

## Let us prepare for worship

Let us be still for a moment as we draw near to worship God...

Lord God, in this time of worship, open our ears and our eyes to see your vision and our part within it. Teach us, hear our prayers and enable us for service wherever you might take us, to your praise and glory. Amen.

## StF no. 249 Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

Refrain 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.

Refrain

2 Neighbours are rich folk and poor, neighbours are black folk and white, neighbours are nearby and far away. Refrain

**3** These are the ones we should serve, these are the ones we should love, all these are neighbours to us and You.

Refrain

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

Refrain

CCL821965 North Ghanaian song, adapted by Tom Colvin

# Prayers of Thanksgiving, praise and confession.

Living God, this is a day of blessedness, when we take the opportunity to give thanks for Your goodness and grace. This is a day when we pause, to take note, to see and know what's around us, and to give thanks for Your many blessings. We are blessed with life, the living, breathing life which is Your gift to us. We are blessed with creation, the beauty and wonder of which is beyond our comprehension. We are blessed with love, the ability to give love, and the joy of receiving it. We are blessed with the Church, with the Community of God's Faithful People, with whom we are bound and in which we have our place. We are blessed with the Gospel, with the Salvation won for us by Your Son, Jesus Christ. Living God, we are richly blessed, and so we pause and give thanks for Your goodness and grace. But above all we are blessed by Your Love – a challenging love; a rebuking love; a healing love; an accepting love; a forgiving love.

But Lord we come seeking forgiveness for the times when we have loved ourselves and forgotten our neighbour, when we have thought we were right and ignored the reasoned voice, when we have voiced words of judgement when they should have encouraged, when we have acted in haste and hurt others. Forgive us and create within us a clean heart we pray.

We are blessed again when we can confess our failings, and hear Your words of love, "Arise sinner, and sin no more." So, as Your cloak of blessedness is cast around us once again, may we be drawn closer to You in the warmth of Your Spirit.

These prayers we bring You, in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

## New Testament Lesson: John 13: 31 - 35 The New Commandment

<sup>31</sup>After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. <sup>32</sup>And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. <sup>33</sup>My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' <sup>34</sup>And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

# Message

Let us put this reading into context, Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world. He shares a meal with His disciples, gives them an example of humble service as He washes their feet, predicts Judas's betrayal and then begins His farewell discourse, then His final words of instruction and prayer before His arrest.

In this reading Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment, – "to love one another as I have loved you."

Please take note that love is not an option for the followers of Jesus. For Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you". Not a suggestion, not a recommendation. A commandment! To love in the same way that Jesus loves us. Jesus said, "Love one another, just like I have loved you.

This is our challenge. To love with a love that is wide and long and high and deep. To love with a love that is gracious, generous, extravagant. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples". We must put our faith into action and love one another.

Faith is dynamic. Faith is action. It's not a noun, it's a verb. I always remember my teacher at primary school telling us all that a verb is a 'doing' word. People will know that we are Christians through our love, not through the traditions we follow. Therefore, we must continually be looking for ways to love one another. For whenever you did this for the least of these my children you did it for me... you did it for Jesus.

Jesus didn't draw a line and say that going beyond that line was too much to ask. Jesus' love knew no limits.

I read a great story this week, by Ernest Gordon who wrote *Miracle on the River Kwai*. It describes a very moving incident in which British prisoners of war tended the wounds of injured Japanese soldiers and fed them. The Japanese soldiers were encrusted with mud, blood and excrement. Their wounds were sorely inflamed and they were left uncared for by their own people. The British prisoners see them, take pity on them, bathe their wounds, and give them a little food to eat. They care for their enemies who have starved and beaten them and killed their comrades. An amazing example of love in action.

Others will recognise our faith, not through the words we say, but through the things we do. When we 'do' we are building the Kingdom of God on the foundations set by Christ.

Jesus' love is a love we are to know and to show. How are we doing? Do people know we are disciples of Jesus by our love? Where are we failing? Who should we be loving? Who do we find it hard to love? Love is at the centre of our faith. Love is how we can see God at work in the world, and as a community of faith we must live our lives to show love for God and for our neighbour. Our faith isn't something that allows us to sit back and let it happen around us. Our faith is something we need to do, we need to be active.

You may know the worship song 'And they will know we are Christians by our love'; our job, our mission is ongoing, it will never be finished... but people will see the results of our labours through the love we share.

Building people together, building the Church of Jesus Christ together, with an extravagant love as the cement binding us to each other and giving us strength. An enduring love requires God's word, His presence, His Holy Spirit, His love and forgiveness. As we love, we will love not in our own strength and ability, but the strength and ability that we receive from Jesus. We will love because He has first loved us. To love as Jesus commands us in our text today, means that we need to immerse ourselves in His Word and Sacraments and to let the love of Christ enter our lives and empower us to love, serve and work together. We will come to realise more and more our place in God's family and cast off everything that is opposed to love – things like impatience, selfishness, greed, an uncaring attitude, an unforgiving spirit and be led by the Spirit and be more Christ like in everything we say and do.

