

**Written Service Sunday May 5<sup>th</sup> 2024**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
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**Sunday before Ascension Day**

**Theme:** Love one another as I have loved you.

**Prayer of Approach:**

We come in awe and amazement, loving Lord. We look at your empty Cross:  
A sign of your crucifixion – and a sign of your resurrection!

We recall the sword and nails reminders of your suffering on the cross:  
A sign of your crucifixion – and a sign of your resurrection!

We remember the basin, the towel and the perfumed oil of your burial:  
A sign of your crucifixion – and a sign of your resurrection!

We remember the bread and wine from the last supper:  
A sign of your crucifixion – and a sign of your resurrection!

For Jesus who was dead is alive.  
He bore in His body the marks of the sword and nails.  
The bowl, towel and perfumed oil were brought to your empty tomb.  
You were made known in the bread and wine.  
Jesus is alive. **Alleluia!**

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 17:** With gladness we worship

With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,  
free hearts and free voices how blessed the  
bring;  
The old thankful story shall scale thine abode,  
thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.

Thy right would we give thee – true homage  
thy due,  
and honour eternal, the universe through,  
With all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,  
in one acclamation we celebrate thee.

Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,  
thy children revere thee for all thou hast done.  
O Father! Returning to love and to light,  
thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.

We join with the Angels, and so there is given  
from earth alleluia, in answer to heaven.  
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,  
redeeming, victorious and infinite Love!

**Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving:**

Living Lord,  
Who became a vulnerable human being and lived an earthly life, who experienced those which we all  
experience, of joy and sadness, love and rejection, hope and disappointment.

**We worship and adore you.**

Healing Lord,

Who brought sight to the blind and gave steps to the lame, who offered comfort to the sorrowful and strength to the weak, who spoke words of hope to the hopeless and who became The Way to those who had lost their way.

**We worship and adore you.**

Dying Lord,

Who suffered and died, was beaten and tortured, who went silently and willingly to the cross, who asked His Father's forgiveness for those who had hung Him there.

**We worship and adore you.**

Risen Lord,

During this Easter Season we celebrate the joyful news that Jesus is alive. We celebrate the amazing love of God, shown in the giving of His son for all humanity. We celebrate the fact that death has been overcome and new life is a gift of all who believe.

**We worship and adore you.**

**Living, loving, risen Lord,**

**We worship and adore you. AMEN**

**Prayer of Confession:**

As we remember those who were part of the Easter story, we relate them to our own lives.

Loving God, we remember Judas, who betrayed the one he loved:

**Forgive us Lord when we act out of ill-judged motives.**

We remember Peter, who out of fear, denied his Lord:

**Forgive us Lord when we deny our faith for fear of what others might think.**

We remember the women who went to the tomb at daybreak, carrying oils and spices for anointing:

**Forgive us Lord when we lose hope in the future.**

We remember the disciples, who struggled to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead:

**Forgive us Lord when we fail to realise that doubts and struggles are part of our faith journey.**

The stories of Easter are part of the greatest story ever told:

**Forgive us Lord when we do not live as Easter people.**

Jesus died that we might be forgiven. We hear again the words of grace – our sins are forgiven.

**In the name of our risen Lord: AMEN**

**Readings: John 15:9-17**

I love you, just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. If you obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be complete. My commandment is this: Love one another, just as I have loved you. The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them.

And you are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.

You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father gives you whatever you ask in my name. This then is what I command you: Love one another.

## 1 John 5:1-5

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is a child of God; and whoever loves his father loves his child also. This is how we know that we love God's children: it is by loving God and obeying His commands. For our love for God means that we obey His commands. And His commands are not too hard for us, because every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith. Who can defeat the world? Only the person who believes that Jesus is the son of God.

**Hymn: Singing the Faith 242:** A new commandment I give unto you

A new commandment I give unto you:  
That you love one another as I have loved you,  
That you love one another as I have loved you.  
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,  
If you have love one for another.  
By this the world shall know that you are my disciples,  
If you have love one for another. *Repeat the verse*

### Sermon:

#### Introduction:

Unfortunately, the word 'love' in English has many different meanings: for example "I love fish and chips" or "I love you dearly" or even "Mum, I love you" especially if she has given you something that you really want! The same is not true of Greek, in which the New Testament is written. So, when Jesus asks us to love one another, He uses the Greek word 'agape' – just so that we know what kind of love He is talking about. He doesn't mean the erotic love, or the love of family and He certainly doesn't mean "I love fish and chips"! What He means is the kind of love which is a matter of will – not the emotional kind of love but the type of love that we **decide** to feel – not easy but this is what Jesus asks of us.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where He was going to His death – so he was demonstrating to them that he was giving His life for all of them.

