

Cheshire South Methodist Circuit
Worship at Home - Sunday 6th September 2026
Loving our Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Call to worship

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures for evermore. So let us worship and praise him!

StF no.403 *God is love, his the care*

1 God is love, his the care,
tending each, everywhere.
God is love, all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
that we all might know him:

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good! God is truth!
God is beauty! Praise him!

2 None can see God above;
neighbours here we can love;
thus may we Godward move,
finding him in others,
sisters all, and brothers:
Sing aloud, loud, loud!...

3 Jesus came, lived and died
for our sake, crucified,
rose again, glorified;
he was born to save us
by the truth he gave us:
Sing aloud, loud, loud!...

4 To our Lord, praise we sing –
light and life, friend and king,
coming down love to bring
pattern for our duty,
showing God in beauty:
Sing aloud, loud, loud!...

CCL 821965 Percy Dearmer

Prayers of thanksgiving and confession

God of integrity and wisdom, you are the source of peace and the healer of conflicts within ourselves, our families, our communities and in our churches. Lord of love, we are grateful that you continue to look after us, despite our waywardness. As you love us, so we love others in turn. We thank you for caring when we hurt others, for grieving when we are divided and for rejoicing when we are reconciled. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit that we may become the people you want us to be, sharing your love with all those around us. In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

God of truth and integrity, we come before you in humility, seeking forgiveness for those times when we have failed to love others as you have loved us. We are sorry when we put ourselves first, and regret our self-serving deeds and words. Forgive us when we have failed to listen to those around us, or simply ignored them. We regret that sometimes we have collaborated in what is wrong, or compromised our principles, instead of seeking to put them right.

We turn to you, Lord, trusting that you will forgive us once again. For your Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world to save sinners like us and, out of great love, he gave up his life for us. We rely upon his Grace to make us whole, and upon your Spirit to guide us in the paths of righteousness. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Readings: 1 John 4, 7-12

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Matthew 18, 15-20

¹⁵ "If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Sermon

Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ: **We love other, because God first loved us.**

The word 'love' often appears in the Bible, not least in the New Testament, and notably in St Paul's epistles, but it also features prominently in the first Letter of John from which we have just read. Yet we may hesitate to use that word outside of our families, because of its romantic connotations. I can remember the surprise, even shock, on the part of my colleagues at Keele University, where I used to work, when a member of my department was leaving and, at our final gathering, he spoke very warmly about the love that he had experienced between us. I knew what Peter meant, since he was a fine Christian, and what he valued was the concern that we showed towards one another, and not least towards him, since he had a disabled daughter and depended a lot upon our support in coping with the difficulties this entailed.

John commands us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ in precisely this way, looking after one another. Such love should be the touchstone of our communities, marking them off from other societies and associations. St Paul spends a lot of time talking about how members of the churches to which he ministered should live together, with love very much at the centre. It was the same for John, writing a little later, inviting those early Christians to love one another: 'We love because God first loved us.' Of course, this echoes the Old Testament, where we are commanded to love both God and our neighbour. But John adds the Christian revelation that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to atone for our sins. Despite our disobedience, God still loves us, as demonstrated in the parables of Jesus, not least in the one about the Forgiving Father (also known as the Prodigal Son).

Now, this raises the question of how we are to deal with those Christians who fall out of love with our fellowship, a situation that Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel reading from Matthew: what should be the response when 'another member of the church sins against you'? Conflict of this sort will arise, and efforts must be made to resolve it, but how should we go about it? Jesus suggests that in the first instance, if a brother or sister fails to show us the love that John has been commending, then we should take up the matter individually and informally, between ourselves. If that fails, then we should involve one or two others, both to help out and to establish some record of the disagreement. It may

then become a matter for the whole community, at which point, in the absence of resolution, it may be necessary to part company. The words that follow: 'let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector', may sound rather harsh, yet the very writer of this Gospel, namely Matthew, had been a tax collector who was welcomed as a disciple. So, any expulsion is by no means final. Indeed, when we consider the all-important context of this passage, in Matthew Chapter 18, we see that it is preceded by the parable of the lost sheep (most famously recounted by Luke) with the good shepherd going in search of the sheep that has gone astray and rejoicing mightily when he finds it. We love, because God loves us **and shows us mercy**.

