

# It's not about me

Sunday 04 July 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 89*

O LORD God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O LORD?  
Your faithfulness surrounds you.

**You rule the raging of the sea;  
when its waves rise, you still them.**

The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours;  
the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.

**You have a mighty arm;  
strong is your hand, high your right hand.**

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;  
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

**Happy are the people who know the festal shout,  
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance;**

They exult in your name all day long,  
and extol your righteousness.

**For you are the glory of their strength;  
by your favour our horn is exalted.**

## Beneath the Southern Cross

*Rev Catherine Burton and Rev Malcolm Gordon.*

From the ends of the earth  
We will sing; God is here, the kingdom is near  
In the Land of the Long White Cloud  
Christ to dwell, Immanuel

From north and south, from east and west  
Beneath the Southern Cross we rest  
Found by One who came for all  
In this tale of spacious love we're born

This whenua on which we stand  
This holy ground made by God's hand  
Marred and scarred yet marked by grace  
Held and healed in Christ we find our place

God of nations, at thy feet  
In the bonds of love we meet

Strangers once, now called as one  
Aotearoa, wake to greet this love

**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**

God of the seasons, of spring and summer, autumn and winter  
God of the weather, the wind and the rain, the sun and the snow  
God of the earth, of trees and seas, of the animals and the birds and the fish  
We come before you amazed that you see us  
Amazed that in our puny, misshapen lives you know us  
Even to the hairs on our heads  
And we pause in wonder.

God who sees us  
Who knows our thoughts before we think them  
You hear our deepest fears and secret longings  
And still you love us  
Forgive us for how quickly we forget that love  
Forgive us for how easily we move on to other things  
Searching for how we might serve ourselves better  
Often to the detriment of those around us  
We bring our private confessions before you. Pause.

Thank you for your continued love  
Thank you for your forgiveness in the face of our constant failure  
Thank you that we are your people and held in the palm of your hand.  
Amen

## Reflection

Who do you say I am?

When Jesus asks this question of you in this moment, 'What is your response?'

Think about your answer. How does it make you feel?

How does your answer inform how you live?

Is there anything you could do differently this week as a result of your answer?

## Notices

### The Peace

Share the peace with someone you wouldn't normally or often share with.

### Come, now is the time

Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to give your heart

Come, just as you are to worship

Come, just as you are before your God

Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God

One day every knee will bow

Still the greatest treasure remains for those

Who gladly choose you now

### Jesus, we enthrone you

Jesus, we enthrone You

We proclaim You are king

Standing here, in the midst of us

We raise You up with our praise

And as we worship build Your throne

And as we worship build Your throne

And as we worship build Your throne

Come Lord Jesus and take Your place

### 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**      It's not about me

Homework: High expectations, encouraging engagement and self-awareness. Think about what you need to work on and maybe how you are going to begin. Turn to a neighbour and talk about what you have done this week in response to the homework.

I've been thinking about the homework too. As I pondered I realised that there is a clear and present danger to all this love stuff. The danger is that I allow my personal feelings, my brokenness, to bleed over into my practice of Agape love. At which point it is no longer Agape because it moves from being about the other to being about me. I begin to look to fulfil my own needs by seeking them in others. A completely over the top example of this is the parents who attempt to live out their hopes and dreams through their children. I'm talking the parents yelling at the kids or the ref on the rugby pitch or the pushing them to perform beyond any reasonable limit. More on that as we go.

Last week we looked at the first of six principles of practice that I think can help us to think about love and to act in a way that reflects love. Today we are going to get into the next two principles.

## Principle 2

*Support each other to work together and involve everyone.*

Of course, this really follows directly on from our first principle of having high expectations that encourage engagement. Those high expectations will call on us to be supportive of each other. There are a whole range of reasons for that and I want to take some time to think about some of those.

The first is that I can't do it all on my own. I am amazing, talented, intelligent, and incredibly good-looking, and I am only one person. I can't be everywhere. Elon Musk with all his billions of dollars and artificial intelligence can't be everywhere. I am bound to a single spot at any particular point in time. So, if I am dealing with something over here and an issue comes up over there, I can't be there doing that as well. Now we could get into the talent and intelligence and whether they are useful measures of anything at all another time. But even if I were the absolute best person for both jobs, I simply can't do it.

The second is that for all my amazingness there are somethings I am not equipped to do. I have a total mental block when it comes to keeping things tidy. I can follow instructions to put things away, but left to myself entropy takes over and chaos ensues. And that's just a simple example. There are many, many things I can't do, or at least I can't do well.

The third is that I get tired. Even if I could be everywhere at once and achieve everything to a high standard I just get tired. My energy levels drop and I need to rest and recuperate. While I am resting I'm not doing everything else.

And finally, should I be able to work tirelessly and without sleep, I only bring one perspective. I can only see what I can see. Take mathematics for example. I love numbers so I cannot understand why some people struggle with them. It's obvious to me that numbers can open up a whole new world of possibilities. So if you say to me that numbers make no sense I am left confused and befuddled that something so obvious to me wouldn't be obvious to you. Or to take an example in the other direction. For the most part I just don't get emotions. I don't understand why people respond to things emotionally in the ways they do. I get that they do, and I have evolved appropriate responses that for the most part enable me to help a person feel understood, but honestly, I have no idea what's going on, most of the time. Possibly not something I should confess to as a minister, but there we are.

