

Sunday 31st July 2022

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,
we worship together in God.

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

Prayer

Loving God, ever present, ever faithful, as we gather in the name of Jesus, we come to praise you and give thanks. Every day we are surrounded by messages of your love, in the blessing of a new day, in the friendship of others, in the opportunities to be inspired, and in the challenges that help us grow. When we live in your love, and journey on the way of Jesus, we know that everything we need is provided and we thank you.

Our world is your joyful creation, with its variety of species and climate. Each season brings something different and whilst we may have favourites, we know that we need the gifts of each season to make our planet the source of life. We know we need day and night, times of activity and times of relaxation, and we thank you for the variety of life.

Every day we make choices and recognise that they are not always the wisest choice, but you love surrounds us in good times and bad, and your mercy has no end. In unconditional love we find forgiveness, and in response we seek to learn from our mistakes and share your love more faithfully. Eternal and loving God for your love and mercy we give your thanks and praise, and in the guidance of the Spirit we find our hope for tomorrow.

Lord's Prayer

Reading Hosea 11:1-11
 Luke 12: 13-21

Suggested hymn God who spoke in the beginning
Listen [here](#)

Reflection

How do we view God? It is all too easy to imagine and interpret God as some sort of superhuman and to transfer our feelings onto God. We feel angry about something so God must be angry as well. The key word in that sentence is 'be' for I believe that God does experience all our feelings as we experience them but that does not mean that God is angry or sad simply that God, as present in everyone and everything knows what we are feeling. In verse 9 of our reading from Hosea, the prophet speaks for God saying 'For I am God and not mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. This reading is about the anguish felt when despite your best efforts a child chooses the opposite path and ignores advice. We might feel frustration and possibly anger but God feels love and compassion. This is our goal.

Israel has felt God's love and compassion but has ignored the call to mirror that love and compassion and has chosen instead a different path. At first glance this reading might imply that God will punish them but look carefully and you will see the opposite. Bad things may befall Israel because of their choices but these are the consequences of the choice rather than the punishment of a punitive God. God will always love Israel and when they are ready they will be welcomed home. When any of us ignores that call to love and chooses a different path we may experience consequences that are not good, and when we do this as a people, society, then we see the consequences in the world around us. Kingdom is the world's natural state, it is the actions of humanity that deny and prevent Kingdom, if we continue to abuse and pillage the earth, it will die, if we continue to allow and foster injustice through our choices in the way we live, then how can God's Kingdom come?

God is not an interventionist God, for good or bad, it is our choices that create the reality we live. God is love and when we choose to live in love a different reality can be created. Israel's choices will lead then back to slavery and a state of exile, and they will probably blame God, but we are all good at blaming others when things go wrong! The opposite of love is fear, and fear drives us to build walls, fear breaks down relationships, fear drives people to arm themselves and then to strike first. We see the effects of fear all around us but there is a choice, we are called to love, to grow love and foster love, to be love for this is the antidote to fear.

God is not a God of punishment and retribution, but a God of love and love forgives and demands no payment. There are always consequences to the choices we make, and we will be held accountable, but love is about helping people and behaving differently, and through our actions we may help others to make wiser decisions, loving decisions. Restorative justice is about helping people to face the consequences of their actions and rebuild relationships, it is about love, whilst there is no love in the notion of locking people up and throwing away the key!

Song – Forgiveness by Matthew West

Listen [here](#)

Our passage from Luke is another of those familiar stories which at first sight seem to have an obvious meaning. Don't hoard more than you need. However perhaps there is more to it! Let's look again and imagine. Jesus precedes the telling of the parable with the statement "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then the parable – There was once a rich man whose estate was very fruitful; he had sown well, and the harvest was so plentiful that he could not store it all. He debated with himself over what he could do, he could share the harvest but who would he share it with, the people who needed it had no storage and it would still rot and be wasted. No, he told himself, you must build bigger barns in which to store all this goodness. Then he thought, when I have built bigger barns, I can rest and enjoy life without having to worry. Although he had forgotten about sharing, it all seemed very sensible but before he could start to demolish and rebuild the barns, he heard a voice speaking to him. This was so unusual he was quite startled until he realised he was hearing God. God said, 'beware, this very night you will return to me, and then what will happen to all your crops? The man is speechless and then sad, for God's words have revealed his loneliness.

