

WRITTEN AND RECORDED SERVICE FOR SUNDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2022

Introduction

A warm welcome to our recorded service today. Our main theme today is one of love and living God's way. I would like to thank the Church of Scotland for their guidance in prayers and some of my thinking.

Call to worship

Come before the Lord your God,
from the quiet spaces and the busy places.
Come in worship, praise and thanksgiving,
all we have and all we are is a gift from God.

Come before the God of love.
Come as you are, no pretence, no judgement,
come with your thoughts and your feelings,
in the highs and lows of life,
come with your successes and failures,
come knowing that you are loved unconditionally.

Hymn STF 110 In the wonder of creation

You tube link:

<https://youtu.be/X-DTv0f3xiM>

Prayers of adoration/confession

eternal and everlasting God,
You came to us in our world in Christ.
You shared in our humanity, you walked with us.
You still come to us through the presence of your spirit,
sharing in our experiences each and every day,
sharing in our worship, whatever our number,
for where 2 or 3 are gathered, You are there.
So, hear us as we offer our praise
for all the things that you have done for us
over all the years but especially over the past weeks.

We thank you for all our medical, public health, nursing and ancillary staff
for all that they have managed over the past 2 years
in their overstretched work environments.
We thank you for the teams that initially created the vaccines

and we thank you for all who have helped vaccinate us
so that we could be sustained through Covid,
whilst still waiting for the variance of the virus to subside.

You Lord, speak to us through your church and the fellowship of others.
You speak to us through the different seasons, the landscape and the weather.
We praise You for your prophets and for those who speak to us in leadership and ministries of today.
For all the ways you have guided us and supported us
and for the ways you continue to lead in our lives,
we give You our heartfelt thanks and praise.

When we are foolish, you hear us and respond in love.
We acknowledge and give thanks for all that enables our spiritual growth.
You Lord are rock and refuge in times of trouble,
and for that we give thanks.
When we are flummoxed by the world around us
we are assured that we can lean on and trust in You.
In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

Confession

God of never-ending patience,
even in the times we fail You,
You understand our weaknesses and help us to put our faults behind us.
You dust us off when we have fallen from grace and help us to start again.
We offer so little, yet you give so much,
our love is so weak, yet You respond richly,
your grace defies expression
too wonderful for us to fully comprehend.
Though we fail You, You never fail us.
We thank you for the gift of Jesus,
for his death and resurrection,
which lead us to acknowledge his words of grace
"Your sins are forgiven".
Lord, continue to grant us, unworthy as we are, your grace.

Amen.

Reading Genesis 45:3-11, 15.

New Living Translation

³“I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ⁴“Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. ⁵But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. ⁶This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither ploughing nor harvesting. ⁷God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors.^[a] ⁸So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser^[b] to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. ⁹“Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! ¹⁰You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. ¹¹I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise, you, your household, and all your animals will starve.’”

¹⁵Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and wept over them, and after that they began talking freely with him.

Psalm 37:1-9 This is a paraphrase by Sara Hargreaves of Engage Worship. I will read the light type, if you will respond with the **bold type**.

Don’t worry about the wicked
or envy those who do wrong.
For like grass, they soon fade away.
Like spring flowers, they soon wither.

**Let’s live God’s way!
Trust in the Lord and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you your heart’s desires.**

Let’s live God’s way!

Commit everything you do to the Lord.
Trust him, and he will help you.

He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,
and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

Let’s live God’s way!**Be still in the presence of the Lord,
and wait patiently for him to act.****Don’t worry about evil people who prosper****or fret about their wicked schemes.**

Let’s live God’s way!

Stop being angry!

Turn from your rage!

Do not lose your temper –

it only leads to harm.

For the wicked will be destroyed,
those who trust in the Lord will possess the land.

Let’s live God’s way!**Trust in the Lord and do good.****Amen.**

A few words on Joseph’s attitude – no anger, he lived God’s way! Joseph saw his whole journey as being God led. His love for his brothers remained in the present with no anger over the past. He went beyond anything they were expecting. God enabled Joseph to do everything without recrimination. We may come back to that later but for now we sing:

Hymn STF 615 Let love be real**You tube link:**<https://youtu.be/SkBAxZw5NxU>**Reading Luke 6:27-38****New Living Translation**

Love for Enemies

²⁷“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. ²⁹If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. ³¹Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

³² "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! ³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

³⁵ "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate

Sermon

The verses that we have just read from Luke continue Jesus' teaching that put us all on a level plain – his disciples and a large multitude from all over Judaea and Jerusalem plus people from even further away – so I think it's quite reasonable to include us now. Many of those with him have already felt his healing power and his presence because that is why they are following him.

