

This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Revd Valentin Dedji. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Welcome and Invocation:

Greetings to you all. We meet in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Amen!

I warmly welcome you in my back garden. Whenever I am here, gardening, I do feel God's presence with me. Specially that I believe that through gardening, I connect with God's creation.

Likewise, I strongly believe that, wherever you are listening to me from now, God is with you. This has inspired me to choose our first hymn entitled: 'As we are gathered, Jesus is here'...

Opening Hymn: Songs of Fellowship 'As we are gathered'

Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCdD5Ouq-2Q>

As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
One with each other, Jesus is here;
Joined by the Spirit, washed in the blood,

Part of the body, the Church of God.
As we are gathered, Jesus is here;
One with each other, Jesus is here.

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Prayers of Adoration: (adapted from StF 25)

O Heavenly Father, you are here with us!
As we your people meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
focussed on the work of the Holy Spirit
into open minds and hearts.

Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,
in an age of change and doubt,
keep us faithful to the gospel,
help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive:
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe! Amen!

Bible Readings:

1Corinthians 12: 12-13 & 25-26

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ²⁵ So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

John 13: 34-35

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Sermon: ‘Building each other up’

A Key Biblical Principle

As we remain in the setting of my back garden, let’s reflect very briefly on the theme: **‘Building each other up’**. This is a key biblical principle. It is based on the wisdom of mutual respect, mutual love, service and compassion. **‘Building each other up’** is quite the opposite of individualism or holding one another back. It involves every act of generosity, every gesture of support, every word of encouragement and every attitude

of sacrifice and humility that make a positive difference in the life of somebody else. You would agree with me that, our experience during the last 18 months has shown that no one can pretend to be able to live a healthy life by cutting themselves from the service that they may need from others. Let’s think about what our social life in Great Britain would have been without the vital work of ‘essential workers’ such as teachers, nurses, medical doctors, health visitors... Let’s also think about the fantastic contribution of thousands of volunteers who have become more creative in their assistance to others. Here, I think of the commendable work and campaign of the young Black footballer Marcus Rashford, together with the Late Sir Captain Tom Moore and many others...

Likewise, as we have just read in 1Corinthians 12, the Christian community is viewed by St Paul like ‘One body’, where **‘there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.’** (1Corinthians, 12: 26-27). What is at stake here is how through our togetherness and our interdependence, we can empower one another. As our Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 7: 12: **‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you’**. The Late Martin Luther King Junior put it more sharply by saying that **‘unless we learn**

to live together and support one another as brothers and sisters, we'll die together as fools. This is the foundation of a healthy community where selfishness has no place. In such a community children, adults, the elderly together with all who are vulnerable, feel mutually encouraged, supported and empowered in order to achieve their God-given purpose in life. This is where the 'Great Commandment' by our Lord Jesus Christ comes in: ***'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*** (John 13: 34-35).

Love gets genuine and Practical

As a follow up of Jesus' teaching in His 'Great Commandment', there are many other passages in the New Testament that focus on theme of true love 'Agape' that we are called to have for one another. I like the Message version of 1 Corinthians 13: verse 3 that goes like this: ***'If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.'*** And St Paul continues like this: ***'Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, It isn't always "Me first," it***

doesn't fly off the handle, it doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel...'

Crucial Questions

Having said all this, we are faced here with some crucial questions: Despite those clear teachings about mutual support and mutual love as a key principle of our Christian identity, why is it that this principle has not yet become common practice? Why is it that some of us are not yet as loving as Jesus recommended us to be?

The problem is that insecurity and feelings of unworthiness keep many of us from being good 'receivers' of God's Love for us. Therefore, due to our personal experience and circumstances, many of us feel unloved. We even feel undeserving of God's love. Consequently, by refusing to accept God's love for us, we feel unable to love and support one another because we cannot give what we do not have. The truth is, none of us deserves God's love. God's love for us is pure Grace. God loves all of us as we are. It does not matter what our past and our present may be. As the apostle Peter discovered at his amazement, ***'...God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'*** (Acts 10: 34-35). Therefore, when we understand and accept God's unconditional love for us, we'll also be well prepared to love and build each other up.

Conclusion

As St Paul said in Galatians, 6: 2 '***Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.***'

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.'

And by doing so, we prepare the ground for God's blessing to fall abundantly on us.

For every act of generosity and support we do for one another, we do it for ourselves. That's when we may hear our Lord Jesus Christ telling us: 'Well done faithful servant, come and receive the crown of God's Grace. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession (Adapted from StF 718)

O Heavenly Father,
we lay our broken world
in sorrow at your feet,
haunted by hunger, war and fear,
oppressed by power and hate.

Here human life seems less
than profit, might, and pride,
though to unite us all in you,
you lived and loved
and died.

Lord Jesus Christ, we bring our broken towns,
our neighbours hurt and bruised;
you show us how old pain and wounds
for new life can be used.

We bring our broken loves,
friends parted, families torn;
then in your life and death we see
that love must be reborn.

We bring our broken selves,
confused and closed and tired;
then through your gift of healing grace
new purpose is inspired.

Come then, Holy Spirit, breathe on us,
with life and strength anew;
find in us love, and hope and trust,
and lift us up to you. **Amen!**

Final Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you (Singing the Faith 611)

Sing/Read/Pray/Proclaim the Words

<https://youtu.be/OJahFRDrSCs>

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 Christ-light for you
in the night-time 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.

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Blessing

May the Lord bless you and make His face to shine upon you.
May He grant you His peace. **Amen!**

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