

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon

Sunday 2 May 2021

Order of Service for Worship at Home including the celebration of Holy Communion



*Led by the Revd Alistair Cumming
(Church of Scotland minister, Clerk of the Presbytery of England)*

Gathering in God's presence

Call to Worship

Hymn 552 - The King of Love my Shepherd is

The King of love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight,
thy unction, grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Prayer of approach, and confession

Teach us to love one another with that passion which comes from your overflowing heart, so those around us will recognize us as sisters and brothers, bound together by your love not divided by our fears.

Teach us to serve one another with that compassion which comes from our broken heart.

Teach us include others with that embracing welcome which comes from your inviting heart, Fruit-bearing Spirit, offering forgiveness to those who hurt us, peace to all filled with hate, hope to those burdened by despair. Teach us to understand all we read and hear.

As we focus our minds, it is easy for our minds to shoot off in so many directions. We find it hard to slow down, to remove all the clutter and concentrate on You, Lord. In the stillness of this place, this time, take from us the strain and stress as we feel ourselves rest in Your eternal love, in the everlasting arms.

Then quietly, the small beginnings of praise well up as we remember what we have in Jesus Christ. That we have one who is with us, who guides and strengthens us. Who holds us through every storm of life who leads us to everlasting life.

We confess that sometimes the storms we endure are of our own making. A foolish word, a thoughtless comment, a misguided action, a quick judgement. Then we have to live with the consequences, and the guilt. In the silence we confess to you our faults, our failings and our transgressions.

Take all that stress from us and replace it with Your forgiveness and peace. Heavenly Father, in Your hands we are safe and secure – we rejoice in Your eternal love and all sufficient grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who taught us when we pray to say together

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed
be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive
those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listening to God's Word

Bible reading: 1 John 4: 7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.

¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.

¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Bible reading: John 15: 1-8

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.

² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Hymn - Here is Love vast as the Ocean

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
loving-kindness as the flood,
when the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten
throughout heav'n's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion
fountains opened deep and wide;
through the floodgates of God's mercy
flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
poured incessant from above,
and heav'n's peace and perfect justice
kissed a guilty world in love.

In Thy truth Thou dost direct me
by Thy Spirit through Thy Word;
and Thy grace my need is meeting
as I trust in Thee, my Lord.
Of Thy fullness Thou art pouring
Thy great love and pow'r on me
without measure, full and boundless,
drawing out my heart to Thee.

William Rees

Sermon

If I had to give this mornings' service a title, I would have to steal the title of one of the Great Beatles songs " All you need is Love".

This past year or so has been very difficult for so many people, not being able to see or to hold loved ones. Not being able to grieve properly at a

funeral. Who could not fail to be upset watching our Queen sit on her own and isolated at her husbands' funeral, but having to grieve in the public eye, seen by millions but no one allowed to give her a hug?

We see the devastation caused by Covid in India this week and cannot help but be moved.

We look back on some devastating natural disasters of earthquake, fire and flood over that same past year and decide that all taken together there's been more than enough suffering and brokenness in the world.

It's easy to wonder where God is in the midst of the pandemic, natural disaster, and injustice, and why we humans have such a hard time loving one another.

Fortunately, this week's gospel and epistle lessons provide an opportunity to focus on the source of all life, hope, and healing—God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the gospel lesson, Jesus is preparing his closest followers for his impending humiliation and death at the hands of an unjust political and social system.

Those early followers may have heard and experienced Jesus' words. We, today, can see them for the radical, challenging, and inclusive message they bear.

This is no sugar-coated dream or do-it-yourself imagery, but rather a communal mandate for how we are called to live, bearing fruit and thriving in the vineyard of this world.

And it's all about the love.

Not a saccharine-sweet pop song love, but the radical death-defying love of Jesus. It's not about earning or deserving love either. It's about a love so amazing and so limitless that it continues to pour forth in bread and wine, Word and water, and Spirit-wind.

Love is, in fact, the very nature and essence of God, and we are only able to love because God first loved us.

If you listen to those songs or watch certain programmes on TV you might be fooled into thinking that love is easy. We just do it.

We talk about chemistry, and indeed, the scientists tell us that chemistry has something to do with physical attraction. However, we know that love goes further than physical attraction.

