

Worship at Home

25th October

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From Psalm 1

Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law, day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

Today we are called to think about what it is that the Lord asks of us. This picture of a tree beside a stream is very evocative to me of how we are encouraged and sustained when we root ourselves in God's love and laws. It reminds us that by living and delighting in his ways of love, we can, and will, flourish.

STF 40: Blessed be the name of the Lord

Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be the name of the Lord most High!
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be the name of the Lord most High!

*The Name of the Lord is a strong tower,
The righteous run into it, and they are saved.
The Name of the Lord is a strong tower,
The righteous run into it, and they are saved.*

Glory to the name of the Lord...

Holy is the name of the Lord...

Let us pray

O Lord, our ever faithful and gracious God,
As we take time to come into your presence, may we delight in knowing you are already beside us where we are. Bless us with open minds and hearts ready to receive your words, so we may find new delight in all your ways of justice and paths of peace.

Today we thank you for your law, which shows us your goodness, holiness and just intensions for us – yet it also reminds us of our struggles to live your way and our need of your grace and forgiveness.

So Lord, we come now to ask your forgiveness for the times when we have:

- not cared for your creation as we should
- not heeded your laws or followed your ways
- ignored the needs of those around us
- forgotten that it's you who faithfully provides all we need to flourish - wherever we are.

We bring these prayers of confession to you, trusting in your mercy and not in any goodness of our own. We give thanks from the depths of our souls that you have promised forgiveness to all who come to you in the name of our Lord Jesus – and we rejoice in the new life we can know, by grace, through him. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Read: Matthew 22 vs 34-46

The Sadducees and Pharisees set out to question Jesus by asking, "What is the greatest commandment?"

He answers them saying:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'.
This is the first and greatest commandment.
And the second is like it: **'Love your neighbour as yourself'.** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2 vs 1-8

Paul reminds the Thessalonians how he and his companions came to them from Philippi after being treated outrageously there, and preached the gospel

in spite of the opposition they encountered. He recalls how they came with humility and cared for them, because of the love they (Paul and Co.) had for them. This love meant sharing their whole lives with them.

Reflections on the readings

At home we have a group of fruit trees which are growing next to the stream that marks our boundary. Earlier in the year, when the base of each tree was underwater for several weeks (do you remember how it rained and rained as if it was the time of Noah) we wondered if they would survive. Later, as the fields around us turned brown we wondered if they would fruit – yet when it came to harvest time we found they were all heavy with apples. They had indeed yielded their fruit in season, unlike so many other trees we have heard about this year.

We have no certain knowledge of who wrote Psalm 1, which we call a 'wisdom Psalm'. In it we hear of the man (or woman of course) who delights in the law of the Lord. We are told that such people will flourish in their lives and that they, like the trees at the bottom of our garden, will bear fruit in season (i.e. at the appropriate and God-appointed time).

The Law of God, as given through Moses, was seen as central to the Jewish people's identity. What started as just ten commandments soon became so much more complicated, as many more rules were added.

Developing these laws was a way to define the Jews as a people and a way to show how God's ways were more merciful and just than those of other peoples. But there were soon so many rules it became necessary to ask which ones were the most important – and so we see how this might also be a natural question to ask Jesus.

In a reversal of the ways of men, who it seems had tried to write a rule for every occasion so creating a law that needed experts to remember and interpret it, Jesus picks out just two commands. These together he said, covered everything important in the whole law and both were centred around our relationships and of course, LOVE.

Jesus says that our focus should first (but not exclusively) be our love of God himself. This God-focused love he says, should be offered with all our heart, soul and mind. I wonder, is this where we start?

To love in such a complete way does take commitment, and yet that should not sit heavily on us. We need to remember we are called to love in response to the God we know in Jesus, who loved us first. In Deuteronomy where we first hear this command, it is preceded with some words that put this in perspective. Here we read:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6)

So even before the command to love comes another one, the command to hear. This then may make many of us ask, “What it is that we should hear?”

Hear that, *“The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”*

This statement is one to contemplate and then hopefully delight in, but I wonder, what does it mean to you? Do you see within it that God is supreme over all, unified and complete, and that there is no other like him? He is the one, and we should have no other God – we should not need any other God. He is ours and is all we need. No-one else has done all that he has, and no-one has ever shown us love and grace that can compare to his.

In contemplating who God is and all that he has done for us I hope you, like me, will find your love is nurtured and set alight. This love that’s kindled in us encompasses all we are. It includes all we think (mind), feel (heart), do (strength) and all we long for (soul). It is out of this love that we are able to truly love our neighbour as ourselves, as we see them with God’s eyes of love.

I wonder, what does it mean to you to love - and what or who is the focus of that love? Is your love truly focused as God’s commands suggest it should be?

As you answer this, please don’t be downhearted if you are struggling to reach the heights of all God’s law asks of us. As our earlier prayers reminded us, one of the reasons we have the law is to help us understand that we cannot be the people God intended without his help. It is in knowing him and trusting him our love is grown.

And so, we return to our trees beside the stream; trees able to flourish and bear fruit because they have access to water. Without the water they would die.

If we are to be like Paul, showing ourselves to be faithful disciples who bear much fruit, we must first set our roots where they will absorb God’s love, seeking out every opportunity to know him better. Let his love inspire us to

find fulfillment in sharing the love we’ve received from him with those around us, whoever they are.

This is what God asks of us; not to be perfect, but to be the best we can as we try to live his way, relying on him to help us, and finding delight in his presence with us, as he teaches us the true meaning of love and grace.

STF 615: Let love be real

*Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go:*

*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands
and space to grow.*

**Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are
weakness, give me your love in spite of all you know:**

As God loves us...

**Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other’s incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope
through dreams and disappointments,
give me your trust when all my failings show:**

As God loves us...

Michael Forster, © Kevin Mayhew

Intercessions

God of love, as we contemplate what it means for us to be loved by you, we thank you for the people who have shown us love and taught us about your love too. Yet we know that your love is not ours exclusively but that you love all the world, and so today we lift to you the world you came, in Jesus, to redeem. We pray for:

- **Your church** – that we may walk ever more closely in your paths of love and grace

- **The communities around us**, that your love may be recognised in every kind and generous deed.
- **Those who have been abused in the name of love**, praying that they may find the strength to become survivors and live alongside trustworthy people, so they may learn to trust again.
- **The places we hear about on the news** where we see distress, fear, conflict and hopelessness – and the people who are suffering today because of the greed of others (and us?)
- **The people we care for and those who care for us**. We remember the people on our prayer lists and all those we know of who need to know God’s peace, strength, healing and blessing.

Lord, we thank you that you hear all our prayers,
those we have shared and also the unspoken prayers
of our hearts – all brought to you, our loving merciful
God, in the mighty name of Jesus our Saviour. **Amen.**

STF 479: The King of love

**The King of love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never; I nothing lack
if I am His, and He is mine forever.**

**Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul He leadeth, and where the
verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feedeth.**

**Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love He sought me, and on His shoulder
gently laid, and home rejoicing brought me.**

**And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never: Good Shepherd,
may I sing Thy praise within Thy house for ever.**

Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877)

Blessing

God has called us to live under his grace and spread the good news of his love and justice to all. May we love His mercy, and act justly, as we walk humbly with our God.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon us and those we love, filling us always with his grace, his love and his peace. Amen