

Written service 20th February 2022

Call to worship - Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude. it is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Hymn 65StF Sing of the Lord's goodness

Prayers

Loving God. Still our hearts as we come to meet with you. Give us a real sense of your presence here with us in our own homes. Surround us with your love.

Almighty and majestic Creator on this early spring morning, we thank you for signs of new life. As days lengthen, snowdrops and crocuses bloom and birds sing. We look forward with joy to the promise of sun and warmth.

Dear Lord as we give grateful thanks for all our blessings, we acknowledge our own self centredness and pray for greater awareness of the needs of our planet

Loving God we thank you for the people we have been given in our lives. Help us to show the love of Jesus, in all our relationships. If we are careless in thought or speech or action and cause hurt to others help us to acknowledge our faults knowing that where there is love there will also be forgiveness.

We thank you most of all for the sacrifice of Jesus your son and our Saviour and we pray now in his name. The Lord's prayer

In our reading from the old testament we join Joseph as we come towards the emotional climax of his story. Thanks to the musical most people know the bones of the story of Joseph. A boy spoiled by his father in the face of his older brothers, he became so boastful about his dreams and how great he would become, that they decided to teach him a lesson – one that got out of hand, nearly became murder and ended up with him being sold as a slave. Bought by a good master with a corrupt wife, Joseph refused her seductive tactics and was thrown into gaol, when she lied about him. He languished there for some time, until his ability to interpret dreams bought him release and ultimately fame and fortune.

It is a story of epic size yet this morning just three verses sum up the end of a very long story encapsulating the moment when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

Gen 45: 3,11,15.

Joseph said to his brothers 'I am Joseph - Is my father still living? - but his brothers were not able to answer him for they were terrified at his presence.' (so he sends them back to invite his father to come with everyone and everything he has to Egypt) 'for I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come, otherwise you and your household and all you have, will be destituteand he kissed all his brothers and wept over them.

This scene involves more than the characters in today's reading and reflects outcomes from actions that happened in the time of, Joseph's great grandfather, Abraham his grandfather Isaac and Jacob his father, things that affected people's actions and their outcomes as the Bible says, right to the third and fourth generation.

Theft, lies, deceit, subterfuge, favouritism, nepotism, intrigue trickery - the right a man had to more than one wife and with her. rights to father children on her servant cause repercussions to be felt long afterwards. Bad parenting and continuing relationships that do not follow God's way lead to a dis-functional family, and what we might call skewed love, one that may seem quite modern in its relationships - yet Abraham Isaac and Jacob had all met with God and Jacob already has the title Israel - they knew how they should have behaved.

No doubt the brothers felt shame, but it is terror that the Bible mentions after all, they had planned first his death and then his enslavement. What thoughts we wonder flew through their minds as they faced the mightiest man in Egypt after Pharaoh himself.

Did Joseph as he matured and grew beyond slavery and into Pharaoh's graces,

look back on the youth he had been, understanding how his conviction that God had special plans for him, had grated on his brothers' nerves. Although he both benefitted from the skewed love of the past and was damaged by it, in the long run, he was able to rise above the bad memories and difficult times and to reach out to his brothers in love and forgiveness. His outpouring of emotional joy, his longing to see his father and the younger brother he hardly knew (although he was not above playing a trick over Benjamin) must have rubbed salt in their self-inflicted wounds of guilt and shame. Joseph's love for his family as he reunites with them is unconditional. The past is over and done with and Joseph has moved on, for Joseph has trusted God through thick and thin, believing that everything was working towards God's plan. And so Jacob and all his holdings 66 people in all came to Egypt with flocks goods and chattels and everything was fine for years. Yet when Jacob died, the brothers feared again for their lives because they could not believe in the sheer continuing unconditionality of Joseph's love and forgiveness - they expected revenge.

There is no revenge involved in the love Jesus has for this world and for each of us, yet although we pray 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' we often find it difficult to forgive in that unconditional way - particularly if there is 'history' involved through the actions of relatives or friends. On the

other hand, we may find being forgiven almost too much as the brothers did, as shame heaps coals of fire on our heads.

