

# Let's Get Practical

Sunday 27 June 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 48*

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised  
in the city of our God.

**As we have heard, so have we seen  
in the city of the LORD of hosts,  
in the city of our God,  
which God establishes forever. *Selah***

We ponder your steadfast love, O God,  
in the midst of your temple.

**Your name, O God, like your praise,  
reaches to the ends of the earth.**

Walk about Zion, go all around it,  
count its towers,  
go through its citadels,  
that you may tell the next generation  
that this is God,

**our God forever and ever.  
He will be our guide forever.**

## The Church's One Foundation

*S J Stone*

The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, our Lord;  
we are a new creation  
by water and the Word.  
From heav'n he came and taught us  
what perfect love can be;  
through life and death he sought us,  
and rose to set us free.

The church in ev'ry nation  
is one through all the earth;  
our charter of salvation,  
one God, one faith, one birth;  
one name together blessing,  
one holy food we share,

to one hope ever pressing,  
at one in work and prayer.

Yet we on earth have union  
with God, the Three in One,  
and mystic, sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won.

Oh, happy ones and holy!  
God, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
may live eternally.

**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**

*by Bethne Dodd*

God

whose love is constant  
whose faithfulness endures  
whose mercy never ends  
we worship you.

Jesus

whose heart calls us  
whose grace enfolds us  
whose compassion stirs us  
we honour you.

Holy Spirit

whose presence comforts us

whose touch renews us  
whose breath inspires us  
we praise you.

We stand in awe that you embrace us in relationship – warts and all – with the kind of universal love which is relentlessly committed to our wellbeing. We're so grateful that you remain willing to undertake the ultimate risk of love... that of being rejected.

And so,

For the times we have rejected God's love,  
ignored Jesus' calling,  
or neglected to discern the Spirit's leading...  
forgive us.

For the times we have  
failed to stand up, stand out or speak up...  
forgive us.

For the times we have settled for how it is rather than how it can be,  
or given up too soon on others, as well as ourselves...  
forgive us.

We pause to place into your trusting hands whatever you now place upon our hearts...

Thankyou God for reminding us that when we confess our failings, misunderstandings and mistakes, you remain faithful to forgive us, through the one who gave his life, his death, his all, for us... our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

## Reflection

### Notices

I am considering running a one off 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

## Shout to the Lord

*Darlene Zschech*

My Jesus, my Saviour,  
Lord, there is none like You;  
All of my days, I want to praise  
The wonders of Your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter,  
Tower of refuge and strength;  
Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing  
Power and majesty, praise to the King  
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar  
At the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands,  
Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand,  
Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.

## Way Maker

*Sinach*

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

<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** Let's get practical

God who is at work in each of us, would you prepare us to live for you. As we consider your Word today may we have soft hearts and willing minds to receive what you have for each of us. Amen.

How many of you have ever played a sport or an instrument or learnt a new craft? I'm picking pretty much everyone. One of the few things that ties nearly everything we do together is that in order to get better at something we need to practice. I played volleyball for a number of years in Dunedin. For the most part we turned up on Monday night, played for a couple of hours and then headed home again. But every two years the Masters games came along. And our team would get serious and we would practice, sometimes twice a week for several weeks beforehand. And surprise! We got better. We got better as individuals and we got better as a team. All because we were putting in the effort to practice and develop skills that you simply don't work on when you are just playing a game together.

It works for sport. It definitely works for music. It works for card games and puzzle solving. It works for cooking and gardening. Whenever we want to get better at something we practice. And the more we practice, the better we get. Turn to your neighbour and give an example of how you got better at something through practice.

This practice thing even works in church. The first time you attend a church everything they do is foreign. The standing up and sitting down, the words people sometimes say together, the singing. It's all a bit weird and unsettling. If you manage to get past the first week and come back it's not quite so unsettling. You know that people are going to stand and sit at different times. You've not quite figured out when, but it's not such a surprise when they do. And then, maybe at week three you're on to it, in fact you're so on to it that you stand a bit earlier than everyone else – whoops! That was embarrassing. Maybe the music isn't quite so strange now. You still have no idea what half the words mean and some of them are just gross, like this one...

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.

But with time, a little research, you begin to get what is going on. The practice begins to pay off. You might even begin to get quite good at it. Practice is helping you to turn the conscious incompetence into unconscious competence.

I think that love is kind of similar. For many of us, the first time we discover love for someone else we have little or no idea what to do with it. How do we process these weird feelings that have so suddenly beset us? Why do we feel

this way and what to do about it? Of course, I'm talking about Eros love here, those feelings for another person that can lead to so much more.

