



ST JAMES AYR – SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 5 May 2024

Introduction



Welcome back to our Sunday Reflections, this week we will reflect on our connections to each other and to God through His love.

Please do consider sharing this document if it is safe for you to do so.

INTIMATIONS

5 May: coffee after church

11 May: rummage sale/coffee morning 10 am

18 May: Prayer for Peace and fundraiser for Ukraine from 11 am at St James

26 May: Pentecostal lunch

Call to worship

The apostle Paul says:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres: (1 Cor 13, 4-7)

.Hymn:

Childrens' Talk : love

Hymn:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

Loving God,

On all our life's journey you have accompanied us with your love, when we walked through darkness, you were there, when we walked into sunlight, free of burdens, you walked with us, you have loved the world so much you sent your only son to us to save us and to redeem us. And so we come to this place to praise you and to worship you together as our loving Father, knowing that we all belong to you.

Gracious Lord,

You have given your servant Moses the commandments that bring us together to this day, that connect us to you and to each other in love, because they were given to us so we can live well together. We give you thanks for your loving guidance.

You have sent your own son into this world, so we can live in him and he in us, so through him we come closer to you and to each other. He has revealed to us the greatness of your love through his life, through his death, through his resurrection. We give you thanks that you sent your son to us to show us your love.

You have sent your Holy Spirit into our hearts, as a gift that lets us persevere in love to you and to each other. Through your Spirit we are enabled to serve you and to serve each of our brothers and sisters. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Loving God,

You have commanded us to love each other as you loved us, to put others before ourselves, but there are times when we struggle, when we find it difficult to accept and love our neighbour. Forgive us when we do not fulfil your commandment.

You have called us to be your disciples, to follow your son in faith, love and hope, but there are times, when it seems that our faith is weak, when we ask questions, when we doubt. Help us to find our way to you through our questions and our doubt, we pray.

Gracious Lord

We know that we are fallible, that often we are not as you intended us to be but we also know that we are saved through your love and through your son's, and knowing this in our hearts we pray to you as Jesus has taught us to pray.

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 today our daily bread

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

and lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

Hymn:

READINGS

Psalm 98

Sing a new song to the LORD; he has done wonderful things! By his own power and holy strength he has won the victory. ²The LORD announced his victory; he made his saving power known to the nations. ³He kept his promise to the people of Israel with loyalty and constant love for them. All people everywhere have seen the victory of our God. ⁴Sing for joy to the LORD, all the earth; praise him with songs and shouts of joy! ⁵Sing praises to the LORD! Play music on the harps! ⁶Blow trumpets and horns, and shout for joy to the LORD, our king. ⁷Roar, sea, and every creature in you; sing, earth, and all who live on you! ⁸Clap your hands, you rivers; you hills, sing together with joy before the LORD, ⁹because he comes to rule the earth. He will rule the peoples of the world with justice and fairness.

1 John 5,1-11

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is a child of God; and whoever loves a father loves his child also. ²This is how we know that we love God's children: it is by loving God and obeying his commands. ³For our love for God means that we obey his commands. And his commands are not too hard for us, ⁴because every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith. ⁵Who can defeat the world? Only the person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶Jesus Christ is the one who came with the water of his baptism and the blood of his death. He came not only with the water, but with both the water and the blood. And the Spirit himself testifies that this is true, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷There are three witnesses: ⁸the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and all three give the same testimony. ⁹We believe human testimony; but God's testimony is much stronger, and he has given this testimony about his Son. ¹⁰So those who believe in the Son of God have this testimony in their own heart; but those who do not believe God, have made a liar of him, because they have not believed what God has said about his Son. ¹¹The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son.

REFLECTION

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit

Loving God,

You have made us as part of a community, we are connected to each other and connected to you, we cannot live without each other and we cannot live without you. We thank you that you have forged this bond between us and you, between us and your son, between us and our neighbour and as we come together to worship you and to hear your word we ask that you fill us with your Holy Spirit, so we feel that connection in our hearts and live in unity with you and with each other.

For this we ask in Jesus' name. AMEN

Last week the moderator of the Church of Scotland, or I should say the moderator of the General Assembly addressed the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood. That is nothing out of the ordinary. Faith leaders, including ministers of the Church of Scotland do that all the time and now and then it is the moderator's turn. All moderators choose a theme at the beginning of their office that is meant to lead them through the challenges and privileges of that year. The current moderator chose the South African phrase ubuntu and she shared with parliament why it is important to her. Apparently, the word is notoriously difficult to translate into English or into any Western language and yet the idea of ubuntu has made its way into Christian theology and belief, especially among African Christians. The South African Bishop Desmond Tutu renders the phrase as: "I participate, I share" and the moderator sums it up in one short sentence: "I am because you are" or "I am because we are". Ubuntu is about our humanity in relation to each other, it is about community, harmony and reconciliation. It is about connectedness, in essence it is about love.

The moderator gave one example for the connectedness of ubuntu, that stuck with me: When we engage in such a simple activity as to eat our breakfast cereals, there are hundreds of others who make that happen: farmers, who grow the wheat or the corn, factory workers who shape it into hoops and flakes, students who stack the supermarket shelves, to name just a few and so with this simple act of eating our breakfast we are connected to hundreds and thousands of people we have never met, but who have their own life, their own story, who are important for us and important to God. To feel that connectedness, to respect and to value the other and to recognise how dependent we are on them and they on us, that is ubuntu, that is love, or at least it is part of it.