Jesus starts with "but you who are willing to listen", indicating that he knows many aren't really listening to him – you could believe that what Jesus was really saying was those who are still listening. Then come those unexpected words "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you." I would not be surprised if many who were listening would have started to protest. He was talking to a group of people who were generally overtaxed and downtrodden under occupation. That was done to keep them poor, thinking that would make them less likely to rebel. They probably would never, even in a million years, consider doing a good turn towards a Roman soldier or palace guard. Their experience of being beaten or in one way or another being abused, would not allow them to even consider a kindness towards an occupier let alone "love" them.

And still Jesus continues, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who hurt you". And then he goes further talking about

turning the other cheek and if someone takes your coat offering them your shirt. Doing that last action could leave many of those poor listening to him, naked. And then finally Jesus tells them not to try to recover things that were taken from them or given away; always do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That's difficult enough on its own.

Place yourself as someone listening to Jesus at the time – look at this at face value given the feelings generated, what would your reactions be? Anger, disbelief, frustration – does this Jesus really know anything about us? It was turning the laws and the normal reactions that they produced, totally upside down. I wonder how many more then stopped listening to Jesus at this point. Would they/would you have taken more time out to listen to Jesus explaining his reasoning?

Jesus is dedicated to, and will bring about, a very different world – God's world. The thriving of all creatures in the Kingdom means that God's will requires a different ethos to those customs in place on earth. Jesus has already started by saying the very first imperative is "love". Then he lists a bunch of further imperatives that describe required behaviour for those who want to know his new world. You do good, not just think it. You should help those who need financial help without thought of repayment. Do good to your enemies and lend to them without expecting any return. Forgive others and you will be forgiven. Give and you will receive – your reward will be for you in heaven.

Don't do just as other sinners do, always do more. God loves all his creation. Jesus believes in compassion as God is compassionate.

I have already asked you to think about what those listening to Jesus that time would have thought or felt – anger, frustration, sheer disbelief. Does that apply to us, who are being a better position to understand what Jesus was getting at.

From the Old Testament reading, Joseph could have been very angry with his brothers, selling him to the Ishmaelites to get rid of him. However, he wasn't angry, he saw this as God's way of working,

creating a situation where Joseph could be of much greater help to his family than if he had stayed with them. Joseph took the opportunity to show his love for his brothers and the rest of his family by sending the brothers back to bring his parents and all those associated with the family back to Egypt with their animals.

Joseph lived God's way. Psalm 37 picked up the same theme with some words Sara Hargreaves had added, "let's live God's way!" The description of God's way does not sound different from that which Jesus was saying. Trust in the Lord and do good, and you will live safely and prosper. Commit everything you do to the Lord, trust him and he will help you. Be still in the presence of the Lord and wait patiently for him to act. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper – it only leads to harm. Let's live God's way by trusting in the Lord and doing good.

Jesus says that first thing needed, overarching everything, is love. We know that when Jesus was answering another question about the 2 greatest commandments, he said that the first was "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind" and the 2nd was "love your neighbour as yourself". So, if we start from there, we love God because he loved us first and we love our neighbours – that is all God's children – equally. You could, of course, extend that to the whole of God's creation. God has his agape love which, despite how hard we try, we cannot imitate. I guess the best we can do normally, is that love of a parent for their child, where most parents would say that it is totally unconditional – however old they are, you always love them and are always there for them. However even within families, as with Joseph, there are rifts.

Go beyond your family and things become even more difficult but Jesus says that should not stop you loving people. You hear many phrases like go the extra mile, sharing others' burdens, doing your bit/your share. Jesus wants us to go beyond this. He wants us to show what following Christ means to us. We simply have to do more than the world does; we have to be better than pagan sinners, who make quite a good job of what they do; their world's norm is they

love, lend and do good, as long as each is reciprocated. It would be great if we could all simply do that. But for disciples, God's people, loving, lending and doing good is about generosity that does not draw boundaries based on the recipients' responses. Those who follow Jesus are to live as God lives, mercifully and generous beyond expectation – beyond comprehension.

