



The Church at Carrs Lane
Sunday 2nd May 2021
With Stuart Scott



Call to worship:

Love (III) George Herbert

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on Thee.'

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'

'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'

'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

Hymn: I will enter his gates with thanksgiving (R&S 386)

I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart,
I will enter his gates with praise,
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made,
I will rejoice for he has made me glad.

*He has made me glad, he has made me glad, I will rejoice for he has made me glad.
He has made me glad, he had made me glad, I will rejoice for he has made me glad.*

Prayer: Approach and confession

Gracious God, we come to you in worship and praise, but we are so easily distracted. We find it difficult to slow down, to free ourselves from life's clutter and to be still and rest in your presence. Help us in this time to find stillness. Free us from the tensions of our everyday living, and help us to trust in the security of your eternal love.

Quietly, and yet confidently, let our expression of praise and thanksgiving well up within us. We celebrate your gift to us of life in Christ. He comes among us as one of us, and is one with us to guide and strengthen us. Through every storm we are held in love; in every tunnel, a light of hope burns. Forgive us when we bring tempest and storm, darkness and despair, on ourselves through rash and foolish words, through thoughtless comment, misguided action, or too hasty judgement. We live with the guilt and the consequences, broken relationships and walls of suspicion and mistrust. Forgive us, free us from all that is past and help us to face our future knowing ourselves loved and forgiven, and able to love and forgive others.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

We share the prayer Jesus himself taught us to pray: The Lord's Prayer (in traditional form)

Bible reading: 1 John 4.7-21

Address

1 John 4.v.4,17

Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Love is made complete among us, so that we will have confidence in the day of judgment.

We are between Easter and Pentecost – the disciples wait and watch eagerly and expectantly or in nervous apprehension. The promised Holy Spirit will come, in wind and fire.

“Between” is very much part of Christian faith and life. We journey from what we know to what we do not know, between God's promise and its fulfilment, between the reality of life as we know it and the world we know, and our hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future, for a better life for all, a world of justice and peace. We live between the “now and not yet” of God's kingdom. In the words of the hymnwriter “God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal, in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole”. God reigns through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but there is much yet to be fully realised and revealed.

Here and now, at this time and in this place, we are between pandemic lockdown and the lifting of restrictions. Here and now, then, it is good to remind ourselves that love has the first and final word. God never gives up on us and so we should never give up on ourselves. The way may be hard, we may long for calm seas and more light, but God goes with us and stays with us, holding, sustaining, leading, guiding. The love of God is the foundation for all we are, all we do, all we seek to be.

In love we are equipped and challenged to live as people of hope. Paul writes to the Romans “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us (another translation has “put us to shame”), because God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us.”

In the Old Testament Psalms there is a time and place for lament, for crying out to God. When God's ways are hidden, we long for God to be revealed and for deliverance from our current circumstances, those in which we find ourselves and those we have unwittingly or knowingly brought on ourselves. Through the darkest of days and nights, the pleas of God's people for deliverance turn to expressions of thankfulness and praise. God acts in love and gives strength to his people when they need to hold firm and to keep going.

The months of lockdown have been difficult, but there is so much we have learnt. We have been reminded of the value and significance of relationships. We need each other; we thrive when we have others around us to share with and learn from. We need to share joys and sorrows, struggles and successes.

We have rediscovered human resilience and resourcefulness. The pandemic has taken us to the depths but the human spirit has also triumphed – in the technology that has enabled meeting and communication, in the power of science and human minds in the development of the vaccines, in the willingness of people to give of themselves in serving others unselfishly and even sacrificially, and in creativeness and inventiveness in homes, families and even churches that have not only kept life going but brought enrichment too.

We have rediscovered re-creation; we have been put back in touch with nature and the world we depend upon; we have learnt the importance of slowing down, treating the world and each other and ourselves with respect.

It has not been easy and much of this ground has been hard won. Not all pandemic stories are heroic; suffering, injustice, abuse and exploitation have been experienced by many and continue. As we move forward in worship and service, witness and discipleship, we need to be listening sensitively and attentively so that we might respond graciously and appropriately.

We cannot now go back to life as it was, but there is no simple “one size fits all” for the new “normal”. There is considerable diversity in the life of local congregations in each place particular challenges and questions need to be addressed. But going forward it is important that we learn from one another as we seek to develop new possibilities and potential. Very recently the Mission Council of the United Reformed Church has initiated a consultation of our life and resources that might help our thinking and planning as a denomination but also local churches.

