

Service sheet 25th October 2020

Song: [Speak O Lord](#) – Stuart Townend

Welcome and opening prayer:

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word.

We come anxious and frustrated because of the pandemic, but we also come rejoicing that, through the wonders of technology, we can still meet together to worship you from the comfort of our own homes. We also rejoice and celebrate that we can now broadcast live from inside our own little chapel, here in West Ardsley. So, come, people of the Risen King, who delight to bring Him praise, let us rejoice to be in His presence! One heart, one voice! O Church of Christ rejoice! **Amen.**

Song: [Come people of the Risen King](#) – Kristyn Getty

Prayers:

Loving and faithful God, we come into your presence rejoicing. We come to offer you our praise. We come to hear your words of power. We come to speak with you in prayer. We come to experience the healing of Jesus. We come to encounter the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we come to share your all-embracing love. *As God loves us, may we in turn learn how to love others.*

Living Jesus, we praise you because you show us that God's love reaches out to all people. In return, may we too love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our mind. And as you commanded us, may we learn to love our neighbours as ourselves. *As God loves us, may we in turn learn how to love others.*

Please forgive us for the times when our love for you and for our neighbour has been absent from our lives. We are sorry also for when we act against your will and let you down. We thank you, however, that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our wrong doings have been forgiven and cast aside. *As God loves us, may we in turn learn how to love others.*

So, as people of the Risen King the rejoicing in our hearts remains endless, and we delight to bring you our praise at all times. For, without doubt, you are the author of creation and the Lord of every man **Amen.**

Song: [Across the lands](#) – Keith & Kristyn Getty

Readings: [Matthew 22: 34-40](#)
[1 John 4:16-21](#)

Reflection:

Rules, rules and more rules! From the day we are born to the time we breath our last breath we are surrounded by rules. Rules at home, rules at school (including home-schooling) rules at work, rules on the sports field and even rules at church.

And, as we know, rules have been particularly prevalent during the ongoing covid19 pandemic. I don't know about you, but there have been times these past few months when I've been totally confused by all the conflicting rules and regulations that we have been receiving from Westminster. At first it appeared quite straight forward, "wash your hands, stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives", they said. Simple, we thought, so the majority of us carried out this straight forward instruction to the tee.

But then as things progressed it got more complicated. "Stay at home" changed to "stay safe" and as different parts of the UK reviewed and changed their Covid19 strategy, different rules and regulations began to appear and totally confuse the population – "stay at home, don't stay at home, visit your family, don't visit your family, eat out, don't eat out, go on holiday, don't go on holiday, wear a mask, don't wear a mask, and go to church, but don't go to church". Is there little wonder, therefore, that we all became rather puzzled, complexed and at a loss as to what we actually could, or couldn't do?

I suppose in a way the bible is a book of rules and regulations on how we should live out our Christian lives. Adam and Eve, as we know, got mankind off to a bad start by breaking God's rule not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Moses then came along and received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, which, in the first instance, kept things nice and easy to understand. Worship no other God than me, do not take God's name in vain, keep the Sabbath day holy, honour your Father and your mother, etc, etc, etc. Ten, straight forward instructions on what to do and what not to do. What could be simpler?

However, a little bit like the Covid19 rules and regulations, things became a little more complicated when the Jewish leaders started to introduce more and more man-made rules and regulations. In fact, by the time Jesus arrived on the scene, things had got a little bit out of hand and no-one really knew anymore exactly what was right in God's eyes and what was wrong.

As such, Jesus decided to simplify matters. So, when quizzed by a Pharisee, an expert in the law, on which was the greatest commandment of all, Jesus replied that the first and greatest commandment was to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind". The second commandment, he continued, was to "love your neighbour as yourself". And as far as Jesus was concerned that was it, a two sentenced summary of God's complete rule book.

So, what does all this mean to us?

I recently listened to a video recording of a group of children talking about love and the two commandments which Jesus gave us.

And the great thing about it was their honesty and simplicity. "Love means being nice to each other, being happy all the time and just going with the flow" said one little girl. "Love is being kind to one another and helping my friend pick up her crayons – it's just a nice thing to do" said another. I think my favourite, though, was the one at the end of the recording who said quite innocently that, "sharing my love for Jesus is simply a fun thing to do and I just love doing it!".

