

Order of Service 27th March 2022 (Mothering Sunday)

Love's Simple Work

Welcome

Hello, and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 27th March 2022 - Mothering Sunday. Today's service is entitled 'Love's Simple Work'. Let's settle ourselves into a deep acknowledgement of the presence of the One who simply loves us.

Call to Worship

1 Blessed is the one

whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Psalm 32: 1 - 2

Hymn (BPW 559) **Love Divine All Loves Excelling**

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Opening Prayer of Thanksgiving

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
cascades through life in overflowing grace,
to tell creation's meaning in the story
of love, evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
in you, deserted, scorned, crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
embracing us in love serene and pure;
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,
as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;
love which commands, enables, and obeys;
you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating
one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us seek love and serve love's purpose,
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

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.

Offering

Make us generous people, dear Lord, and receive the simple gifts of our hearts today. Amen.

We enjoy two worship songs together now...

Songs (WT 410 & 285)

(WT 410) **The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases**

The steadfast love of the Lord never changes;
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning,
New every morning.
Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,
Great is Thy faithfulness.

(Repeat)

They are new every morning,
New every morning.
Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,
Great is Thy faithfulness,
Great is Thy faithfulness.

Song (WT 285) **Love Beyond Measure**

Love beyond measure,
Mercy so free,
Your endless resources
Given to me.
Strength to the weary,
Healing our lives,
Your love beyond measure
Has opened my eyes,
Opened my eyes.

(Sing x3)

Prayers of Intercession

We begin with prayers for our personal friends. You might like to name three friends in the quiet of your heart.

We thank you, Lord, for those friends who have stayed with us through thick and thin; for friends we have known for decades; for friends we have recently made. We pray for our friends. May they know happiness, health and wellbeing. May they open their hearts and lives to the love that you have for them. May we be for them a rock in times of change; a listening ear in times of confusion; and a bringer of joy and happiness to enrich the ordinary events of life.

We thank you, Lord, for our mothers, and for all who have been motherly figures in our lives. We pray for young mums we know, perhaps busy with the demands of a career alongside the care of children. We pray for mums of adult children. We pray for mums whose children have died. We pray for women who wished to be mums but never had the opportunity to make that happen. For all who have given us

maternal care we give you our thanks, and we pray for all mothers today, asking that you give them the strength, wisdom and tenderness they need to share your love.

We thank you, Lord, for our church, and for all Christians who have been an example of discipleship we could follow. We remember some fellow Christians - at Hearsall or elsewhere - in our hearts today. Draw close to these sisters and brothers we remember before you now. Encourage and direct them in their walk with you; deepen and broaden their faith; make them open to the challenges and comforts of your word; and inspire them in new ways of serving you in and out of the church. May our church be a place where people grow in faith and in love for you and one another.

Finally, we pray for all people whose friendship and family life and church are severely disrupted by circumstances beyond themselves. We think of friends separated by the displacements of war. We think of families scattered as refugees; of mothers comforting children as they flee violence. We think of churches holding firm to faith and fellowship in cities under siege. We think of Christians persecuted because of their faith. Strengthen, inspire and uphold all these people, and give them hope that your kingdom may come in their lives. Amen.

We hear now our Bible readings from 2 Corinthians and from Luke.

Bible Readings

2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Luke 15: 1-32

The parable of the lost sheep

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

The parable of the lost coin

⁸ 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^[a] and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

The parable of the lost son

¹¹ Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

¹³ 'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ 'When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants

have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.” ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

‘But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him.

²¹ ‘The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

²² ‘But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ ‘Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

²⁸ ‘The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”

³¹ ““My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.””

Perhaps religion has a bad habit of overcomplicating life and faith. In the words of our next hymn: *If our love were but more simple, we should take him at his word, and our lives be filled with gladness from the presence of the Lord.*

Hymn (BPW 573) **There's a Wideness in God's Mercy**

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up heaven:
there is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgement given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of man's mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own,
And we magnify its strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the head.

