



## AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024

*compiled by Vicki Penfound - Lay Assistant*

### Opening words:

Bless the Lord, let all that is within me bless his holy Name  
You are light and love, help me to sense your holy presence  
Here and now as I come to you. Amen

### Song: 56 Singing the Faith

1] King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love thee;  
and that love may never cease,  
I will move thee.  
Thou hast granted my request,  
thou hast heard me;  
thou didst note my working breast,  
thou hast spared me.

2] Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing thee,  
and the cream of all my heart  
I will bring thee.  
Though my sins against me cried,  
thou didst clear me;  
and alone, when they replied,  
thou didst hear me.

3] Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise thee;  
in my heart, though not in heaven,  
I can raise thee.  
Small it is, in this poor sort  
to enrol thee:  
e'en eternity's too short  
to extol thee.

*George Herbert (1593 - 1633)*

### Let us pray:

Loving Father God,  
There are not enough words to express your greatness  
and your goodness, nor tears enough to express gratitude for your grace and mercy.  
You call me your child, beloved, redeemed, sanctified through Christ Jesus.  
Help me to grow deeper and stronger in love, faith and understanding as I seek to live for your glory.  
Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

### **Hymn: 439 Singing the Faith**

Abba Father, let me be  
Yours and yours alone.  
May my will forever be  
Ever more your own.  
Never let my heart grow cold,  
Never let me go,  
Abba Father, let me be  
Yours and yours alone.         *Dave Bilborough (b.1965)*

### **Reading: Psalm 146**

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul.  
I will praise the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.  
Do not put your trust in princes,  
in human beings, who cannot save.  
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;  
on that very day their plans come to nothing.  
Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God.  
He is the Maker of heaven and earth,  
the sea, and everything in them—  
he remains faithful forever.  
He upholds the cause of the oppressed  
and gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets prisoners free,  
the LORD gives sight to the blind,  
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
The LORD watches over the foreigner  
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,  
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.  
The LORD reigns forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD.

### **Reading: Mark 12 v 28 - 34**

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." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he

said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

### **Reflection:**

It was Holy Week, with Jerusalem buzzing in the run up to Passover and Jesus had just had a conversation with some Sadducees in the Temple courts. People sensed the opportunity for asking Jesus their theological questions - some from genuine curiosity and others from malice, hoping to catch him out. They were still reeling from Jesus making a scene turning out the money changers in the Temple Courts the day before. It is worth reading from Mark 11 v 27 all the way through to get a sense of the intensity of what is going on.

The encounter of the teacher with Jesus is one that brings me a reassuring smile. Sometimes we can view Jesus in Jerusalem during Holy Week as him going to a completely hostile environment, especially as we know what happened on Good Friday. However, this conversation with the teacher at the Temple shows it was more complex and nuanced than that.

When asked which is the greatest commandment, this was a common topic for debate. There were 613 commandments divided between "heavy" and "light", trying to figure out which were in which category was a contentious issue. Jesus replies with the "Shema" from Deuteronomy 6 v 4-5. A scripture recited every day since early childhood. Shema means "hear" it is a foundational scripture of the Jewish faith. Reading it in English doesn't quite get the full meaning of what Jesus and the teacher were talking about though, we need to understand on a deeper level. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and all your strength - it sounds very emotional, like we should be singing praise hymns non-stop. However, the word here for love is "Ahava", it is not just about feeling but always involves action. It's something you do, not simply what you feel.

What about heart? For us, we think of it as the seat of our feelings, but not so in Hebrew. The word translated as heart is "Levav" and is the centre of the mind and thoughts, not emotion. "Nephesh" is the Hebrew for soul and is not, as we might think, our spirit, it describes our whole life. Strength is "M'eod" and may be translated "very". We could call it "Oomph". It's a word of effort and intention, some people may have more natural strength than others, but this word affects everyone equally. We love God with all we have, regardless of individual weaknesses.

Then Jesus adds on a second commandment, even though he was only asked for one. He adds Leviticus 19 v 18, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord." It is clear that Jesus sees these commandments as intertwined. You can't have one without the other, his teaching of the good Samaritan contrasts the actions and hence, the love of God of the religious people compared to the Samaritan. This well-known parable was Jesus' response to the question, "Who is my neighbour?"

The teacher's response suggests that he is someone older with years of study and experience behind him, someone who not only studies, but who prayerfully seeks and finds the heart of God in the Scriptures. He would have been familiar with the character of God portrayed in Psalm 146, Mighty Creator with compassion for those in need. Jesus' affirmation, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" stunned everyone listening into silence.

I imagine that in amongst the Temple hierarchy, this nameless teacher was known to be a quiet spiritual man, compared to those who were more concerned with preserving their culture in a political tinderbox. I wonder what this teacher thought as Holy Week progressed, whether he became a follower of Jesus. It is likely he was known to Joseph of Arimathea and as a seeker after the heart of God, he may well have become part of the early Church.

His conversation with Jesus is timeless, always relevant when religious people get in a tangle about whether they believe the right things in the right way. Jesus cuts through it all with what is actually important. Ahava God and ahava your neighbour. Simple.

**Prayers of Intercession:**

Compassionate God,  
We see so much heartache in your world.  
People who are affected by war, oppression and natural disaster.  
Help us to be helpful to our neighbours near and far.  
We pray for aid agencies and give thanks for those who work for humanity.  
Uphold and protect all who give of themselves to help others.  
Help us to be willing to follow your will,  
and that thoughts and prayers will be supported by action.  
May we listen to your Spirit's prompting  
And be conduits of your compassion in our own community.  
In Jesus' Name. Amen

**Hymn: 713 Singing the Faith** (to the beautiful old Welsh tune - Dim Ond Jesu - Here is love vast as the ocean)

1] Show me how to stand for justice:  
How to work for what is right,  
How to challenge false assumptions,  
How to walk within the light.  
May I learn to share more freely  
In a world so full of greed,  
Showing your immense compassion  
By the life I choose to lead.

2] Teach my heart to treasure mercy,  
Whether given or received –  
For my need has not diminished  
Since the day I first believed:  
Let me seek no satisfaction  
Boasting of what I have done,  
But rejoice that I am pardoned  
And accepted in your Son.

3] Gladly I embrace a lifestyle  
Modelled on your living word,  
In humility submitting  
To the truth which I have heard.  
Make me conscious of your presence  
Every day in all I do:  
By your Spirit's gracious prompting  
May I learn to walk with you.

*Martin Leckebusch (b.1962)*

**Blessing:**

The peace of the Lord rest in your heart,  
The strength of the Lord be your life,  
The love of the Lord be your everything.  
Now and always. Amen