

# Morning Worship for Sunday 9 May 2021

“God’s all-encompassing love”

Good morning and welcome to St George’s United Reformed Church, Morpeth with Great Bavington and Widdrington who are joining us. . We begin our service with some words from Psalm 98

## Opening words: (from Psalm 98)

Sing a new song to the LORD;  
he has done wonderful things!  
By the power of his Spirit and holy strength  
he has made his salvation known.  
The LORD has made his saving power known to the nations.  
He kept his promise to the people of Israel  
with faithfulness and constant love for them  
And all people everywhere have seen the salvation of our God.

Our 1st hymn takes up the theme of the Psalm:

## HYMN Sing to the Lord a joyful song

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,  
Lift up your hearts, your voices raise;  
To us his gracious gifts belong,  
To him our songs of love and praise;

For life and love, for rest and food,  
For daily help and nightly care,  
Sing to the Lord, for he is good,  
And praise his name, for it is fair;

For strength to those who on him wait  
His truth to prove, his will to do,  
Praise ye our God, for he is great,  
Trust in his name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above  
Cheer those who love his sweet employ,  
Sing to our God, for he is love,  
Exalt his name, for it is joy.

*J S B Monsell*

## Opening prayers

Almighty God, infinite and eternal  
In wisdom, power and love,  
We praise you for all that you are,  
And for all that you do for the world.  
You have shown us your truth and your love  
In our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Help us by your Spirit  
To worship you in spirit and in truth.  
God our Father, we confess

We have sinned against you and against one another,  
In thought, word and deed;  
We have not loved you with all our heart,  
We have not loved our neighbour as ourselves;  
But you have kept faith with us.  
Have mercy on us, we pray, forgive our sins,  
And restore us to newness of life,  
In Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

## (Declaration of faith):

Our God is gracious and kind,  
Forgiving all who turn away from wrongdoing.  
Here are words we may trust,  
Words that merit full acceptance:  
‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’  
To all who turn to him he says: ‘Your sins are forgiven’.  
He also says ‘Follow me.’  
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Our readings today are read for us by the Cleverley family.

1st Reading: Acts 10 v 44-48 The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

## Introduction to the Word

These days in books and films we are often told the ‘back story to the main events to help put things into perspective. The back story to today’s reading is life changing for the early church as this imaginative interpretation by Nick Fawcett tells us:

## ‘Peter reflects on a strange dream’ (from No Ordinary Man Book 2)

**Comment:** Accepting people who are different

The story of Peter and Cornelius is a turning point in the embryonic movement that became the worldwide church. At first the disciples preached the good news of Jesus mainly to Jews but everything changed when Peter realised that God’s plan for salvation encompassed the whole of humanity, not just the Jewish nation and that in order to become a follower of Jesus people didn’t have to become Jews or adhere to all the Jewish Laws.

Jesus had hinted at this during his ministry and on a few occasions healed Gentiles but through the conversion of Cornelius’s household and friends the whole world was enabled to become part of God’s vision for humanity. Barriers were broken and all were to be accepted and welcomed into God’s kingdom, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. Yet prejudice of one kind or another isn’t easy to eradicate.

When I was young in the early 1950s (not long after the Second World War) I often played with my friend, Margaret, who lived round the corner. Margaret's mum was a friendly welcoming lady but when she spoke she had a funny accent and sometimes her English was hard to understand. One day my mother & I were out shopping and a neighbour stopped us and said 'Why do you let Carol go to that house. The woman's a German.'. 'She's Austrian actually' my mother replied 'and if you got to know her you would realise that she is one of the most helpful and hospitable people in the street.'

