

NKMC – Worship at Home

Sunday 20 February 2022

Led by : Roger Byard

Technical support: Martin Smith

E-Steward: John Frost

Order of Service

10.15. Pre-service hymns/songs

StF 148 Come, let us with our Lord arise
StF 249 Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love
StF 303 I know that my Redeemer lives
StF 306 Now the green blade rises
StF 423 'Forgive our sins as we forgive'
StF 429 Lord we turn to you for mercy
StF 436 What shall I do my God to love
StF 455 All my hope on God is founded
StF 457 Author of faith, eternal Word
StF 466 Have faith in God, my heart
StF 519 Father, I place into your hands
StF 520 Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart
StF 613 God, how can we forgive
StF 686 Jesus, Lord, we look to thee

10.30 Welcome

Good morning and a warm welcome to you whether you are joining us for the first time or are a regular to the weekly streamed worship from the North Kent Methodist Circuit.

My name is Roger Byard. I am a local preacher in this Circuit and will be leading our worship this morning.

I hope you will feel fully part of this online community today and that you will meet with God through our worship together.

Let's first gather ourselves in God's presence wherever we are.

Call to worship

Come and worship the living God who loved us into being.
Come and worship Jesus, the one who died and was raised again.
Come and worship the spirit who renews and empowers us to be God's people.

The Lord is here come worship his name.

Amen.

Our first hymn written by Joel Payne, a minister who developed his song writing on what he describes as a 'unsuspecting and generous congregation' in York, draws us into God's presence.

It's number 609 in Singing the Faith: *As we gather in your presence now.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpFhLE765IM>

And now a time of prayer. Let us pray.

Opening Prayers

We seek to clear our minds as we come before God.

If our thoughts have been negative, or inward looking we leave them behind in this sacred time of worship.

We ask to be shown again the better way – the way of love. A way not without cost but the way through which we come to know God in Christ and ourselves for who we are; loved by God to the uttermost.

As we sing our hymns and songs, say our prayers and hear about you Holy God in the Bible may we put you at the centre of our lives.

We praise you for all that you have created and how you are faithful in your love for all that you have made.

We thank you that because you are God who is love you came to us incarnate in your son Jesus who lived and died and rose again to show how real and strong your love is.

Today we see you in the love of those who care for and about us, and in the love a person shows to a stranger.

God of love and light we thank you for being the source of the love and light in us and also in others that so often we fail to recognise.

It's truly amazing that your love for those who have done good things and those whose words and actions have hurt everything and everyone can never be extinguished.

We thank you for your promise that there is no hopeless person and no hopeless situation that you cannot change.

Lord God, we ask you to touch our hearts and lives and by your Holy Spirit; help us to serve you in ways that bring hope to others and praise to your name.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

A prayer of confession

Living and eternal God we come to you in prayer as part of a divided and broken world.

We acknowledge our part in its pain and we are sad that your beautiful creation has been so spoiled by human selfishness and cruelty.

You created us to live in love and harmony with each other, but our human relationships have been stretched to breaking point and beyond. In ever widening circles our families, neighbourhoods, cities and nations are fractured by our inability to love, respect, and honour one another.

You have created us in your own image and to reflect that image in lives that are generous caring and compassionate.

We confess our many failures to be such people.

You call us to change our ways.

So Lord, take our hands and wipe them clean of every selfish action.

Take our feet and change the paths of self-interest they love to walk.

Take our lips and remove every hurtful word that brings division where it is heard.

Take our ears that we may no longer listen to gossip but discern what is pleasing to you.

Take our eyes that we may see the need of our neighbour and not just the things that affect us.

Take our minds and transform our ways of thinking that your will and the needs of others may take priority over our own.

Take our hearts and reign in us as you were always meant to do.

Lord by your grace may we know that we are forgiven and by your spirit may we become channels of Christ's cleansing and renewal offering hope to a divided world.

We ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our father in heaven,
hallowed by 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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Our first reading is taken from Genesis chapter 45 reading from verses 3 to 11 and then verse 15.

We enter the story at the point where Joseph, who as a boy survived abandonment by his brothers and who has risen to a position of power, reveals his identity to his brothers which leads to reconciliation.

Genesis 45: 3-11,15

³ Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty."

¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The gospel reading is from St Luke's gospel chapter 6 beginning at verse 27.

We're into Jesus' teaching of the disciples. This passage follows Luke's version of the Beatitudes and sets out in plain terms the fundamental rule of life for a disciple.

Luke 6: 27-38

Love for Enemies

²⁷ 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.^[a] Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Judging Others

³⁷ 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

I follow the reading with this meditation on its themes.

Love your neighbour

Lord, if I listen to you, you tell me difficult things.

You say, 'Love your enemies', and you expect me to love terrorists.

You say, 'Do good to those who hate you', and expect me to be kind to the neighbour who always winds me up.

And then you expect me to bless them and pray for them.

Lord, give me a break.

I can manage loving my family (well most of them) and my friends.

