

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Revd Tim Swindell. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

**Call to Worship:**

Through the psalmist, God says,  
Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

God of love,  
you call us to come before with love in our hearts.  
We all have our own ideas and experiences of what love is.  
From the human to the divine.  
From the smallest flicker to the greatest flame.  
We offer ourselves to you now, seeking to learn more about the depth and breadth of your amazing love.  
We need to know how to put that love into action,  
share that great warmth with our neighbour,  
every day of our lives.  
Still us before you now and enable us to receive.  
**Amen.**

**Prayer of Adoration:**

God of love,  
you are so much more than anything we could ever imagine.  
Abundant love flows from your very being.  
We know your love is the greatest of all.  
We bask now in that love, making our small offering in return.  
We love you with all our heart, all our understanding,  
and all our strength – and always will.

**Amen.**

**Hymn: Father we love you (Singing the Faith 6)**

*Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ_U)

Father, we love you,  
we worship and adore you:  
glorify your name in all the earth.  
Glorify your name,  
glorify your name  
Glorify your name in all the earth.

Jesus, we love you,  
we worship and adore you:  
glorify your name in all the earth.  
Glorify your name,  
glorify your name  
glorify your name in all the earth.

Spirit, we love you,  
we worship and adore you:  
glorify your name in all the earth.  
Glorify your name,  
glorify your name,  
glorify your name in all the earth.

Donna Adkins (b 1940)

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### **Prayer of Confession:**

Lord God, we confess that we struggle to love others.  
Sometimes we don't even recognise who our neighbour is,  
never mind knowing how to love them.

**Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.**

We confess that we don't always realise  
that to show love to others,  
first we have to learn to love ourselves.  
Sometimes we haven't a clue how to do that.  
We may have an ideal in our head of what love is,  
then get cross with ourselves when we fall short.

**Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.**

We confess that we have the idea that love is  
this great dramatic gesture or action,

when sometimes it can be as small as a touch of a fingertip.

**Encourage us in your ways, O Lord.**

**Amen.**

Let's spend a moment in quiet, reflecting on our lives.

### **Assurance of forgiveness**

The God of all heaven and earth  
looks upon us now with love.  
He wraps us tightly in his arms.  
His love pardons us, enfolds us,  
emboldens us to accept that our sins are forgiven,  
and we can go into the world to reveal his love.  
Praise be to God.

**Amen.**

### **Today's readings:**

***Deuteronomy 6:1-9***

***New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised***

### ***The Great Commandment***

6 Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into

and occupy, <sup>2</sup> so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. <sup>3</sup> Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup> Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup> and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### **Hebrews 9:11-14**

#### ***New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised***

<sup>11</sup> But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood

of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

### **Mark 12:28-34**

#### ***New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised***

#### ***The First Commandment***

<sup>28</sup> One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup> you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." <sup>31</sup> The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' <sup>32</sup> Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; <sup>33</sup> and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the

strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”, —this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’<sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

### Reflection

For our Old Testament reading we heard a passage from Deuteronomy, the last of the first five books of the bible, known as the Pentateuch, the most holy books of the Jewish Torah, writings, for the most part, thought to have been written by Moses. ‘Deuteronomy’ itself means ‘repetition of the law’, or from the Hebrew, ‘a copy of the law’. And here, we hear the heart of things, the core of the Jewish belief:

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.”*

These words are so important that the Jewish people are told to make them a key part of everyday life – commit them to memory:

*“Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

I was reminded of the importance of this when watching “Your Home Made Perfect” on the BBC recently when Naomi and Yehuda, and orthodox Jewish couple, had their house make-over. Before they moved back in, they blessed the house and attached a scroll – a “Mezuzah” to the doorpost – a scroll with these words that we have just heard, fulfilling this command to remind themselves to love God whenever they entered their house.

Keep these words in your heart, in your mind, constantly – love God with all your heart, soul and mind.

Jesus would have grown up with these words, and with the practice of the scroll on the doorpost. It was more than familiar to him; it was a part of life itself.

So, when we hear in our New Testament reading from Mark’s Gospel Jesus being asked what the first commandment, the most important commandment is, the answer is clear and obvious. Jesus answers as expected:

*'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."*

But that's not enough for Jesus. He gives a second, supplementary answer:

*'The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'*

It's all about 'love'. And actually, the supplementary answer, although short, could be thought of as a further two answers – 'love your neighbour' and 'love yourself'. We need both elements to come together, with a love for God, to make a whole picture.

Love God, love your neighbour, love yourself.

Live a life marked out and identified by love. How could you love God and not love all of her creation? How could you love God's creation and not love God's people? In all that, perhaps a difficult step for each of us, at times, is that step of loving ourselves. Let me return to that later.

Jesus also agrees with the questioner when he says that this love is more important than burnt offerings and

sacrifices. It's less about religious practices, and much more about a life well lived.

Perhaps many of us have missed worshipping in Church over the last 20 months, but I suspect that most of us have missed more the love and companionship of family and friends. I know I have.