As a Roman soldier, Cornelius would have been seen by many Jews as a hated enemy – one of the occupying forces and despite his belief in the Jewish God and his generosity to the local community would have been regarded as a second class citizen as far as the Jewish religion was concerned. Peter too, for all that he had spent 3 years in Jesus' company, would never have chosen to go willingly to a Gentile's house or meet and eat with his household but the Holy Spirit changed all that as Peter's opening words to Cornelius and his friends demonstrate (in Acts 10 v 34): 'I now realise it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis and all who respect God and do what is right are acceptable to him, no matter what race they belong to.' Peter's eyes had been opened to the all-encompassing loving generosity of God.'

Our next hymn is a prayer asking God to open our hearts and minds to everyone we encounter: 'Help us accept each other'.

#### **HYMN Help us accept each other**

Help us accept each other  
as Christ accepted us;  
teach us as sister, brother,  
each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us  
and bring us to believe:  
we are ourselves accepted  
and meant to love and live.

Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,  
as in our daily life  
we struggle to be human  
and search for hope and faith.

Teach us to care for people,  
for all - not just for some,  
to love them as we find them  
or as they may become.

Let your acceptance change us  
so that we may be moved  
in living situations

to do the truth in love;  
to practise your acceptance  
until we know by heart  
the table of forgiveness  
and laughter's healing art.

Lord, for today's encounters  
with all who are in need,  
who hunger for acceptance,  
for justice and for bread,  
we need new eyes for seeing,  
new hands for holding on:  
renew us with your Spirit;  
Lord, free us, make us one!

*Fred Kaan (born 1929) © 1975 Stainer & Bell Ltd*

The second reading is from John ch 15. V 9-17  
followed by some verses from the first letter of John  
ch 5

#### **John 15 v 9-17**

Jesus said ' I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them. And you are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I heard from my Father. You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. This, then, is what I command you: love one another.

#### **1 John 5 v 1-5 The way of Love**

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is a child of God; and whoever loves a father loves his child also. This is how we know that we love God's children: it is by loving God and obeying his commands. For our love for God means that we obey his commands. And his commands are not too hard for us, because every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith. Who can defeat the world? The person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

#### **'I love the name of Jesus, King of my heart' -**

I love the name of Jesus, King of my heart,  
He is everything to me.  
I bless the name of Jesus, reign in my life,  
show the Father's love so free.

Spirit of love, Spirit of power,  
shine through eternity.  
I love the name of Jesus, Light of the world,  
let me walk each day with Thee.

I love the name of Jesus, risen above,  
and He loves and prays for me.  
I bless the name of Jesus, ruling on high  
with a glorious majesty.  
Spirit of love, Spirit of power,  
shine through eternity.  
I praise the name of Jesus, Lord of my life,  
for He died to set me free.

I love the name of Jesus, splendour of God,  
and His face I long to see.  
I bless the name of Jesus, Shepherd of all;  
by His side I now can be.  
Spirit of love, Spirit of power,  
shine through eternity.  
I praise the name of Jesus, for He is love,  
and that love He gives to me.

*Kathleen Thomerson ©1970, 1975  
Celebration/Thankyou Music*

#### **Comment: Love one Another**

I was blest with loving parents who were open-hearted to friends and strangers alike. They never had much money but they practiced hospitality and our home was often filled with visitors. Many a time I remember my Scottish father saying 'Will ye bide with us for tea', and a pot of tea with some of mother's Bero book scones would appear, as if by magic. The Scots' word 'bide' is a derivative of 'abide' which older translations of the Bible use in the passage we heard from John's Gospel – Jesus' final instructions to his disciples before his death – 'Abide in my love'. William Barclay (the theologian whose Daily Study guides were popular when I was young) describes abiding in Christ like this; 'The secret of Jesus' abiding in love was his constant contact with God. When we 'abide' with someone – stay with them for a long time – often we pick up one or two of their habits as we enjoy their company, learn more about them and begin to understand what is at the heart of their nature. And so it is with God.'..... The Message Bible translates this as being at home with God. 'Make yourselves at home in my love', says Jesus, 'And as you keep my commands, you'll be at home in my love, just as I have followed my Father's commands and am at home in his love.' When we spend more time 'at home with Jesus' (through our prayers and reading the Gospel stories) our love for him grows and spills out in our actions towards those around us and we try to live in a manner that does him justice and draws us closer to God.