And it strikes me that Agape love requires practice too. I think in part because Agape love generally doesn't strike us unaware. It doesn't sneak up on us and go, 'Surprise.' It doesn't suddenly pop up unannounced and demand to be taken care of. No, Agape love is a deliberate, purposeful love, considered, and intentional. It requires us to think and act in a way that is never accidental. It's not like me serving a volleyball and being pleasantly surprised when I actually manage a good serve. All of which suggests to me that if we are going to become expert in Agape love we need to get in some practice.

Which of course begs the question, 'How do you practice Agape love?' 'What are the things we can do to improve our skills?' I have to confess that I am no expert on the practice of Agape love. But I do like to think I have done a fair bit of practicing over the years – not so much on the love thing – I think I'm pretty naff at that – but on all sorts of other activities. And I'm pretty sure the principles will carry over, for the most part at least.

These principles are not original. I have read things that are similar and they seem to give a good beginning point for us to work from. So here we go...

#### Principles for practicing Agape Love

Principle 1: Have high expectations that encourage engagement and self-awareness

Principle 2: Support each other to work together and involve everyone

Principle 3: Learn to construct and apply new knowledge

Principle 4: Assess our progress and learn from feedback

Principle 5: Taking it into the real world matters

Principle 6: It works best when we do it together

We likely all know that saying, if you aim at nothing you're sure to hit it. I have been encouraged to hear so many people have been connecting with this subject of Agape love. I also know that moving from saying, 'I like that idea,' to actually doing something about it can be a big leap. So from here on in I'm kind of heart in mouth because if you're not with me on this it's really a little pointless.

I want to ground all this in 1 John 4:21 '...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.' We are not practicing love for some good idea or gee whiz concept. We are practicing because it is absolutely central to who we

claim to be as Christians. Those who love God MUST love their brothers and sisters also. This is not a love God, would you like salt with that? It is far more fundamental to our self-identity. Without love for our brothers and sisters we cannot claim to love God. And without love for God I would hesitate to claim to be Christian. So loving our brothers and sisters is a baseline. It is where we begin. With that in mind, let's look at Principle 1.

*Have high expectations that encourage engagement and self-awareness*

So there are three parts to this principle.

The first is high expectations, the second is encouraging engagement and the third is self-awareness. We need to begin by asking what we mean when we say high expectations in regard to loving our brothers and sisters. What do we expect? What would be a high expectation? What would be a low expectation?

Because this is about putting love into practice I want to suggest that a low expectation would be that we exhibit signs of Agape love around our close friends and family. It's a good place to start, right? But it is at the low end of what we would be hoping to see. Think about the people you know and like. You get on with them well and enjoy their company. Even there, sometimes, Agape love can be a bit stretched when they say or do something that gets on your nerves. For the most part though, you can manage it without too much effort and minimal outside help.

I'm not going to work through different levels here. I'm sure you can work them out for yourself. Let's go right to the high expectations. That would be where you actively look for how to love those who are difficult to love. You check in on yourself and ask how you're doing. You look for ways to love more deeply and more keenly. It is hard, energy sapping, and you need to constantly press into Jesus to sustain this kind of love in action while supporting and being supported by others around you. I don't know about you, but I feel tired just thinking about it. Of course, as with any skill or talent, the more we practice the easier it gets.

What about encouraging engagement? We think what we say and do with our brothers and sisters and we look for ways that we can work together, do life together, that encourage and build up. We are conscious of when someone is struggling and we get along side and support them. I used to be in Boys Brigade, a long time ago. The Boys were always divided up into squads and everything we did came back to how well our squad did as a team. Much to my



frustration I was always given the slow, the difficult, the boys that struggled to keep up. Incredibly competitive I worked my guts out to bring my guys up to speed so that we had a chance of winning the different competitions through the year. Some years even coming second was a huge achievement. But we often won. And then the next year I would get a new bunch of slow and difficult. It made me so mad!

One night I sat down with my parents after Boys Brigade and moaned about what I kept ending up with. They pointed out the reason I got them was I was really good at helping them succeed. Something many of them might never have managed otherwise. Without even realising it, I was encouraging engagement. I looked for ways we could succeed as a team and worked hard at it. I helped the slow ones, walked with the difficult ones, supported the struggling ones. And unrealised by me, I was better at it than anyone else. I could blame wanting to win at all costs – which would be true to an extent. But it was more than that. I wanted my team to be successful and unconsciously realised that to do that we had to work together to encourage each other. In love it is being patient and kind, bearing and hoping and believing in and for the other. It is loving the unlovely because God loved me first.

Which brings me to the third part of our principle. Self-awareness. Some people are naturally self-aware. They understand what is happening in their thinking. This is not being self-conscious. Self-aware people tend to be much less self-conscious than others. They examine their ideas and actions looking for what sets them off, what they struggle with, the things that energise them and the things that drain them. They know when they need to stop. And they know when they need to start. None of which necessarily means they obey the internal signals, but they are aware of that too. They are conscious of their natural inclinations to love some and not others. They take note of what makes them recoil and think about how they might respond differently. They tend to be the exceptions.

