

# Chicken or the Egg

Sunday 20 June 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 24*

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it;

**For he has founded it on the seas,  
and established it on the rivers.**

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

**Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,  
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,  
and do not swear deceitfully.**

Who is the King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.

**Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.**

## And can it be

*Charles Wesley*

And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

**Reading** 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.

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

<sup>8</sup>Love never ends.

**Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

Surprising God, what an amazing world we live in. Such diversity and difference, languages, cultures, religions, politics, economies. Even in little Oamaru there are people from all around the world – from the Tangatawhenua of Aotearoa to newly minted Kiwis, from Africa and Asia, to the Americas and Europe. We have so much to learn from each other, so many ways we can support each other and encourage each other.

Forgive us for the times we turn inward and push the world away. For the times we deride and make fun of those who are different to us. We struggle with difference, Lord. It can seem so hard to love those who don't fit into our particular way of thinking and being. Help us to learn to love people, no matter how different they are from us and their ways from our own. Teach us to see the spark you have placed in every life and to discover the unique ways it can be fanned into flame through your Spirit.

We bring our own confessions before you (Pause)

Amazing God, who created all the diversity of our world, as we pull apart you draw us near, forgiving our sin through your Son, Jesus and healing our brokenness.

Thank you for your love toward us. 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. 1 John 4:10

- Stay with these words, repeat them to yourself. Say them together. Split them up. Listen to how they sound.
- How do you feel about what these words say? What emotions do they stir?
- What do you think God might be saying to you personally through these words?

## Notices

I am considering running an afternoon or evening that would be like an extended reflection time. I would be interested to know if anyone would be interested in something like that. It would be an active reflection with things to do as a way of helping people to reflect in different ways.

## The Peace

As you share the peace, very briefly share one thing about your week. It might be, I saw a good programme on TV, or I spent time in the garden, or I went to a funeral, or I talked to my grandchildren. No details, just simplicity.

## 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

## 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

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

## Message      Chicken or the Egg

We come to you, God, to hear what you have to say to us today. May the living Word of Jesus be active in our hearts and lives and the testimony of the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts so we can hear clearly and in hearing act decisively to your glory. Amen.

Take a moment to think of your best friend. How did you meet? Who made the first move to connect? Did you even like them to begin with?

I met my oldest friend at an Easter Camp. Actually, it was before the camp because we had both been asked to help lead the camp. Neither of us had ever attended an Easter Camp but it was a new camp for young adults rather than teenagers and so the Easter Camp committee decided to set up a new team. Dean and I had dislike at first sight. Our approach to leading was chalk and cheese and to be honest I'm not sure why either of us kept at it. But over the couple of months we had to prepare and then the camp itself we began to see past the dislike and realise that actually not only did we work together quite well, but we also quite enjoyed each other's company. It was only a couple of years later that he was best man at my wedding and then 18 months after that I was best man at his. Thirty years later and we can still strike up a conversation as if we had just left it yesterday. Can you remember which word for love covers that kind of relationship? Philia.

That relationship wouldn't have happened at all if someone neither of us knew hadn't contacted us separately and asked us to be part of the team.

Friendships can be like that. Or they can happen very quickly – love at first sight as it were. Clip. And we would term that kind of love Eros.

Then there are the relationships where one person connects quickly and the other takes a little longer. Clip

And of course, the memories of what happened at the time will be remarkably different depending on who you ask.

Now those relationships I have been talking about are, of course, between adults or at least people who have some idea of what is going on. The love we have for children, whether our own, or others is quite different.

Particularly when they are very small children, while they may respond instinctively, have no concept of what we might mean by the term, love. Well, any term at all really. And yet we love them. You could say that we love them first. They don't understand what we are doing for them, or the love we try to

show them. They just lie back and soak it in, a little bit like sunshine I suppose. And when the sunshine goes behind the clouds for a bit and they get hungry or fill their nappy they are sure to let us know.

