

8th January, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you

begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea;
a great High Priest whose name is
Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.

my sinful soul is counted free;
for God the just is satisfied
to look on him and pardon me,
to look on him and pardon me.

My name is graven on his hands,
my name is written on his heart.
I know that while in heav'n he stands
no tongue can bid me thence depart,
no tongue can bid me thence depart.

Behold him there, the risen Lamb,
my perfect, spotless righteousness,
the great unchangeable I AM,
the King of glory and of grace.

When Satan tempts me to despair
and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look and see him there
who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Saviour died,

At one with him, I cannot die;
my soul is purchased by his blood.
My life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ my Saviour and my God,
with Christ my Saviour and my God.

Sermon by Rev Howard Wright.

Read **Ephesians 3:14-21, Matthew 4:23-25, Responding to God's Love**

This term's teaching series looks again at our vision and values. We'll be using passages from Matthew and Ephesians for most of our readings, but using the whole Bible as we study the different themes.

At the beginning of a New Year we often have questions about our reason for living, our purpose and direction. This is a question for us as individuals but also for us as a church. Five years or so ago we adopted a purpose/vision statement and a set of values, alongside our mission statement. Our, or rather God's answer, to 'why are you here?' and 'why do you do what you do?' is that we are, Responding to God's Love. Our services, our gatherings, our projects and activities are all in response to God's love.

God's love is extravagant, amazing and extraordinary. No one else loves us so unconditionally. We act and speak; we live, in response to his love.

It is a fundamental human need to receive and give love. We see God's love in creation, in patience in our sin, in his incarnation, and most supremely in the cross.

In creation. The creation of a beautiful and varied world.

In patience at our sin. From the moment of the fall in the Old Testament, there is the promise of rescue (redemption), and even the touching kindness of the making of clothes (Genesis 3: 15 & 21). The New Testament tells us '*that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*' (Romans 2:4)

In the incarnation and the cross. God so loved us that Jesus comes among us (John 3:16). Jesus' ministry, as in our reading, demonstrates love – see Matthew 4:23.

Paul points out the lengths to which Jesus has gone in his love for us – read Philippians 2:6-8.

God gives us the most extravagant invitation into relationship – read Romans 8:14-17.

So, what should our response be?

Seek God. Last week's sermon about the Magi encouraged us to pursue God. This will mean spending time reading the Bible, praying – listening and

speaking, meeting with others, studying – books, podcasts, videos, conferences, etc.

Know God. Knowledge comes from the same praying, reading, sharing with others, and living in the company of the Holy Spirit. *‘And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.’* Ephesians 3:17-18

Worship and Serve God. We respond in love as we walk in obedience, loving and serving God and one another. *‘If you love me, keep my commands.’* John 14:15. *‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.’* John 15:9-14

And, we respond lovingly in worship and in service. Worship and service are same words in Greek, and Hebrew. For the ancient people of God, and for us (!), worship is to serve, to serve is to worship! It’s much more than the singing of songs or turning up to church. It is to live thankful and sacrificial lives, submitting to God and sharing generously with others. *‘For me to live, is Christ, to die is gain.’* Philippians 1:21.

We respond in love as we take on the family likeness: *‘For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, ...’* (Romans 8:19), and join in the family business: *‘Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’* (John 20:21).

So what might this responding to God’s love look like for us as we enter this New Year? Make sure you set aside time, and maybe even a space, to pray and read the Bible – you can get a reading plan or download an App! And as you listen to God’s voice in prayer and through scripture, walk in his ways. Practice loving others, consider how you might worship and serve God by sharing time, skill, property, possessions, and money with others directly and through his church.

Prayers: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* (Philippians 4:4-6)

- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, neighbours, and for family & friends.
- Pray for the Church.



Collect: *The Baptism of the Lord, First Sunday after Epiphany*

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat & Bowls: Wed. 18th Jan. at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 25th Jan at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: TBA
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays. COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.