

WORSHIP AT HOME – 11TH JULY 2021 – INCONVENIENT COMPASSION

Dear friends,

As always I hope that life is treating you well – and where there are troubles may you remember, with me, that Our Lord is walking ever beside us. Today we tell – and dwell on – a familiar tale realising that caring is a vulnerable venture, asking all for love. The story is familiar to us but we pray that the familiar will not be comfortable and uninspiring, but that it will prove more adventurous and challenging than we thought possible, so that God will help us to explore what it means to be compassionate – and who is our neighbour. *With every blessing, Margaret*

Call to worship: Come and hear the song of love, echoing through time and space, touching darkness and bringing light. Share the song of love, unsilenced by the deepest pain, released in an empty tomb. Sing the song of love that gathers up all creation in wild wonder and unending joy.

Gather up your faith and leave behind your prejudice – journey together and leave no-one by the roadside. Heal with the oil of compassion and be healed by the wine of God’s love.

As we draw near to you, God of parable and truth, open our ears to hear your word – our hearts to receive your truth – our eyes to discern our neighbour’s need. Grant us the humility to walk back where we have walked by – to embrace where we have cold-shouldered – and to trust where we have been afraid. We ask this in the name of Christ, our friend and Saviour. **Amen**

The words to ‘Lord, the light of your love is shining’ written by Graham Kendrick [b.1950] StF 59

1 Lord, the light of your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness shining:

Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us; set us free by the truth you now bring us, shine on me –

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father’s glory; blaze, spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy; send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light.

2 Lord, I come to your awesome presence, from the shadows into your radiance;

By your blood I may enter your brightness; search me, try me, consume all my darkness – shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine.....

3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness so our faces display your likeness,

Ever changing from glory to glory:

Mirrored here, may our lives tell your story – shine on me, shine on me –

Shine, Jesus, shine.....

Prayers: Lord, at the beginning of time your love touched the void, bringing order out of chaos and creating a world that gave you joy.

God of love, we praise you for your priceless gifts.

In Jesus Christ love was poured out without limit – challenging, caressing and captivating human hearts and minds and never being defeated,

God of love, we thank you for your priceless gifts.

Your Spirit’s boundless love moves us ever onwards, revealing how the world can be changed by your invigorating love, giving strength and offering love.

God of love, we praise you and thank you.

In our lives your love goes deep, beyond words or explanation, into darkness and into light, present for us now and in all our tomorrows, shaping us into your image.

God of love, for your priceless gifts we thank you.

But we know that we do not always love as we should – and so we come with humble hearts to say we are sorry for the hurtful words we wish we could take back – for impatience shown and tempers lost – for the

times we have crossed the street to avoid someone – for the times we’ve listened and shared in gossip – for a lack of respect shown to others, in words and actions – and for the times when we have neglected you, Lord, choosing to follow our own path.

Merciful Lord, we confess our faults, and we ask that you forgive us. Lead us in your truth that our feet may keep to your paths.

We are God’s children and God loves us.

God calls us to love him – to love each other – to love ourselves with all our being for all time. **Amen**

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

Colossians 1: 1-14: NIV]

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy our brother to God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: grace and peace to you from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 10: 25-37: [Living Bible paraphrased]

One day an expert on Moses’ laws came to test Jesus’ orthodoxy by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what does a man need to do to live forever in heaven?’

Jesus replied: ‘What does Moses’ law say about it?’

‘It says,’ he replied: ‘that you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you must love your neighbour just as much as you love yourself.’

‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you shall live.’

The man wanted to justify his lack of love for some people, so he asked: ‘Which neighbours?’

Jesus replied with an illustration. ‘A Jew going on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes and money and beat him up and left him lying half-dead beside the road. By chance a Jewish priest came along, and when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Jewish Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but then went on.’

But a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw him, he felt deep pity. Kneeling beside him the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his donkey and walked along beside him till they came to an inn, where he nursed the man through the night. The next day he handed the innkeeper two twenty-dollar bills and told him to take care of the man. If his bill runs higher than that," he said, "I'll pay the difference next time I am here."
'Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the bandits' victim?'
The man replied: 'the one who showed him some pity.'
Then Jesus replied: 'Yes – now go and do the same.'

The words to: 'When I needed a neighbour' written by Sydney Carter [1915-2004] StF 256]

- 1 When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 2 I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed.....
- 3 I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed.....
- 4 When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter, were you there?
And the creed.....
- 5 When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed.....
- 6 Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there,
Wherever you travel, I'll be there.
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.

Comment: Jesus was facing opposition - the seventy-two he sent out had returned and there was quite possibly an angry backlash from the towns which had been denounced by Jesus for their refusal to receive the message brought to them.

Here the law expert is smug, thinking he was drawing Jesus into a trap – but Jesus neatly sidestepped and trapped the man instead. Perhaps that lawyer had been hoping that Jesus would agree that 'neighbour' only referred to those living within the Jewish law. Then he could have caught Jesus out, he would have thought, for denouncing those towns like Capernaum which had rejected his message.

The answer in this story form forced him to look at things from God's plumb-line – to look at attitudes and assumptions and see that they needed a thorough overhaul. He obviously knew all the right words [they would have been written in little leather box called a phylactery strapped on his wrist] and could glibly quote them – but the spirit of those words had dried up and left only the shell.

The rabbis sought to define who was a neighbour and, at their worst, limited this to fellow Jews. Gentiles were not counted as neighbours no matter how closely they lived to Jews. This parable of the Good Samaritan is a challenge to our limited care also.

