

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John. 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 - pray for them as they pray for you.

Welcome to the online service from Enfield Methodist Circuit.

Introduction

Today is the 5th Sunday of Easter. It is also the start of Christian Aid Week.

The theme for this service is Love. Jesus says “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

Call to worship

Loving God, we come before you with thanksgiving for all your loving kindness and tender mercies. We come from different places and different challenges in our lives. But united now, with one voice, we say thank Jesus for uniting us through your love. We ask your Holy Spirit to be among us now and to help us to be a holy people, rooted in your love so that by this

everyone will know that we are your disciples. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen**

Opening Hymn STF **409 Let us build a house where love can dwell**

(Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here.)

<https://youtu.be/mTdxFRfEoMs>

Verse 1

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;

here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 2

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God’s children dare to seek to dream God’s reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God’s grace;

here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 3

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat:

a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;

as we share in Christ the feast that free us:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 4

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone

to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;

let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 5

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard

and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,

let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place

Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

Prayer of Adoration and Thanksgiving

Let us pray.

Almighty and loving God, you loved this world so much that you gave your only Son, Jesus to be our Saviour. He emptied himself of glory and became your suffering servant, living a human life, despised, and rejected and tortured to death on a cross. Yet you exalted him above all things and raised him from the dead. He is our Lord, and we have known his presence with us. Today we give thanks for your glory, and we praise and adore you O Lord for all the work of creation: the earth, the sea and sky and everything that has breath. You are worthy to be praised and we know that your promises are true. You

invite us to extend your love to the world around us and to care for others as deeply as we care for ourselves. And so, we open our hearts to your Word and ask you by your Spirit to lead us in your ways and give us strength to follow you and to live in a manner worthy of the Good News we have received. Show to us how our lives may be transformed, that the love of Jesus would shine through to the dark places of our world for the glory of your name we pray. **Amen**

Prayer of confession: –

The Bible tells us in 1 John 1 :8-10 that ... If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1 :8-10 NRSV)

So let us confess our sins to God.

Silence

Lord Jesus, you were called the friend of sinners, be my friend, for I acknowledge that I have sinned. Forgive the wrong that I have done and the right that I have failed to do; my secret and my more open sins; my sins of ignorance and my deliberate sins; sins to please myself and sins to please others; the sins

which I remember, and the sins which I have forgotten; forgive all these, for it was for me also that you died. My Lord and Saviour. Amen. .

(John Wesley)

Absolution....

God has promised that whenever we repent and seek a new union with God, forgiveness is ours. That promise comes true now. Sisters and brothers, know that in Christ Jesus, we are forgiven.

Amen. Thanks be to God

1st Reading: Acts 11:1-18: New International Version

Peter Explains His Actions

11 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

⁴Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw

a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

⁸ "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

⁹ "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹ "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'

¹⁵ "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with^[a] water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

2nd Reading: John 13:31-35 New International Version

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him,^[a] God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

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.”

Time to reflect

Love one another... This is a significant phrase that we heard in our gospel reading today. Jesus had a long conversation with his disciples. He needed to impart the most important messages to them, and he is saying the same to us today “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.” (John 13:34-35 NIV)

What is love?

‘Love’ is usually a very positive word and can be used in all sorts of different ways, mainly romantically. C.S Lewis, the great British writer and theologian, identified four common verbs for love in the Bible in Greek, namely:

Storge - familial love

Eros - romantic love

Philia - friendship love

Agape- love that is concerned with the greatest good of another.

Maybe for some of us, Love is not something we reflect upon often; our lives are usually permeated by simple signs of love within all of these categories, and I think we tend to take the concept pretty much for granted. Nevertheless, people think that steps towards love demand a major effort such as when we fall in love with someone, and this is quite true. Love requires time, it requires being together. It involves working on shared tasks. We cannot be in love alone. Love demands relationship and a relationship where there is respect, reciprocity, mutuality, and accountability. We must not forget Paul’s exhortation on love- that all powerful statement that “love is kind, love is patient.....” Etc (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) However it must be noted that there some relationships that are seen as ‘Loving’, are far from it. People get tied up in unhealthy or abusive relationships in the ‘name of love’ for various reasons. We have heard a lot recently about people who groom others especially those who are vulnerable with a view to exploiting them. Some aspects of life put strains on relationships such as pressure on time from work commitments which can mean that people really must intentionally make time to meet with their loved ones. However modern media can be a mixed blessing too as people are able to see their loved ones at great distances and even across continents on Facebook, Skype, Facetime WhatsApp etc. Love is self-sacrificing and because of this, it can be hard sometimes.

Jesus' commandment to love as he has loved would seem completely beyond our grasp if it were not for the nature of Jesus' relationship with us. We could be asking the question- what does the command to love, mean in the face of hatred and devastation and atrocities in the world? There is so much misery to behold in our world today. There is cruelty and death as we are continually witnessing on our TV, radio, and other social media platforms but there is also tenderness, kindness, bravery, and the resilience of love. There is evidence of what we become when we permit ourselves to belong to each other. How the spirit connects us across the miles through the years and even beyond the borders between this life and the next.