If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word,
and our lives be filled with gladness,
from the presence of the Lord.

Sermon

Love's Simple Work

From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view, wrote Paul to the Corinthians.

What does it mean, to regard someone “from a worldly point of view”? In fact, the original Greek is more literally translated, “according to the flesh”. In Paul’s thinking it refers to a world of competition, separation, superiority and hatred. It’s the world of dog-eat-dog, of the devil-take-the-hindmost, of every-man-for-himself, of charity-begins-at-home, of extreme nationalism, of arrogance, bullying, using; it’s the world of murder, rape, genocide; it’s the world where some people are good and others are bad; it’s the world where some may be given a seat at the high table of life, but others may be snuffed out. It’s the world in which some people are slave-material, untouchables, expendables; it’s a world with no room for the learning disabled, for gay people, for disabled people generally, for those who are mentally ill, for foreigners; for anyone who is not of my race, my religion, my sexuality, my worldview. That’s what Paul means by ‘a worldly point of view’.

Before he met Jesus, Paul along with his paymasters, the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, looked at Christians and at Jesus in this worldly way. Jesus was the enemy they executed. His followers should be imprisoned, beaten or even lynched. Paul was an enthusiastic executioner of their orders.

But all that changed in his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. There, the Spirit of Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **me**?” Two startling conclusions followed.

1. Jesus, the executed one, was still alive!
2. And he identified so much with his followers that he experienced their pain.

Only God could rescue Jesus from death, and Paul applied his brilliant theological mind to realise that something completely new was happening in the world. The worldly point of view was in the end doomed to failure. Its harshest weapon - the ignominious death of a cursed criminal - had been the place where God revealed his glory the most. Something new was going on.

In his later thought, Paul was convinced that the whole universe would inevitably fall into line with this new creation. All things would be under the feet of Christ, he says to the Ephesians. In Christ, all things hold together, he told the Colossians, and God was reconciling all things to him through his blood shed on the cross. This new creation of mutuality, inclusion and grace was bound to succeed.

So, he writes in verse 17 of chapter 5:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

The Greek is more terse:

If someone in Christ, new creation.

This new creation is a world of mutuality, of forbearance, of forgiveness, and of radical welcome.

This phrase 'radical welcome' is important. 'Radical' is a word some of us associate with evil activities. But what does the word mean? It simply means, *at the root*. So, by 'radical welcome,' I mean a welcome that looks at the root of what really matters; not seeing people in a superficial way. A radical welcome sees beyond the labels we use, to the core of a person who needs love.

And Paul's conviction was that this radical welcome was an invitation to the new creation that would last forever. This was the real world, and the 'worldly point of view' was only a temporary delusion. To live from the new creation was to live from the future.

Our reading goes on to develop this idea. For the Christian, the worldly point of view is old news to be forgotten. The old has gone; the new is here. God is reconciling the world to himself, and Paul accepts the ministry of reconciling people to God, and the basis is spelt out in verse 19:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them!

Grace, forgiveness, mutuality, inclusion - this is the norm of the new creation, and it comes directly from the cross. It's a radical welcome from God. And it's a welcome not tied to performance, class, religion, righteousness, race, nationality, gender, sexuality, ability or disability, age, intellect, class, or anything else. This is the new reality, the new creation. It's the deep reality at the heart of the universe. All the human categories we care so much about are mere temporary posturing that will be

laughed away as irrelevant in the coming kingdom of God; a kingdom we Christians live from already.

* * *

In our gospel reading, this radical welcome is sublimely illustrated. Tax collectors and sinners are gathering round to hear Jesus. Pharisees and teachers of the law - religious and theology experts - mutter precisely against this radical welcome:

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So, Jesus tells three stories, and they’re all stories about the lost being found. Ludicrously, the farmer ignores 99 sheep and goes searching for the one lost sheep. We learn: Invest your energy, and take risks, and go on adventures, to rescue one who is lost! And celebrate when you find him - joining the great party of welcome in heaven!

