

## Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021

*All material © Heather Whyte unless stated otherwise*

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.

**Suggested Hymn**            Great is thy faithfulness

Listen [here](#)

### Prayer

Creator God you have surrounded us with postcards of love, images and messages woven within the fabric of our world to delight and surprise us, to lift our spirits and remind us of the wonder of being a part of your creation.

When times are hard, you send us the voice of a friend, someone to care for us, the cycle of the seasons and nature's eternal hope witnessed in the perennial blooming of spring flowers as we emerge from winter. Images to store and treasure.

When life is overflowing with grace, you nudge us to share, to be the voice for a friend, to care for others and to paint pictures of your love through our words and actions. You are with us in every ebb and flow of life and for that we offer you our thanks and praise.

As we gather to worship we remember with thanks the times we have seen or felt you by our side and in response we offer you this time; time to listen together, time to share together, time to learn together, for together, in oneness, we will build a world of justice and joy, following the way of Jesus. We share the words of prayer Jesus taught the disciples.

Our father ....

**Readings**                    1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
                                      John 2:13-22

### Exploration

Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, a mixed church of Jewish and Gentile Christians, has something on his mind. How do you overcome the notion that the message of Jesus is foolishness? He is aware that to many on the outside the message has been undermined by the crucifixion of Jesus, for the Jews where was the miracle when it was needed, and for the Greeks where is the wisdom in killing off the leader of the revolution?

We are very aware that people such as Richard Dawkins have spent much thought and energy in their effort to declare belief in God foolish, a delusion even, however, often their definition of God is not a God I recognise. It is a picture of God built upon out of context quotations and excerpts from Scripture, together with a vague memory of God informed by school assemblies or early years church attendance and often compounded by church doctrine, misunderstood or otherwise. Nothing much has really changed then!

Paul reminds his readers that God has not elevated the great and good, the wise and the mighty. He has called the ordinary people of the world, the fishermen, the tax collectors and the outcasts, the Marys and Marthas, to recognise his presence with them and in the oneness preached by Jesus to understand themselves differently, and through the power of love to change the world. The wisdom of the world is, says Paul, foolishness in comparison to God's wisdom, and worldly strength is weak in the face of the power of God's love. The wisdom we learn through the way of Jesus is that our worldly skills and talents mean nothing if not used for the benefit of all, but in sharing those gifts we bring a whole new perspective to the understanding of wealth, power and status. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The way of Jesus is the way of service and in that service we empower others to know themselves and to know God. Not the God of fiction but the God of creation.

Jesus challenges the ways of the world, and the ways of the temple. We read of this in all the gospels, but John puts it into a new perspective. The gospel of John is different and was the last gospel to be written. By the time John creates his gospel the early church is established, and the temple has been destroyed. I have come to the conclusion that the best way to view John is to see it as a parable – a story with a purpose, which is to look at things differently. Throughout the gospel John uses the

technique of compare and contrast, look at the world as it is and then compare that to how it could be, and he does this by pairing stories. Today's reading is an example it is paired with the Wedding at Cana. Chapter two begins with the wedding, a story of generosity and joy, the generosity of creation demonstrated by an abundance of wine created from water, far more than could be needed and of a quality that astounds the guests. We are reminded that this is at odds with the way of the world where it is normal to serve good wine first and when the guests are drunk give them the poorer wine, with God things get better with time. To emphasize his point John uses the story of the turning of the tables in the temple, reminding his readers that way of the world, and the way of the temple, is to extort money, to make things difficult for those following the rituals of religion, it is a mean-spirited world. Which, we are invited to ask ourselves, is the better way? John's gospel does this time and again, asks us to compare life in God with life in the world as it is, and it invites us to dream the kingdom into a reality through following the way of Jesus.

There are many today who reject church, and other faiths, because they think they know what it is about, just as Richard Dawkins is convinced he knows about God. Many people have not rejected God, and may do not realise there are many different expressions of church, which is why talking about our experience and understanding of God is so important, and why being faithful to our understanding in the way we do church is also important. We are following a different way, the way of Jesus, and Jesus did not give us a doctrine to follow but a simple commandment – love God with all your being and love your neighbour as a part of yourself and in oneness grow the kingdom of justice and joy.

**Suggested Hymn**      O Lord all the world belongs to you  
Listen [here](#)

### **Reflection**

How do you picture God? I suspect we do not ask ourselves that question often enough, we can be guilty of assuming we have answered that sufficiently for ourselves and for others. However, everyday we see God in creation, in kindness, in miracles and everyday we need to stop and revisit that question for we are building a picture daily, and it changes daily as we learn more about God. We also need to remember that many have a different image of God.

