

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 11th August 2024

Prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

Welcome to this week's service at home sheet.

Psalm 19 begins:

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm
19.1-4)*

As you prepare to worship God today, what is on your heart that you want to praise God for?

Listen, read, pray or sing along to STF 116 [Sing for God's Glory](#)

Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
Racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
Sun of delight
Succeeds the velvet of night,
Warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
Searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us,
Touching our shame
With love that will not lay blame,
Reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
Tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;
Lifeblood of right,
Resisting evil and slight,
Offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us,
Who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;
In them we see
The new creation to be,
Spirit of love made flesh for us.

Kathy Galloway (b. 1952)

Prayer of Approach

Take a moment of silence to open yourself to God. Give God the joys, anxieties and sorrows of this past week. Entrust these to God, and this time of worship, trusting that God will meet with you and hears your praise and your prayers.

We pray:

Gracious God, whose love surrounds and enfolds us, wherever we may be,
may our words, thoughts and prayers be pleasing to you today.
Meet with us as we worship.
May we know your presence
and hear your voice.
In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Read Ephesians 4.25-5.2

Read John 6.35, 41-51

Reflection



Most children love to play dressing up games – whether it is Disney princesses, pirates, doctors and nurses, or pretending to be Peppa Pig. Simple dressing up games might involve wearing their parents' clothes, many sizes too big, and clomping around in their enormous shoes.

How wonderful for any parent when, for a short while, the person their child looks up to and wants to be most like, is their mum or their dad. Sadly this doesn't always last – and other heroes and famous people often take their place.

Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, tells his readers that they should, as beloved children, be imitators of God their Father.

'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'. (Ephesians 5.1-2)

This passage from Ephesians is strongly Trinitarian, as indeed is the whole letter. They are urged not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (4.30), to imitate God as God's beloved children, and to live in love as Christ loved us (5.1-2). Here Paul is talking about Christ's sacrificial death for us, as the supreme example of his love.

How then are we, as followers of Jesus, to imitate God? You might be surprised to find out that the dressing up analogy can be quite helpful here. Paul often writes about putting off or putting away former ways of life in order to put on Christ – a metaphor for the way we dress. A few verses earlier Paul writes:

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (4.22-24)

It is as if we have been given a whole new set of clothes – but we need to decide to throw away the old ones and clothe ourselves in the new. What is your wardrobe like? Is it full of clothes that you are keeping, in case they fit again, or old clothes you can't bring yourself to throw away? Perhaps there are new clothes you have bought but have never worn.

And what about your metaphorical wardrobe? What does Paul tell us to put away and what should we clothe ourselves with? His instructions are in fact quite simple moral commands – but this does not mean that they are easy or that we follow them.

There are four simple rules Paul outlines in these few verses:

1. Put away falsehood and speak the truth (v.25)
2. Be angry but do not sin (or 'in your anger, do not sin' v. 26)
3. Give up stealing and work so that you can give to others (v. 28)
4. Don't use your mouth for evil but for good – and for building up (v. 29).

How easy do you find it to speak the truth – or do you ever lie when it is to your own advantage to do so? We tell ourselves that a small white lie, won't hurt. But Paul says we need to put away falsehood - our words should be trustworthy. It is not always easy to speak the truth because we are bombarded with different stories about the world everyday through the news and social media channels. Do we pick 'our truth' or are we open to hear the views of others and make sure our opinions and beliefs are informed by facts, rather than choosing the 'truth' which is convenient for us?

We have seen this week, following the terrible events in Southport and the children whose lives were taken, how lies and distortions of the truth can cause such chaos and destruction. One mistruth about the perpetrator of the violent attack spread widely, and now asylum seekers, migrants and members of the Muslim community are being targeted by far right groups and there have been riots across the country. As we pray for peace and for comfort for those who mourn, may we also commit ourselves to speak the truth and to be careful not to knowingly or unknowingly spread lies to others.

Paul's words about anger are interesting – and a reminder that there is such a thing as Christian or righteous anger. Anger is a feeling we will all experience – and surely we should feel angry when we see the injustices in our world. Yet in our anger we are urged not to sin, not to nurse our anger and not to give an opportunity to the devil. I feel anger when I hear the narratives in the media about asylum seekers and refugees, stories that feed anxiety and xenophobia (fear of the stranger) in this country. What makes you angry on behalf of others – and how can you use this constructively, to make a difference?

But if you struggle with anger and use your voice or your fists to lash out when you do, you are giving the devil a foothold and may need help to control your anger. Don't let other people suffer because of your anger – don't let it lead you into sin.

When I preach on a Sunday morning, I don't look out on a congregation who are likely to think stealing is right. But when Paul exhorts his readers to give up stealing, there is a wide application. Whether stealing money or possessions, evading taxes and customs, employers oppressing and underpaying workers, or workers giving poor service or working under their hours, there are lots of ways we might find ourselves 'stealing'.

And finally, what are we to make of the urge for us to put away evil talk and only say what is useful for building up. Isn't this something many of us struggle with – the urge to talk about someone behind their back, to bad-mouth someone so that we feel better about ourselves? As Christians, how can we learn to be honest but kind to one another, to deal with our disagreements openly, to be those who build up a team rather than act obstructively and bring other people down?

What a wardrobe of clothes we can choose to put on each day! Let us make the decision to clothe ourselves with Christ, to imitate God by

putting away falsehoods, out of control anger, stealing or destructive words. Our desire is that, in seeing us, other people see something of what God is like, that we are recognised as children of our heavenly father. God's love for us is not dependent on how we behave, but as those who are forgiven and loved by God, our response shines God's light and love to others.

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 4.31-5.2)

You are a child beloved by God, shown in Christ's death for you. How do you respond to God's love and, with the help of the Spirit, what are you going to choose to clothe yourselves in this coming week?

A Prayer following the recent unrest (from the Methodist website)

God of love,
We pray for your Spirit of peace to move in our communities,
that those who are targets of hate might be safe and that people of good will might work together in love and respect.
We pray for your Spirit of healing,
that those who grieve, might be comforted and those who are injured might be made well.
We pray for your Spirit of hope,
that those who despair might see a way ahead and those who live in fear might find sanctuary and freedom.
Soften the hearts of those motivated by hate and help us all to love our neighbours as those made in your image.
In Christ's name.
Amen

In the silence, bring your own prayers to God.
When you are ready, join with God's people
across the world in praying the words of the
Lord's prayer:

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.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along to STF 503

[Love Divine, All Loves Excelling](#)

Love Divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, Thou art all compassion;
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee, without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

A sending out prayer

(from Roots on the web 2018)

As your dearly loved children,
we have presented ourselves before you.
Now we go out to follow your example, Lord,
to live our lives according to your will,
and to spread your wonderful love.
Go with us, Lord.
Amen.

Closing Blessing

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son
and Holy Spirit, be with us and those who we
love and pray for, now and always. Amen.

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