

The Common Good

30 January 2022

Call to Worship Psalm 36

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

**Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;**

you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house,

and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life;

in your light we see light.

**O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!**

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!

Reading 1 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Reflection 1

How many people here could explain to me exactly how an aeroplane manages to get into the air and stay there? Or how a microwave works to cook food? Or the process used to make the tires on the cars we travel around in?

So much of what we see and do is based on technology that is as good as magic for most of us. We have no idea how it works and don't really care so long as it keeps doing what it is supposed to be doing. And if it stops working we are quick to complain loudly before either calling in the repair person or replacing the offending item. Difficult to do should a plane suddenly stop flying, but you get my meaning.

It is unlikely to be a problem for most of us. After all, I have little idea of how a chicken actually forms an egg, but I have no problem cooking and eating eggs. I would love to be able to stop here and say that it is OK to live in blissful ignorance of how the world works because where and how I am is just fine. Unfortunately, that is exactly the attitude that has led to the term fake news and people losing themselves down weird and wacky tunnels on the internet. Although, in saying that, it bewilders me how well educated and apparently intelligent people can end up in those same places.

All of which leads me to our reading with Paul's words, "I do not want you to be uninformed." He is not talking about Covid or 5G or microchips under the skin. He is talking about the Holy Spirit and how to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing in us and among us. The church in Corinth existed within a spiritual milieu that covered an incredibly wide range of options and possibilities. The Romans never forced their gods on other people. They simply added the new gods to their own. It was like there was a marketplace of gods and you could pick and choose who or what you wanted to worship. It was this vast array of

options that made it so difficult for the new Christians in Corinth to know how and what to do. So, Paul begins with a very simple rule for discernment. When the Holy Spirit is at work, no-one says, 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' unless the Holy Spirit is at work.

Notices

Bible Study, 10:30am, 03 February in the Church Lounge.

'Where to from here?' is a short 4-6 week conversation aimed at asking questions about how the church might be in the future and how can we help and not hinder what God is doing. Drawing on Scripture, current events, personal experience and anything else we can find to help us think about what is next. There's no agenda apart from listening to God and to each other. Signup sheet for the, 'Where to from here?' conversation.

The Peace

Prayer of adoration and confession

Matthew 6:30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Consider this stalk of grass

How does it display God's care?

What words or images can you think of that express how much more God cares for you than that stalk of grass?

We thank you God for your care and love

For the way you feed us and clothe us

For the way you know our very thoughts

And lest we try to hide from you

You know the depths of the oceans

The back of the caves

The height of the heavens

Forgive us for forgetting how much you care for us

Help us to see you at work in our lives

More clearly than we do today

We bring our private confessions before you now

God, who clothes the grass of the field
Thank you that we live enfolded in your love
Forgiven through your love
Held by your love
We worship you with all we are.
Amen.

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 2 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Reflection 2

I came of age during the Charismatic Renewal in the 1980's. Speaking in tongues, full immersion baptism, prophecy, healing were all a part of what I thought of as the normal landscape. People fell down under the power of the Holy Spirit, they shook, they cried, they experienced profound transformations in their thinking and actions. Addictions were cured, relationships healed and broken lives restored. It was a heady time and occasionally I look back wistfully and wish it hadn't ended. It was a time that came with its own share of mistakes and disasters. The people involved didn't cease to be mistake prone

human beings because they had given their lives to Jesus. Poor choices were made and many people were deeply damaged through insensitive and sometimes foolish interpretation of Scripture. You weren't getting healed – you obviously had unconfessed sin in your life. You didn't speak in tongues – clearly a sinner. I could likely find you as many people who thought of those times as a curse as I could those who thought them a blessing.

One of the real problems as I see it was that people forgot Paul's second rule. 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.' The common good was interpreted as what suited a particular group in a particular church. If you didn't see eye to eye with some people in the church then they were obviously not saved. Common became very particular, each group hunkering down and creating a fortress out of their beliefs, firing over the parapet at those who differed from them, often in very slight ways. Very similar to the, 'I follow Paul,' 'I follow Apollos,' debate of church in Corinth. Hang on a minute, the fundamentals are the same. Don't let minor details get in the way of healthy relationships. We can see this breakdown in relationships with the vax-anti-vax debate that is raging around the country. (possibly minor point – the number of anti-vax people is tiny yet their voice is incredibly loud – food for thought). At its core people are arguing that they shouldn't have to get vaccinated. The fact is they don't have to get vaccinated. The problem comes when we allow a disagreement over people having choices to destroy relationships. I suspect we all know of families where people have broken communication because some are vaccinated and some are not.

