

SERVICE TRANSCRIPT
SUNDAY FEBRUARY 14TH 2021

Service Leader: Delyth Mayhew

Speaker: Mark Reid

Welcome

Good morning everyone and a warm welcome to our service on this Valentine's Day

It is good to be together again.

I hope you will take time to read the newssheet for today - guiding you towards prayer points and informing you of what is happening in our fellowship and the wider Christian community.

And to all who have had a birthday recently – Happy Birthday.

We come together today, joining with all God's people around the world to give Him our praise and worship. And we say these words from Psalm 47 together.

*LEADER Clap your hands, all you nations;
 Shout to God with cries of joy.*

**ALL *How awesome is the Lord most high,
 The great King over all the earth!***

*LEADER God has ascended amidst shouts of joy,
 The Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.*

**ALL *Sing praises to God, sing praises;
 Sing praises to our King, sing praises.***

*LEADER For God is the King of all the earth;
 Sing to Him a psalm of praise.*

**ALL *God reigns over the nations;
 God is seated on His holy throne.***

Let's pray –

Heavenly Father, we thank you that You are the one true God –

The God who has saved us; the God who has given us a new life in Christ.

We thank you for your love which surrounds us and your faithfulness that means we can always look to you for guidance and forgiveness.

We thank you that as we trust in you, as we lean on you, our fears are washed away and you give us the strength to face each new day.

AMEN

God is the everlasting God – the unchanging one – the only firm foundation for our lives. He is the same – yesterday, today and for ever.

Let's sing to our amazing, merciful God whose love endures forever.

(Reading - about God's love for us and His goodness)

As I read these next words, I invite you to sit quietly and open yourselves to God's presence with you.

*We are in the presence of the Father who created us.
We are in the presence of the Son who redeemed us.
We are in the presence of the Spirit who guides us.*

*We call upon the Father to strengthen and uphold us.
We call upon the Son to forgive and to shield us.
We call upon the Spirit to comfort and direct us.*

*We rest in the love of the glorious Father.
We rest in the love of the wonderful Saviour.
We rest in the love of the blessed Spirit.
Today and forever, in love and adoration.*

We rest in the love of our good, good Father

Every year I receive a Valentine Card – not from my husband – from my sponsor dog, and right now that is – Paulo! I give something towards his keep (and that of other dogs) each month, and I regularly receive messages of thanks from him.

We had dogs from 1983 to 2010 – and each one of them gave us unconditional love. And we loved them back – they had, and still have, a special place in our hearts.

We didn't need a valentine card from them to know that they loved us – and that is how we all feel about everyone dear to us, I am sure.

Some people express their love freely, others are more reserved – but each of us is able to show our love for others in our own way.

I, like many, love to hug those I care for – and how I have missed that over this last year – but I have tried by messages and calls to let them know I care.

One dictionary explanation of love is

“Love is an emotion that keeps people bonded and committed to one another”

That is what we have with those close to us – that is what we have with each other in this fellowship – we are bonded and committed to each other.

God loves his people - He is bonded and committed to each one of them – that is why He sent His only son to live amongst them, and to die for them so that they would know the strength of His love, his commitment.

And when we follow Jesus, and give our lives to Him, we enter into that relationship, that bond, that commitment – a commitment to follow Him, to give our lives for Him, to obey His will for us and follow His path.

AND to be committed to others – our neighbours - those God has placed in our lives – to love and care for them.

Jesus said it like this

“the most important commandment is this: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Love the Lord 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”.

Loving means caring - caring means sharing – our lives and all we have – just as the first followers of Christ did. And sharing not just material things, but even more importantly, the truth of the gospel – with all those God loves – that means everyone

First – a follow up on the news I gave you last time of **SIFT** and Graham's virtual walks. He has now raised over £8000 for the work of the clinic on Omatepe Island in Nicaragua, and is busy planning his next adventure!