1. **Friendship:** Jesus says that they are no longer to think of themselves as servants but He has chosen them to be His friends. And as a proof of this He states that He has told them all that the Father has revealed to Him.  
Jesus tells them that love cannot be legislated for. The command to love is given by one who has done everything that love can do – and more than that.  
Have you ever read or seen the film by George Orwell 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'? This is a perfect parody of what love is **not**. It is about a totalitarian ruler (Big Brother) who has done nothing but oppress and terrify his subjects; nevertheless he orders them to love him. And the devastating climax, after initially resisting, after his subjects, having been brainwashed, is that it works! Our hero admits that he is happy and "loves Big Brother". What we realise is that he ceases to be fully human. This is not the way of Christ. He calls His disciples 'friends' for He chose them, and acted out the greatest thing that a one friend can do for another 'to give His life for them'. He makes us more human, not less.
2. **Love:** We are chosen for love. We are asked to 'love one another'. Unfortunately we live in a world where we are in competition with one another, or to dispute with one another, but the Christian is to live in such a way to show everyone what is meant by loving our brother and sister. It is here that Jesus makes another of His great claims. If we ask Him how He can ask anyone to love anyone else His answer is "No person can show greater love than he lay down his life for his friends – and I am going to do just that".

This is extremely challenging. For it means that we also are asked to do the same. Like a soldier who is asked to lay down his life for a colleague.

3. **Partners:** Jesus did not choose us for tremendous privileges. He called us to be His partners. He suggests that they should love one another simply because it shows the kind of life that is possible for a believer. And because we are called to spread the Gospel of redemption – to bear much fruit. Jesus knew that He was going away, back to heaven so He knew that He had to rely on His followers to keep the Gospel spreading. There was no ‘backup plan’ – Jesus was relying on His followers to do the work which He set them.

It is part of God’s plan to rely on us too. We are never too old or infirm to be chosen to spread the Gospel! Sometimes it is a word here and there that might help a person to set out on a journey which could lead to Christ – but we have to be ready when the opportunity arises. Are you ready? Christ may be relying on you.

4. **Joy:** Jesus suggests that the reason for Him to ask us to love one another is actually because it would give Him joy. If we are not careful, we can get in a muddle here because it is not **our** joy He is talking about but **His** joy. We may feel that sometimes joy is not part of our lives and we may feel cheated because this is not part of our experience. But on this occasion Jesus is talking about His joy.

And we know what gives Him joy – it is when one sinner is asks for forgiveness. Remember the stories that Jesus spoke about – ‘the lost coin’ (Luke 15:8-10), ‘the lost son’ (Luke 15:11-31) and the ‘lost sheep’ (Luke 15:1-7). What we need to understand is that there is real joy in heaven when one sinner repents. If we love everybody maybe we too can feel the joy in heaven when one sinner repents and perhaps that may spur us on to feel we are making every effort to spread the Gospel message and cause joy in heaven.

I wonder if you ever watch ‘Father Brown’ on the television? I am always impressed when Father Brown always takes every opportunity to suggest that people who have done wrong – sometimes the most heinous crime – and suggests that they should admit their sin and will find forgiveness.

Perhaps if we all did that then perhaps there would be real joy in heaven!

#### **Hymn: Singing the Faith 611:** Brother, sister let me serve you

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too.
2. We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road;  
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.
3. I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you; speak the peace you long to hear.
4. I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I’ll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow till we’ve seen this journey through.
5. When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony;  
Born of all we’ve known together of Christ’s love and agony.

*Repeat verse 1*

#### **Intercessions:**

God of Grace,

Whose love embraces us; enable us to reach out to others so that through us, your love may be known.....*(in the quiet we pray for all those known to us who are in need, through sickness, pain and fear, or those who struggle to make ends meet)*

God of Justice,

Free us from the confines of culture, that we may be the voice of the voiceless, oppressed and hungry.....*(in the quiet we pray for those who are caught up in violence – Gaza, Israel, Ukraine and Russia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan etc. We pray for the hungry and those living with drought. We bring to God all those who have died in Australia and those injured)*

God of Hope,

Strengthen those who search for purpose in life: whose life lacks quality: for those who have lost their way.....*(in the quiet we pray for those known to us who have lost their way)*

God of Time and Space,

Hasten your Kingdom of justice, peace and love in the world and all people.....*(in the quiet we pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God and ask that His will may be done on earth as in heaven)*

Loving Lord,

We know you and see you in the face of Jesus:

So come to us in friendship and walk with us along the way.

When that pathway is rocky and uphill, strengthen us.

In all circumstances, give us eyes and ears that are open to others, so that we may be for them instruments of your purpose, sharing faith, encouragement and love. **AMEN**

**Hymn Singing the Faith 249:** Jesu, Jesu fill with your love

*(Chorus) Jesu, Jesu fill us with your love, show us how to serve  
The neighbours we have from you.*

1. Kneels at the feet of His friends, silently washes their feet,  
Master who acts as a slave to them.

*(Chorus)*

2. Neighbours are rich folk and poor, neighbours are black folk and white,  
Neighbours are nearby or far way.

*(Chorus)*

3. These are the ones we should serve; these are the ones we should love.  
All these are neighbours to us and you.

*(Chorus)*

4. Kneels at the feet of our friends, silently washing their feet.  
This is the way we should live with you.

*(Chorus)*

**Final Prayer:**

Risen Lord you have travelled this way before us and you have known joy and pain –  
If the way ahead of us is smooth or stony

**Risen Lord, travel with us.**

If our days are full of sunshine or rain:

**Risen Lord, travel with us.**

If in our lives we know joy or tears:

**Risen Lord, travel with us.**

And bring us at last to our home with you. **AMEN**