



Written Service Sunday October 29th
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Jan Davies

Call to Worship: Psalm 90:1-2
O Lord, you have always been our home.
Before you created the hills
Or brought the world into being,
You were eternally God,
And will be God forever and ever.

Prayers of Adoration and Praise

Merciful God, you are our Father and we are your beloved children.
You have taught us that we are loved and forgiven,
Cherished and longed for,
Held in your hand.

We praise and adore you.

Creator God, you bless us with life and love,
You have taught us that all we have is a gift from you;
Food for our wellbeing, shelter and clothes, love and laughter,
Nourishment for our souls and a sense of your abiding presence,

We praise and adore you.

Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord,
You have taught us that we are not servants, but friends,
Friends for whom you died.
You offer us new life, a home in your Kingdom for we are Kingdom people.

We praise and adore you.

Holy Spirit, ever present God, you warm our hearts and fill us with your love.
You guide us and teach us opening our hearts to new possibilities
Stretching out our horizons, leading us into new experiences
And accompanying us on our journey,

We praise and adore you.

One God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, you are all we need.
As we gather to worship you, may we sense your presence;
Accept our worship and praise
And fill us with gratitude and joy.

Amen

Hymn: StF 81 Now thank we all our God

Now thank we all our God,
with hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our lives be near,
With ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
with them in highest heaven.
The one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore,
For thus it was is now,
and shall be ever more.

Readings: Mark 12:28-34

A teacher of the law was there who heard the discussion. He saw that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer, so he came to Jesus with a question: "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

Jesus replied, "The most important one is this: 'Listen Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."

The teacher of the law said to Jesus, "Well done, teacher! It is true as you say, that only the Lord is God and that there is no other God but He. And to love God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, is more important than to offer animals and other sacrifices to God."

Jesus noticed how wise his answer was and so He told him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

2 Timothy 2:1-7

As for you, my son, be strong through the grace that is ours in union with Christ Jesus. Take the teachings that you have heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also. Take your part in suffering, as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus. A soldier on active service wants to please his commanding officer and so does not get mixed up in the affairs of civilian life. An athlete who runs a race cannot win the prize unless he obeys the rules. The farmer who has done the hard work should have his share of the harvest. Think about what I am saying because the Lord will enable you to understand it all.

Prayers of Confession

Lord of all mercy, you are our God and we are your beloved children
But we have not always acted as loving children.
We have criticized the weaknesses of others.
We have pictured ourselves as more worthy of your love.

**Forgive us Lord and help us to view ourselves honestly
For although you love us wholeheartedly, we acknowledge that this is no more or less than for others.**

Lord, you offer us food for our soul's health.
Yet we have often turned away and refused the Bread of Life;
Or we have been distracted by the cares and pleasures of this world;
Our lives are filled with other priorities
Forgive us Lord for we hurt ourselves as well as you.

Lord we have judged others by outward appearance,
Giving more value to some rather than others.
We have condemned the sins and failings of others,
But make excuses for our own failures.
Forgive us Lord and help us to change.

Lord Jesus, when we come thoughtlessly to worship,
Or take the bread and the wine with little thought given to your sacrifice,
When we make excuses for a rushed prayer time
Or put off the time spent in meditating in your company,
**Forgive us Lord and show us how much we are missing.
We thank you Lord for your love and forgiveness freely given.
Amen**

Sermon: (based on the reading from Matthew's Gospel)

There was no love lost between the Sadducees and the doctors of the law, who usually came from the party of the Pharisees, so that when Jesus answered the Sadducees who tried to trick Him, he was applauded by the Pharisees. But, what was the lawyer really asking Jesus?

Just imagine that your house was on fire and you just have time to grab just a few things before you escape. What would you grab? Your wallet? Your passport? Your computer or personal documents? Maybe a precious photograph or the watch that your grandfather had given you or a stack of letters from someone you loved?

You may look on from a distance as everything you have ever owned goes up in smoke. Then you realise what you have just done. These things were more valuable than all the other things you might have chosen. It is then that you realise where your priorities lay.

That is really what lay behind this question. What the doctor of the law **really** wants to know is what do you grab onto in a moment of crisis? Of all the many laws that the Jews had, he was asking what was the most important. The Jewish law begins with worship, with love for God in all His greatness. No half measures: heart, soul, mind and strength – that is what covers every aspect of human life and is to be poured out gladly in worship of the one true God. Whatever we do, we do for Him. The Rabbis had a saying, that if we truly lived like this even for a single day, God's Kingdom would have come on earth as it is in heaven.