FEBA update

I have spoken in the past about FEBA – a Christian mission agency which focuses on the use of radio and other audio media to inspire people to follow Jesus. They work with partners across Africa, Asia and the Middle East with a particular emphasis on areas where it is very difficult to be a Christian. The material they broadcast is always relevant, addressing the interests and needs of the local listeners, and through follow-up channels, the team members seek to engage and build relationships with listeners. Where possible, they seek the support of local churches in an effort to proclaim and demonstrate God's love.

Feba video about Hasan, a convert from FEBA's ministry.

Heavenly Father, we pray for Hasan and his family who have all come to faith in Jesus. As they live in a Muslim majority area - Lord, please keep them safe from harm and strong in their faith. We ask you too to be with all those who join with Hasan in his home to listen to radio programmes. May their hearts be opened as they hear the invitation to follow Jesus.

And we pray for all your people around the world, often living and working in difficult and hostile situations – we pray Your protection over them and Your provision to meet their needs. We pray for wisdom and guidance for them so that they can continue their work for you and point the way to Jesus.

May we be inspired by Hasan's example and that of so many others and be bold in sharing with family and friends how You have transformed our lives.
AMEN

Just like these people we've heard about – and all who take God's word into the world - God calls each one of us to reach out – to share the gospel, to show His love, to welcome people in, and let them know there is a place for everyone in His kingdom.

Intercessory Prayer

Father, we thank you for the recent fall in the number of cases and deaths from Covid-19. Help us as a nation to have patience in Lockdown as we start to see an end to this pandemic. Be with families who have lost loved ones to Covid we pray and with those who are currently suffering in hospital. Thank you for those in the NHS and care sectors who have shown so much commitment to help those with the disease. We pray that the NHS may still have the resources necessary to continue to help all. We pray too for those under pressure and those who have lost their jobs as a result of coronavirus. Please help us as Your people to bring your hope to those we know who are going through difficulty at this time.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Next week we are going to commence our Lent Course on Caring for Creation. A recent survey by Tearfund has revealed 9 in 10 young Christians are concerned about climate change, but just 1 in 10 think their church is doing enough to address it. It is a growing issue in our society and the same survey found that our younger generation wants churches to take leadership in this area, not because it's a hot political topic, but that care for God's creation is a Biblical imperative. We are going to be exploring this in the lent course so do come and be encouraged and challenged. Let's pray for it now.

Father as we bring the forthcoming lent course before you, we pray that you may open our eyes to the issues involved in caring for your creation, particularly those of social justice as we look at the consequences of living as rich Christians in a rich country in a very unequal world. Open our minds as to how we may be a people who are bringers of Good News in every respect to a world that is filled with sin and injustice.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen

Let's take a few moments to lift before God those we know of who need the Lord to move in their lives right now.

Silence

Father, we lift these folk before You. May they know the presence of Your Spirit. Bring hope, comfort, salvation, healing, encouragement – whatever they need. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2: 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Sermon

Today is St Valentines Day as we have already been told. It is a day when people profess their love for one another. ST VALENTINE It is a time of romance and romantic gestures – a card, some chocolates, a meal together. I have dealt with St Valentine before and I have put a link to a video I did some years ago below. It is remarkable how real St Valentine of Rome (the one usually linked with February 14th) was changed from being a martyr that suffered and died for his Lord to being a person whose name became associated with romance, love and marriage. Over the centuries, history changed to legend and then to the myth of the modern commercialised and secularised day. How sad because right at the heart of Christian love is not the slush of St Valentine's Day, but the selfless giving of oneself and one's resources for the benefit of others, most shown by Jesus Himself, and by the real St Valentine; whichever you choose as there are at least 11 known St Valentines. Just about all were people who gave their lives for Christ and for others.

Our subject matter for this morning is the final part of the five-fold ministry of the church is Committed to Share, and is all about love, not Valentine's slush, but of the sharing of what God has given to us for the benefit of others. It is a token of our love that we do it, our love for Christ and our love for others, the self sacrificing agape-love.

