

Our Mission: Growing as followers of Jesus Christ, and welcoming others to come to know Him by sharing His love and hope.

Woodville Methodist Church

Sunday 13th September 2020

Call to Worship: 1 John 3:1:
See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Welcome:
Grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father (Our God Saves) (Singers)

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son
In the name of the Spirit, Lord, we come
We're gathered together to lift up Your Name
To call on our Savior to fall on Your grace

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son
In the name of the Spirit, Lord, we come
We're gathered together to lift up Your Name
To call on our Savior to fall on Your grace

Hear the joyful sound of our offering
As Your saints bow down, as Your people sing
We will rise with You, lifted on Your wings
And the world will see that

Our God saves, our God saves
There is hope in Your name

Mourning turns to songs of praise
Our God saves, our God saves

Paul Baloche
Copyright © 2014 Integrity Music

Prayer of Adoration
Worthy of praise from every mouth, of confession from every tongue, and of worship from every creature is your glorious name, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For you created the world by your power and by your compassion saved the world. To your majesty, O God, ten thousand times ten thousand bow down and adore, singing and praising without ceasing: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty – Heaven and Earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
(Adapted from the Nestorian Liturgy)

Prayer of Confession
Have mercy on us, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out our transgressions. Wash away all our iniquity and cleanse us

from our sin. For we know our transgressions, and our sin is always before us. Against you, you only, have we sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. Cleanse us and we will be clean; wash us, and we will be whiter than snow. Create in us pure hearts, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within us.

(Silence)

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. For Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, was the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**
(From Psalm 51 and 1 John)

Readings:

Deuteronomy 6:1-6
These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so

that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Mark 12:28-31
One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

1 Corinthians 13:1-8
If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if

I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Love – A Command and a Response

When I began Local Preacher training 25 years ago, one of my earliest assignments was to sum up the Old Testament in 50 words. At the time I found it quite difficult because there were so many things I felt I needed to include: Creation, Noah, Moses, the Exodus, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Exile, and on and on! I remember that eventually, with a sense of relief, I finished it, having used exactly 50 words. My relief was short-lived though, as the next assignment was (you've guessed it): now sum up the New Testament in 50 words! Looking back I think I tried too hard; if you asked me now I would say that the whole Bible (not just one Testament) can be summed up as

God the Father communicating with us, His children. And essentially it's a message of love – God's love for the world, worked out in history and culminating with the person and sacrifice of Jesus, and how we are to love God and each other. The Bible is all about love, and so today's sermon is going to look at love, and how it is both a command and a response.

The Old Testament – Love as a Command

In our first reading, from Deuteronomy 6, we see how the reading of the Jewish Law to the Israelites concluded with the great command (in verse 4) to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.” Love, if you like, summed up the whole of the Law, and that love for God should be worked out by being obedient to the individual decrees that the Law required. But did the Jews really obey God's Law by love? I don't think so!

Often in the Old Testament God comes across as quite severe, frightening and impersonal (and this is very true when He is condemning the sins of His people or proclaiming punishment upon them or their enemies), therefore the Jews might have found Him difficult to love. Many of them lived in fear of the Lord (“fear” in this context meaning honour and

reverence), and some, I'm quite sure, were literally afraid of God! So although they were commanded to love God, often their obedience to the Law just became rituals that they followed because they were told to.

Having said that, there are many places in the Old Testament where God's loving nature is very clearly expressed, many passages speaking of His tenderness and gentleness, His mercy and patience, His grace and forgiveness, and describing God who loves His people like a father (e.g. Hosea 11) and who cares and protects them like a shepherd (e.g. Psalm 23 or Isaiah 40). But mostly people served God in fear instead of love.

Jesus and the Greatest Commandment

Moving on to the New Testament, in our second reading, from Mark 12, we read how Jesus was tested and was asked which was the greatest commandment (the teachers of the Law often wanted to trip Jesus up and discredit Him). In verses 30-31 He declares that LOVE is the greatest commandment: love for God and love for each other (and in doing so cleverly sums up the Ten Commandments, which were certainly the key teachings of the Law). Jesus reinforces that love is

the heart of the Jewish Law: not merely a mindless ritual of obeying obscure rules and offering animal sacrifices, which was something that many of the Jewish leaders of the time were guilty of, as well as the common people.

Love as more than a command!

Love is more than just a command; for the Christian it must be a way of life and must be at the very heart of our discipleship. In the Old Testament love can be seen as a **command**, but in the New Testament it is expressed more as a **response**: a response to the love that we have been shown and have experienced in Jesus. Let's explore that a bit further.

Love as a Response

When Jesus died on the cross for us (for all humankind) – bearing our sins and achieving forgiveness for us – it was the greatest act of love ever shown. In John 3v16 it tells us that that was why God sent Jesus into the world – for the love of every single one of us: “For God SO loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not die but have eternal life.” And when Jesus was teaching His disciples He said that there was no greater love than someone laying down their life for another (John 15:12).

So I believe that it stands to reason that when we know this love that was shown to us in Jesus (and by Jesus) – and I mean **really** know it, deep in our hearts – we should **want** to respond by loving God in return. That love should be shared with others too; remember that Jesus taught His disciples, “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Love, then, becomes more than a command – it becomes a natural Christian response. To illustrate, I support the RNLI and I often read in the Lifeboat magazine of how, when people have been rescued, they want to give a gift to the charity in return; they know they can never repay them for what they’ve done, but the help they have been shown has prompted them to make a response. So it is with Christians: once we experience God’s love in Christ, it compels a response. As 1 John 4:19 tells us: “we love because God first loved us.”

