**Morning Praise Sunday 31st October 2021**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

### Bible Readings Deuteronomy 6: 1 - 9 Mark 12: 28 - 34

**Reflection from John**

In our Gospel reading, we see a scribe, a teacher of the law, who asks Jesus this question:

*“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*

Jesus answers him:

“The most important one, is this:

‘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 mind and with all your strength.

The second is this:

‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no commandment greater than these.”

# 1 Love God Love People

If we think about it, human life is all about relationships, which begin at birth and ends only when we die.

This is so because that is how God created us - to be in relationship with Him and with one another.

Some of these relationships are those between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, relatives, friends, neighbours, classmates, teachers and students, employers and employees, customers, and vendors so on and so forth.

Instead of focusing on just one relationship, I would like to share some fundamentals based on the Bible that would be applicable to every relationship.

Relationships are God-ordained

Relationships are as old as creation itself and began when God created Adam and Eve.

God made them husband and wife and then blessed them with children.

Adam and Eve had this unique privilege of communing with God, and with each other.

The Serpent in a subtle way entered this beautiful relationship and messed it up big time.

When sin entered, not only did it tarnish man’s relationship with God, but it also marred the relationship between people.

God gave the guidelines

In this fallen state, as people grew and multiplied, the problems in relationships among people also increase greatly.

This eventually became an enormous challenge for Moses, who led the people of Israel across the wilderness for forty years.

The issues that the people faced were numerous, and it became impossible for Moses or the leaders to handle them.

It was at this point that God called Moses and handed him laws to help guide the people.

These laws were broadly categorized into three main sections:

* Ceremonial laws,
* Civil laws, and Moral laws, which included the Ten Commandments.

It was the love of God that was operational behind these laws, to enable people to live in love and harmony.

Sadly, over a period, the people missed the point and got so engrossed in the nitty-gritty, that they forgot the true purpose of these laws.

The Greatest Commandments

However, when Jesus came down to earth, He established the New Covenant and took these laws to a much higher level.

To the Pharisees who conspired against Him, and wanted to trap Him, Jesus summed up the entire law with this most confounding reply.

Here’s the question that Jesus was asked by a lawyer among them, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Listen again to Jesus’ astounding reply as found in Matthew’s Gospel:

*‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’*

This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important:

*‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’*

The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

The fundamentals for strong relationships

Jesus was establishing two fundamental truths by His reply.

The first one is the fact that as those created in the image of God, our relationship with God must be the foundation on which all other relationships are built.

This relationship with God is a love-relationship, wherein we love God with our whole being.

The second part of this commandment is that we have a responsibility to love others the way we love ourselves.

If we were to say it simply, these are two sides of the same coin.

Oftentimes, we try to set right earthly relationships, not realizing that if we don’t have the right love relationship with God, it just **won’t** work.

This can be a little tricky because there are those who are content with having the right relationship with God but care nothing for others.

So also, there is another group who are keen to love others and don’t care much about their relationship with God.

The first one will make us a recluse, while the second alone will simply make us a do-gooder.

Loving God means to obey His commandments

When we love God the way we should, we will also keep His commandments.

Jesus said it so aptly in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

To obey God’s commandments means we will walk as God desires for us to and will therefore reflect His attributes in all our relationships.

We, as children of God, have also been given the Holy Spirit of God to live inside of us.

If this is so, then the fruits of the Spirit, as mentioned in Galatians, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; will be evident in our lives.

Share God’s love with others

Once we love God the way we should, the next step is for us to extend this love that we have received from Him to those around us.

This love that we are to share with others should be as profound as the love we have for ourselves.

This is not a love that puts us down, but one that respects and treats others the way we would like to be treated.

God’s love should be evident in our relationships

John explains this so well in his first letter:

“We love Him because He first loved us.

If someone says,

“I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

There is a beautiful process explained in the above-mentioned verses.

God loved us first and He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten son Jesus to die on our behalf.

We love God because He loved us first.

We love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and we also extend this love to everyone around us.

It’s a simple logic that one cannot claim to love God and hate his brother or sister.

The reason for this is that the only way our love for God can be shown tangibly is when we demonstrate that same love to those around us.

Moreover, this is God’s clear command that those who love God have the obligation to love those around us too.

Let’s establish this fact firmly in our minds, that if we try to love others with our own efforts or in our own strength, it most certainly will prove futile.

On the other hand, when we love God and allow Him to fill our hearts with His Divine Love, loving others would become easy and uncomplicated.

Every day, may we pray and ask God to fill our hearts with His Divine Love - one that is pure, intentional, unconditional, and sacrificial; a love that teaches us to love others the exact way we love ourselves.

Enjoy your day loving God and loving others.

**Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession led by Philip**

Lord we come to you now to ask for your involvement in our lives and in the affairs of the world.

We pray for the International Climate change conference in Glasgow next week. We ask that the leaders of nations and their representatives will work constructively to agree solutions to the climate issues and that they will all look beyond their own domestic issues.

We pray that the interests of the poorer countries (potentially those that might suffer most from the effects of global warming) will be represented fully; not just the political muscle of the rich.

 As in The Lord’s prayer, we pray for Your Kingdom come – we pray for social justice, for compassion. We worry about the anger we see in our politics, the language of confrontation, not understanding. We pray that we might care for one another, loving one another as commanded, as neighbours, as countries.

We pray that we might love the Lord our God and that we might seek to live our lives as you might wish; Kingdom Living. Help us to grow in our faith, to increase our understanding of God.

Help us to adopt a pattern of prayer and bible study, that we might deepen our faith and become the people you would want us to be; that we would want to be.

We pray for all those who are sick or in need of care and comfort. Lord be with them and those who care for them.

We continue to pray for this church as we continue our discussions with the Diocese and as we seek the right person to lead us in the future. Help us to remain positive Lord and to trust that you are in control of all things. There have been vacancies before; there will be vacancies again. Whatever decisions are made as to how matters progress, Lord we put our faith & trust in you that you will help all to reach an appropriate solution and that you will touch the heart of the right person who will themselves be seeking your guidance for their future role.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**