One feature of Valentine's Day that's missing this year is the highly overpriced Valentine's meal at a restaurant. MEAL AD This is one from six years ago. If you think this was cheap, then this pub restaurant usually did 2 meals for a tenner. Sensible people, usually married couples, have a Valentines meal on a different day when it's half the price! (What price love, eh?) Because of Lockdown, the best one can do is order a takeaway or better still, cook a nice meal at home. For those valentines separated by Lockdown, the very best they can do is maybe a What's App or Zoom call, but perhaps not quite like this one where

Rod Ponton, a lawyer couldn't switch his children's kitten filter off whilst participating in an online court hearing. KITTEN. If you want to see a good Valentine's video on love in Lockdown, take a look at Glen Scrivener's CANCEL VALENTINES in the description below.

One of the great features of Valentine's meals in restaurants is the sharing platter. SHARING PLATTER It's an opportunity to literally share all sorts of food together from the same plate – how romantic! Of course, none of us need to be in a romantic relationship to share a meal together. Sharing a meal is a mark of friendship, and of being part of a family and it doesn't even need a special day to share a meal together, although it is often a fundamental part of getting together as a family do or having a party with friends. Hospitality is often a means of developing or cementing friendships. In business, the breakfast or lunch is an informal and friendly way of having talks.

As we look at Acts 2:42-47 we see a group of people who just loved to hang out together. Here are these words again. *4 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Last week, I talked about this in terms of service, but there's a wider point here. They willingly shared the blessings that God had given them, particularly to those who were the most poor and vulnerable. That is where the love of Christ takes us.

We see this community, this church at Jerusalem, caring for one another, out and about together, hanging out with one another, having meals together, and people looked at them and Luke records that they enjoyed the favour of all the people. We know from 1 Corinthians, that even later, meetings of the church to worship were based around a meal.

Here was a group of people that weren't just a load of religious people doing religious stuff, but a community who loved and cared for one another.

NO LONE RANGERS

If there's anything that Lockdown has shown what's important about the Christian faith is that God has saved us in Christ to be part of His people, His family, the church. He never calls anyone to be a lone ranger. In lands where Christians are persecuted, you'll find some – but oh, how they rejoice when they meet other Christians!

As God's people, we do everything best when we do it together. That is the message of scripture. A building stands because it is made up of INTERLOCKING BRICKS, a body lives and moves because of its variety of parts. Fellowship and everything that goes with it is what church is all about – worshipping together, learning together, serving together, sharing together.

One of the things I would like us to get out of this last year is that God would give us a renewed love for the church – not the organisation, not the bricks and mortar of a building, but a love for one another. And a love to share who we are and what God has made us. And what do we most have to share? It's a case of who rather than what; and that's Jesus!

SHARING GOOD NEWS

I expect you were wondering when I was going to talk about evangelism – sharing Jesus with others as that's come up on our list every week for the past 5 weeks! I presented things this way for a reason. We often present evangelism as an individual endeavour. We talk of those gifted with evangelism – preachers, or those in personal evangelism ministries. Perhaps you like me have been through evangelism courses – or been taught by me! And we struggle with our own experience of talking about Jesus to others and feel guilty when we see those who seem to effortlessly talk about Jesus with others and we can't seem to

do it ourselves. There is a place for all those people whom God calls and the Spirit equips to speak to others about Jesus. Praise God for them. We're not all called or gifted to do that individually, but we are called as church to share Jesus with others. What we can't do individually, we can do together.

That said, I'm not kopping you out of being a witness. As Christians, our lives and our words should speak of our Saviour. Let it never be said of any of us "and they call themselves Christians." Whether we speak out directly about Jesus or not, our lives and our words tell others about our faith in Christ – WHAT IS YOUR LIFE SAYING ABOUT YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST?

EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

We know that in the early Church, the apostles preached, as did many others who took out Good News into the Roman Empire. The church grew rapidly in the first two centuries, which was remarkable considering that before Emperor Constantine legitimized the church in the Edict of Milan in 313. Prior to that, it was illegal and subject to frequent bouts of both empire-wide and province-wide persecution and preaching was illegal.