Many nurturing agencies/groups that go out of their way to look after the destitute, the poor and the unloved were started by Christians or with Christian help. We can be part of these organisations or even just give financial help. But that is only the start. Love should affect all that you do. It should help us to be slow to anger or fly off in rage. It should make us stop and think about our options before we even get to that stage. This isn't about the nice, fluffy interpretation of love that appears on birthday/anniversary cards. This is about something far deeper and far greater. Can you remember when you first became Christian and what it felt like. That warm glow, the wish to put everything right in the world and the initial energy to attempt anything that seemed right.

Over the years what happens to us? Do we get set in our ways? Do we let the world's norms take over in our lives? I know it is hard to love those who belittle or abuse and often even more difficult to turn the other cheek. We need to open up to the Holy Spirit and to take God's direction rather than just sort things out for ourselves. We need to keep in mind that the love in the Scripture passage is about willing good for another and acting on that will. Remember that God's mercy is the measure for God's people's behaviour. And yes, I know that sets the bar very high, some might say unattainable. But we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit to guide us and to guard us in all we try to do.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 talks of faith, hope and love and acknowledges that the greatest of these is love. We need to take that on board and work out for ourselves, through Jesus' love, what we can do to help turn this world back towards God's original intention and what he longs for this world to be – for us and our descendants. We need to

take His word out into the world, into all our activities, to show that God's love transcends everything. Our joy is to love the world, all of God's creation, in every way that love is able. In essence "Let's live God's way".

Amen.

I like to add a short prayer, let us pray:

Lord, you ask us do good to those who hate you,
which can seem difficult and to some unfair. It is hard to love those who belittle, shun, who exclude and who racially abuse. When we feel we should get our own back, you ask us to turn the other cheek. Inspire us to be willing advocates for truth, justice and reconciliation. Hate does not lay a healthy soil that enables love to grow and flourish, but, walking in faith in the footsteps of Jesus, you call us to make a positive difference and heal your broken world of its hurt and its divisions. For we can all make a positive difference in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen.

Prayers for others plus Lord's prayer

There is a response, when I say "Lord in your mercy," your response is "**hear our prayer.**"

Loving God,
you have called us to be a living community. People bound together as the body of Christ, and a family united in love. Yet Lord, in our broken world so many are suffering, so many are hurting.

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for those whose lives are ruled by hate and vengeance, rather than love and justice. We think of:
all those areas of war, of mistrust and argument, of where the gun rules.
We pray for those whose homes are not places of love or safety, but places of fear and violence. We think of all those have been moved from their homes by natural disaster or by human action. We think of those caught in webs of control and abuse.

Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for those who have no hope to speak of and have become invisible on our streets. For those out in the open and for those sofa surfing – all who have no base to claim their own in their lives.

We pray for those who are stigmatised because of status, ill-health ethnicity, religion. We see so many examples of people on the margins of society being ignored or maltreated.

Lord you asked us to love our neighbours, all of them, not just the ones we choose. Enable us and equip us to carry out your command and to a make positive difference in the lives of those who are our neighbours and are struggling.

Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all those in our congregations and communities who are ill at home or in hospital – bring your healing hands and soothing balm upon them.

We take short time for individual prayer for those we know.....

We pray for all who are anxious in waiting for treatment, results, or appointments changing due to the impact of Covid 19 and our overwhelmed health service.

For anxious relatives and carers who are exhausted and there is no rest, no end in sight, while the much-needed care packages are few and far between.

Lord equip us, your servants and disciples, to assist them in their time of need. Enable us to become beacons of light another dark day.

Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all our medical, public health, nursing and ancillary staff and the difficulties they face in overstretched work environments.

The vaccinations to sustain us through Covid and for the variants in the virus to subside.

May we also play our part, Lord, in protecting others.

We ask all these prayers in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who taught when we pray to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against
us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory
For ever and ever.
Amen.

**Final hymn STF 470 Lord for the
years**

You tube link:

https:<https://youtu.be/RkkYUEcN234>

Blessing

Go now and share God's love with all you
meet.

Go now and share the love of Jesus.

Go now and share the inspiring breeze of
the Spirit.

Go in peace, assured of God's love.

Amen.