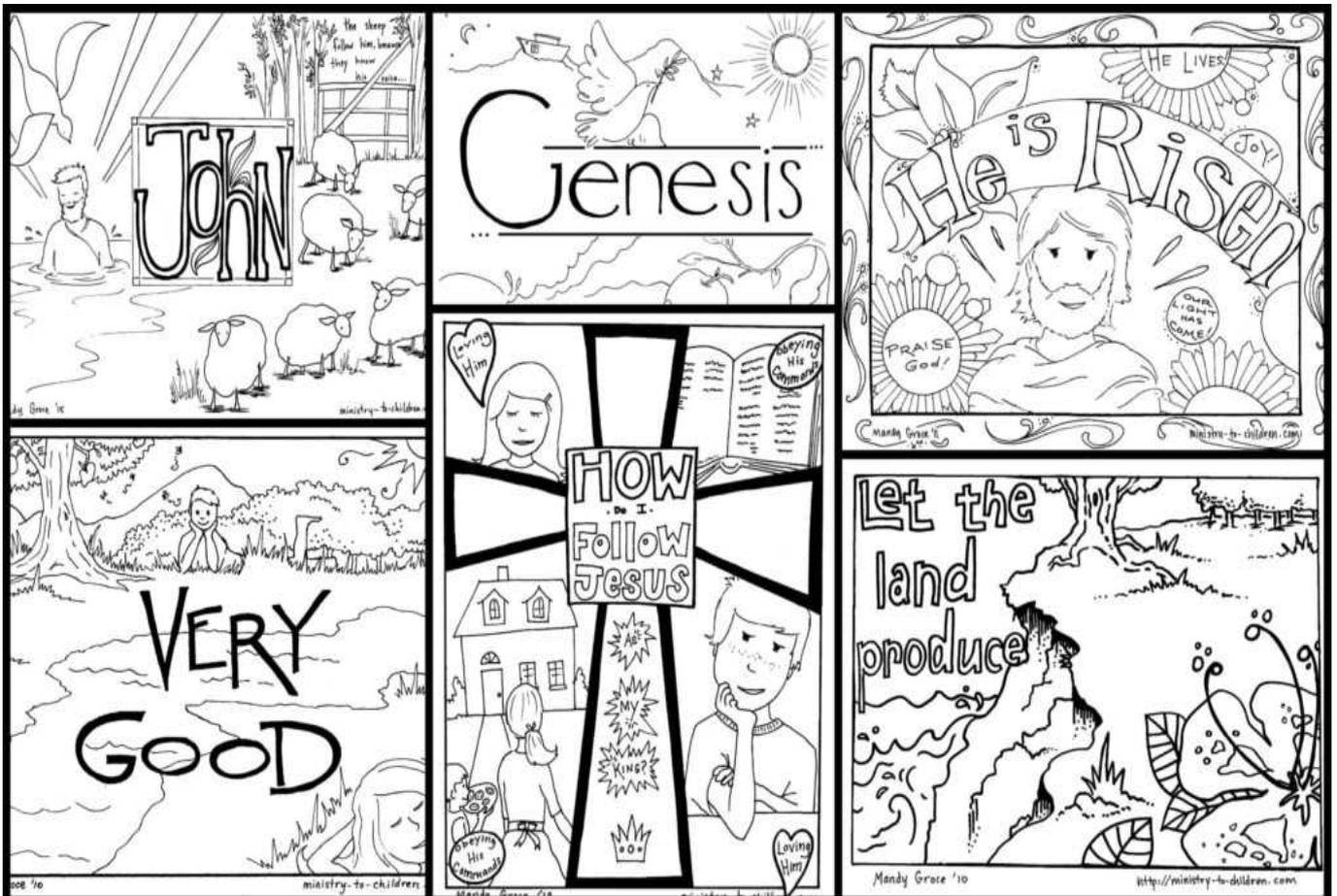


September 2020

Worship for a month of Sundays

Preston Ribble Circuit Ministry Team



6th September 2020

Call to worship

“Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Opening Prayer

Jesus, stand among us at the meeting of our lives.
Be our sweet agreement at the meeting of our eyes.
O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here,
Join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

God among us,
we gather in the name of your Son to learn love for one another.
Turn our feet from evil paths,
our hands from shameful deeds,
our minds to your wisdom,
and our hearts to your grace.

Merciful God, you call us to turn away from behaviours that belong to the darkness and to live honest and transparent lives as children of the light.