At the time of Jesus, when it came to “love”, the Jewish leaders had a sliding scale of who could be “loved” the most. In this respect, everyone, with no exceptions, was to love God, that was compulsory, no questions asked. Everyone else, though, was graded as to how much love they were to be given. There were those people in the Jewish society to whom lots and lots of love had to be displayed, namely the leaders such as the Scribes and the Pharisees. Others, on the outer circles of the community, like the outcasts, the sinners, the tax collectors, the Gentiles and the Samaritans, for example, had to be loved less. And there were even those who were owed no love whatsoever and had to be completely ignored.

But the teaching of Jesus turned this philosophy on its head. By saying that the greatest commandment was to love God *and* to love your neighbour, this put a whole new slant on the traditional Jewish interpretation. To love God, that was clear enough, but to also say to love one another, in the same breath, put both of these commands on an equal footing.

One is no more important than the other. To love God is to love our neighbour and to truly love our neighbour is to love God. The love of God, therefore, and the love of our neighbour is inseparable. You cannot claim to love God if you don't love your neighbour. Essentially, therefore, as Jesus said, the entire law of God comes down to two simple commandments: Love God with your whole being; and love whoever God puts next to you as you love yourself. This might be, for example, the person we have to sit next to at school who is not very kind to us; a work colleague who we struggle to get on with, or a noisy next-door neighbour whose loud music keeps us awake until the early hours of the morning!

This is the challenge to us this morning. Are we ready to face that challenge head on? Yes, there will be people we like more than others and yes, there will be some people who are really hard to like, but, nonetheless, we must strive to “love” everyone who crosses our path.

Our second reading this morning, from 1 John chapter 4 puts the message across another way “We love God because he first loved us” John says. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates their brother and sister is not telling the truth. For whoever does not love their brother and their sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God who they have not seen”. One of the most famous and most read verses in the bible can be found in John's gospel, chapter 3, verse 16 which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.

So, as we conclude, let us focus on the image of Jesus Christ being flogged, beaten, mocked and nailed to a wooded cross, just for you and just for me. And as we reflect on this amazing sacrifice, is it not too much to ask of us all, “to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind and to love our neighbour as ourself”. I pray that as we go forward into the next week, we will have this message at the forefront of our minds. **Amen**

Song: [Let love be real](#) (StF 615)

Intercessions – Loving God and others:

Heavenly Father, You have taught us through your Son to love you, our neighbour and then ourselves, in that order and above everything else. That makes it easy for us to remember and yet it seems we so often forget. Renew us in our efforts to abide by your command and to spread your gospel near and far, drawing on your holiness to ensure a strong foundation.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Send your Church out into the community, bringing hope and good news to people in their homes, offering hospitality to those we know and to those we don't know: all part of your Son's mission to the Gentiles. And when people visit our church, whether it's the actual building or online, may the experience be special, holy and transforming, and, above all else, may they feel loved beyond measure, and recognise that your presence is in the midst of us all, ready, waiting, listening and responding to our worship.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those in society who feel marginalised, by birth, race, background, abandonment or oppression. Your Son set us the example of inclusion through his association with Samaritans and sinners, his love for the poor and underprivileged, and his care of the diseased and the lame, the chronically sick and the mentally ill. All this demonstrated power, not weakness, so let us take courage in showing acceptance and outreach as we pray especially for looked after children, for refugees, the homeless, and for the organisations and churches giving shelter and refuge.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the recovery of the sick and the hope of wholeness for us all. And in a short period of silence we remember those close to us who are in urgent need of your healing, your care and your love at this time.....

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In conclusion, we pray for comfort for the bereaved, and the promise of the peace of your eternal kingdom to those who have passed away.

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

The Lord's Prayer

Song: [To God be the glory](#) (StF 94)

Blessing:

May the love of Jesus Christ bring us wholeness,
the grace of God the Father grant us peace,
the breath of the Holy Spirit fill us with passion,
and the unity between them all give us strength
for this and every day. **Amen**