And this connectedness, this love is also the theme of our New Testament reading and I dare say that it is the theme of our entire faith. “This is how we know that we love God's children: it is by loving God and obeying his commands” the author of the letter we are talking about today, explains to his congregation. The letters of John are not the same as the gospel of John, but they are related, the author follows in the evangelist’s footsteps and so it is not surprising that the theme of connectedness, the theme of the vine and the branches that we talked about last week, is taken up once again in today’s reading. But the author of the letter goes one step further: for him this connectedness to God and to each other is the very definition of love, of God’s love, Jesus love to us and our love to him and to each other.

In practice our love for God means two things: The first is to obey his commandments, because these commandment enable us to have a positive relationship with God and with one another, these commandments enable us to live well together and the second is to trust in and bear witness to what we believe to be true: That Jesus is our Messiah, our Christ and that we gain eternal life through him. Love and eternal life are therefore inextricably linked: God loved us so much, he gave his only son, so that we may live. Jesus loved us so much that he walked with us through joy and pain and did not recoil

from his own horrific death for us. Jesus loved and trusted God so much, that he gave his life and death into his hands, trusting that he will be raised to eternal life.

Where does that leave us? It leaves us with love and with faith, it leaves us connected: “We believe human testimony; but God's testimony is much stronger, and he has given this testimony about his Son.¹⁰ So those who believe in the Son of God have this testimony in their own heart”, our reading says. And so our faith, the trust in his testimony through the son is what connects us to God. A simple historical example might illustrate what that means: On 17 April 1521 Martin Luther was cited by the pope and by emperor Charles V to the city of Worms to publicly and in the face of everyone who was important at the time, including the emperor himself recant his protestant beliefs about good works and eternal life. Reportedly he said: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither safe for us nor open to us. Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God”, that makes him a troublemaker, that makes him a pain in the neck for those who wielded power in the state and in the church. As far as the pope and his bishops were concerned that makes him a heretic. It also made him a witness to the gospel, to what he believed in; and he believed himself to be connected to God through the word and through his conscience. Luther passionately believed that eternal life cannot be earned or bought, as the official church of his time would make people believe, but that it is given to us by God's grace and that echoes our scripture reading today when it says: “The testimony is this: God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son”.

Ubuntu, connectedness, for the psalmist in our Old testament reading that does not only encompass God, Jesus and humanity, that extends to the whole of God's creation. Yes, God is forever connected to his people, because he chooses to be. He seeks out a relationship to us and makes his love known. Or as the psalmist in our reading puts it: “he made his saving power known to the nations.³ He kept his promise to the people of Israel with loyalty and

constant love for them” and that for the psalmist is a reason for joy and celebration, that is a reason to praise God with horns and trumpets, that is a reason to sing a new song to the Lord. God is faithful to us and we to him. That is connection, that is love.

But the psalmist goes further than that, he includes God’s whole creation in the praise: “Roar, sea, and every creature in you; sing, earth, and all who live on you! ⁸Clap your hands, you rivers; you hills, sing together with joy before the LORD,⁹ because he comes to rule the earth”, he sings. Stands to reason that there is a connection, that there is love between God and his world, between God and rivers, hills and trees, after all he made them all. And that, too, is a reason for praise and joy. That connects us to all of God’s creation as we join in with the praise, with the song, with the joy.

We started the sermon with the African phrase “ubuntu”, I am because you are” or “I am because we are” and we have explored many facets: the spiritual side and the promise of eternal life, the interpersonal side, our connectedness and love to each other, friend or stranger and the connection to God’s creation. It all belongs together, is part of the whole. I would like to close the sermon in the same way that the moderator did, has she told the Parliament: “I am, because you are” – live that truth. AMEN

Hymn:

INTERCESSION

Loving God,

You have given us responsibility and purpose when you gave us the highest commandment of all, to love our brothers and sisters as your son loved us, you have given us the ability to love and to care and in gratitude for these your gifts we pray for all those who experience hatred and not love, neglect and not care, exploitation and not responsibility and we entrust them and ourselves into your hands.

Once again we lift up to you the innocent victims of war and violence in Israel and Gaza, in Ukraine, in Eritrea, Yemen and Sudan and everywhere where peace seems a distant hope. We pray for orphaned children. For parents and grandparents who mourn for those gone too young, we pray for the civilians in cities and villages and for soldiers on the frontlines. May they be able to live in peace soon.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

As many battle painful and dangerous diseases and injuries we pray for scientists, doctors and nurses who work tirelessly to help us with modern medicine and new treatments, we pray for the NHS who continue to do their best in difficult circumstances. May they find courage and strength to do the work we all benefit from.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers

As the country and government of Scotland faces new uncertainties and worries, as a new leader will come to Holyrood we pray for politicians of all parties on a local and national level, who must make decisions and take on responsibilities that affect us all, May you fill them with wisdom, responsibility and compassion as they lead Scotland into the future.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers

We will always pray for everyone in our congregation and in our community, we pray for those who are in hospital or recovering at home, we pray for all who care for someone they love, we pray for friends and families and strangers alike. May we see your face in all of them.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers

For all this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

We prepare for the dedication of the offering

Dedication

Loving God,

You have called us into your service and in doing so you have made us your own. This is a privilege and an obligation for us and as we come to your table with our offering we dedicate ourselves to you to serve you with our time, talent and money, and we ask that you accept these offerings as a sign of our love for you and for each other and add your blessings to it.

For this we pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Hymn:

Benediction

And the God of love guard you and guide you in this coming week.
And the almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all,
now and forevermore. AMEN