We confess the times when we have failed,
giving in to our darker thoughts and desires;
and acting in ways that did not bring honour to Your name.

Lord, in Your mercy, forgive us.
Teach us how to live as children of the light.
Give us hunger to know You more,
so that we may do Your will
and walk in Your ways,
to the glory of Your name.

Jesus Christ has called us to lay aside the works of darkness
and to confess our sins and be reconciled to God.
You have confessed your sin in the company of God’s people.
Your forgiveness, declared on earth, is sealed in heaven.

Sisters and Brothers, our sins are forgiven; be at peace. Amen.

Bible reading

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

Reflection by Rev Janet

Every preacher has experienced that moment when the vestry steward prays before the service “Lord, you said that when two or three are gathered, you are there with them.” The preacher does not need to look out of the door to know that there are not many in the congregation! It is good to know that Jesus turns up to be with us even when we are low in number.

But that is not really what He meant when He said those words. What He meant was that He is with us when we agree. He is with us when we find common ground. He is with us when we find a way to live in peace with each other, even though there may be differences between us. And of course, the opposite is true. Jesus is never with us if we cannot find a way to love each other. He is not with us if we are determined that we will not be at peace with each other. For if we are not at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are not at peace with God.

John and Charles Wesley were always deeply concerned about peace and unity within the church. Methodist tradition established the Class system, under which the members of the church would meet regularly to “examine” one another, asking one another “Is it well with your soul?” Members would make confessions to each other. I wonder how we would feel about following this practice today? We would probably be horrified at the very thought, because we think that our spirituality and personal morality are our own business and nobody else’s. “It is between me and God” we say.

But Jesus reminds us that by being members of the church community, we are responsible for one another. We are our brother’s and sister’s keeper, we are responsible for their spiritual well-being, and we are to watch over one another in love. This is never an easy task, we may find that our advice, however gentle and loving, is unwelcome. We risk being told to mind our own business, to take the log out of our own eye, to take a look in the mirror before we try to correct anyone else.

Our church is made up from many thousands of very different people, of different ages, backgrounds, races and opinions. Of course, we will

have disagreements about many important things - the right way to worship, to live, to spend our money, to conduct our relationships. But as Christians, our differences must be aired with love. We must seek out the peace of God among and between us. Let us pray to be given the Spirit of love and the wisdom, that we might all find the right way to carry out the task of love. For when two or three people agree in the name of Jesus, His presence and peace are there in the midst. Thanks be to God.

Jesus, Lord, we look to thee,
let us in thy name agree:
show thyself the Prince of peace;
bid all strife for ever cease.

Make us of one heart and mind,
courteous, pitiful, and kind,
lowly, meek in thought and word,
altogether like our Lord.

Let us for each other care,
each the other's burden bear;
to thy church the pattern give,
show how true believers live.

Free from anger and from pride,
let us thus in God abide;
all the depths of love express,
all the heights of holiness. (C Wesley)

Prayers

Lord of love and compassion,
your son has promised that you are there
wherever two or three are gathered in your name,
and will listen to what we ask.
So we pray in trust.

We pray for your church, still scattered throughout the world:
for those who lead and those who serve
in many different ways,
for those who hover uncertainly on the edge,
and for those who have turned away.

We pray for insight
in realising our own strengths and gifts,
and for honesty in using them
to build up your church.

We pray too for discernment
in recognising the gifts of others,
and generosity in affirming them.

We pray for greater understanding
of our own weaknesses,
and the ability to acknowledge them.

We pray for those we have irritated or offended
and those we have misjudged, wronged or rejected
through our own fault.

We pray for those who have annoyed us,
and those who have hurt us deeply.

We pray for grace and gentleness
in healing the wounds that we have made,
so that we can bring wholeness to our families,
our neighbourhood, our world.

Lord of love hear us,
And teach us to live in your ways. 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.*

Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage;

Hold fast that which is good; render to no one evil for evil;
Honour everyone. Go to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

13th September

Call to worship

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Psalm 103v1-2

Opening Prayer

Teach us, O God, how to treat you, how to know you, how to love you, how to learn of you, how to do as you would have us do. Teach us, above all, how to show those same things to those around us, and those whose lives meet ours, those who rub alongside us each day and those who flit briefly by. Amen.

Hymn

Father we love you, we worship and adore you, glorify your name in all the earth.

Glorify your name, glorify your name, glorify your name in all the earth.

Jesus we love you etc....