A QUESTION OF FASCINATION

How did the church grow? It grew through the example of Christians, through their lives of integrity, through their hospitality, their willingness to serve others and evidence of the power and presence in their lives. People wanted to belong because they saw Christians had something they wanted, values they could attach themselves to, as much as having a system of belief that made sense to them. Someone has termed it "fascination evangelism" and it's what drove church growth for two centuries. Think about it. Why does the church grow so in countries where there is strong persecution? It isn't because they have great church programmes or big events. It's because others see the realness of Christians' faith.

For the church, sometimes our strengths can become our weaknesses. In the immediate past we planned events and organised Christian charitable ministry as the way the church may reach out to others. The church's ability to do mission and to present Good News depended on having the people and financial resources to do so. There's no doubt that these ministries have been productive too.

But in the second decade of the 21st Century, the church in the UK is small, and churches like ours have difficulty in organising events and activities. How can we share Good News when we can't maintain an organised programme? That's why we need to go back to Year Zero of the church. In Acts 2:42-47 we see the church without building or programmes. We see that there were a few people -the apostles - doing preaching and engaging the powers that be. The rest were just hanging out with one another, worshipping, showing hospitality, serving needs. To their friends and neighbours and others in Jerusalem, their activities were compelling – they were spiritual magnets drawing people in – and the Lord added to their numbers daily, those who were being saved.

As we come out of Covid, we need to be that kind of church – a people who draw in others because they see God in us. How do we do that? I shall explore that next time, but I'll leave the questions (in the description) below for you to reflect on.

I'll close by giving you what I believe the first thing should be in becoming a church that has a magnetic fascination to others – and that's to pray, that the Spirit will move as he did in those early days to bring the necessary change in us. Let's pray

Holy Spirit, move in us we pray as we seek to embrace the new situation we find ourselves in. Challenge our hearts, move in our lives and equip us to be people who have a magnetic sort of fath that draw others to want to know Jesus. Transform into being like Him in words and deeds. Father, may we as Your church be good news herein Felixstowe. May you give us a passion for You, for Your word, for prayer and a desire to obey You as disciples of Christ. May our fellowship be true friendship; may our service to one another, to You and the needs of our community be truly sacrificial. May we show hospitality to all. May we, like

the early disciples enjoy the favour of all the people and through our obedience, our attitude and our love cause others to be added to the church who are being saved.

Father, fill us with Your Spirit, that we will be transformed by You into a people that are like Jesus in every aspect of our lives. Challenge us as to where our lives need to change. May we bring Jesus glory.

We ask this in His name

Amen.

And so we come to the end of our service today. I pray that you have known God's presence and blessing this morning – and that, as you go into the week ahead, you will know His peace and His joy. Until we meet again next week - same time, same place, keep safe and God bless you.

Benediction

May the love of God be the passion in your heart.
The joy of God your strength when times are hard .
The presence of God a peace that overflows.
The Word of God the seed that you might sow.

May the beauty of God be reflected in your eyes,
the love of God Be reflected in your hands,
the wisdom of God be reflected in your words,
and the knowledge of God flow from your heart,
that all might see,
and seeing, believe.

May the Lord shine on you

FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Read Acts 2:41-47

1. Why is fellowship so important in developing strong Christians and strong churches? In the past few weeks we have seen five ways in which the early church was committed. Which of these are strong in our church, and which need attention?
2. Why is love such an important ingredient in everything we say and do as a church? List the ways in which the disciples expressed their love for one another. How much do they reflect how we do things now?
3. The early disciples were given to hospitality, which as we heard in the sermon, is an important way in which human beings interact. How do you think we may use hospitality as a way of sharing Jesus with others?
4. In a world where our options could be limited for a while and where we have an ageing congregation, in what ways do you think we can make others understand that Jesus is real, our faith is life-changing in a way that they would be drawn to us like a magnet?
5. For us to personally reflect on: what is my life saying about my faith in Christ?