And it is the sheer helplessness of the small child that lets us say that it was definitely the chicken, in this case the parent, that came first. Without the care and protection of the parent the child would not be able to survive. It could seem strange that God would design us in such a fashion. Why create something that is so dependent on its parent for such a long period of time? Chickens can survive on their own from the moment they hatch out of the shell. Most mammals take a little longer, but their period of dependence is remarkably short when compared with our own. It is one of the few questions I have around undirected evolution. I just can't see how the evolutionary process would lead to such a long period of helplessness.

Which makes me think there must be a reason God has us this way. In asking that basic question of, 'Why, God?' we begin to delve into the world of the ancient Hebrews. The 'What?' and the 'How?' questions are for the scientists. They are not irrelevant. But it is the 'Why?' that exercises our faith, that begs us to turn to God for answers to what are surely the most fundamental of questions. Physics and Chemistry and Biology pretend to answer the 'Why?' They will tell us that particle A has interacted with particle B to create particle C. And that is why we have C. But that doesn't explain why we feel the need to ask the question in the first place. It cannot explain why I might look at a person and, 'fall in love.' It can't even explain what love is. And rather than attempt to answer the most fundamental of questions science, for the most part, simply avoids them.

So that most basic question, 'Why?' is left to the philosophers and theologians. Funnily enough it was the philosophers and theologians who developed the sciences before the scientists decided they knew more than their creators.

Back to, 'Why, God?' Why did you create us to be so dependent on another for such a significant part of our lives?

I think that a part of the answer to that question lies in understanding 1 John 4:10: In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us...

Fresh into the world we have no concept of anything beyond hunger, pooping and sleeping. Not parents, not shelter, not hygiene or self-care. Yet we are loved by our parents. Nor do we have any concept of God. Yet we are loved by

God. Not only that, but God also knew us and loved us before we were even born. Psalm 139:13 reminds us, 'For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.'

It has me wondering if perhaps this is one reason why we are dependent on our parents – it is so we can begin to understand how God loves us. That the love of the parent is an image of the love that God as parent has for us. It is a blurry and dented image to be sure – I don't think I have ever met a parent who claimed to be perfect. We bring our brokenness into our parenting in all sorts of ways, and sadly our children often reflect that brokenness in all sorts of ways. Yet marred and damaged as we are we still represent something of the way God is for us – both the fatherhood of God, and the motherhood of God. From the tender care of a mother hen for her chicks to the fierce defence of the father for the threatened child. As Paul wrote to the Romans, if God is for us, who can be against us?

1 John 4:19 puts it in a nutshell: We love because God first loved us. Even our ability to love comes because God loves us before we are aware of us let alone aware of God. The chicken of God's love most definitely comes before the egg of our awareness of that love, let alone any halting return of love.

I do want to emphasise something here. God's love does not require our love in return. God is self-sufficient in that department. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit demonstrate a loving community that has no need or requirement for outside input. So in loving us God steps out of that self-sufficiency and becomes vulnerable to the whims of an unpredictable and often hostile human race. God doesn't need us, yet God loves us even as we trample all over that love.

All of which is interesting. But what do we do with it? John tells us, 'since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.' Of course it has to get complicated, right!? Why couldn't we just leave it at God loves us, we love God, game over? It would be so much easier, so much cleaner. I wouldn't have to go around loving people I don't like, loving them in their messiness and self-interest. But wait, wouldn't that mean that people don't have to love me in my messiness and self-interest? And John saw that coming too. 'for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. Somehow God has us stuck in this state that will not let us claim to love God without loving those around us. I guess it comes back to that idea that faith without works is dead. There needs to be evidence of our love, or it

is merely words, much like the Pharisees claiming to serve God while denying help to those who need it.

If I cannot claim to love God unless I love my brothers and sisters then I clearly have some work to do to maintain that I love God. I want you to pause for a moment and think of a brother or sister in the church family that you don't much like. Be honest, there will be someone, maybe even several. Don't tell anyone else, this is between you and God. Now holding that person in mind, ask God what you need to do to love them. I place an emphasis on, what you need to do, because this is not a mental exercise, this is a practical exploring of what and how we behave. It may be something about how you speak to them or how you speak about them. It may be something that you do. What is God saying to you about loving that person? If it is a little uncomfortable, that is probably a good thing. Embrace the uncomfortable and make some choices about how you will be for that person. I'm going to leave a little time for you to sit with that. Think about it. Pray about. Begin to prepare yourself to love.