Spirit we love you etc....

Bible reading

Matthew 18v21-35: How many times shall I forgive? Numbers are not important says Jesus. Let me tell you this story about forgiveness and punishment.

Reflection (Rev Barbara Pettitt)



How many sweets are in the jar? I know its hard to tell because we can't see the whole jar. Imagine the other side of the jar looks the same. Can you tell how many sweets there are? I got this image from the recent 'Roots' magazine. I don't know how many sweets there are at all. But the image is there to help us think about forgiveness.

At the start of the reading Peter asks: 'how many times shall I forgive. Seven?' Which as people we might think is a lot of times. Maybe Jesus shocks the life out of him when he says; 'no Peter, more like 70x7'. Well OK that's a big number 490 times.... that's a staggering amount Jesus. Well I don't believe Jesus is being specific here. I don't think he means when you have forgiven someone 490 times you don't have to forgive again. I believe its more like you forgive as often as you need to forgive.

That is so hard. I did a bit of a word association and one of the words I associate with forgiveness is impossible. Doesn't it sometimes feel impossible to forgive. I don't mean those little daily hurts, but those really big hurts. Those times when someone really hurts us, hurts us to our core, then forgiveness can feel impossible. I think then these numbers apply because maybe we can only forgive those deep hurts when we say it over and over and over and over again. Maybe as much as 490 times. deep hurts take a long time to heal and forgiveness is no quick fix.

How many sweets are there? I honestly do not know. But perhaps you can use this jar to think about where you are in relation to forgiveness. How do you view forgiveness? Where are you in your own journey of forgiving those who have hurt you? Is your forgiveness jar empty or full? Where are you in terms of accepting God's forgiveness for the things you have done wrong? Where are you in terms of forgiving yourself?

Take some time to think through this passage of scripture and how it relates to your life and how forgiveness figures in your walk with Jesus.

Prayer: Forgiving God, more willing to forgive than often we are to confess, help us to see our failings, to see where we fall short, to see where we deceive ourselves, where we close our eyes and ears to the ripples of our wrongdoing. May we breathe in the reality of our actions, the need to change, the depth of our unworthiness. We come before, seeking forgiveness. (keep silence) now let us breathe in the power of your forgiveness and breathe out the need to live and love in the shadow of your forgiveness of us, that we may forgive as you have forgiven us. Amen.

Prayers:

Loving God, we pray for the needs of others, knowing you delight to hear our prayers.

We pray for your church throughout the world, that men and women, children and young people of faith will follow you and stand firm for peace and justice. At this time we remember all who miss what used to be church and ask that we might continue to adapt and grow in what is church now. Together yet separate, online, in our homes and not in our church buildings. Lord hear us. Graciously renew us.

We pray for work leaders and any who exercise authority, that power would not corrupt that those responsible for the lives of others would work honestly and with integrity for the good of all. Lord hear us.

Graciously renew us.

We pray for men and women courageous enough to work for peace and justice, that they may know your presence as guide and comforter. Lord hear us. Graciously renew us.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind or spirit, those who are sick and those who are dying, people who are alone and afraid, those who mourn, those who have lost faith in the goodness of life, that your light and love might shine in their lives and bring the possibility of comfort, encouragement and peace. Lord hear us. Graciously renew us.

We pray for ourselves that we might seek your will for us and follow you with determination and trust. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit, that forgiven and renewed we may face our daily life, filled with your love and working with you in this world. Lord hear us. Graciously renew us. Amen.

Hymn

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me bring your love;

Where there is injury, your pardon Lord;

and where there's doubt, true faith in you

O master grant that I may never seek,

so much to be consoled as to consoled

To be understood as to understand, to be loved,

as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;

Where there is darkness, only light;

and where there's sadness, every joy.

O master grant.....

Make me a channel of your peace.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

In giving to all that we receive

and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

O master grant

Blessing: God of all go with us as we live out our faith in a world that has changed so much in recent months. Bless us as we rely on your unchanging grace and faithfulness. Fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit. We go in your peace. Amen.

20th September

Call to worship (Psalm 145: 1-8)

¹ I will exalt you, my God the King;

I will praise your name for ever and ever.

² Every day I will praise you

and extol your name for ever and ever.

³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;

his greatness no one can fathom.

⁴ One generation commends your works to another;

they tell of your mighty acts.

⁵ They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty –

and I will meditate on your wonderful works.^[b]

⁶ They tell of the power of your awesome works –

and I will proclaim your great deeds.

