



THE METHODIST CIRCUIT OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

9th May 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use while you are unable to attend worship in a church building.

Opening Words

Palm 98

- ¹ O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.
His right hand and his holy arm
have gained him victory.
- ² The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication
in the sight of the nations.
- ³ He has remembered his steadfast love
and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.
- ⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song
and sing praises.
- ⁵ Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.
- ⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King,
the LORD.
- ⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.
- ⁸ Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy
- ⁹ at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

Hymn: All heaven declares. StF 293

[All Heaven Declares \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

All heaven declares
the glory of the risen Lord;
who can compare
with the beauty of the Lord?
For ever he will be
the Lamb upon the throne;
I gladly bow the knee,
and worship him alone.

I will proclaim
the glory of the risen Lord,
who once was slain
to reconcile us to God.
For ever you will be
the Lamb upon the throne;
I gladly bow the knee,
and worship you alone.

Noel Richards and Tricia Richards

Let us pray together:

Gracious and loving God,
today we bring our praises to You, because:
You are the maker and sustainer of all creation,
upholding all things by Your hand;
out of Your great love for the world, in Jesus You
chose to leave the holiness and purity of Heaven,
embracing life on earth, to live as carpenter and
preacher, leading His disciples into all truth and
calling them to mission;
in Jesus, You showed Your care for all people and
call us to receive the gift of life won at the cost of
His death on the cross;
to receive your forgiveness for sin through
repentance and faith and Your healing by the
power of Your Holy Spirit that we might live in
Your power and be transformed into the image of
Jesus, in whose Name we pray. Amen.

Today's Bible Readings:

[Acts 10:44-48](#)

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' ⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

1 John 5:1-6

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ^[a] has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.



John 15:9-17

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater

love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants^[a] any longer, because the servant^[b] does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Time to Reflect

Words that you hear in one time and place can take on a different significance when they are repeated in a different time and place. "How are you?" can be no more than a casual greeting when you meet a friend in the street. It takes on much greater significance when asked by a hospital consultant doing the ward round.

In John's Gospel we hear Jesus saying, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Then he goes on to say, "I do not call you servants any longer, ... but I have called you friends."

These words are part of a speech Jesus makes to his disciples after he has shared a supper with them and washed their feet as a sign of humility. Judas has left the group and when the speech is finished, they go outside to be met again by Judas and a detachment of soldiers who arrest Jesus. In the speech Jesus talks about his relationship with the Father and the Spirit and by extension their relationship with the Christian community. He uses the image of a vine and the vine grower to explore this. The Spirit will be sent to the Church and into the world as the work begun in Jesus is continued. The reality of the coming death of Jesus on the cross is present as he is talking.

The words leap out as an interpretation of Jesus' death as a sacrifice he makes for us – people he now calls friends.

Most people agree that John's gospel was written towards the end of the 1st Century, nearly 70 years after the events they describe. The Christian community John wrote for were

probably experiencing growing oppression from the Roman empire as well as experiencing serious conflict with some Synagogue leaders.

In this situation the words are no longer only about Jesus and his death. They are also about the sacrifice of members of the community. The sacrifice they are making is an expression of their friendship with one another which has its roots in their friendship with Jesus.

When we look at a passage of scripture today, one of the questions it helps to ask is, "If this is what it meant there and then, what could it mean here and now?"

It is worth noticing that Jesus talks about love and friendship together in this passage. The New Testament writers had several different words for love which covered a range of relationships including the romantic, family relationships and friendships. One of the words also included a strong sense of self sacrifice.

Having only one word in English is not always helpful in expressing the depth and breadth of what the New Testament means by love. Sometimes it can mean what we say about love becomes impossibly idealistic or sentimental.

If we want to understand what Jesus means by love we need to begin with God. The relationship of love between the Father, the Son and the Spirit comes from the way in which they abide in one another. They provide a model of what it is to love and a source of power to enable love to be lived in everyday situations.

