

Dorset South and West Circuit
Service for 6 September 2020 by Christine Hatton

Please focus on God's presence with you today, be comfortable. When you are ready I invite you to say the following service out loud and slowly, letting the words sink deep into your being. Don't rush from one section to another - take your time.

A prayer

Loving God open our eyes to the beauty of your holiness; open our ears to the message of your word; open our minds to the challenge of your truth; open our hearts to the power of your love. Open our lives to the coming of your spirit, that we may truly worship you, now and forever. **Amen**

Hymn

Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbours we have from you.

Kneels at the feet of his friends, silently washes their feet, master who acts as a slave to them. *Jesu, Jesu.....*

Neighbours are rich folk and poor, neighbours are black folk and white, neighbours are nearby and far away. *Jesu, Jesu.....*

These are the ones we should serve, these are the ones we should love. All these are neighbours to us and you. *Jesu, Jesu.....*

Kneel at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet, this is the way we should live with you. *Jesu, Jesu.....*

North Ghanaian song. Adapted by Tom Colvin (1925-2000) CCLI 879917

Prayers

Creator God, you made us in your image, yet each one is unique; you made us in your image, yet you gave us freedom to be ourselves. We praise you for our differences, for the variety of our gifts, and our many expressions of love. Through our praise we celebrate our diversity and rejoice in our differences.

But as we praise you we know that we have not always lived as we should. We have allowed ourselves to be imprisoned by tradition, captivated and held back by habit and limited by the fear of change of the unknown. Through your healing power, make us whole to live and love as we look towards a future that is so unfamiliar, so scary, with open hearts and generous spirits.

Father God, we thank you; for the wonderful world around us and for the gift of life within us. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the life of the Church through long generations and for our own fellowship over the days, months and years, here in west Dorset. We especially thank you for the opportunities we have each week to worship you during this strange time, with these written services posted through the door or on email, for the video and zoom services. We thank you and your faithful servants who make it all happen each week.

Holy Spirit, we thank you, for the power of goodness sweeping through the ages and your work within us as we continue to seek to find wholeness in our own lives.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise and thank you. **Amen**

Romans 13: 8-14 – from The Message

Background:

Romans is Paul's letter of self-introduction to a Church he has not yet visited. None of the Gospels have yet been written but Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus – as he tells the believers that love is the fulfilling of the law. Paul's concept of our sinful nature is the realm of rebellion against God. It contrasts with the realm of the spirit as we still want to sin. In this section he tells the church in Rome how to behave, that Christ is their armour.

8-10 Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code – don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be wanting what you don't have, and any other don't you can think of – finally adds up to this¹¹⁻¹⁴ But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourself in Christ, and be up and about!

Reflection

Read again what St Paul tells us in today's reading from his letter to the Romans: *'Don't run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other'*. Owe no one anything, except to love one another. OK, we all agree it's good, really good or as my grandchildren would say 'it's cool' to love your neighbour, this is the golden rule, and most of us try to do our best to stick to the rules- but do we? Or do we fool ourselves, really. *Owe no one anything, except to love one another.*

Promote Christian love – for that is what we are told to do. It is the most important thing we are to do. Here we have what it is all about. If we succeed with this, we have done everything, by implication if we fail, then we have done nothing. Whoa! That is hard to take on board - done nothing, all the good we have done, tried to do, is wiped away because we have not loved one another, our neighbour, all of them, as ourselves.

We could look at it that way but I would rather start from a different point. This Christian love, does not originate with us does it? It starts with God. It was to share the divine love that the creator launched the cosmos and formed the human race. It was love that brought heaven to earth in Christ Jesus, and it was love that led him to accept the cross, and it was love that opened his tomb on Easter morning. And this divine love came to live in the first disciples. It is still in our human hearts and we see it in the many gifts we share, all of them grace at work in the world, this is the action of the Holy Spirit.

This divine love is the source of any love we experience which is worthy of the name, and our calling as followers of Christ, is to serve as agents of this love. Here we have it, the great struggle, worthy of all our efforts, is to serve as agents of God's love - that is what we have been called to do.

We all have opportunities to love one another as we live our day to day lives amongst our family or friends. But these opportunities to love extend beyond these boundaries. We can work for God's peace in many places. We can work for right relationships to prevail because divine love wants to work through us to establish justice and peace everywhere.

The Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross tells us that "in the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone". This absolute priority of love challenges us, we will not be judged on success or wealth or knowledge or anything else the world counts as important, however we will be judged on love.

So love is the most important of the Christian graces. It is the one thing we always owe to one another. At the end of our lives it will be the deciding factor, all this requires is that as God's church we become a community that is learning to love. There is so much in our society that counters and blocks the progress of love. Hearts and relationships and communities all can become infected with sin, the list of don'ts is long, and we fail. So love in action must often take the form of reconciliation, the mending of broken relationships.

We must not deny that clashes and conflicts occur. We must not pretend they are not there or paper them over. Nor must we keep them alive and hurtful, like a skin rash constantly scratched. In the Gospel for today Matthew 18 15-20 we get some sound advice from Jesus on how to deal with those who sin against us, here he is talking about in the church but it would apply in families, friends and workplaces. The heart of what Jesus is saying is to find a solution, common ground, and as we try to work things out, we experience something more of that love that is available to us all.

If we find it hard to love everyone as we are called to love all of the time, and we do – then we are human beings who are far from perfect. God knows us and every day is a fresh day we can begin as forgiven children. All he asks is that we try.

So can we think about, sign up to, the practice day by day of this same love? Then imperfect as we are, we can become what God would have us be; his light in our troubled world.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

Father, we pray for the whole church, which you called into being through your Son. We are aware that it was always your intention that your church should be a blessing to all people everywhere. We ask that by your Holy Spirit your church may be daily renewed and empowered for the task for which you gave it life.

We pray, Father that we may be ready for any sacrifice, any action, any declaration that will clearly demonstrate faith, hope and love to our neighbours, our family and our friends, and those we meet as we live our lives.

We pray for all those who are ill, infirm and lonely, all those who miss their friends and family and remain too afraid of the virus to resume normal life. For all those who care for others whose lives and emotions are in need of health and healing.

We pray for all those who work in the NHS and we pray especially for those who work in care homes or work caring for people in their own homes, we know God has made them his special people, as they do all they can to make others feel special too;

Father, we pray for ourselves. We pray that we have the attitude of mind that honours you, That we continue to learn to love and to show your love to all our neighbours, whoever or wherever they are and that we think and behave well in this uncertain time. We ask that the assurance of Christ's presence, power and love may give us strength, hope and faith.

We bring our prayer in the name of Jesus, **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn

May the mind of Christ my Saviour, live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me, as the waters fill the sea,
Him exalting, self abasing –this is victory.

May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.

Kate Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928) CCLI 879917

Father, we know that we are yours because you have made us your own.
We belong to your kingdom because your Spirit tells us that it is so.
Father, go with us on the journey of life, and may the peace of Christ
and the power of his Spirit go with us. **Amen**

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