

## **Circuit Service 8 August 2021 prepared by Mr Symon Turner**

**Call to worship:** Matthew 5 44-45

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

**Childrens' address:**

So, I have a question why do you do good things?

I want you to either physically or mentally stand in one of three groups. The first group are those who do good things to avoid being told off. You know, those who do their chores because they don't want to be shouted at.

The next group are those who act well to get some reward, so those who do their chores for pocket money or thanks. This group is complex, there are many rewards, even the feeling that we are better than others, is a reward.

The last group are those who do it out of love, this is for no reward or out of fear. I expect the last group is the smallest. The world we live in far too often runs according to the other two impulses, either to punish or reward. It was just like that in Jesus' times, we see those who are punished and even occasionally those who are rewarded but rarely those who act out of love.

If you need to look at someone who acted out of love, look at Jesus. Jesus is God who gave up everything in heaven to save his creation. Not because we can give him anything or out of fear, but because he loved us. The difficult thing about following Jesus is he asks us to live in the same way.

Jesus asks us something odd, to act out of love, not behaving like the world does, not following reward or running away out of fear but acting out of Christ's will, out of his love for the world. This means giving up things we may want to help others who we may not even like! See this living based on love is hard, but we can do it because the good news is that when we do, we have God with us and before us.

**Reading:** Luke 18 18-27

**Reading** Matthew 5 17-20

This service is about the supposed tension between a loving God and the God of judgment but as this hymn reminds us, there is no such division:

[Hymn StF 233 When Jesus came to Jordan](#)

1 When Jesus came to Jordan  
to be baptised by John,  
he did not come for pardon,  
but as his Father's Son.  
He came to share repentance  
with all who mourn their sins,  
to speak the vital sentence  
with which good news begins.

2 He came to share temptation,  
our utmost woe and loss,  
for us and our salvation  
to die upon the cross.  
So when the Dove descended  
on him, the Son of Man,  
the hidden years had ended,  
the age of grace began.

3 Come, Holy Spirit, aid us  
to keep the vows we make ;  
this very day invade us,  
and every bondage break.  
Come, give our lives direction,  
the gift we covet most :  
to share the resurrection  
that leads to Pentecost.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

## **Prayer of confession**

Read From StF 700 God weeps Verse 1-3 (by SHIRLEY ERENA MURRAY)

God weeps

at love withheld,  
at strength misused,  
at children's innocence abused,

and till we change the way we love,

God weeps.

God bleeds

at anger's fist,  
at trust betrayed,  
at women battered and afraid,

and till we change the way we win,

God bleeds.

God cries

at hungry mouths,  
at running sores,  
at creatures dying without cause,

and till we change the way we care,

God cries.

## **Silence**

### **Prayers of pardon and thanksgiving**

Let us raise in our prayers of thanksgiving and adoration.

We give our thanks and prayers that Christ has shown us a way out of death and sin, to salvation and life.

We adore you Christ because you preached the repentance of sin and a new life.

We love you of merciful lord for fulfilling the law and living the life that fulfilled the law.

We honour you, for we are faltering, stuttering but you fill in the gaps in our lives.

Above all, we give you thanks that you said 'Go, your sins are forgiven.'

We rejoice that you forgave our sins and have adopted us.

Oh great God, oh great redeemer

Oh great adopted, cleaning father.

Amen

## **Sermon**

How often have we heard this sermon, some preacher staggers to the pulpit to preach about the law of love, to echo the plethora of scripture about loving each other. I mean we can all guess that I am going to recite the new commandment, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these (Mark 12 30-31).

This sermon is not about the great commandment because Christ makes it clear in the Matthew passage, we are still a people of law. He says he is not going to change the smallest dot but he does say something more disturbing, he is going to fulfil the law? This does not fulfil their requirements but fulfils their purpose and we know that all roads lead to the cross and the self-giving love which these laws were supposed to lead to.

In the Luke passage we see a rich man who lives by all the laws of God but he fails **badly** with Christ. I like to think the rich man is full of himself, I mean who would not want him as a disciple, full of confidence he strolls up to Jesus.

‘Good Master’ the rich man says – strike 1

Jesus has no time to be called good, this is earthly flattery, a reward of status **for his acts, Christ. (not sure of this, should it be ‘from Christ’)** This is not the reward for following the true law.

Only God is good says Christ, a reminder that Christ cares little for our technical observance but the **full** observance of it. Christ wants a circumcision of the heart.