This is a man who talks to himself, and it seems he has no family or friends. He thought about sharing his good fortune, but he had no one close to share it with. Yes, this parable reminds us of the need to share but more than that it reminds us of the need to build relationships and to be love. This story helps us to appreciate our friends and the opportunities we have, in God, to share love in all its guises. We are called into relationship and in the way of Jesus we are called to build kingdom through our choices. That is quite a challenge, and it can seem daunting, but Paul gave some advice in Colossians 3.

Colossians 3 (8-11) 'But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!'

We are made in the image of God, made to be love and God's love embraces everyone. In God we are one and just as there is nothing that separates us from God, there is nothing that should separate us from one another. We have chosen to follow the way of Jesus, which means going out and building relationships, it means being love and lighting the darkness to show a different way. Do we really desire goodness? If we do, then changing the world and restoring the kingdom requires us to desire to change our outlook.

Story – The magic vase (source unknown)

Once upon a time there was a poor family who lived in a small dark house in a neglected part of the city. They tried to remain happy and positive but there were few jobs to be had and they had little to live off. As time went on their attitude changed, they stopped washing the windows and the house became darker; they stopped caring for the small patch of garden outside the door; they stopped caring for the house and it began to look neglected.

One day, as the eldest son was roaming idly through the town he came across a market. It was a bright, lively place with stallholders selling their wares and engaging passers-by. The boy was caught up in the experience and watched people buying fruit and vegetables, bread and cakes, fish and the most beautiful summer flowers. As he wandered through the stalls, he came across a small second-hand stall tucked away almost out of sight. As he looked, he noticed a beautiful vase and was entranced. He had a small amount of money in his pocket and on counting it found it was exactly the amount the vase was priced at, with scant thought to be left with no money the boy purchased the vase, knowing how much his mother would love it. In fact, he thought everyone will love it. As the stall holder wrapped the vase in brown paper he told the boy to enjoy the vase, and then whispered, treat it well it is a magic vase.

Pondering on the mysterious words, the boy returned home and showed the family the vase. No mention was made of the boy having wasted money, they all loved the vase. Then strange things began to happen. With the vase in pride of place the boy's father suddenly realised how shabby the room was and so he got out the paintbrushes and gave the room a makeover. When the boy's brother saw how nice the room looked he got out a bucket and washed all the windows for the first time in years. Looking out of the clean windows, another brother noticed the neglected patch of garden and went out to weed it. Seeing the newly dug patch another brother decided to plant some seeds and nurtured them all spring. When the summer came, the boy's young sister was outside and seeing the flowers that had grown she picked some for her mother and gave her them saying how much they all loved her. With tears in her eyes the mother put the flowers into the magic vase. The light of love shines in the darkness and invites us to change.

We are surrounded by the Spirit but what are we doing to use it?

The wind can be blowing but if you don't raise the sail the boat won't go far.

We are surrounded by oxygen but if we don't breathe it will not do us any good.

We have to learn to connect and be aware of God's presence and God's love. Rather than doing the right thing because we should, it should be our instinctive response to God's love in our lives, it should be our desire. It takes time and practice.

When we are born, we are dependent on others to get from one position to another, one place to another but there is a desire within us to move and so we gradually learn to roll, then crawl, then stand, toddle and finally we can walk. It is not a smooth transition and there are many stumbles and bumps and bruises and even when we are quite experienced at walking we can still fall but as we practice we discover the art of jumping, running, dancing and we do it without giving it much thought, it becomes instinctive.

