

It works best when we do it together

Sunday 18 July 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 14

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.

Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.

Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.**

All things bright and beautiful

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.

Each little flow'r that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings.

The purple-headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky.

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

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. ²And 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 with the news, God? Disease, killings, drugs, poverty, housing. Everywhere we look things seem to be going wrong. And then the supposedly good things only happen to famous people or rich people. The rest of us look on in dismay as the world shatters into a hundred billion pieces. The rich get richer, the criminals get away with their crime, and the ability to tell the difference between the rich and the criminals gets harder and harder to determine.

We are your people and it can feel as though you have abandoned us. Our voice is lost in the scream of a world that is dying by degrees. We pray and it seems as though only empty echoes bounce back to us. You have promised to never leave us or forsake us, yet at times we feel desperately alone.

Turn to us, Lord, and hear our cry. Show us your mercy as we look to you. You are our refuge in times of trouble, our hope in our distress. Be our safe harbour where we can pause and know your peace.

We bring our fears, worries and concerns to you and lay them at your feet.

We are your people, and we know you are still with us.

You are our God who calms our hearts and stills our fears.

We rest in you.

Amen

Reflection

Where are you, God?

Notices

A reflection. Saturday 30 July, 10:30-12:30. \$5 donation for TearFund

The Peace

Briefly share one memory that is special to you. It could be something like, I met my best friend and school and we are still friends. Or, I'll never forget

watching the sun go down over the African desert. Or, I remember the day...
you get the picture.

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 it's true
It's my joy to honour You
In all I do, I honour You

You are my King

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth
Will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace

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 It works best when we do it together

God, who is love in its fullest sense, open our hearts and our minds to what your Spirit has for us today. Grant us insight into your word and draw us to treasures, new and old.

How are you doing taking your practice of Agape love to a new level?

Some of you will be familiar with the old parable about two donkeys. The donkeys were tied together with a length of rope. Then two bales of hay were set down – out of reach of donkeys who strained to reach their bale of hay. They tugged and tugged. But neither was strong enough to reach it's particular pile of hay. No matter how hard they tried they were stuck.

We used to play a game with our young people at youth group. You could only play it once with any group of people because once they latched on it lost its impact. The idea was that two people faced each other and held up their left hands. With their right hand they held the wrist of their opponent. Then they were given 30 seconds to see how many times they could slap their opponent's face. What followed was a hilarious round of twisting and turning, huffing and puffing as they fought each other to get in the most slaps. In the best cases neither player landed any hits. They were playing the game just like the donkeys. I have to win was all that came to mind. I confess that the first time I played the game I was no different to anyone else I ever saw do it for the first time. A full-on wrestle to the death ensued. And in the end the score might have been 2-all or something like that.

After a few rounds we would set up a pair who were in on the joke. Instead of fighting each other, they worked together. You see we hadn't told them to stop the other person getting in hits, only that they had to get in hits. The new pair would hold their hands close to the other's face and lightly pat away as fast as they could go for the 30sec. High scores every time. It would always elicit groans from everyone who had been before.

The lesson of course is that it is nearly always more productive to work together than it is to compete. As you may remember the donkeys eventually figured out that if one gave way, they both got to eat hay and one pile, then they could go and eat the hay in the other pile at their leisure.

It is the same way with Agape love. In fact, I would venture to suggest that Agape love can only be done together. Let's explore that for a moment. Imagine you are with a group of people who are working to display Agape love. You decide that you don't like what they are attempting to do and so, rather than work together with them you head off on your own. You set up your own processes and expectations. Then you sit on your newly created throne and look across at the others, content that you have it right and they have it wrong. Is that really Agape love in action? Given what we have discovered over the last few weeks, I don't think it is. Even if you are totally right and you are doing exactly the right thing, you have broken relationship with the others. And that puts everything you have done to the lie. 'But wait,' you may ask, 'if I am doing the right thing then how can it not be love?' It seems to me that sometimes the right thing can be the wrong thing when it leads to damaged relationships. Working with the others may not be optimal. It may take longer. It may not look as good or work as well. In the end I suspect that best process matters less than healthy relationships. I'm not suggesting that good process doesn't matter. Just that it doesn't matter as much as staying connected with God's people. 1 Corinthians 13:3 puts it this way: 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. Do everything right, be made a martyr for doing everything right, and if it is not grounded in love, it has no value.

So, the question then is, 'What does doing Agape love together look like?' It's not a simple question to answer. The reason for that is we are all so different. We have different interests and tastes, experiences, hopes, expectations. It can seem like taking all the pieces from ten different 4000-piece puzzles, tipping them all out on the floor in a single pile, and then attempting to do the puzzles, all at the same time. Only it's even worse than that. Every one of those puzzle pieces has just four other pieces at most that it connects with. (Let's assume that the cut pattern is different for each puzzle.) If I only had to work with, Agape love with four other people then it should be reasonably straightforward, in as much as working with people is ever straightforward. Adding more people into the mix makes it much more complicated. Let me illustrate with a parable of a king who was introduced to the game of chess.