We love our parents our partners and our children. We love our friends. There's a whole neglected tradition of love between friends that has nothing to do with physical attraction.

If we think about it, physical attraction does not necessarily have anything to do with love.

So what then does it mean to abide in love. The dictionary tells us that to abide means to accept or act in accordance with, it also gives an alternative meaning which is 'cannot tolerate'.

When we talk about abiding in the Love of Christ, I wonder which meaning we tend to gravitate toward.

In the Church, congregations pride themselves on being very loving. When the church is in vacancy, it assures prospective ministers that everyone loves everyone. In Nicola Sturgeon's words 'Aye Right'.

Just try being someone who has braved coming through the front doors, found a vacant pew, tried to negotiate the liturgy and then found his or her way to coffee after the service.

The visitor then sees love in action. Groups of people form impenetrable circles. Each group is made up of people long accepted in the circle, bound by an affinity made up of shared backgrounds, longevity, perhaps political beliefs and shared interests.

Even if the visitor manages to gain entrance, the subjects discussed involve an element of shared experience foreign to the visitor. Love turns out to mean an easy acceptance of people we know well.

So which version of Abide do we practice? Of course we want to abide in love, we want to accept and act in accordance with Jesus.

I wonder if we are willing to abide in anything, to immerse ourselves wholly in something, to allow anything to captivate our heart and life, to view our whole existence through that one lens.

At first I want to say, no, no one would be willing to give of him or herself in that way. It sounds too constricting.

But then I begin to think about the many things that we give ourselves to: our jobs, our families, our hobbies, interests, or activities.

I begin to think about the things that we spend our time doing, the things that we give our lives to.

Many of us are sports fans, we dress up, we go to games, and we make the time. Some of us love our television programmes, so we sit there and even "binge-watch". Before Line of Duty concludes tonight we cannot wait for the next season to begin again.

So as it turns out, we are constantly abiding - constantly living in, taking residence in, fixing ourselves permanently on, many things in our lives. Our abiding speaks to our rooting, and it turns out that we are rooting in different ways every day. We do so every moment of our lives.

We kid ourselves if we think that those things that root us are not affecting us, shaping us, and transforming us. The proof of our shaping is evident all around us.

That which we value, which we spend our time doing, the activities that we engage in, our attitudes and ways of engagement, all speak to the things that captivate our hearts. These things are the fruit of our abiding, the fruit of our rootedness.

Where are we abiding? What's our rootedness? Are we truly rooted? Are we truly abiding in Jesus? Are we letting Jesus abide in us?

This is a difficult question. I struggle just thinking about it. It seems like it would be an easy answer. I want to say, "Of course, I abide in Jesus. Of course, Jesus abides in me!"

This seems like the answer that any good Christian would give.

But if I am honest, I have to recognise that often I do not abide in Jesus and I'm not alone.

We abide. O, we abide in things that we think we can control, then they end up controlling us.

We abide in things that require little of us, but they end up taking us over. Our abiding seems fruitful; our vines seem healthy. They might even be producing grapes, but it's rotting grapes, underdeveloped grapes, seedless grapes, grapes that are unable to produce the wine of the kingdom.

- Grapes of idolatry, self-importance, and self-righteousness.
- Grapes of control, over our lives and over others.
- Grapes that keep us from paying attention to the needs of others, that keep others at arm's length.
- Grapes that refuse to put ourselves in the place of the other and to live alongside them.

It is hard having to face the reality that what we have produced is truly not fruit but weeds, of how "overgrown" everything is around us.

One of the key places where I see the weediness mistaken for fruitfulness is in the unhealthy rhetoric of our day. In our civic life, in social media like Facebook and Twitter, and in our personal conversations, we have become divisive; we have become unwilling to listen, unwilling to see other points of view.

We have couched this weediness in talk around what is right, truth, in our own desire for a "so-called" better life; but in the end we have questioned the motives of others, we have called other names, we have made caricatures of the positions of others, and have become peddlers of untruth.

All this shows us that none of this is truth. None of this is abiding in Jesus.

We have allowed fear, ignorance, and our limited understanding of God to take root. We have chosen to allow our souls to become rooted in a religious version of ourselves instead of being rooted in God's abiding love.