Scripture urges us to walk in the Spirit, to walk in the light, to walk in love and that takes time to learn, and we will probably stumble now and again, get distracted perhaps but just like learning to walk we get up, refocus and try again. So, how can we consciously practice increasing our desire. It starts by seeking out and acknowledging God in the world. Little things, like every morning pausing to focus on the opportunities the day offers to nurture relationships and build new relationships, being thankful for every meal, recognising every journey however long or short is an opportunity to see the world in a new way, every meeting an opportunity to be more positive in our thinking about creation and creator.

When we feel panic, we should consciously seek God for wisdom, support, and love. When we are drawn to those fearful emotions of anger, pride, greed we should pause and breathe, inhaling forgiveness and exhaling a new commitment. The more we think of God the more we connect with God, and the more we have to share with others. It is all too easy to stop and look back, and if this is

momentary to pause on our journey with and in God that is good, but when we tempted to stop and dwell and begin comparing and judging ourselves and others that becomes a distraction and a temptation to forget to walk in love.

There is always a road to walk, and we have a choice in how we walk it. It may be a long and winding road, but it is the road home, and our journey will reveal the light of love which is the Kingdom. So, let us travel together, encouraging one another and loving the world as our hearts desire. In the words of Buzz lightyear – To infinity and beyond.

Suggested Hymn

[Tune](#)

The Kingdom of God will be fair and be loving,
everyone having as much as they need;
no hunger or thirst, just a sharing and caring
where everyone's valued for all that they bring.

The Kingdom of God will be justice and freedom,
everyone sharing so all can grow strong;
no envy or fighting, no greedy dictators,
instead all will flourish because we are one.

The Kingdom of God shows a new way of living,
changing our values and outlook on life;
we're called to be one with all neighbours and strangers,
remembering others in all we decide.

Heather Whyte 2019

Prayers

Eternal God, source of all being, we rest in your presence and offer you our prayers, sharing our concerns in our commitment to the way of Jesus. As we share together, we recognise that often we lose sight of the kingdom, may we imagine the finest world possible and learn to create a new tomorrow, through you love.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

We pray for the people who are struggling with challenges that feel threatening and overwhelming. May those whose feel overwhelmed feel your presence and know your strength within them, bringing them light and hope. May we commit ourselves to practising and advocating love in the face of fear, being light in the darkness of despair.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

As we seek to live in oneness, we pray for all who find themselves displaced, refugees of war and famine struggling to find their place in a strange land having often faced danger and death in their attempt to reach a new freedom. We pray for the people who commit themselves to reaching out to the stranger and offering help to those whose lives have been turned upside down by circumstances over which they had no control. We pray for a world in which there are no refugees, and all sense their belonging in your universal oneness. As we pray for your kingdom to come, we commit to being catalysts for change and challengers of the status quo.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

Creator God, we pray for your creation and seek forgiveness for the times when we have been neglectful of the earth. We pray for the people who shout out against pollution, the plundering of rainforests, and the practices which put convenience over care. We pray for those who seek to conserve and preserve the amazing diversity of life on the planet, risking hostility and harm in their attempt to raise awareness of how our actions are affecting life on earth. As we pray for our world we commit to taking all necessary steps to become people and churches who whose footprint is light, and whose actions are loving.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

As we look to the future within our country and our churches we pray for vision and imagination. Your spirit, which holds us as one, surrounds us with prompts and opportunities which we often fail to recognise in our determination to keep going. Loving God may we open our eyes to the possibilities, may we allow ourselves space to imagine and may we have the courage to do things differently. In a time of loneliness and isolation may our buildings become an oasis of hope and love.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

Loving God within our fellowships and families, and within the communities in which we live, people are facing challenges. May all who are grieving a loss, those who are undergoing treatment or awaiting results of test, those who are struggling with isolation and loneliness or frailty and a loss of a familiar way of life, sense your presence around them and know in their hearts that they are not alone. In the silence we name those we each know personally.

Silence

Recognising your call to be people of oneness, guided by the way of Jesus, we commit to being prophets of love and pioneers of change.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

In oneness we pray. Amen.

Our offering to God.

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 sharing the message of hope that is God's love. Amen

Suggested hymn Teach me to dance

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.