The story goes that the king offered to pay the creator of the game anything he asked for. The creator thought for a moment and then said, I would like one grain of rice on the first square of the board, 2 on the next, 4 on the next. Keep doubling it until you reach the last square on the board. The king thought that was hilarious. Until it was worked out that the last square on the chess board would have 190 000 000 000 000 000 (190 quintillion) grains of rice on it. Big number, right? That's 387 000 000 000 (387 billion) tons of rice. Suffice to say, the creator didn't get paid his asking price.

My point is that when we add people into our mix the complications multiply, just like the grains of rice on the chess board. Each extra person brings their own stuff and it doesn't just add to the problems, it multiplies them. If two people have two problems, three will have four, four will have eight, five will have sixteen and on it goes.

Arrrgggghhhh! How do we do this? How do we take something so difficult and make it work? I guess the honest answer is not very often and not very well. It is almost certainly why John wrote, 'Don't think you can claim to love God while hating your brothers or sisters.' John knew how hard it is to love those around us, and how hard it is to keep loving them when things don't go according to plan. He also knew that our likely default setting would be, 'Oh well, I love God, so that should be enough.' It is most pointedly not enough. In fact to say that I love God while not loving my brothers and sisters is to make myself a liar.

Where does that leave us?

I think it leaves us utterly dependent on God. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us, 'But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Love is first and foremost a fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we read that love is patient it is telling us that the love lived out in patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love lived out in kindness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of love, given through the Holy Spirit is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. The only love that truly rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things is fruit of the Holy Spirit. The love that never ends comes from God as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, when I say love works best when we do it together, I am talking about a team that is formed not just of you and me, but with God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Agape love, done together is loving with God.

I am going to pause on that for a moment. I said last week, love is not something I can manufacture. It is a gift. If we as a church are to work together in Agape love it will only come as a gift from God. That doesn't let us off the hook by saying God isn't doing that here. God is very much doing it here – God is love. God's very nature is love. In fact, it challenges us to press into God with all our might. To seek the gift of love so we can exercise it as a community here in this place. And it seems to me that is where we might begin to work together. Pressing in to God together. Making ourselves ready and willing to respond as God directs us in love toward love. Complex and complicated? Absolutely. Precious gift. Completely. Will you pray with me, listen with me, to press in to God and seek the gift of love?

We Pray

God, you are love. You initiate love. You embody love. You demonstrate love. Would you fill us with a desire to know your love and to share your love right where we are? We long to honour you in love and still we struggle so hard to comprehend what that means in all we do. Even as we groan our way through difficult parts of what it means to love in spirit and in truth, help us to grow into the people you would have us be. In the name of Christ, who lived love in its fullest sense. 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

Offering

Holy God, you love us so deeply that you pursue us relentlessly. You sent your son Jesus into the world that we who were far off would be brought near to you by his blood. We offer our gifts to you, knowing we can never outgive you, never balance the equation. You don't desire balance, no quid-pro-quo, only that we find the peace you desire for us, whose foundation is in your word and whose cornerstone is Christ alone. In that holy name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Farmers

Farmers wrestling to make a living and provide food and supplies for people all around the world. Faced with issues around climate change and care for the environment, protesters who all have agendas that don't necessarily balance out, government rule-making. Some have too much water, some don't have enough. Some are pushed down by corporations, others struggle to get their produce to market. Many are not paid what their produce is worth.

Low paid workers

Workers in low paid jobs. Those who struggle to find work. Those who struggle to find enough work. Those who want to work but don't know how. Those who get work and are then treated poorly by their employers.

St Patricks

- The home groups that the participants grow in their faith and look for opportunities to share their faith with others.

- Newcomers to the parish, especially those from other countries, that they feel welcomed
- All parishioners, that they are inspired to offer their gifts and talents to the parish and community

Ourselves

Our finances. Thinking about our futures and how we care for ourselves as we get older. Our families and those we love.

All these things we pray 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

Crown him with many crowns

Crown Him with many crowns,

The Lamb upon His throne;

Hark! how the heav'nly anthem drowns

All music but its own!

Awake, my soul, and sing

Of Him who died for thee,

And hail Him as thy matchless King

Through all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of Love:

Behold His hands and side;

Rich wounds yet visible above

In beauty glorified:

No angel in the sky

Can fully bear that sight,

But downward bends his burning eye

At mysteries so bright.

Crown Him the Lord of years,
The Potentate of time.
Creator of the rolling spheres,
Ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail
Throughout eternity.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we press into God with all our might. To seek the gift of love so we can exercise it as a community here in this place.

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.