As you can see, I really need to support and be supported as we work together. And I need everyone around me to be involved. There is not a person listening today who doesn't have something to offer that I can't provide. Wow! That's a lot of negatives. Everyone here has something to offer that I will either struggle to come up with or could never come up with. It might be just the right words, or the right kind of help, or the right kind of being present. Just so many things that we bring to serve and support each other.

The thing is, the words of 1 Corinthians 13 slip so easily over our lips:

<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.

But when things get difficult being patient and kind and not being irritable or resentful is hard. And if you are in it on your own, without support or encouragement it can be next to impossible. Now please, I am not alluding to me here. I am talking about the Agape love that I believe God is calling us into as God's people. I'm talking about how we love a person with a difficult personality or with addictions or struggles that we don't understand or can't fix. Even the person who has done or is doing something we don't believe we can ever accept. Imagine for a moment you are sitting in church with a prostitute sitting on one side of you and a drug addict on the other. In a community that is recognised for its Agape love the chances are high that could happen. How will you go, accepting them as they are and loving them as they are? Not as they might be or could be, but as they are. That's the kind of love that needs everyone involved and working together.

It's also where principle 3 comes into play.

*Learn to construct and apply new knowledge*

Who here knows the best way to deal with a person who arrives at church inebriated and friendly? Or how to support a person who is wanting to come off drugs? Or how to support a young person struggling with their sexuality? Or how to support a person struggling with having had an abortion? This is tough stuff. Some people have excellent training and understanding. Most of us have little or no idea what to do. And so we have to learn. Together.

That does not mean that we must start from scratch. There are experts who can help us, professionals who will do the heavy lifting while we support. There are a whole raft of people issues that we have no business meddling with. But

we can still love and encourage. And it is that learning to love and encourage without stepping over appropriate boundaries that is where our principle comes into play.

Remember the first 3 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. <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.

We learn to love in such a way that what we do and say is gain. We speak with love, we prophesy with love, we practice faith with love. It is very different from what could kindly be called meddling. It is not about attempting to fix someone. It is not about making ourselves feel better because we have helped another person.

And this is where I want to come back to my earlier comments. Agape love is about serving the other. That temptation to try to fix people is probably universal. It's the parent trying to ensure their son or daughter will play for the All Blacks or the Black Ferns because they never quite made it. It's the talk about how you're not making enough of your life, or the desire to set people up with others. None of that is Agape love. Serving another is about listening for God's heart for that person and doing your best to respond with love. It might mean saying or doing nothing while you are itching to go into fixit mode. It might even mean saying or doing something that goes against what you've believed all your life about something. Yet God says, love that person who doesn't fit your idea of right or proper or correct. And so you do. God says, love that person who is or does differently to you. And so you do.

And you do it learning all the way. And you do it with the support and encouragement of those around you. And then they will know us by our love.

I gave you a little homework last week. I want to give you some this week too. I want you to think about how you would need to support to love someone who is unlovely. Imagine that it is someone on the fringes, involved in things that make you uncomfortable or even afraid. What kind of support would you want from those around you and how would you get it?

## We Pray

God who loves the unlovely. Who loves us. Every one of us desperately needs to be loved. Every one of us needs to love in return. And yet we can be so bad at it. We try to love on our own. We turn love into something about us. We miss out on the support of those around us because it can seem too hard to love together. Teach us to love to the gain of those we love. Teach us to involve everyone in our practice of love. Teach us to set aside our own wants and desires and love as you love us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

## Ten thousand reasons

Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul

Worship His Holy name

Sing like never before, O my soul

I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning

It's time to sing Your song again

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me

Let me be singing when the evening comes

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger

Your name is great and Your heart is kind

For all Your goodness I will keep on singing

Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find

And on that day when my strength is failing

The end draws near and my time has come

Still my soul will sing Your praise unending

Ten thousand years and then forevermore

## Offering

Holy God who both calls us and confronts us: the gifts we bring to you are only a small part of the multitude we have received from your goodness. In the depth of our being, we know that in calling us, what you really seek is our faith, our belief, our conviction – our very hearts. What you long for from us is not a trip to church but a lifelong journey into the world to follow Jesus with our whole being. Forgive our unbelief, our holding back, and lead us in the way that frees us from the grip of the world – the way of life! In Christ, we pray. Amen.



## Prayer for Ourselves and Others

We pray for the country of Brazil. With continuing high numbers of deaths from Covid and alarming numbers of children dying from it. With corruption and greed leading to a frightening destruction of the Amazon rain forests.

We pray for continuing problems around the provision of mental health services in New Zealand. With our high rates of suicide, particularly among young people, and facilities overwhelmed with too much need and not enough resource.

We pray for our schools, particularly in Oamaru. For the young people learning. For the teachers and support staff. For the principals.

We pray for Orwell St Chapel

- Christianity Explored on Wednesday
- People coming to faith and the church growing
- Community lunches on Wednesdays
- The Pastor, Chris, moving in September

We pray for ourselves and our loved ones. We think of those who are struggling with their health. Of those who are far from us. Of those who are travelling and those who are wrestling with life issues. We thank you for the good things in our lives, our friends, our pets, our gardens, our hobbies.

All these we bring in the precious 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

## Brother, Sister let me serve you

Brother, sister, let me serve you;

let me be as Christ to you;

pray that I may have the grace to

let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christlight for you  
in the nighttime of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;  
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow,  
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,  
we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to  
let you be my servant too.

### [Benediction and Grace](#)

As we go out from here, may we go as community, not individuals facing the world alone, but as God's family, bringing love that overcomes adversity and draws people into relationship with Jesus.

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.