our reading from Romans, guided from **1 John 4:21**, 'The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.'

I'm going to keep saying this over the coming weeks and perhaps months. Loving our brothers and sisters is not about smiling and being nice once a week at church. It's not about simply spending time with our friends talking about our week. It is about living with each other, experiencing each other's ups and downs. Those of our friends, and those of our brothers and sisters who may not be friends, who may never be friends.

While I was ministering in Brockville I had a 75 year old lady come to me and say, 'I've lived my whole life in Brockville and I have never got to know anyone except my friends. Then you began inviting others in and to begin with I didn't like it. They didn't fit in, they didn't know how to behave. But they have opened up a whole other part of life to me. And I love it. I love them.' My prayer as we take on the meaning of Agape love is that together we might discover some of what that lady found for herself.

And with that as an introduction lets start digging. I am going to read Romans 12:1-8 again and I invite you to listen carefully. You might like to close your eyes as you listen. Ask God to help you hear beyond the words to God's heart.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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There are five ideas in this reading I want to highlight today. Each of them feeds directly into our understanding of Agape love. See if you can get to my point before I do.

Here's the first idea

Present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Paul is nothing if not direct here. Think for a moment about what it means to sacrifice something. I'm not talking about sacrificing avocado on toast so you can buy a house on the savings. That's not a sacrifice, that's just setting priorities. A real sacrifice is giving something up completely. It is no longer yours. A sacrifice to those living in the New Testament days came at a real cost and was often burnt. It could have been an animal or a bird, or it may have been something like grain or other produce. When you brought a sacrifice the priest took it out of your hands and that was the last you ever saw of it. So when Paul talks about our bodies being a living sacrifice it is no throw-away line. We are giving ourselves away, with no returns. Of course, as living sacrifices there is a catch. We remain in control of our bodies and can renege on the deal any time we like, something we tend to do rather more often than most of us care to admit. Applied to Agape love I want to suggest one consequence (there are plenty so let's focus on one). The consequence is that as a living sacrifice I don't get to choose who I love. I won't expand on that, just let it sit with you.

Our second idea

Be transformed by the renewing of your minds. We all know what we like, right? Favourite colour, best ice-cream, favourite rugby team, the list is endless. And it includes people. I like that person, and I want nothing to do with that person. I don't like the way they act, I don't like what they say, I don't like...put your own 'don't likes' here. Renewing our minds is about thinking differently about life in general. One aspect of that is learning to not let what or who I like control who or how I love. Who or how I love is not longer a function of my likes and dislikes. Instead, I look to Jesus, as the author and perfecter of my faith to see who I should love, and in loving, how I should love. It is no small thing to think this way and doesn't come easily or smoothly, even with plenty of practice.

Our third idea

Discerning the will of God. Wow! This one is a can of worms. There will be those who tell us that the will of God is clearly written in Scripture. I have this strange feeling that if things were that straightforward Paul would not have felt the need to say it. I will confess here that I can struggle with some of Paul's writing as I think it is often translated directly into our context without thought for the ways we have changed in our thinking over the centuries since.

Take slavery as a good example. If we were to take Paul's writing as directly applying we would find ourselves condoning slavery. That's just not how we think today. But here I think Paul addresses different contexts. He's not saying here, do everything I say because that's just the way it is. He is saying, use your discernment. Look at your context and ask the question, what do we think God would have us do in this situation. Take everything we know about God and apply it to what we are experiencing right now. Who and how should I love in this moment, in this place? Be aware that the answer, if we are being genuine in our discernment may not always be what we want or like.

Our fourth idea

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought. It's a biggie this one. In New Zealand we often throw it off and say it's an Aussie problem or an American issue. We're the people of number 8 wire and Toyota utes. If anything we think less of ourselves than we should. Or do we? It can seem weird, but Kiwi's can take pride in being humbler than anyone else. And when someone lifts their head above the crowd we are very quick to cut them down. Who does he think he is, spouting off like that? We often see it in people who are clearly gifted and talented saying, 'Who me? I couldn't possibly do that.' I confess that I am that way with my guitar. I look at all the people who are better than I am and fail to recognise the talent I do have.

I would like to suggest that we don't leave it with thinking more highly, but also thinking less highly than we ought. Rather we need to be honest and genuine with ourselves and with others. In a sense this is Agape love applied inwardly. Directed at how I love me.

Our fifth and last idea

We are members one of another. This last idea is both powerful and a little frightening. It carries a range of implications for how we are as Christians and how we work out love as a Christian community. First, if I am a member of you, I don't get to make all the decisions about what we do and how we do it. That's a challenge of submitting to each other. Second, if I am a member of you, I am responsible to care for you because if you are not healthy, neither am I. Third, if I am a member of you, what I do has a direct effect on you and if it causes you harm it also causes me harm.

(Take a moment to look around you at the people sitting nearby.)