In these times of transition and change, we live “between”. It is in Jesus, crucified and risen, that God has bridged the great “between”. As we come to celebrate the sacrament of holy communion, we recall the dying of Jesus and proclaim his death. Rowan Williams has suggested, in recently published reflections on the pandemic, that communion is the sacrament of resurrection, reconciliation and renewal. In our sharing of bread and wine, God is with us, with us in Jesus and with us in our homes and hearts, our churches and congregations. Gathered or dispersed, we are the body of Christ in the here and now, serving others and the coming of God’s kingdom

We proclaim “the Lord’s death” but it is “until he comes”. We share a foretaste of the heavenly banquet but this is perhaps above all a sacrament for the between times. We look back and forward, trusting in God’s love and committing ourselves to love in action in our own lives and through the life of this church. In Jesus, crucified and risen, God has bridged the great between. We watch and we wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We journey together with and towards all that the God who raised Jesus from the dead has yet to give and reveal to us, in us and through us.

Hymn: Great God, your love has called us here (R&S 339)

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| <p>1 Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed ;
we come, with all our heart and mind,
your call to hear, your love to find.</p> <p>2 We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.</p> <p>3 Great God, in Christ you call our name,
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone;
we strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.</p> | <p>4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friend;
suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.</p> <p>5 Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share ;
give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do,
while love is making all things new.</p> |
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Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Communion (Responsive liturgy)

This liturgy is used annually at First Congregational Church of Malone, New York, during United Church of Christ Women’s Week. It is distinctive in how the entire congregation participates in praying and blessing the elements.

The Communion Prayer

Pastor Let us gather around the table with the offering of bread and drink upon it and the promise of the Living Christ among us. This is the welcome table of God where all who seek to be at peace with their neighbour and all who seek the mercy of God in Christ are embraced. Come for we are invited in to this holy mystery. Come

People **We are ready!**

Pastor Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. All who come to me shall not hunger, and all who believe in me shall never be thirsty."

People **We are hungry and thirsty. O Lamb of God, we come!**

Pastor We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took his authority as the Christ and offered the bread in thanksgiving and said . . .

People **"Take, eat. This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**

Pastor In the same way, and by the same authority, Jesus offered the cup in thanksgiving and said,

People **"Take, drink. This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."**

Pastor Come, Holy Spirit. Come. Open our eyes to the mystery of Christ's presence in these ordinary things in these our ordinary lives. May they be for us the very essence of the living Christ in our midst. Through the broken bread . . .

People **We participate in the Body of Christ.**

Pastor Through the cup of blessing . . .

People **We participate in the new life Christ gives.**

Pastor These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all things are ready!

Sharing of the Elements

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious and loving God, you have made us one in the body of Christ, and nourished us at your table with holy food and drink. Thank you for feeding our hunger and relieving our thirst. Now send us into the world to do the work you have given us to do; to find the lost and lonely, to heal broken souls, to free prisoners, and make the powerful care. Grant us strength to persevere in resisting evil, and to proclaim in all we say and do your good news in Christ Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

Prayers: thanksgiving and intercession

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Father; in the name of Jesus, the true vine, we come to you. We acknowledge the limits of our knowledge and experience and seek the gift of the Holy Spirit for our worship and discipleship. By your Spirit, help us grow together in love towards the maturity in faith that is your will and purpose for us as your children.

As we draw closer to you, the source of our life, our lives are drawn closer to others. Help us respond in constructive and life-giving ways to the needs that the media bring to our attention, to distressing images of violence, to news of places and people living in fear and terror, to communities and nations divided by race, or religion, or land, or power. In our longing for peace we pray for men and women in leadership, whose decisions impact economies, lives and livelihoods. We pray for our own nation and its leaders that government legislation and policy, local and national may be shaped by the values of your kingdom.

We pray for needs around us and known to us in this church and in our local communities; where hearts are breaking, where bodies are failing, where minds are confused where family life is under stress.... Lord, come to help and heal, to deliver and save.

[Silence]

As your church, called to witness and serve in this place, we give thanks for all the saints of the past and the fruit they have borne in this community and beyond. Keep us faithful on our own journeys as we respond to today's challenges and all the opportunities that lie ahead, that we might remain in you and bear fruit that will last to the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn: Christ is the world's true light (R&S 601)

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| <p>1. Christ is the world's true light,
its captain of salvation,
the daystar clear and bright
and joy of every nation;
new life, new hope awakes,
where'er we own his sway;
freedom her bondage breaks,
and night is turned to day.</p> <p>2. In Christ all races meet,
their ancient feuds forgetting,
the whole round world complete,
from sunrise to its setting:
when Christ is throned as Lord,
all shall forsake their fear,
to ploughshare beat the sword,
to pruning-hook the spear.</p> | <p>3. One Lord, in one great name
unite us all who own thee;
cast out our pride and shame
that hinder to enthrone thee;
the world has waited long,
has travailed long in pain;
to heal its ancient wrong,
come, Prince of Peace, and reign..</p> |
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G W Briggs (1875-1959) altd*

Blessing