The command to love is Agape love – love that is concerned with the greatest good of another, love that is unconditional, love that requires giving without counting the cost. Jesus' disciples were commanded to choose love in the aftermath of betrayal and in the midst of uncertainty. And of course, these are the kinds of situations in which we need to be reminded to choose love, not when all is well. Those times when evil seems to be having its way or when that person you thought was a friend abandoned you in your time of need or when the actions and words of others clearly come from hate or prejudice. We need to trust that all shall be well when we choose the way of love.

In her book 'All shall be well' Julian of Norwich, an English anchoress and mystic, discusses the characteristics of love and hope in biblical and theological terms. She emphasises that all of us are held in the arms of God. She reminds us of God's abiding presence in whatever situation we find ourselves in and that even in those circumstances there will be capacity to hold dreams and vision.

Jesus asked those who sought to follow him to love as he had loved. His life and ministry had been an enacted parable of what that meant. They should love one another and that means acting in a loving way to each other. Jesus did not just talk the talk. He actually walked the walk. He brought in the outsider, included the marginalised, offered encouragement to the downtrodden, he offered healing to the sick, he was compassionate to those who had been disregarded and he gave all the possibility of a new quality of life-life in all its fullness.

And we are invited to believe that we are sent in the power of the spirit with this hope in our hearts. The eternal love of God revealed to us in Christ is constantly opening new paths for us, inviting us to move beyond ourselves and our limited vision and to share in the great commission to make Christ's love and welcome known to all people. We love because God first loved us-

“¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV)

This past week was our convocation, which is the annual gathering of all deacons of the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) and its associates. As a dispersed order, it is the only time that we get to meet our brothers and sisters from around the UK. It is first time in the ten years since I joined the Order that I was unable to attend convocation. I had a partial dispensation because I needed to attend my daughter's graduation ceremony and, due to the distance involved, I could only attend convocation for a couple of days via Zoom. However, even before convocation ended on the Friday afternoon, I had received a beautiful card telling me how much my physical presence was missed. On the cover of the card was a picture of a flickering MDO candle, a bowl and towel, and a rainbow with the words 'Love, Joy and Peace' on it. These words penetrated sharply in my state of mind and as I reflected on this experience, I sense God saying to me that as God's creation we are indeed bound by love. If anything, the covid -19 virus has taught us the perils of living in isolation.

And so today on this beautiful spring morning and on this 5th Sunday of Easter, and the beginning of Christian Aid week, I thought I'd have another gaze at my little card. I look at the

flickering candle and think again about Jesus' command to love one another. I think about those who have shown love for one another over during the pandemic, those who have shown love for one another since the invasion of Ukraine, those who have shown love for one another during the multiple wars that have happened in our world. Those who run marathons, climb mountains, sell their possessions for good causes. Those engaged in charitable work of all sorts and magnitudes. The list goes on and on. The candle burns brightly in those dark places where lives are being restored, where hope is given.

In this passage from John, Jesus commands "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." (John 13:34-35 NIV) . I remember I am loved, and I remember to choose love. And so, in response I proclaim with the hymn writer's song: "In Christ Alone"

In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

May God grant you the gift to hear your saviour saying these words to you. Love one another as I have loved you. And may you respond. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God we pray for the global church and for Christian communities everywhere, especially those who are persecuted for their faith. We pray that you will walk with us collectively that the world may know we are your disciples by the love that we have for one another. We pray for our circuit here at Enfield and the wider Methodist Connexion, for all who use our buildings. We lift up the Space project, the contractors and all who work at the building site. We pray for your continued provision so that the building work can be completed to the glory of your name.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for leaders of nations and all persons in positions of authority, that their lives may be marked by Christ-like service and love. We lift up all international discussions and negotiations, we ask you to purify the minds and attitudes of all world leaders that they may seek the way of peace at all times, building bridges and not walls, so that all might experience your deep love for

humanity and all that you have created

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are oppressed and living in captivity, may your sustaining presence be with them. We lift up those affected by political unrest, civil disturbance, war and terrorism that they may escape from evil and death to find the land of freedom you have promised.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are hungry and thirsty this day: those affected by famine, drought, or extreme conditions of climate. Today we remember the work of Christian Aid and pray that their vision of an end to world poverty may be fulfilled. We lift up those who have too much that they may learn to share and help those in need

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For those who are dealing with loss or facing death, we lift up those in hospital, care home or hospice that they may feel your presence and know your peace. Enfold them in your love and hope, now and always.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves. We thank you for connecting us all through your love.

We pray for all who feel alone, disconnected, or abandoned. We pray especially for those we know who are having a difficult time, who need special reassurance and understanding. Help them to feel your presence with them, and help us to be people who bring hope and love to others.

Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Jesus Christ is the light of the world; a light no darkness can quench. We remember before God those who have died and light a candle to symbolize the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings hope. May their soul rest in perfect peace and may they rise in glory. Amen.

Merciful father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come.
thy will be done.**

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses.

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation.

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power, and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn 2: Closing Hymn -STF 503- Love divine all loves excelling
(I invite you to sing/ read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here)

<https://youtu.be/8q3jmXn6HTQ>

Verse 1

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Verse 2

2. Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Verse 3

3. Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Benediction

Christ has given us a new commandment:
that we love one another, as Christ has loved us.
By this, everyone will know that we are Christ's disciples,
if we share that love with the world.
And through this love, all things will be made new.
Go now and do as Christ commands. **Amen.**
We go in Peace to love and serve the Lord
Thanks be to God. Amen

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