The “Most Excellent Way”

Finally we turn to our third reading, from 1 Corinthians 13, a very famous passage about love (often read at weddings – possibly to remind the bride and groom how to behave towards each other!). The Apostle Paul was teaching the Corinthian church about how they can serve God by using different Spiritual gifts, and about the value of those gifts in the Church and in

Christian ministry (this is in chapters 12 and 14). But in chapter 13, sandwiched perfectly between teachings about gifts of prophecy, healing, miracles and speaking in tongues, comes what Paul describes as “the most excellent way” to serve God – not by exercising all kinds of spectacular gifts of the Spirit, but by **love** – love for God and for Jesus, and love for one another.

Why is Love so excellent?

But what makes love so excellent? Why is it the greatest way to serve God? Well, Paul explains why by listing the virtues of love: love is patient, kind, not envying or boastful, dishonouring or self-seeking; love is forgiving and doesn’t hold grudges, it delights in good and truth, not evil; love protects, trusts, hope and perseveres, and it never ever fails. These virtues are what makes love so excellent! And this is why we should strive for it! This is why it should be at the heart of all we do. Remember that Paul says early on in this passage (in verse 3) that if we don’t have love we are nothing (no matter how many other gifts and abilities we might possess). Love must be at the heart of the Gospel message that we are called to share (“for God so loved the world”) and at the heart of all we do in church and in our relationships with others (i.e. “love one another”).

As Paul says in Ephesians 3:17, we must be “rooted and established in love.”

Churches grow through love

Love is how churches grow and develop (and I’m not talking about numbers here); not by how many attend, or how many events they have, how great their pastor is or their worship group or youth work. Churches grow – Christians grow and relationships grow – where love is at the centre, and where all people are loved and welcomed and accepted. To love must be our number 1 priority as Christians and as a Church. Remember, without love we are nothing, but love is the “most excellent way” to serve God.

Let your love be a response – a response to all that God has done for you in Jesus, and for all He continues to do; for Jesus dying on the cross and rising again to secure your salvation (your place in Heaven). Let your love overflow and let it touch the lives of those you come into contact with. God’s love will be seen if we love one another, and if we live in love then we live in God, and God lives in us.

Brian Parker

A time to sit quietly and reflect on God’s love for and how we can let it touch others.

Prayer of Intercession

Let us pray to God the Father, in the name of Jesus the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit: We thank you, Father, that we can come before you in confidence to bring you our prayers. We commit them to you, the all-loving and all-powerful God.

We bring to you those who are in need of peace:

- those who long for freedom from war and oppression;
- those who lead chaotic lives, or lives filled with doubt, worry or fear;
- those who need reconciliation within a troubled relationship;

(Silence)

- We bring to you those who are in need of healing:
- those in hospital or who are facing operations;
- those who are having treatment whose outcome is uncertain;
- those needing healing of physical pain or discomfort;
- those in broken homes and broken relationships;
- those who are mentally scarred by abuse or suffering mental anguish;
- the broken-hearted and bereaved.

(Silence)

Please, Lord, would you draw near to them in their need, move mightily in their lives and enable them to know your presence and to trust in your unfailing love.

You are the God of all-sufficient grace, unending compassion and tender mercy. We place our prayers in your hands, and we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

(Brian Parker)

Prayer of Petition

Lord, we know that one of the best ways we can show our love for you is by loving other people.

Sometimes this is easy – when we're with people we like. Please help us when loving is hard, when people are unkind, when they don't understand, when we just don't like them.

Teach us to love as you love –

Everyone,

Always.

Amen.

(Brother Kenneth and Sister Geraldine)

Love divine, all loves excelling (Singers)

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven 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.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving
Spirit,

Into every troubled breast!

Let us all in Thee inherit;

Let us find Thy promised rest.

Take away the love of sinning;

Alpha and Omega be;

End of faith, as its Beginning,

Set our hearts at liberty.

Come, almighty to deliver,

Let us all thy grace receive;

Suddenly return and never,

Never more thy temple leave.

Thee we would be always blessing,

Serve thee as thy host 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 heaven we take our place,

Till we cast our crowns before thee,

Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707—88)

Public Domain

Blessing Prayer

Set our hearts on fire with love for you, O Christ our God, that in its flame we may love you with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul and with all our strength, and our neighbours as ourselves, so that, keeping your commandments, we may glorify you, the giver of all good gifts. **Amen**

(Eastern Orthodox Church)

If you do not have a computer or smartphone but do have a CD player or DVD player and wish to hear the accompanying audio or video of this service, please contact Peter on 01283 213766 and I will arrange that you get the appropriate disc.

If you have a DVD player you will be able to play the video of the service

If you have a CD player you will be able to play the accompanying audio of the service

Please Note

Next Sunday (20th September 2020) there will not be a service from Woodville Methodist Church..

Details of the Circuit Service for that Sunday will be circulated.

There will be a service from Woodville Methodist Church on Sunday 27th September 2020. (Our Harvest Festival).

www.woodvillemc.org.uk

CCL No. 1694 Calamus 2064

Minister, please contact:

Rev Dr M Biggins 01283214080

Rev M Redshaw 01283 564439