And I can cope with handing out care to the needy – that makes me feel good. But I know I can go home and shut the door and have a shower and wash them out of my life.

(Dear Lord, there are some pretty awful people out there, and I know you will sort them all out, and in the meantime you leave it to us to do them good, even when they don't deserve it.)

(Not that I'm judging them, you understand.)

I do what I can – you can see that, can't you – and I do a lot more than most people.

I give to the foodbank. I put £5 in the plate at church. I give my unwanted goods to the charity shop.

So I have listened, and I do everything in my power.

And I fill up every minute of my time with doing good, (as I mentioned before).

There's nothing more you can tell about loving – is there?

Our next hymn was written by Fred Kaan, one of the best hymn writers of the second half of the last century. It's a petition for healing which ultimately depends on faith, hope and love.

Hymn: StF 649 God! When human bonds are broken.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaYtn-UCNnU>

Reflection

Luke 6: 27-38

I once had to make an urgent application to a judge in open court. It was the first case to be heard that afternoon. On taking his seat the splendidly attired judge looked me up and down and said: '*I can't hear you Mr Byard*'. Understanding that his impediment to hearing me was not because he was deaf, I explained that the urgency of the application had not allowed me time to get my court robes and asked if he would be willing to hear me anyway. Fortunately, he understood my situation, listened intently to what I had to say and granted my application to the relief of my client.

Maybe it's a bit like that with the way we pick and choose which bits of Jesus' teaching we want to hear. Is it dressed in a way that conforms to our expectations and so allows us to hear?

Jesus often wrapped up his revolutionary message in stories, so that their truths would 'slow release' rather like some modern medicines. I sense that had he not done that his ministry may well have not lasted even three years. But to his disciples he often spelt it out. If they were to continue his work, it was essential that they understood what he was teaching them about God's kingdom.

In the previous verses of this chapter, Luke sets out in poetic language - what we call the Beatitudes - Jesus' description to the disciples of what his Kingdom message was about. But then Jesus switches to direct speech and says, for those who are willing to *really listen*, this is what Kingdom life looks like.

He spells out in exuberant, counter-cultural, language the things that we'd rather not hear. In truth neither the world nor the Church (in its long and at times terrible history) has wanted to hear what Jesus says about the real nature of God's love as he is, and intends it to be in creation, let alone put it into practice.

Jesus recognises that people find it hard to get along with each other. Tribalism whether based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, or drugs then and now causes deep rifts in human social life. Equally the way we treat each other as individuals often betrays the difference in the power we have over others. It's reflected in the language we use daily when we speak of the migrant, the refugee, the slave. The news is full of stories of racism and discrimination, of tensions between the haves and have nots. Conflict is never far away.

Here Jesus offers another way to resolve conflict – knowing full well that it is dangerous. *We* know it will cost him his life. For Jesus, who viewed things from the perspective of God's love for all creation, it is the perpetrators of revenge, hatred, greed, violence, and abuse, who are the real victims, for they are bound by their wounds of pain and hate in all their destructive power. Jesus is offering them freedom from this bondage. 'Ah!' You say, *'he must be talking about someone else because I'm not like that'*. But have we never felt we have been wronged, unfairly or unjustly treated and wanted to get even?

Forty years of working to resolve conflicts that have gone to legal action taught me that most people are not interested in a satisfactory financial outcome (*'It's not the compensation money I'm after'*) but want someone to hear their side of the story and to feel that justice is on their side. But sadly, there's very rarely any justice to be found in a court of law any more than outside it for judgements are based not on impartially determined facts but how two sides of the 'truth' are presented.

Coming back to Jesus' teaching he says that in this new way of being, we need no longer be imprisoned in the old ways. We are made in God's image; to bear the family likeness if you like. Because when we accept being made in God's image – made to share his characteristics – also means accepting vulnerability, and the possibility of suffering, as God does. And if I'm honest that's scary!

Which means meeting other people's desire for power and control with Jesus' methods, the tactics for which don't involve getting your own back.

I've spoken of justice and judgement both of which have a part to play in the new way of being as taught by Jesus. But not as we may think and certainly not as they may be perceived as operating in our legal system.

I've mentioned that in society the imbalance of power is commonplace; a typical example is the imbalance between rich and poor. What then does the love of our neighbour mean in the context of the common imbalance of power between people?

When two people must settle something and neither has the power to impose anything on the other they must come to an understanding. In this context justice is the prime consideration for justice alone has the power to make two wills coincide.

But when there is a strong person and a weak person there is no need to come to an understanding. There is only one will – that of the strong. The weak person has no option but to obey. In such a situation the weak person loses something of their humanity for the strong can treat them like dirt – as being of no matter. The weak become like things.

In the Kingdom of God, the essence of justice is to behave as though there is equality when one person is the stronger in an unequal relationship. People who treat as equal those who are far below them in strength make them a gift of the affirmation of their humanity.