Then Christ reads of an **abridged** version of some of the 10 commandments, the rich man gathers himself and proudly declares that he has kept them.

‘Fine’ says Christ, if you want to follow me, then you must do what the others have done and give up everything and follow me.

This is a test of where the heart is, it is easy of a rich man to be kind, but does he love God, love him enough to give up everything and follow Christ? Does he love God enough to love the poor, feed the hungry, comfort those who mourn and love those who hate him?

Here the rich man’s shallow faith is displayed for all to see. He trusts not God but his riches. He is happy to follow God’s law on his own terms but he will not suffer with those seen as good, he will bear no harm to follow Gods call and thus departs.

Christ who still loves even this half-hearted child of God, still offers him salvation. All is possible with God. We call the idea that the law is solely required to be good legalism, all monotheistic religions suffer from man thinking he is cleverer than God.

It is here we come back to Matthew, Jesus asks us to be better than the Pharisees – a quick refresh of Matthew 23 or Mark 7: 1-23 will remind the reader of their sins. Placing legal burdens on people that they cannot bear, distorting the law to serve themselves and worst of all closing the doors to heaven behind them. In the wonderful passage Christ gets to the point of this sermon. The law does not make us sinners but what is in our hearts is what comes out from them.

Maybe I am an odd preacher but I see no confusion over the law and Christ. God is not dim, he understands and understood that his people will just find technical ways of fulfilling his laws and often legalism leads to cruelty not mercy. Christ is not doing away with the law but explaining that we should do what God wants out of love not out of obligation and in this he asks those to follow and to at least be better than the Pharisees

I am forced to wonder with the reporting of thousands of sexual abuse cases, dead bodies beneath ”Christian” schools, and bible wielding thugs, if we listen. When this lost world looks upon Christ’s church do they see a worse version of the Pharisees? Does not the commandment to love your neighbour not ring hollow after all the sheep we have scattered?

So, brother and sisters I am asking you, who is good? Will you give up everything to follow Christ? Not out of fear or reward but because he will lead us on the way of the law of love, a law that asks about our lives but a life that is part of God’s great reconciling mission.

We remind ourselves that's God word never changes with our next hymn

[Hymn: StF 157 God has spoken by his prophets](#)

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| 1 God has spoken — by his prophets,<br>spoken his unchanging word ;<br>each from age to age proclaiming<br>God, the one, the righteous Lord.<br>'Mid the world's despair and turmoil<br>one firm anchor holding fast :<br>God eternal reigns forever,<br>God the first, and God the last. | 3 God is speaking — by the Spirit,<br>speaking to our hearts again,<br>in the age-long word expounding<br>God's own message, now as then.<br>Through the rise and fall of nations<br>one sure faith is standing fast ;<br>God still speaks, the Word unchanging,<br>God the first, and God the last. |
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| 2 God has spoken — by Christ Jesus,<br>Christ, the everlasting Son,<br>brightness of the Father's glory,<br>with the Father ever one ;<br>spoken by the Word incarnate,<br>God from God, ere time was born ;<br>Light from Light, to earth descending,<br>Christ, revealing God to all. | George Wallace Briggs (1875–1959) |
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**Prayers of intercession**

It is my habit to mention some topics that the congregant may wish to pray about and leave them some time to leave these prayers with God.

**Silence**

God who created all creation, who tends to the sparrow and the criminal equally. Who causes the sun to rise upon his creation? We know that you are at work in the world and in your creation. You are always healing, building, and caring for your creation. Come now upon the world like a flood, enter every broken heart, ever broken life and bring it new life. Amen

**Lord's prayer**

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed 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.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

Whenever we are lazy and just label God as judge, let the last hymn remind us that he is the King of Love.

[Hymn StF 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love](#)

1 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
tender and true ;  
out of the heart of the Father above,  
streaming to me and to you :  
wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,  
joyfully came ;  
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,  
sharing their sorrow and shame ;  
seeking the lost,  
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet ;  
why do they roam ?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget ;  
home, weary wanderer, home !  
Wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,  
come and abide,  
lifting my life, till it rises above  
envy and falsehood and pride ;  
seeking to be  
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

**Dismissal**

Let us go from this faith, not a worshipper of stones, or laws but believe in the dynamic, life giving redeeming law of love, the revolutionary, earth shattering law of love. Let us go and live with Christ not as servants but as disciples.