**Printed material for Sunday 3rd October 2021**

**Compiled by Revd. Pam Siddall (Buckden Methodist Church)**

**Call to Worship:** In1 Corinthians 13**,** St Paul says, “I will show you the most excellent way. --- Love is patient, love is kind. --- Love never fails. --- Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love.” As we draw nearer to the God of love in worship today, may his Spirit enlarge the response of love within our own hearts.

**Hymn**: StF 499; H&P 50 - Great God, your love has called us here

*Please take a moment of quiet to ponder that very moving picture in verse 3 of Christ ‘kneeling at our feet.’*

**Prayers of praise and thanks:**

Loving heavenly Lord, creator of all, we come in awe of your mighty power. **We worship and adore you.**

Loving Lord Jesus Christ, we come in awe of your humility and compassion. **We worship and adore you.**

Holy Spirit, Love Divine, we come in awe of your holy presence always with us. **We worship and adore you.**

Thank you for your all-embracing, comforting, nurturing, healing love for us and for all the world. **Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Share together Psalm 8 (STF 801; H&P 836)**

All-age thoughts: The other week my grandson asked me if I really believe in God. It wasn’t easy to put into simple words what God really means to me day by day. Think for a few moments, or talk together about what you think God is like. Our psalm calls God ‘glorious’, but what does that mean? Perhaps we’d be better with the simple description “God is love.” (1 John 4, 16) Think of the people you know love you (or have loved you while they were still alive.) How does it feel to know you are safe in somebody’s love? John’s gospel tells us that God loved the world so much that he showed that love by sending us his son, Jesus. As we sing our next hymn let’s be considering what Jesus shows us about God.

**Hymn**: StF 343 Jesus is the name we honour (or H&P 260; StF 353 Jesus is Lord)

In our set reading from the letter to the Hebrews, the writer tells us about the greatness of God made manifest in the person of Jesus.

**Reading: Hebrews chapter 1, verses 1-4** & 2, verses 5-12

**Hymn**: StF 317 (H&P 74) At the name of Jesus

In our next reading the greatness of Jesus is challenged by the doubting Pharisees. Note how Jesus’ response mentions human hardness of heart and in contrast, notice the loving welcome at the heart of his dealings with the children who are brought to him later. I think this reading is all about a call to more loving relationships.

**Reading: Mark 10, 2-16**

**Prayer of confession**

Father, the love you showed us in Jesus demonstrates the more excellent way to live but it also shines the clear light of conscience on our own standards of love. Too often, in the words of our first hymn, your image in us is “marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.” *(We take a time of quiet to consider those ways in which we may have failed to demonstrate Godly loving, or when our faith has been pharisaical.)*

Forgive us Lord and grant us a real re-filling of your spirit and your grace. Lift us up and set us on the path of love once more. AMEN

**Sermon**

My heart sank when I saw this passage set in today’s lectionary, dealing with the Pharisees challenge to Jesus on the subject of marriage and divorce. Our on-going conversations on the subject of Christian marriage resulting in the overwhelming approval by the Methodist Conference recently of a number of resolutions in the ‘God in Love Unites Us’ report have demonstrated what a ‘tricky, divisive and painful’ subject this can be. (*some quotes and ideas here from this week’s edition of* *the vine*)

In order to live out the ideal of being God’s inclusive, all-embracing church we are called to the principle of learning to live with contrary convictions. We are called to unity but not to uniformity. We are called to love and faithfulness both of God and with each other. Jesus affirms that his standards of love and faithfulness are not one ‘jot or tittle’ lower than the scripture and law of his day decreed. That ideal of faithful love remains for us all to aim for in our various circumstances. Moses only allowed divorce because he had to recognize and live with human frailty and ‘hardness of heart.’ Yet, as we see when Jesus welcomes little children whom others would turn away, he is ’indignant’ at ALL hard-hearted attitudes, and that includes those of the Pharisees who earlier found an excuse to confront and challenge him and those of the disciples who tried to drive the children and their parents away.

God’s intention from the beginning is for all of creation to be harmonious and whole and for human beings to live together in ‘communion’ or partnership. The gospel is less an instruction on marriage and divorce than it is a way to address the issue of our hard hearts, or human failings which stand in the way of God’s intention and divide us from each-other and from Him.

Jesus says, “make no mistake, my ideal is absolute faithfulness and love.” But then he turns to the bothersome, motley, needy crowd of parents and their noisy offspring and says, “Look, God loves all these innocent little ones. This is what his kingdom’s all about. It belongs to those who come running to him, not those who pontificate and judge.” Can you imagine him scooping up those little ones, giving them a welcoming hug and then placing his hand on each little head in blessing and affirmation? What a visual demonstration for his challengers of the true hallmarks of the Kingdom. That embrace is for you and me too, if we accept the kingdom of God like a child and then, ourselves, accept and bless the needy ‘children’ of this world.

**Hymn:** StF 526; H&P 552 Lord of all hopefulness

**Intercessions**

Lord, your love is divine; ours is only human, so we ask that in your great love for the world, you will gather up our praying today and use it for your healing purposes in the world.

We lift to you the Church worldwide as our little congregations locally that we may be channels of your peace and love in our communities. Bless and inspire our leaders and ministers at all levels but also help us to see our individual responsibility for worship, service and outreach.

We lift to you the needs of the world as we find them in recent news. Be it natural disasters or political earthquakes please guide world leaders and raise up those who will work for good at the heart of all governments.

We lift to you all who are suffering through sickness, poverty, fear, over-work, loneliness or any other kind of need. We take time to name to you those known personally to us and ask to show us where our own actions in your name might be part of the answer to our praying.

We offer you our own needs and ask you help us to know your closeness, assurance and comfort.

We remember in Christian faith and hope those who have died and those who grieve for them. May they find comfort in your embrace.

We ask these prayers in Jesus’ name. **Amen**

**Hymn:** StF 503; H&P 267 Love Divine

**Sending out: (StF 771)**

May the love of the Lord rest upon your soul.

May his love dwell in you throughout every day.

May his countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May his spirit be on you as you leave this place.