

Sunday 6 September

Worship from the United Reformed
Church
at Morpeth, Widdrington and Gt
Bavington

Opening Words

There is one God:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

There is one Faith

and one baptism

There is one people

the people of God

We are God's people

We are children of God,

followers of one faith,

bound to each other,

in the love of Christ Jesus.

Amen

Hymn: Jesus calls us here to meet him

as through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of life and Lord of all,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell this tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory
came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other,
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in the common search for truth.

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Reading: Psalm 149: 1-5

That reading is most suitable for today – in which we give Praise to the Lord, as we sing a new song in the assembly of God's people. It is good to be here and to return to worshipping together in this place.

But for those of you watching the upload of this service, that last verse says "Let his faithful people rejoice in this honour, and sing for joy on their beds."

Whether you are here, worshipping in this place as God's people, or at home on your beds, we gather together as the people of God to Praise the Lord.

Prayer of Approach

Praise the Lord!

It is good to be here, in the assembly of all God's people,
as we come to hear the Scriptures,
to offer our prayers to God,
and to sing our songs of thankfulness and praise.

We gather together in prayer,
giving thanks for our churches,
these places where people have gathered for generations.
We thank you for all those who
have gone before us,
those who have helped to build these worshipping communities,
and have served the Lord in many and varied ways.

We thank you God, that we are here today.
For some this may be the first time in a long time,
that they have been within the walls of this church,
Others may be meeting in Spirit, if not in person,
and looking forward to a time when they may
themselves feel able to return to church.
We thank you for those who are with us today
in fellowship over the internet,
or are joined with us in prayer in their own churches
overseas.

Wherever we are, we give you thanks Lord God,
that we are part of this worldwide fellowship,
as we share together in worship.
We hold onto the promise that you give to us,
that whenever two or three meet in your name,
you are there with them.

May we sense your presence beside us today,
as we gather to worship.

AMEN

Bible reading: Matthew 18: 15-20

Hymn: As we are gathered, Jesus is here.

one with each other, Jesus is here;
joined by the Spirit, washed in His blood,
part of the body, the Church of God.

As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here.

John Daniels

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Sermon

A young rabbi found a serious problem in his new congregation. During the Friday service, half the congregation stood for the prayers and half remained seated, and each side shouted at the other, insisting that theirs was the true tradition.

Nothing the rabbi said or did moved toward solving the impasse. Finally, in desperation, the young rabbi sought out the synagogue's 99-year-old founder. He met the old rabbi in the nursing home and poured out his troubles.

"So here tell me," he pleaded, "was it the tradition for the congregation to stand during the prayers?"

"No," answered the old rabbi.

"Ah," responded the younger man, "then it was the tradition to sit during the prayers?"

"No," answered the old rabbi.

"Well," the young rabbi responded, "what we have is complete chaos! Half the people stand and shout, and the other half sit and scream."

"Ah," said the old man, "that was the tradition."

Conflicts and disagreements within the church are inevitable. And as our churches start to meet together again, it is good to be reminded of how we should behave when we are together.

It is always surprising how bad we are at dealing with **conflicts**, and how happy we are to keep putting up with them, even if they last year upon year, and even generation upon generation. We can go for years just bottling up our problems and our feelings and our

anger, instead of addressing any dispute that we might have with others in the church.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus tells us how to deal properly with conflicts that might arise within a small church. Or does he? Because, of course, in Jesus day, there was no church. And so addressing unresolved conflict by bringing it to the whole church was not possible..because the church did not exist.

So perhaps, these words might not be exactly from Jesus mouth, but certainly Matthew includes them in his gospel, and would have been along the lines of what Jesus would have said to resolve those situations.

Jesus says "If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault." Now taking out the obviously male bias in the passage. What Jesus says is "If someone does something wrong by you, **go to them and tell them**" In some versions it says "have it out with them at once - **just between the two of you**" and in the New English Bible it says "**strictly between yourselves**"

Is this good advice? I think so. Its certainly better than bottling things up for years and years and letting it fester inside you. Jesus says "If someone upsets you go to them immediately, keep it between yourselves, don't go and gossip about it to someone else. But go to them at once, as soon as it has happened, and tell them."

And then Jesus says, if you go and the person just won't listen to you, then take someone else and both of you go. Because if there is a problem between you two, then at least it brings in a third persons point of view. It takes the problem away from being a personal, private grievance between two people, to a situation between two people that needs to be sorted out.

And then if the person still won't listen, if that person is still not interested in sorting out this problem, then take it to the whole church, make the church aware of this situation in their midst. Because if a person doesn't want to restore a relationship, if there is a dissension in the church, if there is a division in the community, then the community needs to know about it.

And then lastly, if the person is not interested in the wellbeing of that community, if a person is not interested in the ongoing health of the fellowship, then that person is no longer welcome to be part of that community. This is how the early church was instructed to deal with the conflicts that arose:

- We should express our discontent, not brood on it.
- We should take the initiative to put matters right personally.
- If that fails, we should seek the advice and help of a wise and gracious person.
- If we still fail, we should take our troubles to the Christian fellowship, where everything should be judged in the light of love.

They are good pieces of advice, but I am still not sure that they came directly from Jesus' mouth. Not just because the church had not yet come into existence, but because Jesus tells them to treat such people as gentile and tax collectors. Those very people who Jesus encouraged his followers not to treat as outsiders.