⁷ They celebrate your abundant goodness

and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate,

slow to anger and rich in love.

Opening Prayers

As we settle ourselves in to experience more of God's love let us just quieten our minds. Acknowledge all the thoughts that are racing through your head, listen to the sounds around you and focus on becoming still (Pause for 2 minutes of quiet).

We come into a place of change and challenge, a place where there is an abundance of love streaming from a living God. Let us offer to God all within us that stems from a lack of love; all the harsh words we have said this week, all the unhelpful thoughts, all that makes us feel unsettled and not at peace. The God that we worship is full of forgiveness for you, he understands you and today he says that you are forgiven and free. In freedom now we enter into worship.

May the God we worship allow us to feel all freedom, may we be filled with hope and may love be the connection we have with those around us. God's love is without limits and, it is this God we worship today so may we feel that love in all that is to come. Amen.

Bible reading

Matthew 20: 1-16

Reflection (Revd Karen Le Mouton)

The Psalm that was used for our call to worship talks of God's abundant goodness and righteousness, how God is gracious, compassionate and rich in love. I once experienced a practical demonstration of God's lavish love and I want you to share it with you. Imagine a can of squirty cream as God's love and you as the cup or mug. Picture that squirty cream filling you as the container, right to the very brim, then it starts to overflow and run down the sides and continues being poured out until you can see nothing but the cream covering every bit of you/the container. That is God's lavish love filling you to overflowing, giving you more love than you can imagine. It is this steadfast, compassionate, lavish love that Jesus uses the parable to illustrate.

Matthew's is the only gospel to include this well-known story about the social and economic issues people faced in 1st century Palestine. This is a parable where Jesus again uses imagery familiar to the audience –

the vineyard as a symbol for Israel, is common in the Hebrew scriptures; and God is sometimes understood as the landowner. The landowner recruits his workers according to the generous lavish love described in Psalm 145. This contrasts with the usual way of treating the hired hand at the time (and even now).

I must admit, I feel for those who have laboured in the hot sun and understand their reaction; but I also wondered why the landowner didn't pay them first so they could leave and then pay those who worked least last. Then there would not have been this resentment. However, if they'd had their pay and gone off happily, they would never have seen what unconditional generosity and true compassion looks like.

This parable is not about running a business, it is about what compassion looks like in practical terms. Jesus was suggesting that no worker's family should go hungry. Two thousand years ago this was relevant and is still pertinent today for our contemporary economics and 'zero-hour' contracts.

So, we might each ask, 'Where am I in this story?' Are we at risk of becoming the all-day labourers, grumbling about the 'latecomers' or 'incomers' intruding into our church/community/society/country? Or are we reflecting the owners' selfless generosity, welcoming, giving generously and abundantly to all, regardless of who they are to you?

God loves everyone equally; God's love is the same for the person who has faithfully served all their life; and it is the same for the person who discovers God's grace, mercy and forgiveness at the 11th hour. God's overwhelmingly, lavish, generous love, which is beyond our understanding, enables each person to be accepted and welcomed into God's family at whatever stage of their life and given equal opportunities. It is not for us to judge another's generosity, especially God's!

Prayers

God of love we come to you in prayer as we think about and pray for your people and your world.

You are the God who came down from heaven and showed the greatest gift of love in Jesus Christ, who gave his own life in order to offer salvation to all.

LET THERE BE LOVE SHARED AMONG US....

Let there be love shared among us,
Let there be love in our eyes;
May now Your love sweep this nation,
Cause us, O Lord, to arise.
Give us a fresh understanding
Of brotherly love that is real;
Let there be love shared among us,
Let there be love.

We pray for those in this world who have not experienced your love, may they be reached out to, embraced by, and receive your love in all its fullness.

LET THERE BE LOVE SHARED AMONG US....

We pray for all people who feel unloved and isolated, may they feel your loving arms around them, experience the warmth and love you give out so freely and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to love and appreciate themselves enabling a life to be lived in all its fullness.

LET THERE BE LOVE SHARED AMONG US....

We pray for those who think their love is real but is twisted by hatred and anger, resentment and jealousy, we pray for them to be released from the pain they are carrying and be filled by the Holy Spirit enabling a new way of loving following by your example.

LET THERE BE LOVE SHARED AMONG US....

