

Sunday 31st October 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.

Suggested hymn God is love, let heaven adore him
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Eternal God, in whom all souls dwell and all lives are lived, we come to you in praise, lifting our voices and our hearts in thanksgiving. You know our inner thoughts, our fears and our hopes, our despair and our dreams and you are always with us. We thank you for your loving presence with us and around us as we journey through the ups and downs of life. You know our potential, our skills and gifts whether we use them or not and we thank you for the people who inspire us and who encourage us to grow in faith and love. We thank you for Jesus and his inspiration which has led us to gather together, following his way and serving one another in love.

We offer this time to you, and to each other, and pray for listening ears and open hearts as we worship together. Let us share the words that Jesus taught his disciples, saying,
Our Father....

Reading **Mark 12:28-34**

Climate change contemplation

Video – Sorry
Watch [here](#)

Prayer – Sorry

Creator God, you have surrounded us with beauty and wonder, and we have misused and abused it, caring for ourselves rather than you.

Earth strains under our actions, the polar caps are melting, the water level is rising, land is being lost, land which is habitat and home to life, and we are denying the wonder of earth to our children's children.

Creator God, in sorrow we acknowledge our failure to care.

Earth groans beneath the weight of our living, we create waste which fills land, pollutes rivers and chokes the life in the seas. Our living is not sustainable, our planet is dying.

Creator God, in sorrow we acknowledge our failure to care.

Earth sings to the tune of need, the cries of the poor and the hungry echo amidst the extravagance of the wealthy, and all the while the orchestra of injustice sounds in the guns and mortars of war and frustration.

Creator God, in sorrow we acknowledge our failure to care.

Earth shakes as forests are felled and resources mined without thought for the fragile infrastructure that underpins life.

Creator God, in sorrow we acknowledge our failure to care.

May we STOP. May we THINK. May we LOVE. May our love for you be expressed in our love for each other and the planet on which we live. May your love, though our love restore life in all its fullness and once again be the treasure of generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Suggested hymn A new commandment
Listen [here](#)

Reflection

Our passage from Mark is one that we all know so well, perhaps too well. As is often the case with something familiar maybe we no longer really hear the words but anticipate them. So, let us stop for a moment and read then again and then reflect on what we hear.

The first commandment is: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Have you ever signed a card 'with all my love'? It is a phrase reserved for someone very special in our lives. I have often wondered if you can give all your love to more than one person, and I think that when that love is of God the answer has to be yes, after all we believe that God's love is for all people, and we are called to love in a similar way. This commandment is to love God with everything we have and everything we are, to be fully within and of the love that is God. Reading this again I am struck by the very first part 'the Lord is one'. This is part of the daily Jewish prayer, part of the bedrock of being Jewish, and of course Jesus is Jewish and knew this. However, I believe that for Jesus the oneness mentioned was more, in John's Gospel Jesus is often recorded as saying he was one with the Father, his own special term for God. Oneness is an important aspect of Jesus message and is explicit in the second commandment that he gives the lawyer: *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*

Many of you will have heard me sharing a new understanding of this, to love your neighbour as if they were one with you rather than simply loving them in the same way as you love yourself. This is important because there are many people who find it difficult to love themselves, and if this is a comparative statement it could lead to a distorted relationship. However, if it is an acknowledgement of oneness then it goes deeper and echoes the oneness of the first commandment. Jesus is asking us to determine what is most important in our lives, Tom Wright suggests it is akin to prioritising what you would save in the event of a fire. It is a recognition that often only dawns in a crisis which is a pity. The lawyer in the story sees beyond the obvious and recognises that the ritual acts of the temple fade into insignificance in the light of this commandment, and Jesus commends his insight.

So, what might it mean to live by these commandments, to know what is truly important and how to live as one with God, creation and others?

Reading Ruth 1:1-18 ([The living translation](#))

Song I will follow him

Watch [here](#)

Throughout the Old Testament we are reminded that women often have no place in their own right within society. They are daughters, wives and they hope mothers, but if their husband dies and they are childless, and their husband had no brother for them to marry, they become displaced persons – a widow and an outcast. We like to think this does not happen anymore, but it does in different ways. Think of a family fleeing from their home in desperation, risking danger, and a woman facing the death of her husband, maybe even her children, on the journey. How will she cope in a strange land? Naomi's family fled famine and settled in a new land, then disaster hits and she finds herself a widow. She has nothing to offer her daughters-in-law and recognises that they will be better off with their own families, for they too are widows. Orpah is persuaded to stay but Ruth is determined to go with Naomi and in the most beautiful statement of love shows the depth of her relationship with Naomi, it is a statement of oneness.

Right now, in Afghanistan females are being marginalised, girls refused education and women denied the right to work, what is left for them? We imagine we live in a civilised country but in Britain today there is a growing number of displaced persons: homeless people, elderly single people reliant on an unfair and failing care system, women trapped in violent relationships, women left without money when their husband dies, women denied social fellowship through outdated cultural systems, people with different needs and no families to care for them, young adults ejected from the care system left with no place or home, and the list goes on, stories we would rail against if they appeared in scripture.