I used to enjoy watching Ann Robinson with "**you are the weakest link - goodbye.**" But its not exactly the Christian way is it. We don't just evict people from our Big Brother house just because we can't get on with the people in it.

And that wasn't Jesus' way anyway. Jesus went to lengths to include people such as this tax collectors and gentiles within the community. To him they were not to be regarded as outsiders.

It's interesting that Matthew chooses to include this teaching of Jesus in this place in the gospel. It appears just after the parable of the lost sheep. A parable about how God will leave the 99 in the flock to seek out the one that is lost.

Surely then, if we cannot resolve disputes with someone within the church, we are not to throw them out and never speak to them again. But our emphasis on resolving conflicts must be in an atmosphere of mutual love. If all else fails, we should regard the other not as hopeless, but to be loved, as Jesus loved the Gentile and tax-collector.

And then Matthew puts in these two passages at the end of this teaching, and they don't really seem to fit with what has been said previously.

The first is a repetition of the teaching where Peter is given authority to bind on earth what is bound in heaven, and loose on earth what is loosed in heaven. But here that authority is passed on to the whole of the church. Jesus says "**What you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, what you permit on earth, will**

be permitted in heaven." What an awesome responsibility that is? What a heavy burden to place on those who represent the church?

What we permit to happen here, will be permitted in heaven.

What we do not allow, will not be allowed in heaven. Imagine if we were to take those instructions, that authority to heart.

How many times do we turn a blind eye to what goes on in our communities, even in the church? How many times do we not address wrongful behaviour and attitudes - feeling that it is no business of ours, and it doesn't really matter anyway.

Jesus says whatever you do in this place, is reflected in heaven. Here in this place, in this community, we set the rules for the kingdom. What we allow here has a profound impact.

I don't know exactly what that means - I don't think we can ever really know what Jesus means when he says that. But the **intention** of what he says is really clear: what we allow to happen in this community, is fundamentally important to God. We are not to allow conflict and disputes to continue, because if we allow those things to continue, it affects the community, and if it affects this community it has far reaching impact too.

If we bottle up our feelings, if we ignore our disputes, if we sweep it under the carpet for generation after generation, then you are allowing it to shape what this community, and ultimately what the kingdom is.

As a church, we have to think about what goes on in the community. We have a say. What we allow, is allowed in heaven, What we say is not acceptable, is not acceptable in heaven. And we have work to do in addressing the issues. In healing our communities and the world. Because it is not just how we behave in here, but out there too.

As our communities start to come alive again, as more and more people start to live together again, how we behave towards each other is vitally important. We need to demonstrate faithful Christian living, how to behave towards each other, especially when there are disputes that arise among us. We need to continue to pray for our communities, to continue to work towards the healing our communities. We pray for the healing of divisions in our churches, between denominations and

with congregations, but we pray for healing of divisions in our wider communities too.

Jesus says our prayers will be answered. But he goes one step further in our passage today, and says "whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." This is not a blanket promise that whatever we ask for will be given. But is here in this passage, specifically talking about solving disputes and conflict in the community.

Michael Green says: "It is telling them that prayer offered for reconciliation is utterly part of God's will and never falls on deaf ears in heaven."

We can be sure that reconciliation and peace are certainly part of God's will for us. And Jesus assures that when we pray for this, when our wills are in line with God's will, and the Father will do for us whatever we ask.

So let us pray together right now, not just for ourselves, and our own illness and relationships, but for the communities around the world that are in conflict and dispute. Because when we pray, we are saying, this is not acceptable. This is not part of God's will here on earth.... or in heaven.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ,
we come before you in prayer,
to offer our thoughts and concerns for
our world, our communities and ourselves.
You proclaim your kingdom a place of peace and justice,
and as citizens of that kingdom we bring
our lives in tune to your will and purpose.

We pray for our world.
We pray for those areas of our world that are in
conflict: Afghanistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabi, Syria, Turkey,
Mexico, Somalia, Kenya, Iraq, South Sudan, Libya.
We pray for a resolution to those conflicts,
that different races may live alongside each other in
peace, and that leaders of the Governments may
make peace and justice a priority in their countries.

We pray for our communities.
As lockdowns are eased and tightened in various places,
we are aware of the tensions and conflicts that this may
bring. Those who are cautious will oppose the casual,
and the fearless will discredit the frightened.

As our communities start to heal themselves,
we pray for patience and understanding between
people so that each may live alongside each other as
they are able.

We pray for ourselves.
For the relationships we have with partners, and with
children. For our relationships with parents and
relatives. For the fellowship we share with others in our
churches. Grant us tolerance and understanding so that
we may ever work towards reconciliation with each
other and the unity of the body of Christ of which we
are part.

Lord Jesus,
grant us peace within ourselves,
that all inner conflict may cease
and we may rest in your presence
be filled with your Spirit,
and share your love with those we meet this week.

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, who taught
us to say....

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Jesus stand among us
at the meeting of our lives
be our sweet agreement
at the meeting of our eyes;
O Jesus we love you,
so we gather here,
join our hearts in unity
and take away our fear.

So to You we're gathering
out of each and every land,
Christ the love between us
at the joining of our hands;
O Jesus, we love You,
so we gather here,
join our hearts in unity
and take away our fear.

Jesus stand among us
at the breaking of the bread;
join us as one body
as we worship You, our Head.
O Jesus, we love You,
so we gather here;
join our hearts in unity
and take away our fear.

Graham Kendrick,
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