I am reminded of a Trevor Dennis story, At the dawn of Heaven, in which we are introduced to a God who plays with the animals, diving, jumping and swimming in the most beautiful lake you could imagine, a heavenly lake. This heaven is around us and yet hidden, but is within earshot of the city, the place where humans live. Trevor invites us to imagine how God might enter the lake, graciously of course, and then describes a playful God who leaps very ungraciously propelling the fish and animals in the lake high into the air. There follows a conversation between God and an otter in which God sighs and wonders why humans take her so seriously, apart that is from the children.

God then sadly tells the otter that humans are afraid of her, 'they daren't look me in the face, they get down on their knees, or turn their backs or even hide from me'. God wonders why when the animals are not afraid of her. God reflects that she thought she had made humans especially wise, thought she had shared with them all the secrets of her heart and taken particular trouble to come out into the open and show them what she was like, but they are still afraid. Why?

The otter replies, explaining that humans have made God in their own image, and not just that, in the image of their own kind they fear the most. The conversation goes on with the conclusion that humans praise God so much because they have made an idol out of God. Worse they think they need courage to face God and so because they think that, the reality is they do need courage. The otter suggests God brings them to the pool and lets them get caught up in the delight and play of creation.

It is a story with much food for thought. Do we take God too seriously? Do we portray a serious God in our being church? Jesus said if people had seen him, they had seen God. What was life like in Jesus' presence? We are told there were serious moments, we are told of sad events, but we are also told of shared meals, of sitting around and sharing and listening and in most groups of humans when that happens there will be laughter. I somehow cannot imagine the disciples sticking around as they did if there were no moments of light relief.

As I travel through life, I see God in many ways most of which bring hope, and a smile to my face. I feel God's presence nudging and inviting me to explore possibilities, to make changes that will bring more love into the world and love has to be good, surely. We say God is love, do we act as if God is love, do we share an image of God as love. If we don't then we are doing God a disservice and we are not serving friends and family faithfully. If we are to change the world, to bring in justice and joy for everyone then we need to share the God of love.

**Suggested song** For everyone born a place at the table  
Listen [here](#)

### **Prayers**

**Sit in silence for a moment and think about the ways and places you have seen God this week.**

Loving God, we gather in your presence and having shared together we offer you our prayers of concern and commitment. We pray for the world in all its glory and its pain and we reflect upon our image of the world. When we see the world as a commodity may we reimagine it as a gift of love to be shared with all life upon it. When we would treat it carelessly, may we stop and find ways that reflect your generosity and grace in our living.

**May our lives reflect your love, and our actions bring justice and joy to the world.**

We pray for our neighbours, our brothers and sisters in the oneness of creation, in all their glory and their pain and we reflect upon our image of people. When we see others as different may we remember we are all made in your image and held within creation together, bringing diverse skills and talents and different needs. When we see need may we be prompted to find creative ways of sharing what we have with those in need. When we treat people with less care than we should, may we remember Jesus and his way of love.

**May our lives reflect your love, and our actions bring justice and joy to all people.**

We pray for the church, and for all who are exploring a faith journey by different paths. May we share together our learning and understanding to enrich our picture of you. When we are tempted to feel we have all the answers may we remember that our wisdom is foolishness and to open ourselves to exploring new possibilities. As we live together as church may we reach out in love and generosity to enrich our community and share your gifts with those around us, and may we create a space for questions and doubts, a place of belonging that is open to all.

**May our lives reflect your love, and our actions bring justice and joy to our community.**

In silence we reflect upon our own needs and our prayers for family and friends.

May those in need be enriched by sensing your presence around them and knowing your love for them. Loving God you are with us always, in sadness and in joy, in our tears and in our laughter, may we find ways of sharing our picture of you, may we be participators in creating the kingdom and may we never stop exploring the possibilities you offer.

**May our lives reflect your love, and our actions bring justice and joy to the world.**

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**

Listen [here](#)

Jubilate, praises ringing,  
As we gather to proclaim God's love, and  
Share God's treasures with our neighbours,  
Bringing hope in word and deed.  
For our God is ever faithful  
Showering gifts upon his children,  
More than asked for, more than needed,  
When we share them in God's love.

Jubilate, love in action,  
Helping build God's kingdom in our streets, and  
Opening doors to peace and justice,  
Captives freed within God's pow'r.  
For our God is all forgiving  
Gath'ring all within his presence,  
Jesus taught that friend and stranger  
Are united in God's love.

Jubilate, all God's children  
Join together and proclaim God's love, and  
Learn to share your gifts and talents  
Oneness growing day by day.  
For our God is ever gracious  
One with all across creation  
One big picture, one big story,  
Time and space combined in love.

© Heather Whyte 2012

**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.