Most of us have to work at being self-aware. We must be deliberate in stopping to ask those questions of ourselves. Why did I do that? What caused me to react the way I did? How can I respond differently in the future? It can be quite difficult and stressful when we are new to it.

Applied to love self-awareness causes us to pause and ask these questions of ourselves and work to discover the answers. It allows me to ask of myself, 'Was that a loving action?' 'Was it the best action for the other?' 'How can I love

more deeply in future?’ The best part is that we can apply these questions corporately as well as individually. Why do we as the people of God here in this place respond in this particular manner? How can we do better next time?

Put all of this together in the principle and we get: setting high expectations in the love we have for each other, learning to encourage each other as we work out that love, and thinking about what and how we love and how we can do better at it.

There may be some of you thinking, if that was principle one we are going to be here for hours! Well, yeah, but not today. I do want to leave you with a bit of homework. Over the coming week I want you to think about those three aspects of the principle. High expectations, encouraging engagement and self-awareness. And I want you to think about what you need to work on and maybe how you are going to begin. Then, next week, let’s talk about it together.

### We Pray

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. We need you God. We need you to abide in us so that we can learn to love as you have called us to love. It is hard to love as you love. We are, for the most part, rubbish at it. Forgive us for being so self-centred and teach us to love as you love. Grant us grace and courage to change our habits of a lifetime so we can honour you more completely in what we say and how we act. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### Amazing Grace (My chains are gone)

*John Newton, Chris Tomlin*

Amazing grace how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now I'm found

Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear

And grace my fears relieved

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free

My God, my Saviour has ransomed me

And like a flood His mercy reigns

Unending love, amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow  
The sun forbear to shine  
But God, who called me here below  
Will be forever mine  
Will be forever mine  
You are forever mine

### Offering

God of boundless generosity, as we offer our gifts and our lives to you, help us to hear and live out the message of love. We long to grow as disciples, so that we grow in generosity. The abundance we've been given has a purpose in your plan, that we might know the joy of sharing that abundance with those in need. We long for that vision of your kin-dom, where loving hearts bring a better balance between abundance and need. In the name of Christ, our teacher and redeemer, we pray. Amen.

### Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We pray for the countries of Asia as they begin to face the consequences of decades of preferring baby boys over baby girls. With far more young men than women the social disruptions that are coming are frightening. We don't know what the solution might be, if there even is a solution, but we ask that your grace and mercy might be extended to young men fruitlessly looking for a partner and young women caught in the crossfire.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We pray for the millions of innocent people caught in the middle of gang violence in Mexico with multiple murders every day. Men, women and children trying to live normally are in constant fear for their lives. God, would you grant peace and safety in this dangerous place.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We bring our prayers for the people of Sydney and Wellington as they grapple with cases of Covid-19. We are so over all this God, and yet it continues. We

thank you for those who have had their vaccinations and those who are next on the list. And we ask that you would keep our loved ones safe in the days as they wait their turn.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We pray for our fresh water supplies. With plenty of rain and it being so easy to turn on our taps it is easy to forget that fresh water is a scarce resource. Both the supply and the way it is distributed are subject to so many possible points of failure. Grant those in charge of our water supply wisdom as they work to keep it secure. And for those who struggle to gain access to fresh water we also bring our prayers.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We pray for the people of the church in Papakaio.

- Legacy Youth & Snowboard Trip 2021 - 13-15 Aug with 100 young people going this year. So far 90% of those that signed up are not Christians.
  - The leaders, organisers and volunteers - wisdom, strength, energy, as we prepare for the event, the worship team and guest speaker
  - The youth - that God will touch their hearts, that He will speak to them, that He will heal them
  - For resources and follow up plan to disciple those that commit their lives to the Lord at camp.
  - Protection on the mountain, safe travels,
  - Finding sponsors to support those hoping to go.
  - Teens coming to LifeGroups. That God will provide a van for transport.
- Building needs. Needing to change the septic tank (\$75k) and add a room to the building
- In need of a childrens co-ordinator.
- For Ps Esther as she ministers daily to young people through counselling at several schools around Waitaki:
- For both of Esther and Eugen they study on top of ministry and work
- For Ps Eugen and his wider involvement in the Education sector, supporting local Police and more.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

We pray for ourselves and those we love. For those who struggle with their health. For those who are travelling or far away. For our pets and our gardens. We bring our prayers.

Lord, in your mercy. **Hear our prayers.**

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

### Do something beautiful

*Graham Kendrick*

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

### Benediction and Grace

As we go out from here may we go with high expectations, searching out not just the words of love, but the actions to go with the words.

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.