That's why I have only admiration for the RNLI who not only continue to rescue people from their unseaworthy boats as they make the perilous journey across the Channel but affirm that their business is to save lives whoever they are and however they have come to need help.

And this very real example of love in action, in which justice is about treating people as equal and affirming their humanity, is also about not making judgment.

What comes out time and again is that the volunteer rescuers of the RNLI make no judgement about the circumstances or behaviour that have led to that person needing to be rescued. There is a life to be saved and they will save it regardless of the circumstances that have put that person's life – and often the lives of their rescuers – at risk.

This is another important aspect of the love that we are to show our neighbour: our love is to be given without regard to whether it is deserved or not; it is to be without judgement.

Of course, 'Loving your enemy' does not mean loving what he / she does. In fact, it may well mean confronting them with what is wrong. As Lord Soper said on many occasions, from his soap box in Hyde Park to the House of Lords, 'Jaw jaw, not war

war.’ Which is surely our prayer today in respect of the current tensions between Russia and the Ukraine.

Jesus was offering an alternative – starting from a different place, heading for a different destination, not a new rule book where every situation is covered, but another way of being truly human in God’s image.

I know there are people who think the Jesus way an impractical pipe dream. But it has worked and even at a national level. When the appalling apartheid system finally ended in South Africa, with many others I feared there would be a blood bath as the indigenous population took revenge. But it didn’t happen because some amazing people – several of whom were Christians - decided to give what we would call the Jesus way a chance.

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela set up, with others, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For the first time a context was provided within which people could admit to the terrible things they had done and express real remorse to those they had hurt, who in turn, could offer forgiveness.

In Jesus’ terms they were set free from the hatred, racism, and need for revenge which had enveloped them. They were enabled to share in the generosity of God. Sadly, the old ways have crept back, but now we know it can be done.

God is not just generous but enormously patient and is still counting on his wayward Church family to get stuck in to the family business of helping him to love what he has made as he does.

A popular Spanish song says: *‘If anyone wants to make himself invisible, there is no surer way than to become poor.’*

Love sees what is invisible. Are we prepared to look? To hear? To act?

Amen

Hymn writers have often set their words to familiar tunes of the day and John Bell and Graham Maule follow in that tradition. Our next hymn which focuses on where Jesus is to be found uses the tune to an old French carol.

Hymn: StF 251 Jesus Christ is waiting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSzEviUc_o

Now our Prayers of Intercession for the world. Let us pray.

Think of someone you know, a neighbour, a colleague at work, a friend, someone for whom you are concerned:

and ask that God will break into their lives - possibly through you - and open up to them a whole new way of living.

Think of someone who is ill or in hospital and those who are concerned for them;

and ask that they will discover the inner peace that may come from putting their trust in God.

Think of someone whose life is in chaos, whose relationships are falling apart, and who doesn't know which way to turn or what to do;

and ask that they may experience the peace of God that will enable them to begin to make sense of their lives.

Think of someone who knows all is not well in their life and has found that escapism, materialism and every other 'ism hasn't worked;

and ask that they may know that they are loved so much that Christ has died for them.

Think of someone who is lonely or alone, for whom each day is the same and for whom their home has become a prison;

and ask that they will come to know that they are loved by you through the love and care of his people.

Think of someone for whom God is just a name, perhaps someone you knew once a long, time ago;

and ask that God will touch them and change them and that they will know that they have met the living God.

Think of someone who appears to be successful, who possesses so much of this world's good things but who in reality has an emptiness inside too deep for words;

and ask that they will meet the risen Christ who will hold them, love them and fill them with his grace.

Think of someone whose life is filled with darkness and pain, with sorrow and loss, with anxiety or despair;

and ask that in the darkness they may know the light of Christ.

Think of yourself and your continuing need for bread for the journey of life;

and ask that you may be fed by the Holy Spirit to live and work for the glory of God.

The Lord hears our prayer.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

Our closing hymn is also set to a traditional melody: the Londonderry Air and sets in contemporary language the nature of love in all its fulness.

Hymn: StF 615 Let love be real in giving or receiving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZUo4gGaq2c>

A sending out prayer

Lord God, we commit ourselves to love our neighbours as ourselves.

We commit ourselves to visit the lonely; to hold those who are hurting; to share the tears of the broken; to reach out to the lost; to comfort the fearful; to stand with the rejected; to seek justice for the oppressed; to feed the hungry.

We commit ourselves to follow our saviour Lord Jesus Christ wherever he may lead us for your glory.

Amen

That's the end of our streamed worship but the chat will remain open for another 15 minutes for you to share as you wish.

We'll be here at the same time next week when worship will be led by Deacon Elizabeth Harfleet.

We hope you will want to share it with us. If there's anything that you'd like to follow up from this morning please drop us a brief email through the contact page on the website.

Music after the service

Alternative tunes for

StF 436 What shall I do my God to love

StF 455 All my hope on God is founded

StF 466 Have faith in God, my heart