Jesus finally tells his interrogator that he is not far from the kingdom of God. I wonder how you interpret that? It might be that Jesus is saying that the teacher's thinking is solid, and therefore he is close in a spiritual sense – his theology is sound and his attitudes right. But perhaps there is another sense to Jesus' words. 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' also carries with it the sense that not just the teacher, but all of us, are close to God, or rather God is close to us. God isn't over the horizon, out of sight, unattainable. Rather all of what we see, witness and experience are examples of God's creation, his presence with us, his rule over our lives. We are not far from the kingdom of God – we are part of it. If we are willing and able to embrace all we see and experience it as part of our daily, hourly recognition of God's presence, then his love will be all the more apparent to us. His love will be all the more available for us to acknowledge and then reflect back in our actions and our love for others, our love for his creation.

Maybe some of us have had that experience in the last months as our lives have changed. I have certainly found solace in long walks around Hertfordshire, seeing the detail of the changes of the seasons, the patterns of life around me, and God's love of his creation.

But what about loving ourselves? The witness of the 'selfie' generation seems perhaps outwardly to demonstrate that self-love is ever more evident! Or maybe that should be a selfish love? Is there a difference between a love of self and selfish love? Oh dear, I could be in deep water here! You might want to reflect on that yourself, but it seems to me that 'selfies' are often more about the image that someone wants to portray of themselves, rather than about reality. We have a generation of, particularly, young people who are insecure and find it difficult to love themselves, whilst being outwardly confident. Perhaps the reality is like that in some way for each of us. I heard Paddy McGuinness, the comedian and actor speaking recently about his lack of confidence, and how his comedy came out of 'playing a part' to hide his shyness. I can see that in me too – sometimes the way I cope with difficulty is to play a part and pretend a confidence that I don't really feel.

This is where our reading from the letter to the Hebrews is helpful. The writer – possibly Paul, possibly not (it's

unsigned) reinforces the message that the sacrifice of animals and religious practice are not the important factors in life. Rather, it's the example, the sacrifice, that Jesus made for us. His death on the cross demonstrated to each of us that there can be life beyond death. Let's take that more practically; whatever difficulties we might face, however much we might feel that we are held back by the things that have formed us and left us feeling that we are less than we could be, we can break free of those traps.

If we feel inadequate because of things that we have done or feel that we are lacking ability because others have denigrated us, we can break free. We can move beyond the constraints of our past. The death of Jesus makes us clean of these things and shows us that God's love for us takes the place of all our inadequacies. God's love takes us beyond ourselves. God's love in us is so great that it overflows. Just like when someone smiles, or laughs, it makes us feel like laughing, so God's love enables us to show love. Love for his creation, love for those around us.

We are loved.

We are commanded by God in many ways, but...

*'The first is, "Hear, O people of Enfield: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God*

*with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” ‘The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’*

**Amen**

### **A time of prayer**

Let us remember the Methodist Church throughout our own Circuit in Enfield, but also throughout the United Kingdom and in the wider world. Let us hold in our prayers the many communities of faith that are working and sometimes struggling to find an appropriate way forward during the continuing pandemic.

Let us pray:

As the leaders of nations meet in Glasgow to agree goals to combat change, we pray that there may be commitment by all countries to work together, and join forces with civil society, companies and people, on the frontline of climate change, to inspire and lead climate action. We pray that those who meet in Glasgow may have the wisdom and vision to treasure, protect and love the world which you created and which you entrusted to our care.

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

As Coronavirus cases continue to increase, and as many are concerned about the impact of the virus on their lives and their mental health, we pray that you will inspire the leaders of all nations to take appropriate actions to protect all people. We thank you for the vaccination programme, and we pray for all who are delivering the boosters, health professionals and volunteers alike. May research be accurate and helpful; may decisions be carefully thought out and wise; may the response be wholehearted. We pray for those whose mental health has been affected in any way; those suffering now with the virus; and those caring for them.

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

We pray for peace throughout the world. We remember especially the people of Sudan, where the Sovereign Council that was overseeing the transition to democracy has been dissolved and heavily armed soldiers deployed in the capital. We pray for Afghanistan where more than half the population – about 22.8 million people – face acute food insecurity, while over three million children under five could suffer acute malnutrition.

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

We pray for our church and for other churches and places of worship in our community. May we enable people to encounter God, work together to build community, serve those in need and share your love widely. Help us to build each other up as we seek to strengthen your kingdom among us.

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

We bring into your love all for whom we are especially concerned today, naming them in our hearts or picturing them in our minds. We pray for the sick and those who are worried, for the lonely and any who feel isolated, for the sorrowful and those who are recently bereaved, for ourselves, our families and friends.

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

Jesus said, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all

your strength; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

God of love,  
**may we love our world, each other and you.**

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**The 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.**

**Hymn: Teach me, my God and King (STF 668)**

*Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9ykXQ7euL8>

Teach me, my God and King,  
in all things thee to see,  
and what I do in anything,  
to do it as for thee.

For those who look on glass,  
on it may stay the eye;  
or if it pleases, through it pass,  
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake:  
nothing can be so mean,  
which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"  
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause  
makes drudgery divine:  
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone  
that turneth all to gold;  
for that which God doth touch and own  
cannot for less be told.

George Herbert (1593 - 1633)

### **A blessing and sending out prayer**

May the word of God dwell in our hearts,  
in our minds and in our actions,  
every day of our lives.  
And let us pray for one another, saying together:  
**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now, every day and evermore.  
Amen.**

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