We will think more about this after we have sung the next hymn

Hymn 728 StF, 1343MP O God you search me and you know me

Luke 6 :27 -36

Remember our call to worship and the things St Paul said about love?

In our reading this morning, Jesus tells us about loving. 'It isn't hard he points out,

to love people who are close to us - our friends our relations, people who are good to us

or people who help us materially or physically in the expectation that we will help them in return. If we love friends and family, and give to them that is normal – if we give with an expectation of receiving in return, we have done nothing out of the ordinary!

But what, asks Jesus, about those people we'd rather not treat as friends or have dealings with – and what about the people who really annoy us, patronising us, scheming behind our backs, people we feel cannot be trusted in any way?

'Love your enemies' he says 'and do good to those who hate you - without expecting anything in return! So, what about those who steal from us, do the dirty on us, hurt us physically and spiritually? Turn the other cheek says Jesus, for his love is unconditional love and it embraces EVERYBODY.... enemies as well as friends!

That makes me wonder about Shamima Begum still held in Syria? Where is the unconditional love of Jesus applied in her case? Difficult I know, when we think of the senseless killings perpetrated by a perverted view of Islam and yes, we may point to the fact that others have turned against the country that has housed and educated them but judgement for such crimes belongs to God not us. Even if you have not dealt closely with terrorism, you may if you are parents yourselves mourn the girl that she was - as I mourn Shazad Tanweer the London bomber I taught in Holbeck. While I grieve, for all killed and injured by his bomb I grieve most deeply for the boy I knew – bright, hard-working and courteous corrupted by a skewed view of what god wants. I grieve too for his parents, caring, second generation, immigrants and his brother and sister also my pupils.

Love your enemies says Jesus. I can't think of anyone that I know hates me, or maybe I am just too obtuse to realise it. I have had so much love in my life and so little to forgive and I very seldom find people to whom I feel dislike let alone hatred. But each of you dear friends may feel differently. So many factors decide whether love or hatred prevail in any one life.

We know about Joseph and the many aspects, particularly of family life, that led to his long and difficult walk with God. The collusion of Jacob with his mother Rebekah, to steal his older brother's blessing and his subsequent fear and flight. The trickery that gave Jacob Leah, the sister he did not want in

marriage after seven years of toiling and then the extra seven years to win Joseph's mother, Jacob's beloved Rachel, which led to the favouritism shown, to Joseph and later Benjamin over and above the other sons. Yet Jacob too was used as part of God's plan, to lead his people - eventually - to the land promised to Abraham.

We are all sinners and come short of the glory of God, yet he loves us unconditionally and forgives us. He sent HIS beloved son to die for each one of us. Though we may be; disillusioned with human relationships, heart-broken at betrayal or rejection, he still calls us and uses us – and demands, that we in turn practice that unconditional love and forgiveness that Joseph showed. A year or so ago there was a popular idea going around 'Love means never saying you are sorry!' What nonsense! - there will always be times, when we must say sorry just as we will hope others will say sorry to us. Forgiveness? Yes, hurt is difficult to forgive whatever form it may take, but if we can believe that God has the whole matter in hand and sees the bigger view his love can help us overcome our hurt and allow us to forgive. Even if we feel that what has happened is beyond all reparation God will use it to mature our belief. Then, there is the matter of forgiving ourselves - the most difficult of the lot. Believe that God loves us and forgives us whatever we feel about ourselves. There will always be another chance, so go in love and go with God

Amen

Hymn 242StF, 1 MP A new commandment I give unto you

Intercessions.

Loving lord we see a world around us where love seems scarce.

Division, misunderstanding, threats cause instability and fear.

We pray this morning for a new understanding of the universality of God's love for his people and his planet of his longing for fairness equality and Justice.

We pray that those involved in decisions that could be world changing, may put right and reason before the desire for personal power.

We pray for our own country beset with problems at all levels. May your justice prevail.

There is hope that we are coming out of Pandemic Lord. Give us the grace to do what is necessary to keep others safe.

We pray for those who care for others in whatever way.

May their hands touch with Jesus' gentleness and their lips speak words of love and healing.

Be with us and all we love Lord guiding us in your way through the love of Jesus. In your name Amen

Hymn 615 StF Let love be real

Share the grace