

Sunday 31st January 2021

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
though separate let us worship together in God.

Praise the LORD!

Let us give thanks to God with all our hearts,
as we gather together in fellowship.

God's works are great, they are to be studied, and adored,
for this will bring us closer to God.

God is eternal and his creations never ending.

Let us tell of his deeds that others may discover his love.

Based on Psalm 111

Suggested Hymn

Through changing times, that call us to new learning,
you lead us on, the challenge ever- new;
through health and strife, your wisdom still discerning,
we trace your path, and search out what is true.
For you are God, who guides us through the days;
your love is good, your promise sure.
For you are God, who touches us with grace;
your love is good, your promise sure.

When courage fails, and heart and hope are dying,
we struggle on, through conflict and through tears;
you hear our pain, and listen to our crying,
and give us strength, to turn and face our fears.

For you are God, who guides us through the days;

The future now invites us to new sharing,
seeking your will, in ways we cannot see;
we walk in faith, in trust your promise daring,
the God who was, and is, and yet shall be.

For you are God, who guides us through the days;

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Tune How great thou art

Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Loving God, eternal and yet present in this moment, we gather in the name of Jesus to worship you and to recollect the wonders of your creation and the gifts of love within our lives.

We pause to give thanks for the many ways we experience love in our lives, the food we eat, our families and friends, the care of strangers, the beauty of creation around us, the opportunities each new day offers. In this pandemic, which is part of your creation but threatens creation, we give thanks for those who care for the elderly, the sick, the frightened and the lonely, and pray for the scientists who work to understand the virus and develop ways in which we can safely cohabit.

As we worship, we remember the life and ministry of Jesus, the stories which help us to understand your love and encourage us to a new way, opening up new possibilities for humanity. In oneness with Christians around the world we say together the words Jesus taught the disciples,

Our father

Reading

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (read the Contemporary English Version [here](#))

Mark 1: 21-28

Suggested hymn

Children of God, reach out to one another!

Listen [here](#)

Reflection

A healthy respect for things we do not understand is a good approach to life. It can keep us safe; it can save us making fools of ourselves but, at times, it can also prevent us from growing. Sometimes we need to wrestle with the things we don't understand in order to move forward in our understanding. If we never question what we have been told, or have heard or read, then we don't change, and we are designed for change. Discipleship is all about questioning and nurturing change,

particularly a change in attitude. Paul, during his life, did a lot of wrestling. He had grown up immersed in the Jewish tradition, he was a scholar of the law and he argued strongly against the witness of Jesus. Then everything changed, in the blink of an eye we are told, Paul experienced something which changed his attitude to the witness of Jesus. He began to wrestle with what he had heard and what he knew, and in his letters we glimpse some of the outpouring of his struggle to understand things differently. The first letter to the Corinthians is an early example to Paul's new theology. Paul, we believe, had spent eighteen months in Corinth, around 50-51CE (or AD in old money) and he had built the beginnings of a church community. This letter is part greeting and encouragement, part reminiscence, and part instruction, sharing the benefit of his newfound wisdom.

We do not have the letter Paul received so we must guess at what the issues were that prompt his response. The part of the letter we heard today seems to be about dealing with a community where members have grown in understanding at a different rate and some are doing things which others find uncomfortable. The question seems to be what is the loving action? Paul is encouraging a spiritual love that puts the needs of others before our own needs and desires. Some of the more mature Christians in Corinth have wrestled with the question of eating meat previously offered to idols. They appear to have reasoned that if there is only one God, and it is safe to assume that this is teaching they received from Paul, then idols have no power and are in fact an illusion. In which case, any offering made to them is not in anyway altered or different, and eating such meat is fine. However, there are those within the community who are not as far on in their understanding and who are afraid of such actions. Paul says, for their sake the others should refrain from eating such meat to avoid causing distress. We can have all the knowledge in the world but if we do not use the knowledge wisely we are not putting our relationship with God into practice.

Knowledge can puff-up, but love builds up. We are called to grow in knowledge but not to use knowledge for power or control, instead we are to share our knowledge for the good of the community and the world. Many in business have discovered that whilst the way of the world is to keep secrets and use knowledge to make money, sharing knowledge has in fact led to more profit and a better relationship with others. This is using knowledge wisely, and it is wisdom which promotes confidence and enables authority.

In our passage from Mark, we read that his listeners were astounded at the authority with which Jesus spoke, and we might assume the authority they witnessed came from the wisdom Jesus had acquired in his growing up in God. Jesus shared things in a way people had not heard before, and he demonstrated a power not common at the time. His listeners were amazed when he instructed a spirit to leave the man. Taking the passage at face value we are left with a puzzle, why would the man's words have led Jesus to believe he was inhabited by an evil spirit? The words themselves seem to be acknowledging Jesus power and authority. Here we come up against the gospel writer's technique of building the theme of the book, and in Marks case one of the key themes is secrecy, he often has Jesus asking people not to tell others of their experience. There have been many books and papers written about this theme within Mark and there is no common agreement about its depth or purpose, but this early expression of Jesus power and authority is quashed by the idea that the man is inhabited by a spirit and does not know what he is saying. In this instance, Jesus' actions do not prevent word of what has happened spreading and we know the rest of the story, but I wonder how many went away from that event and wrestled with what they had seen and heard? Perhaps some of them would later join the followers of Jesus.