Jesus calls us to be rooted in him; the gospel provides us with a mirror that shows us possibility, shows us a new way, and shows us the beauty of fruitful abiding, of God's call to new life.

We must be willing to get in front of that mirror; we must be willing to see that what we are calling fruitfulness is nothing but weeds. We must see that we are really not abiding in Jesus; instead, we are abiding in our own sense of self.

Only then will we be able to see what it looks like to let God clear the way so that we can live a fruitful life. The process is not easy; it requires a dramatic vulnerability, a willingness to let go.

So Jesus provides us with the way. Our following Jesus grafts us, cuts the unhealthy roots of the human condition and then allows us to live a new life.

Jesus then becomes our root, our vine, with God being the one that grows it, tends it, and makes sure that it is healthy and whole! We are then invited to be the branches. The flowering and visible presence of Jesus in the field of God's kingdom!

In order for this reality to happen, we must abide; (Abide is to accept: to act in accordance with), in order for our branches to be fruitful, we must allow for this re-location, transplantation, and transformation to occur, to happen, in us.

We are seeing again and again our need to re-calibrate our lives into fruitfulness rooted in our abiding, in our changing of address, in the permanence of God's identity as love.

Making our home in God, inhabiting God's place, living into Christ's identity, requires that we acknowledge our need to be grafted... that our salvation, our healing, is dependent on our willingness to acknowledge our interdependence with God, each other, and all of creation.

In a world so broken and bruised, we are commanded to love our brothers and sisters and to constantly draw a wider and more inclusive circle in which Christ's healing love may be found.

No one ever claimed this divine love business would be easy, but we have the promise that in loving one another God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us. Sounds awfully much like a recipe for a better world.

Now more than ever, God's people must lead the way into conversations that uplift, conversations that restore, conversations that renew, conversations that reconcile, conversations that honour the image of God.

It is only in this vital abiding in Christ that we bear the fruits of love, kindness, mercy, and hope.

In the face of any pain and suffering the world may dish out, by the grace of God we are equipped and empowered to love: one small act at a time, one person at a time, one moment at a time.

Amen

Responding to God's grace

Prayers of concern

Dear Father, we stand in need of your guiding hand in so many ways. And our sense of need is not limited to our personal affairs. Across the world, powerful messages come flooding into our homes through papers and TV every day.

The oxygen shortages in the hospitals in India sears our hearts. May there be enough of these vital commodities to be shared with the desperate families there while there is still time. Many countries, as in South America and Africa, are suffering equally and await our compassion.

It was encouraging on Saturday night to know that a wise and bold voice was being raised in America. President Joe Biden has spoken the right note for America. My wife's sister who lives close to San Francisco has expressed to us how glad she is that there is a man of his personal quality now voicing America's responsible role in the world in matters of race, climate and health. His convictions will not make him popular in all quarters and what he says requires courage. But he is carrying a significant number of world leaders with him. We pray for him and his wife to lead their country boldly.

It is not just Covid that must be confronted. There is the oppression of brave people who speak out, as in the case of Alexei Navalny, on hunger strike since 31 March. We ask you, Father, to be close to him and those who stand with him at great cost.

The battle for integrity in this country must be fought. We thank you again for those ready to stand up for honest dealing in government. We thank you for the evidence of a profound teamwork of people drawn from all parts of Britain to administer tests and vaccines to millions of people across the UK - surely the fruits of generous living.

The Queen has expressed gratitude for the flood of whole-hearted letters of understanding from all over the UK and the Commonwealth. We thank God for her superb qualities and that of many of our leaders. There are those in our congregation who have lost dear ones in recent times and it is with one heart and mind that we share our grief.

Above all we express our deepest gratitude for the wonder of Christ's life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. No matter how much we are weighed down the Holy Spirit is always there with adequate, accurate, definite leading showing us the way ahead. Help us to be steadfast in following the promptings of the Spirit. In this way we become an enabling force in every situation.