The letter of John develops this further. 'Whoever believes in Jesus becomes an adopted child of God and it follows that they will love his other children'. The reality test on whether or not we love God's children – the proof that we love God is when we keep God's command to love one another as he loves us. Good neighbourliness is also important (loving our neighbour as ourselves) and we have seen many examples of this over the past year by people of all faiths and none during the pandemic. Our attitude as Christians towards others is to accept them as they are and introduce them to the embracing love of Jesus so that the Holy Spirit can move in their lives as the Spirit shapes and moulds ours.

Christian Aid week (which begins tomorrow) gives us the opportunity to learn about and learn from other cultures and find innovative ways to put love into action. Love is a two-way thing – not just a case of us giving money to someone in need but finding ways of sharing resources. It may be giving a fair price for their goods and being grateful for what they give us. When we know we are loved by God we dare to love in return and the love of God in Jesus is seen in all we say and do.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS45TWyktXg&list=PLnUh\\_ZGnZNfUIV8HEyppRlv8FLBtyEY65&index=40](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nS45TWyktXg&list=PLnUh_ZGnZNfUIV8HEyppRlv8FLBtyEY65&index=40)

As we come to our prayers for the world, we pray:  
'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come.'

**Prayers of intercession (for Christian Aid week)**  
**'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come.'** (music)

Almighty God, who by the Word become flesh,  
gave inherent dignity to all of humanity,  
by your grace, may we recognise your presence  
and the incredible privilege of encountering your  
image in each other.  
Grant that by your inspiration we may work  
continually  
to challenge anything that dehumanises another  
and to amplify the worth and value of all through your  
son, Jesus, our Saviour.

**'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come.'** (music)

Lord Jesus Christ, by your example of serving others  
and teaching us  
that it is more blessed to give than receive,  
help us to be open hearted and open handed  
in our sharing with others and giving to those in need.  
May we learn to accept those who are different from  
us  
and bring your peace to all situations.

**'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come.'** (music)

Holy Spirit of love, quicken our imaginations  
so that we may feel more deeply for the needs of  
others

as we try to put ourselves in their place.

Give us hearts of self-forgetting compassion  
which will move us to give from all that you have  
given us,

and help us to be good neighbours to those both near  
and far.

**'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom  
come.'** (music)

In a few moments of silence, let us bring our personal  
prayers to God as the Holy Spirit leads us...(silence)

**'Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom  
come.'** (music)

We offer all our prayers in Jesus' name as we say  
together the prayer that unites us in God's worldwide  
family: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be  
thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in  
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.

Our final hymn reminds us that God's kingdom is for  
everyone.

The church is like a table,  
a table that is round.  
It has no sides or corners,  
no first or last, no honours;  
here people are in one-ness  
and love together bound.

The church is like a table  
set in an open house;  
no protocol for seating,  
a symbol of inviting,  
of sharing, drinking, eating;  
an end to them and us.

The church is like a table,  
a table for a feast  
to celebrate the healing  
of all excluded-feeling,  
(while Christ is serving, kneeling,  
a towel around his waist).

The church is like a table  
where every head is crowned.  
As guests of God created,  
all are to each related;  
the whole world is awaited  
to make the circle round.

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I hope you have enjoyed sharing in worship with me  
today and I look forward to when we can all meet  
together again. Let us pray our blessing for each  
other:

**Blessing:**  
**May the peace of God surround us,**  
**The love of Jesus enfold us,**  
**And the joy of the Holy Spirit fill our lives,**  
**Today & always. Amen.**

You may like to follow the link below to watch A  
blessing for the world from Aotearoa/New Zealand

<https://www.youtube.co/watch?v=eZQPifs2kjo>

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