What does that mean for how you relate to the people you dwell amongst? We could say that we are accountable to each other, but I think it goes much further than that. Accountable implies some kind of transaction going on. This is so much deeper than a simple transaction. It is a way of being that intertwines with the other, shaping and being shaped by our interactions. It is

being aware of both myself, and the other, in such a way that everything I say and what I do becomes an act of love – seeking the best for all of us. No easy task and one that I will fail on a regular basis. But as Thomas Edison pointed out, failure is not a reason to stop, it is merely information that enables us to do better next time.

Love is not about a transaction between parties, it is about presenting ourselves as living sacrifices. It is about allowing our minds to be renewed and seeking to apply what we know of God to who and how we love. It is about being honest and genuine with ourselves in order that we can be honest and genuine with each other. Agape love in action. We could even think of it as becoming more aware of God's love and more aware of how we can live that love. No Bull!

We Pray

God who lives out love as one God and three persons we can look at your love and what it requires of us and think that it is just too hard, too much. Grant us the courage to pause before you and experience your love so that we can share that love with those around us. Teach us to live as sacrifices to you,

Open the eyes of my heart

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord

Open the eyes of my heart

I want to see You

I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up

Shining in the light of Your glory

Pour out Your power and love

As we sing holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy

We cry holy, holy, holy

You are holy, holy, holy

I want to see you

Offering

Lord of all bounty and blessing, the gifts we offer to you are like seeds. Some will take root nearby, and we will see them grow and bear fruit. Some will be carried far beyond where we can see, and we have faith that they will find good soil and thrive. We thank you for the privilege of being called to sow.

Bless with the joy of good fruit the seed we will see and the seed we will never see. We pray this in the loving name of Jesus, gardener and Saviour. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Based on <http://worldinprayer.org/> June 3, 2021

Just God, we look for you in our governments, and long for signs of hope:

- We pray for Mali, Africa after the second military coup in a year last week, which may jeopardize a democratic election set for February. The African Union has now suspended Mali's membership and threatened sanctions.
- We pray for the discussions about the Iran Nuclear Deal happening this week in Vienna, Austria and for all parties involved as they look for a future where Iran and the United States might return to the 2015 deal.

God of all people, we know you created each of us in your own image, fearfully and wonderfully made, and long for signs of hope:

- We pray for the survivors of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, Canada who believed their friends and classmates must have run away, not knowing they were killed and buried until the remains of 215 children who were students there were found.
- We consider the complexities around coming out and cultural expectations for people from diverse ethnic origins, and pray for young people who fear experiencing harassment and rejection from their communities for being honest and open about their sexuality.

O Holy One, help us to break down the walls we have built around ourselves, that we might invite your Spirit in to work through us, extending your care, love, and hope to the whole world.

As we continue to bring our prayers for the churches of Oamaru, today we pray for Reach Church.

- Continued unity amongst our churches here in Oamaru.
- Pray against sickness especially illness related to the bowels and stomach. That seems to be a widespread/common theme appearing in churches across our town.
- Pray against activity against the church. In the last few months, our property has been damaged – building/fences and signs. We ask for protection for their site and churches in town.
- Pray for more leaders and volunteers to assist in the various ministries at REACH Church.

- Pray for more families, youth and young adults to come.

Living God, as we hope and grieve, work and pray we bring our loved ones to you, asking that you hold them close.

We bring all our prayers through Jesus who intercedes for us and the Holy Spirit who expresses the deep groans we have no words to express. Amen.

Communion

Great prayer of thanksgiving

The LORD is our shepherd

In a world that grasps after everything

We lack nothing

Our strength, our hope, our lives

Come from You, O God

You alone are worthy of our praise

You set our feet in good places

The richness of Your presence

Makes every hillside green

The rushing streams and still pools

Gift us rest amidst the rush of life

You alone are worthy of our thanks

You travel with us in our darkest fears

When life becomes too hard

When our burdens become too heavy

Your presence in our darkness

Brings comfort and peace

You alone are worthy of our praise

You are behind us and before us

In sin and hopelessness, fear and guilt

You abide with us, we with you

The cross of death a symbol of the life you give

The empty tomb a silent beacon of hope

You alone are worthy of our worship

And so we praise you together with all your people

And in the company of the heavenly host

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory
Hosanna in the highest
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna in the highest**

And now we live and proclaim the life, the death and resurrection
The ascension and glorified greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ

**Christ has died
Christ has risen
Christ will come again**

Ever loving God, pour out your Spirit upon us
That as we share in these gifts of the bread and the cup
We might meet Christ anew
Becoming his hands and his feet in this broken world in which we live
By your Holy Spirit draw us together, one in love and unity
That as we live out Jesus in us
Your Holy Name might be praised and glorified forever.

Amen

[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

God of love, send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts, that as we receive this
bread and wine we shall by faith receive the body and blood of Christ.

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to
God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body,
given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. **John 6:35**

This is the Lord's Table. Our Saviour invites all those who trust him to share the feast he has prepared. You may wish to take communion with us, you may choose not to this morning. Know that whatever your choice you are loved beyond measure and we are one in the bond of love

Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour
to his people in distress.
Praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Alleluia, alleluia! Glorious in his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia! Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!

Benediction and Grace

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.