Jesus message was LOVE; we get the impression he did not want to be hailed a hero, rather he wanted people to see and hear of a different way of being. Jesus and the disciples travelled lightly, relying on local hospitality and sharing with people the message of God's universal, unconditional, merciful love. As they travelled, Jesus taught the disciples, encouraging them to question, to philosophise and to share their thoughts with others. He offered a new commandment to love one another, but this love was different. This was not about affinity, attraction or human desires, it was about encouragement, service, freedom and acceptance. We are called to love our neighbour, the stranger and even our enemy, we are called to act in their best interest, a tough call at times but the way of Jesus. The way of changing the world.

We may not yet have discovered the power to turn water into wine or command a spirit to leave a body, but we can show a different way of living together in creation. We can heal people by listening to them, sharing our story with them and how the knowledge of God's love has changed our lives. We can question and wrestle as we seek to learn more of God and understand more of what it means to live in oneness. We can care for one another, allowing each to grow at their own pace and in their own way and accepting that in humanity there are few definitive answers, and we are all on a journey to discover what it means to be fully human in the image of God. Life is an adventure.

Suggested hymn The love of God is broad like beach and meadow

Listen [here](#)

Reflection on Psalm 111 through the lens of quantum theology

In communion with God, the source of all being,
we offer thanks from the depths of our souls,
acknowledging the breadth and depth,
the height and the diversity
of the creation of which we are a part.

God is always,

beyond time and space,

beyond our current experience.

God's love is gracious and merciful,

Nurturing and life-giving.

Every day we glimpse God's presence,

in the beauty and majesty of creation,

in the love that we share,

and in the many gifts which fill our lives.

The source of all being provides all we need.

Throughout time and space,

our journey with God has been charted,

in the wonders of our lives and in the oneness that is God,

we trust.

God's love surrounds and enables,

and leads us towards the fullness of our humanity,

in God's love is the promise of new beginnings,

the promise of hope.

When we understand our oneness in God

we are filled with awe,

fearful of such power

and yet excited by the possibilities it brings.

As we learn of God and creation

we seek wisdom through understanding,

wisdom that will guide our words and actions,

as we learn to live in love.

Eternal God, the source of all being we offer you praise,

and bow our heads in wonder.

Heather Whyte 2021

Prayers

Loving God every adventure has moments of exhilaration and moments of fear, moments of joy and wonder, and of frustration and despair; adventures take us out of ourselves and into the realms of possibility. Jesus offered a new way, with all the facets of adventure coupled with the promise of eternal life and the presence of hope. As we journey together along the Jesus way, we bring to you our hopes and our fears and offer you our love and our commitment.

Eternal God, in the adventure of life may we seek your wisdom and share your love.

We pray for the world with all its diversity and wonder. Your creation needs love and we have not always been loving in our actions, in sorrow we acknowledge the part we have played in damaging the

wonder of creation and ask for forgiveness as we recommit to the care of the world. May we discover new ways of living sustainably to ensure a fair and just existence for all the life of the world.

Eternal God, in the adventure of life may we seek your wisdom and share your love.

We pray for our communities with their diverse nature and common needs. As we journey together may we nurture acceptance and understanding, seeking always to offer a welcome and place of belonging, a place to talk and share, to listen and discover. We pray for those who are hurting, whose lives are oppressed by unbidden and unwelcome thoughts, who feel they do not belong and have no worth. In love, may we invite them to journey with us, to discover their worth and their place within creation.

Eternal God, in the adventure of life may we seek your wisdom and share your love.

We pray for our churches, as diverse as our communities and yet held together in your love and by our shared purpose of following the way of Jesus. We think of those within our fellowships who cannot zoom and who may feel isolated and apart, frustrated by the restrictions on life we are experiencing. May we recognise the needs this part of the adventure of life brings and respond in love, reaching out in creative way to our friends and neighbours in fellowship.

Eternal God, in the adventure of life may we seek your wisdom and share your love.

We pray for ourselves and think of the frustrations and sorrows in our own lives, in the silence we listen for your wisdom and your encouragement to see life differently, looking through the frustrations to the adventure beyond, whilst allowing ourselves to feel your loving presence in our pain.

Silence

We journey on in faith and hope, sharing together the questions and mysteries that will open up new understanding and new ways on the adventure that is life in oneness with you.

Eternal God, in the adventure of life may we seek your wisdom and share your love.

In Jesus name Amen.

Offertory

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

Suggested hymn **For the healing of the nations**

Watch [here](#)

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.