Jewish worship begins, as it has always done, and even to this day, with what is known as the *Shema*. Jesus quotes this as the most important of all the laws (Deuteronomy 6:4). Pious Jews in the time of Jesus, felt that this was so important that they wore them as phylacteries when they were at prayer, in little boxes attached to their foreheads and around their wrists.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. Even though He is not asked by the lawyer to name the second most important law, He does so anyway. He says that it is almost as important as the first and this time He quotes from Leviticus 19:18, to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus Himself was notorious as making friends with thoroughly unacceptable 'neighbours', like tax collectors, prostitutes or lepers. Notice that Jesus doesn't say love your neighbour **instead** of yourself, but as well as yourself. It means that we must love ourselves as well as our neighbours. We are not expected to despise ourselves. We need to love both ourselves and our neighbours

What Jesus did with this quotation, which was unusual; originally the quotation from Leviticus was to be applied **only** to fellow Jews. It was perfectly permissible to hate everyone who was not a Jew. What Jesus did was to apply it to **everyone**, no matter where they were from, even Gentiles (and that includes us!). Remember that Jesus dealt with all people whether or not they were a Gentile or a woman!

This has clear implications for Temple worship and the lawyer picks up on this. He recognises that these laws are **more** important than sacrifices. Hosea heard God say that "He desired steadfast love and not sacrifice". In Matthew's Gospel the writer realises that Jesus has come to Jerusalem partly for this purpose – to do away with the Temple sacrifice system. It continued for a while until in AD70, Rome came with an army and completely demolished the Temple with its system of sacrifice. And this has never been reinstated.

It has always been easy to let ritual take the place of love. It is always easy to let worship become a matter of the church building instead of a matter of the whole of life. Remember that Jesus told a story of the Good Samaritan, where the priest and the Levite could pass a wounded traveller because they were eager to get on with the ritual of the Temple. The lawyer showed that he had risen beyond his contemporaries when he found himself in sympathy with Jesus. No wonder then that Jesus says of the lawyer that 'he is not far from God's Kingdom.'

This passage enables us to understand more fully what Jesus' task was all about, and how His mission was bound to challenge the central role of the Temple and its sacrificial system. This was very controversial – not to say dangerous! It was challenging the status quo and the position of the priests. No wonder that they sought to do away with Him.

Jesus really did believe that through His mission and the coming of His Kingdom, Israel's God would enable people to worship Him and to love one another in a new way, as promised by the prophets.

What you may say has this got to do with the Christian church of the 21st century? After all, we are not involved in Temple and sacrificial worship. But this saying of Jesus has a great deal to say to us Christians. Would anyone, looking at our church today, our lives or our societies ever guess that the person whom we claim to follow demands of us that we love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and that we love our neighbours as ourselves – no matter who they are and where they come from? Or, to put it another way: when a crisis comes, what remains solid in our lives and the lives of our community? Wholehearted love of God and our neighbour? Makes you think doesn't it!

Hymn: StF611 Brother, sister let me serve you

Brother, sister let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Prayers of Intercession (using the words of hymn 706 in Singing the Faith)

Longing for light, we wait in the darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people

Light for the world to see.

(We pray for the whole Christian Church, our own church, its ministers, stewards and those who work with young people. We pray for your vision of the future. We pray for all those who fear persecution for following you.)

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has the power to save us.

Make us your living Voice.

(We pray for those parts of the world where there is ongoing conflict particularly The Ukraine, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan and those places those places where there is need but have fallen out of the news. We pray especially for the Israel/Palestine at this time and ask that there may be peace with justice

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others

Shared until all are fed.

(We pray for those who are hungry today, whatever the cause. We pray for those suffering because of the cost of living crisis where decisions have to be made between feeding children and heating the home. We continue to pray for those who have known only hunger and thirst whilst we have plenty. Remember the work of the food banks. We continue to pray for those who have left their homes and who look for a better life – may they be treated with compassion)

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone

(We pray for the homeless in this country especially at this time. There are also many in places like India where children are abandoned and live in danger of being trafficked)

**Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your Kingdom come.**

(We pray for those we know who are sick and hurting or grieving the loss of a loved one, the lonely and frightened, and we pray for our government that they make the right decisions – and we pray the Gods Kingdom may come)

Hymn: StF 51 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail
not;
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed thy hand has provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and
harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Great is thy faithfulness! ...

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to
guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow,

Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness! ...

Final Prayers

Pure light of sunshine, shining in our hearts;

Joy unspeakable on our lips;

Death swallowed up in life;

Lord of creation and recreation

We live our lives in you.

May this light and joy be with us all the days of our lives, especially when pain and darkness,
temptation and sin would drag us from your side.

Lord of resurrection life; keep us under the shadow of your wing.

Amen