We pray for all those who have lost loved ones, may they find peace in the knowledge of eternal life. May they turn to you for comfort in the knowledge that your love is immense and for each and every person. We ask all of this in the power of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.
Amen

We now share in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: *Our Father*

Blessing

Go in the knowledge that you are richly blessed by the love of God, Eternal God and Father, by whose power we are created and by whose love we are redeemed: guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we

may give ourselves to your service, and live this day in love to one another and to you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

27th September

Compiled by Carol Spencer and Jane Wild

Call to worship

Let us come to the Lord with a new song in our hearts. Let us praise His name and declare His wonders. Let us praise His name among all peoples for even creation praises our God and Creator.

Based on Psalm 96

Opening Chorus StF 24

Come, now is the time to worship,
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come, just as you are to worship.
Come just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue will confess you are God,
One day every knee shall bow.
Still the greatest treasure remains
For those who gladly choose you now.

Come, now is the time to worship.....

Brian Doerksen

Opening Prayer

O God our Father, we thank you that in Jesus Christ all may return to you and find our real identity. We thank you for the power of the Holy Spirit that brings us from ourselves to Christ. We rejoice in the privilege of belonging to the one Body of Christ and the fellowship of believers throughout the world.

By a Ghanaian Christian in Oceans of Prayer compiled by Maureen Edwards and Jan. S. Pickard

Bible readings Matthew 21: 28 – 32 and Philippians 2: 1 – 13

Reflection

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard. ’I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

I remember sitting in a church listening to Mathew 21 and feeling like I had been caught out. How did God know the times when I had said that I would do something and hadn't. Or the times when I felt guilty and done something even though I originally refused. It was a bit of a revelation to my teenage self that God had a handle on what I was thinking. How I experienced the world.

Later on, in life I was caught out again by this passage. Not by the way God understands us, but because it reflected the complexities of the motivations around why we do one thing or don't do another. Thanking this further, how we relate to people; why we stay in unhealthy relationships; why we do things that are out of character or just plain wrong; why we do things that are good but are uncomfortable about our actions because there is a degree of selfishness in them.

When I re read this passage to prepare this reflection the last verse about belief struck me. It is O.K. to change our minds and believe in God. To do that we have to recognize that things we have interpreted one way may not be the way things are. Just as was the challenge to the Pharisees. The God they found in the Temple and covenant was real and talking to them, their understanding had the potential to grow in relationship with God though Christ. So, has ours.

Then we read in Philippians of Christs example is of humility and love. The writer Paul says that he is brought Joy and encouragement by his fellow Christians who seek to love God, free from selfishness and conceit. He reminds then to see others as valuable. We are reminded to serve those around us who God loves.

As the Christian writer CS Lewis once said, it's 'not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less'. Although sometimes, there may be a fine line between putting someone else first and being a doormat – which doesn't make it easy!

To Serve in this context is not to do what you are told but to see the need and reach out. That too makes it difficult.



This is an image from the roots magazine which provides resources to facilitate worship. Where do you see yourself in this image? When do you find joy in helping others?

If the keyhole in this image represents 'key support' what does that look like in your church community?

How are you part of it?

If you see yourself as serving do you express that in terms of the love of God?

Prayers

How can we believe in you, God, when we have to live in uncertainty? How can we trust you when we can see the smoke rising from the volcano? Women worry for the future of their children, men anguish over the harvests that may not be. Children cling to their parents for fear of the dark. Where is your saving hand, O God? Where is your kindness and mercy? When hardship and fear abound, You are there in those who listen and take the strain. Sharing and hospitality, self-denial and benevolence are the signs of your presence.

These will always be with us when you are with us; these will always remain as long as your love remains. Where are you, God, in the times of our troubles? You are always with us in the good times and the bad. You are always with us.

Janice Clark

Today, good Lord, save us from being over-anxious about the world's pains and tragedies; about the future of the Church; about the immediate challenges of life; about the ultimate future of all things and all lives. Teach us to trust in Christ, who carries the sins of the whole world, who is the Head of the Church, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, today and every day. Amen

Richard G.

Hymn StF 448

Lord in the strength of grace,
With a glad heart and true,
Myself, my residue of days,
I consecrate to you.

Your ransomed servant, I
Restore to you your own
And, from this moment, live or die
To serve my God alone.
Charles Wesley

Blessing

Go forth now, in the faith which overcomes the world, in the hope which will not disappoint you, in the love that never fails. You are ambassadors of Christ and He is with you always. Grace, mercy and peace, from Father, son and Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and protect you all this day and for ever.

Ian Cowie