In my experience of management at Keele, Jesus' means of dealing with a falling out among Christian brothers and sisters offers excellent advice for tackling conflict between working colleagues. These days there is no shortage of grievance and disciplinary procedures, but I always began with the personal, informal route to solving such problems, only going on to involve other people in a more formal manner if this did not work. The Christian Church should follow the same process. But I wonder if we allow hurts to fester when we should seek to resolve them, or if we simply allow members to depart without even seeking to know why they have left us. Above all, we should never simply let people go and, whatever we may think about them, we should always seek to bring them back. We love them, because God first loved us.

The notion that any discipline in the Church should be conducted with mercy is reinforced when we glance at the verses that follow in Matthew Chapter 18 (the subject of next week's lectionary), when Jesus talks about forgiveness. In our church and in society as a whole, there is currently – and rightly – a sense that justice must be done and that those who have committed wrongs in the Church, as in other organisations, should pay a penalty for their misconduct. What I think has been forgotten is that mercy and forgiveness also have a place, not least among brothers and sisters in Christ, who should acknowledge one another's weaknesses. I am going to end with a story from my days as a student when, as members of the Swansea University Methodist Society, we would go out and take services at local churches. On one occasion, the subject was forgiveness, and we were extremely surprised when a member of the congregation came to the front and called out another member, whom he proceeded to embrace. We later learned that the pair had fallen out and not spoken for some time, but the message of God's forgiveness had touched their hearts and brought about reconciliation. **We love our brothers and sisters in Christ, because God first loved us. Amen**

StF no. 103 *God is love: let heaven adore him*

1 God is love: let heaven adore him;
God is love: let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him,
and exalt him with one voice.
he who laid the earth's foundation,
he who spread the heavens above
he who breathes through all creation,
he is Love, eternal Love.

2 God is love: and he, enfolding
all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
then they find that self-same aching
deep within the heart of God.

3 God is love: and though with blindness
sin affects each human soul,
God's eternal loving kindness
holds and guides and keeps them whole.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign.
CCL821965 Timothy Rees

Prayers of intercession

God of Love, you know that we do not always find loving easy, for it demands commitment and self-denial, courage and faith, especially when it comes to those whom we ought to love, but find it difficult. So, we ask for your help and pray that in loving you more dearly, and strengthening our bond with you, we might transform our relationships with others.

We pray for those we love and know, especially for those who are experiencing difficulties, illness or anxiety at this time and, not least, for our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been bereaved, recently or in the past. We ask that you may bring healing and wholeness, calm and peace, companionship and hope into those broken lives and painful circumstances that we commend to you.

And help us, Lord, to commit ourselves to you in trust and hope, that we might share your love with others. Enable us to reach out, together with our fellow Christians, and spread our saving faith and good news among those around us. We pray for the mission of our churches, here in South Cheshire, asking you to bless the work of all our ministers and leaders, at the beginning of a new year in our Methodist Church.

And lastly, we pray that your way of love might prevail in our world, so deeply scarred by conflict and want. We ask that wars might cease, not least in Ukraine, the Middle East and parts of Africa, and for the peaceful resolution of conflict in other troubled lands. We pray too for justice, for those who are oppressed, and for the relief of hunger, in places facing severe drought and flooding, which we have recently experienced ourselves. Above all, we pray for those serving in government, all over the world, that they might rise to the great global challenges of poverty and global warming, and strive together to tackle them. In the name of our loving Saviour, Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

STF no. 615 *Let love be real*

1 Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love, wherever we may go.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to
grow.*

2 Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are
weakness,
Give me your love, in spite of all you know.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to
grow.*

3 Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings show.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

CCL821965 Michael Forster

Benediction

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and remain with us, always. **Amen**

This service has been prepared by Dr. Malcolm Crook