In Christ's name, Amen

Offertory

*This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. Call to mind your gift now as you share in the prayer below. At home, you should also **uncover the bread and wine now.***

Holy Communion

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Bring your laughter, bring your tears
Bring your joy and bring your sorrow,
Bring your hopes, bring your fears
Bring today and bring tomorrow,
Bring your fullness bring your thirst
Bring your weakness bring your health,
Bring your best and bring your worst
Bring your loved ones bring yourself,
Bring your gladness bring your cares
Bring your faith and bring your doubt,
Bring your laughter bring your prayers
bring what life is all about.

At this table Christ receives us
All we are and all we bring
Come then now and meet with Jesus
Offer to him everything.

In front of us, behind us, to our right, to our left: look! God is there!
In our past, beside us today, waiting in the future: look! God is there!
in the shadows, in the light: look! God is there!
From the top of the mountains, to the bottom of the seas;
in the morning, in the evening, in every moment: God is with us!

Hymn 495 - Father hear the prayer we offer

Father, hear the prayer we offer;
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;

but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Love Maria Willis (1824-1908) and others

Invitation / Narrative of the Institution

Hear the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper, according to St Paul:

The tradition which I handed on to you came to me from the Lord himself: that on the night of his arrest the Lord Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me.'

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said: 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me.'

For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes. As the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, I take these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses to this holy use and mystery; and as he gave thanks and blessed, let us draw near to God and offer him our prayers and thanksgiving.

Let us pray

Hearts overflow with you, as we lift our hearts to you.

When there was no time as we know it, you crafted day and night, so we could wait for you in every moment, tasting the savoury goodness of grace.

You imagined those moments of gathering us to your side to teach us all the wonder of your ways, but we turned our ears away running off to play in the wilderness with rebellion and death our guides.

You recalled the promises you had made to Noah, to Sarah, to Joseph, and to Hannah, and so sent the prophets to remind us of the good gift of your covenant and to point out the ways to your heart.

When we continued to ignore their words, you sent Jesus to be with us, to set us free from the imprisonment we had created for ourselves.

So, we lift our voices with those who waited patiently, and with those who trust your covenantal promises, joining the choirs of heaven and earth, who forever sing of your hope and love:

Holy, holy, holy, Everlasting God of grace. Every living creature in heaven and earth sing your praises.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who sits at your right hand of mercy. Hosanna in the highest.

Pour out your Spirit of imagination upon this bread, and this cup, gifts of your good and wonderful creation.

As we are embraced at the Table by the One who has prepared it for us, may we open our hearts to welcome our sisters and brothers.

As we have been set free by your love, may we proclaim freedom to the prisoners confined by fear and oppression; as we are filled with the Bread of life, may we never cease feeding the hungry of our world; as we are nurtured by compassion's cup, may we go out into the wilderness around us, to take the lost, the last, the least, the little by the hand to walk together into that kingdom prepared for all your children.

And we are gathered around the Table with your beloved children of every time and place, our songs will join together as our tears of joy mingle, singing your praises forever and ever to you: Jesus of the outcast and lonely; Spirit of those who seek peace and reconciliation: God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.

Holy things of God for the holy people of God.

We do this in obedience to Christ's example and appointment.

The Lord Jesus on the night of his arrest took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me'.

In the same way he took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me.'

Jesus, Lamb of God,
have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins,
have mercy on us.
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
grant us peace.

These are holy things to make us holy. The gifts of God for the people of God.
Eat this the bread of Heaven, drink this the cup of salvation.
Come let us keep the feast.

Let us pray:

We give thanks that though we are apart we have come together in Communion, and been refreshed at this table.

We rejoice in the giftedness of each one of us.

We are grateful for who we are for each other.

May we go forth into the world in courage and peace.

Amen

Hymn 267 - Immortal love for ever full (Tune: Bishopthorpe)

Immortal love, for ever full,
for ever flowing free,
for ever shared, forever whole,
a never-ebbing sea!

Our outward lips confess the name,
all other names above;
love only knoweth whence it came,
and comprehendeth love.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps
to bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
for him no depths can drown.

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet,
a present help is he;
and faith still has its Olivet,
and love its Galilee.

The healing of his seamless dress
is by our beds of pain;
we touch him in life's throng and press,
and we are whole again.

O Lord and Master of us all,
whate'er our name or sign,
we own thy sway, we hear thy call,
we test our lives by thine.

J. G. Whittier (1807-92)

Blessing