Think of this as a small practice exercise. It is a practice, because if people are already here they are likely to be a little easier than the people God will bring to us next. It is those people who come because they will see that our love is different to what the rest of the world wants us to believe is love. And they will want a piece of it. They will bring all their rough edges and uncouth ways among us and our love will be tested. So practicing love for each other is a gentle introduction to how we are called to live generally.

When Jesus left the disciples on the mountain, he told them to go and make disciples of all nations. In John 13 he told them that people would know they were Jesus' disciples by their love. There is a clear link between people having a relationship with Jesus, and love. In a way we could say that it is the chicken before the egg, because in loving others we open a path for them to love too – God, themselves, maybe even us. It is up to us to make that link a living testimony through our love for each other and from that, for God. The question we are left with is, 'What will you do about it?'



## We Pray

Gracious God, as we begin to get to the nuts and bolts of love we confess that it is difficult. It is hard to love our brothers and sisters. Yes, there are some who are easy. But equally there are some who are just hard work. Teach us, we pray, to be Jesus' disciples in action as well as in word. Give us courage where we are afraid and help us to support each other to serve you and those who call you Lord, in love. 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

God of the heavens, the land and the water that covers it, we know what it is like to be tossed about in a storm. We know that the love we profess when people are friendly and easy to get on with is challenged and shaky when they are gritty and unpolished. As we offer our gifts to you this day, they are given with the hope that we will be better able to let go of what the world tells us will guarantee our security and find our hope and assurance in your redeeming love. We dedicate these gifts in the knowledge that the love you have for us is worked out in the love we have for others. We pray this prayer in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

## Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We pray for the 36 people injured during two car bomb explosions in Columbia at a military base near the country's border with Venezuela. Make your presence known in all the places where life is precarious—yet still so precious. May all suffering and surviving in the midst of violence and terror feel the comforting embrace of the Holy Spirit.

We pray for the people of North Korea as the government warns of a “tense” food situation that arises from extensive flooding, pandemic, and international sanctions. We pray for all who know the pain and exhaustion of what it means to go without food and sustenance. Your creation is so rich in resources, yet such inequities remain when it comes to access to nutritious food, adequate healthcare, education, and safe homes. We repent for the ways we have participated in perpetuating these systems of oppression. Let not our spirits be overwhelmed and our compassion fatigued by the injustices we witness. Help us to hold our leaders and ourselves accountable to care for all who are forgotten and marginalized.

We pray as tensions rise after the first armed exchange between Hamas and Israel since an 11-day air war in May. We pray for all who worry about the safety of their children and loved ones. God, bring your peace that surpasses our understanding and an end of suffering to all your children. Let us hold onto hope. May we always open our hearts and minds to the possibility of transformation, for you are a God that turns swords into ploughshares.

We continue to pray as world leaders emerge from the G7 NATO Summit. May these conversations lay the foundations for relationships and policies that will bring about lasting peace and serve for the betterment of all humanity, not just

the national or political interests of a select, powerful few. Help to build bridges over chasms that are too wide for us to traverse on our own.

Salvation Army

We pray wisdom and grace for both the community and their congregation as they continue to journey through the closing of our north end family store.

We pray too that as a church they might see people's hearts and minds softened and opened to hearing the message of the gospel.

We pray for ourselves and for the challenges we face as a congregation that is aging and tiring. We have been blessed by abundance over the years. Help us to discover how we can use that abundance to your glory. We are conscious that our finances are diminishing and ask that you would open the storehouses of heaven to provide us with what is needed to grow your kingdom in this part of our world.

We bring our loved ones before you. We are so conscious of our frailty as we see illness and disease at work in those we know and love. We pray for your mercy in the lives of our families and friends.

All these things 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

## What a friend we have in Jesus

*Joseph Medlicott Scriven*

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms he'll take and shield you;  
you will find a solace there.

## 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.