And the woman who loses one silver coin out of a set of ten, leaves the nine and goes on a search for the one that’s lost. Again - a great celebration on earth echoes a great celebration in heaven - a celebration of radical welcome.

And yet again, the tale of the lost son, the extended parable with so much emotional depth, makes the same point of radical welcome. There is a father with two sons. The younger son can’t wait for his father to die and demands his inheritance immediately. This strange father acquiesces - and gives his younger son the freedom of an early legacy.

We know the story so well. The younger son squanders everything in wild living. He is so reduced he longs to eat pig-food - the food of unclean animals.

He comes to his senses and prepares his speech as he resolves to throw himself on his father’s mercy. *Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.*

The depiction of the father is astonishing. This father seems to be on the lookout for his estranged son. He sees him when he is a long way off, is filled with compassion, and runs to him, throws his arms around him, and kisses him.

The son blurts out the first part of his humble-pie speech, but the father doesn't want to hear it. He orders: Quick: a fine robe, a beautiful ring, sandals, a fatted calf, a feast, a celebration! The lost son has been found; the dead son is alive again! Let's get this party started!

* * *

But radical welcome is too much for some people. What about the punishment this wild son ought to endure? When and how will he pay for his crimes? Enter, the older brother. He complains that no fatted calf was ever killed for him! But the father tells him something he has perhaps lost sight of:

"You are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

So, the older son's perception of not being truly valued does not reflect reality. He has perceived himself as being limited, as being not the beneficiary of his father's bounty. He has failed to live from a vision of the father's love.

But it's not too late. He can come and join the party. Will he do that? The parable ends without telling us.

* * *

So, we come to the great paradox of inclusion. Everyone is welcomed apart from those who can't accept that everyone is welcomed. They then unwelcome themselves.

I would like to build a church that is openly, visibly, going-out-of-its-way-to-make-the-point, welcoming to others, whoever they may be. Whatever groups people belong to or labels people have. I think most of us here would want to welcome them: gay people, transgender people, divorced people. Also people who are hurting or damaged, lonely or confused. All people. Ordinary people. People like you and me.

This is love's simple work - to offer the welcome of God, to repeat the embrace of the father in Jesus' parable; to live from the new creation of Paul.

We complicate the picture so much with our labels and ideas, our insights and our prejudices. There may be some things we have to do to make it clear that when we say all people are welcome to the Father's embrace of love, and to the little community of inclusion here, we really do mean all people.

Of course, everyone grows when nurtured by that embrace. But that growth is nothing to do with the labels people give us, or we give ourselves. It's nothing to do with being trans or gay or divorced or single or married or religious or atheistic or middle class or educated or any external descriptor.

It's about giving a radical welcome that makes all those labels transparent; it renders them redundant. This is love's simple work - to see beyond all the world argues and fusses about and see a heart that needs a radical welcome - a welcome unrelated to any ideas of who deserves what.

Presentation of Daffodils

Song (WT 290) **May the Fragrance**

Verse 1

May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place. (men)

May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place. (women)

May the fragrance of Jesus fill this place; (men)

Lovely fragrance of Jesus (women)

Rising from the sacrifice (all)

Of lives laid down in adoration.

Verse 2

May the glory of Jesus fill His church. (men)

May the glory of Jesus fill His church. (women)

May the glory of Jesus fill His church; (men)

Radiant glory of Jesus (women)

Shining from our faces (all)

As we gaze in adoration.

Verse 3

May the beauty of Jesus fill my life. (men)

May the beauty of Jesus fill my life. (women)

May the beauty of Jesus fill my life. (men)

Perfect beauty of Jesus, (women)

Fill my thoughts, my words, my deeds. (all)

My all I give in adoration.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;

And the love of God;

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with us all, evermore.

Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you

Wherever he may send you;

May he guide you through the wilderness;

Protect you through the storm;

May he bring you home rejoicing

At the wonders he has shown you;

May he bring you home rejoicing

Once again into our doors.