So the story began with a man on the downhill road from Jerusalem to Jericho – his back to the Holy City, he was heading for a place known for its vice and corruption. [Some have seen a symbolism in this image]. Now he was travelling downhill and alone on a road which was notorious for robbers and brigands. It was a foolish move for he was attacked by robbers, stripped of his possessions and his dignity – and he was seriously injured. He was left half-dead – and lying out there in the heat and alone he would soon have been finished.

Still, help was at hand! A priest was coming by – and kept on going. If the priest had even touched the man and found him dead, that would make him unclean and he would not have been able to carry on with his

duties for seven days. Presumably, the priest was less concerned with charity than with his part in ceremonies. Was it the common feeling we often hear expressed: 'It's more than my job's worth!' Still, here came a good churchman – a Levite – so that should have been hopeful. But no! Perhaps the Levite feared that the robbers were still in the vicinity – even that the man on the ground was actually a decoy to trap him. He may have seen the priest ahead of him and felt if it was good enough for him to pass by, then so could he – the law more important than love for one's fellow human.

Here came a Samaritan – a non-Jew. Not much hope there, then! Why should he bother? But he was moved with pity for a fellow human-being and went straight to the stricken man, poured oil and wine on the wounds and bandaged them – a normal thing to do but also they were symbols of peace and joy. Then he lifted the man onto his own animal, got him to an inn and took care of him. When the Samaritan had to leave the next day he gave extra money to the innkeeper so that the man could be cared for until he was fit enough to travel on. 'Take care of him,' he said, 'and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

When Jesus then asked the lawyer which had proved to be a neighbour, the man could do no other than to admit that it was the one who had showed mercy. Jesus then told him, to go and live his life in the same way.

We are challenged to accept as our neighbour and to show concern for all – and that includes the ones we might normally try to avoid – try to pass by. People who perhaps got into trouble through their own actions – those who are different from us – those who are sometimes quite scary. We are called to help all who are in need or in trouble.

In John 8:48 the Jews called Jesus a Samaritan. Maybe we should heed the words of the Good Samaritan and interpret them as Jesus speaking to us. 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

What is the parable of the Good Samaritan all about? The answer that most obviously springs to mind is that it is all about responding to someone in need – not just family and friends but anyone at all we come across who is in need of some kind. Nick Fawcett suggests that it is also about confronting prejudice. The Jews in Jesus' time thought of Samaritan as being a dirty word – in fact, hearing the word was enough to make them spit on the ground in disgust! It all followed a bitter dispute from hundreds of years before, since when Jews and Samaritans had as little to do with one another as possible. For a Samaritan to be the hero of this story must have seemed to other Jews to be heresy. Imagine all the tutting and disapproval. As Nick Fawcett puts it: 'yet another example of wishy-washy liberalism'.

What narrow prejudice – we would never behave in such a way, would we?

Actually, of course, prejudice is still alive and kicking. People are lumped together in groups and looked down on by others, dismissed without a second thought – and these days there is social media which, while it can be a wonderful thing, is often used for vicious prejudice. Maybe it is a trap which can draw us all in more easily than we think. Don't let us be like that lawyer as he tried to trip Jesus up but try to look fairly at everyone. We all think that we do that already but sometimes we catch ourselves not being fair. That is a mistake we need to aim to eradicate.

Prayer:

We pray for those whom we pass by each day who are part of the backdrop of our lives, and whose needs never seem pressing or important. Loving Christ, as you reached out to us, help us to reach out to others.

We pray for those whom our community passes by – difficult or threatening people – adults or children vulnerable to neglect. Loving Christ, as you have reached out to help us, help us to reach out to others.

We pray for those whom our world passes by, whose oppression is timeless – the poor, the frightened, the refugee. Loving Christ, as you have reached out us, help us to reach out to others.

Gracious God, we thank you that you have called us into fellowship – to be part of your people not in isolation but as members of the Church – a family united in Christ. We thank you for that privilege and responsibility, and we ask for your help in fulfilling our role among your people.

Help us to share with one another – not just with our friends or those we find easy to work with, but all in our own church family and the wider fellowship of the Church.

Help us to care for one another – to remember the housebound, the sick and the lonely – to remember all those who are going through difficult times. May we take steps to show our concern and offer our support.

Help us to serve one another – ready, from our own experience of being helped by others, to encourage and strengthen in our turn – ready to put ourselves out on others’ behalf, and to use our gifts in the cause of Christ.

Help us to show sensitivity – alert to each other’s needs – awake to the silent cry of suffering – conscious of the problems with which some may be wrestling, yet careful to keep a balance between intrusion into people’s private affairs and indifference to their troubles.

Help us to be generous in spirit – to be tolerant, understanding, slow to take offence and swift to forgive.

Help us, in all our dealings with one another, to show compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience.

Gracious God – teach us what it means to be your people. Broaden our vision, enlarge our understanding – unite us in care and prayer and in thought, word and deed.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together in love for we ask it in Jesus’ precious name. **Amen**

The words to ‘Bind us together’ written by Bob Gillman – copyright 1977 Thankyou Music. Songs of Fellowship 43:

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, bind us together with love.

1 There is only one God, there is only one King;
There is only one Body, that is why we sing:
Bind us together.....

2 Made for the glory of God, purchased by his precious Son;
Born with the right to be clean, for Jesus the victory has won:
Bind us together.....

3 You are the family of God, you are the promise divine;
You are God’s chosen desire, you are the glorious new wine.
Bind us together.....

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

We pray, loving God, that we will cross the road to care when need is known, and love needs to be shown: risking rejection for healing’s sake and the cause of your kingdom. **Amen**

And may God’s blessing surround us and all whom we love and all for whom we pray this day and for evermore. **Amen b**