The message of Jesus, demonstrated in his statement of the commandments, is we are one and our love should embrace all people, a love which is sharing and caring and through which the world can

change. The current McDonalds advert, in response to climate change, is small changes become big changes, we all play a part by changing the way we are.

I came across a children's picture book recently called 'Dragon's Don't share' by Nicola Kinnear. In this story the dragon, Ruby, lives by the dragon rule book which states 1) dragons must always be very scary, 2) dragons must always steal lots of treasure, and 3) dragons never share their treasure with anyone. It was hard being a good dragon, and lonely, Ruby had to steal treasure all day and then guard it all night. Then, one day while out scaring and stealing she drops her rule book without realising. Ruby is a good dragon, but she does not have a good memory and so every day she needs the rule book to remind her how to be a good dragon. The next morning she cannot find her rule book, she searches everywhere in her cave and then realises she must have lost it outside. Desperate she leaves the cave to search, she is so upset she is crying dragon tears which flood the land. Below the animals wonder what is happening and then they find the Rule book. They read it and know they must return it but don't like the rules within it. As they debate the dragon's tears continue to fall and they wash the words off the pages, now there is a blank rule book and the animals realise they can help Ruby to rewrite the rules, so they set off to return the book. Ruby is not pleased to see them, but they quickly show her the Rule book. When Ruby realises it is blank she starts to cry again, but the animals quickly stop her and suggest they help her rewrite the rules, making them better than before. From then on Ruby follows the new rules, she is kind to others, shares all her treasure and most importantly plays with all her new friends.

Ruth rejected the old rules and followed a new way, a loving way, changing Naomi's life and her own. Jesus rewrote the rule book prioritizing the need to understand ourselves as one in God and to love all people. Every day we have the opportunity to choose a loving response to the situations we find around us, every day we can make a small change which can be the catalyst for more change. When we follow the way of Jesus we are asked to see the world and each other differently, to put others before self not in a pious way but simply recognising that in oneness as we give to others we receive. As we discover more about our humanity, scientists have recognised that the need to give is an important part of our humanity, alongside belonging, taking turns (justice) and agreeing. Recognising our connectedness requires a new rule book of being. To live in oneness means:

- To recognise the whole in every aspect of our daily life, rejecting the notion of separation and difference.
- To create places of mutual support and reject the notion of competition by encouraging each other to be the best we can be.
- To see our purpose in a new light, we are to work together rather than struggling individually and reject the notion of 'king of the castle' in favour of 'no man is an island'.
- To recognise the connectedness that already exists within creation and the bonds which tie us together in love.

Church should exist as the place we can practice this and encourage one another on the journey. Church is the space where we discover true self and learn how to follow the way of Jesus creatively. Doing this asks the question "How do I have to be for that person to be free to be who they are?"

Ruth asked the question and changed her life to enable Naomi to discover new life. Jesus has given us the key to new life for all, something our world desperately needs, will we be the change, together?

Suggested Song Be the change

Listen [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God, as we gather in worship we pray for all those who have lived their lives in servanthood, following the way of Jesus. We remember those who have been recognised and acknowledge the unsung heroes who have made a difference to the world in which we live.

Loving God, may our lives reflect your love and our choices make a difference.

We pray for all those who find themselves trapped in desperate situations, fearing the future and inwardly crying out for help. We remember people who are hungry, people who are homeless, people who feel isolated and lonely, people who are confused by their own minds. In our lives of faith may

we find the inspiration to reach out and make a difference and celebrate and give thanks for the charities that offer help in these situations.

Loving God, may our lives reflect your love and our choices make a difference.

In this pandemic we have witnessed many people who have offered their time and help to others and we know the price key workers have paid to keep hospitals, care homes and essential services running. We give thanks for their selfless love for others and offer their stories to the narrative of our journey.

Loving God, may our lives reflect your love and our choices make a difference.

We pray for those who hold positions of authority, councillors, mayors and politicians. We recognise that it can be difficult to balance the needs of everyone with the need to balance the books and pray for your kingdom where power and money are no longer the drivers of action and everyone has what they need. May we have the courage to speak out when we see injustice and reach out to those suffering from injustice.

Loving God, may our lives reflect your love and our choices make a difference.

In our life together may we encourage one another to be creative in our expression of faith, seek to serve one another in love and inspire one another to live as one. As we celebrate the stories of the past may we always be looking to the future and new ways to express our trust in you and our love for you. May we aware of opportunities and open to change.

Loving God, may our lives reflect your love and our choices make a difference.

These prayers we offer as followers of the Jesus Way. Amen

Offertory

As we worship 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 We cannot own the sunlit skies

Listen [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.