Jesus lived out of the love that he knew from the Father. The Father's love enabled his ministry as well as shaping it. He promised that the same is possible for us as we abide in his love. For those who are members of the Christian community living out of God's love will always be a source of profound joy.

For many the word "love" has become so overused and devalued it is not helpful. Jesus' talk about friendship and sacrifice could help us.

Jesus invites us to reflect on the dynamic relationship between Father, Son and Spirit so we can understand the nature of friendship. We can

experience friendship at different levels. There are friendships that are useful because they help us do business or get introductions into a social group.

Then there are the friendships that bring us pleasure, so we cultivate them because we enjoy them. They are the people we can laugh with and with whom we share interests in common.

There is nothing wrong with these friendships – they help to make communities, including the church, work. But there are the more profound friendships, which we probably do not have with many people because we need to make ourselves available for them through the time we commit and the physical presence we offer. These friendships help to shape the kind of people we are. A friend who loves God will help us to love God too. To go back to Jesus' image of the vine, these are the friendships that are fruitful.

This expression of friendship is one that is always concerned about the well-being and flourishing of others. It is never possessive, manipulative or exclusive and always allows space for others to grow and to be their best selves.

It is these friendships that prevent the church from becoming an inward-looking club. They are built on a deep level of trust and can create the space where injustice and the abuse of power is challenged as well as providing the setting in which the vulnerable are offered security. These friendships are often the best and most fruitful way of sharing our faith.

To experience this kind of friendship is transformational. In the passage we hear Jesus inviting us into a transforming friendship with him. This involves a life-long and whole life commitment that is so deeply woven into our lives that we might be willing to give up everything for it and because of it.

Hymn: *Jesus calls us here to meet him. StF 28*
[Jesus call us here to meet him. Lyric video \(StF 28\) - YouTube](#)

Jesus calls us here to meet him,
as through word and song and prayer
we affirm God's promised presence,
where his people live and care.

Praise the God who keeps his promise;
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess him,
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness,
saving all who fail or fall.
Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory,
came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other:
vastly different though we are;
creed and colour, class and gender,
neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter,
in their common search for truth.

Jesus calls us to his table,
rooted firm in time and space,
where the church in earth and heaven,
finds a common meeting place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
share the love of which we sing;
share the feast for saints and sinners,
hosted by our Lord and King.

[Prayers for others](#)

Lord our God, we pray for our mixed up, muddled
and compromised world. May those who lead
peoples and nations be inspired to work in ways
that benefit all whom they are called to serve.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Where tyranny, violence or oppression spread
injustice, may those who know the truth be
stirred to challenge and transform situations, for
the good of all. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Thank you for those who provide health and
vaccination services. May such resources be
shared among nations, that all humanity may
attain fulness of life. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

We pray for Your Church that we may
demonstrate the humility and love of Jesus,
declaring in word and deed your immeasurable
love. By Your Holy Spirit may we live ever to Your
glory, that others may come to know their place
in Your family. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer Our Father ...

Hymn: Beyond these wall of worship. StF 547

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2eEBTNsic>

Beyond these walls of worship
In the stress and joy of life,
Can we offer you our bodies
As a living sacrifice?
Will we keep you at the centre
Far beyond the Sunday call?
Will return to you,
Be transformed by you;
Still declare you God of all?

Beyond these walls of worship,
In the times of work and rest,
Will we display your love for all
When are faith's put to the test?
When the people that surround us
Deny that you are there,
Will we display our faith in you
In life, in praise, in prayer?

Beyond the walls of worship
may your spirit strengthen us
To make the whole of life our worship
As we witness to your love.
From this hour in your presence
Send us out now to proclaim
That will live our life as a sacrifice
To the glory of your name.

Ian Worsfold and Paul Wood

A prayer of blessing (based on Jude 24-25)

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling
and to present you before his glorious presence
without fault and with great joy – to the only God
our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and
authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before
all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

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Kay, Andrew. Spirit of the Community, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58597> [retrieved May 4, 2021]. Original source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Public_art_-_Spirit_of_the_Community_Belmont.jpg