I am not going to stand here and tell you to get vaccinated. I will stand here and say that Paul's measure of the common good is a yardstick that appears to have been lost along the way. Granted, your idea of common good may differ from mine. But the common good is never, repeat never, served through broken relationships.

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

You are here, touching every life
I worship You, I worship You
You are here, meeting every need
I worship You, I worship You

Offering

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>

Loving God, we have been blessed with so much through your goodness. As we bring our gifts in gratitude this morning, you remind us that it doesn't matter what we have in our lives, if we do not have love, we have nothing. This love is not the love of Valentine's Day cards, and not even the love we feel among families, which are both rich blessings. You long for us to experience agape love – the love of the world, the love for those we don't even know. Open our eyes and our hearts. In Christ, our teacher, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for ourselves and others

For the continuing struggles of the people in Tonga, we bring our prayers.

For the clouds of war hanging over Ukraine and the rest of Europe, we bring our prayers

For the billions of people yet to receive any form of vaccination against Covid, we bring our prayers

For families torn apart by border restrictions, we bring our prayers

For ourselves and those we love, we bring our prayers

All these things we bring through 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

Reading 3

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Reflection 3

I am going to go out on a limb here and suggest that Jesus likely had more than enough to drink on more than one occasion. He clearly knew what made for a good wine, and was happy to provide more than enough for the wedding feast. After all, the volume of wine would have amounted to in the order of 900

bottles of wine, which even at a fairly large ceremony, is a lot of wine. I wonder if there would have been different varieties – red, white, sparkling, roset... Given my message a couple of weeks ago you might be forgiven for thinking I am advocating getting sloshed. Not at all. Simply making the point that having a good time, which may or may not involve quantities of food and alcohol, is not unbiblical.

To be honest, this miracle, the first of Jesus' signs is, in the scheme of things, relatively minor. Jesus did many other miracles of much greater significance – sight to the blind, walking on water, lame people walking, people raised from the dead. Water into wine isn't really all that important. So why do we have the story? John gives us some insight that this was the first of his signs and it revealed his glory. It seems like an odd way to get started, unless there is more to it than we can immediately see.

I think it comes back to the principle of the common good. You see, a wedding in a small village is of no consequence to anyone other than those at the wedding. In that culture the entire village would have been involved, but it was unlikely to be more than 100-150 people at the outside, and that includes the children. Having the wine run out would have been an embarrassment to the whole village. I suspect that Jesus weighed what would be best for all the people there and decided to help on that basis. The miracle of water into wine was in service to the community, to the common good.

It is that common good for which the Holy Spirit shares both the gifts and the fruit. It is the common good that sees wisdom and knowledge and faith and healing shared through the people of Christ. Discerning the work of the Holy Spirit in what people say and how they act leads to a common good. The common good leads to healthy relationships and it is through healthy relationships we can discern the work of the Holy Spirit most clearly.

I still have moments when I long for the moving of the Spirit as I experienced it 40 years ago. Most of all I long for the moving of the Spirit today. Not as a beckoning from the past, but a leading into the future, for the common good.

We Pray

Jesus, who turned water into wine, who sent the Holy Spirit as our friend and advocate. Teach us to discern your work in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Help us to push through our personal preferences and grasp hold of your love for all the world. Grant us insight that we might be seen as your disciples, not for the name we carry, but for our words and actions reflecting who you are. Amen.

All hail the power

Edward Perronet

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.

Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all!

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race

Ye ransomed from the fall,

hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.

Hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe

On this terrestrial ball

to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.

To him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all!

Oh, that with all the sacred throng
we at his feet may fall!

We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.

We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here may we go, filled with the Holy Spirit, seeking the good of each other, and strong relationships that reflect Jesus in us and through us.

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.