I read a story about a man who had a huge boulder in his front garden. He grew tired of this big, unattractive stone in the centre of his lawn, so he decided to turn it into an object of art. He went to work on it with hammer and chisel, and chipped away at the huge boulder until the ugly stone became a beautiful running deer. When he had finished it, it looked beautiful.

A neighbour asked, "How did you ever carve such a marvellous likeness of a deer?" The man answered, "I just chipped away everything that didn't look like a deer!" So, if you have anything in your life right now that doesn't look like love, then, with the help of God, chip it away!

If you have anything in your life that doesn't look like compassion or mercy or empathy, then, with the help of God, chip it away! If you have hatred or prejudice or envy in your heart, chip it away! Let God chip everything out of your life that doesn't look like tender-heartedness and love.

It is interesting to note that love is the Christian's primary witness to the world. Do people see the love of Jesus shining through you? Verse 35 of our Gospel reading "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples." It doesn't take too much imagination to realise that this command of Jesus is one that we take too lightly. To love as Jesus loves us seems way out of our reach. To let love rule everything we say and do, seems almost impossible. We fail again and again. That's not to say that because we don't love as we should, that we should give up. But it does mean that we need the love of Christ more than ever before. We need His unconditional, never-failing love to forgive us for our lack of love. We need to thank God that He doesn't love us like we love others. God's love for us creates the potential for us to love unconditionally and sacrificially.

The Lord, who forgave even those who crucified Him, wants to show His mercy towards us today, to cleanse our hearts and fill us with His loving Holy Spirit. Receive His mercy. Place your trust in Christ and let Him teach you how to love as He has loved you.

# Let us pray:-

Lord, thank you, that you are loving and gracious. Thank you that you've offered us forgiveness and the gift of new life in Jesus. Thank you that your love is perfect, it never fails, and that nothing can separate us from your love.

We pray that our lives will be filled and overflowing with the power of your love, so we can make a difference and bring honour to you. Lord thank you, that your love is patient. Help us show patience with those around us. Lord thank you, that your love is kind. Help us to extend kindness to others. Thank you, that you equip us to face each day with the power of your love, your forgiveness, and your grace. We love you Lord, and we need you today, and every day, **Amen** 

#### Prayers of intercession

Loving God, we thank you for showing us through Jesus what it means to love one another in humility. We pray for our own church, for wisdom, strength, and inspiration and for those involved in the leadership in the Cheshire South Circuit. Inspire and guide us all how best to show your love in our community and to one another.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Loving God, we lift before you those affected by ongoing unease, destruction, and war across the globe. We remember before you the Middle East, Ukraine, Russia, Yemen, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We lift before you those across the world who have the power to make a difference and ask for your love, prompting, discernment and guidance. We pray for those involved in fragile diplomacy and pray for wisdom and decision making that will help support the most vulnerable in your world. In our country, we pray for our health service, our education system, our justice system and our defence services. Give wisdom to the decision makers, help them to find possibilities in situations which feel impossible.

## Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Loving God, we pray for all those who are in need at this time, those who struggle with their health, in body or mind, and those who support and care for them. We remember those who have died and those who mourn them. In a moment of silence we raise before you those on our hearts at this time......

May they know your love and comfort and your presence close beside them at this time. Guide us that we may know how best to care for and love them.

# Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Father God, you know each one of us by name. May we listen to your voice. Renewed by our worship and strengthened by our fellowship, send us out into the world so that we can confidently speak your name to all whom we meet this week.

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Our Father who art in heaven ...

StF website only - God who sets us on a journey - tune What a friend we have in Jesus

1 God who sets us on a journey to discover, dream and grow, lead us as you led your people in the desert long ago; journey inward, journey outward, stir the spirit, stretch the mind, love for God and self and neighbour marks the way that Christ defined.

2 Exploration brings new insights, changes, choices we must face; give us wisdom in deciding, mindful always of your grace; should we stumble, lose our bearings, find it hard to know what's right, we regain our true direction focused on the Jesus light.

3 End our longing for the old days, grant the vision that we lack – once we've started on this journey there can be no turning back; let us travel light, discarding excess baggage from our past, cherish only what's essential, choosing treasure that will last.

4 When we set up camp and settle to avoid love's risk and pain, you disturb complacent comfort, pull the tent pegs up again; keep us travelling in the knowledge you are always at our side; give us courage for the journey, Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

CCL821965 Joy Dine

## A prayer of blessing

May the sincerity of our worship and of our love for each other provide evidence to the world of the power of Christ, and may we be recognised as a living example of Christ's love. May almighty God bless us, now and for ever. **Amen**.

This act of worship was prepared by Jenny Smith