

Sunday 30 June 2024 HC 2.1 (Sung responses)

Introduction

Hymn – TIS 559 A new heart, Lord, create in me

**A new heart, Lord, create in me,
a heart from sin and guilt set free:
O close the gate and guard the door,
that sin may enter in no more.**

**To you my soul I open wide;
come, Jesus, and in me abide,
and from the temple of my heart
make all unrighteousness depart.**

**O let your Holy Spirit's light
with all your heavenly radiance bright,
flow through my spirit like a flood,
eternal source of every good.**

**Thus to my cleansed and contrite heart
your heavenly riches, Lord, impart,
so that your wisdom, truth and grace
may make my heart a fruitful place.**

**Then I will tell in grateful song
the praises that to you belong;
my joy will be, my whole life through,
to consecrate myself to you.**

The Grace

**of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you.
And also with you.**

'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Lord have mercy on us, and write your law in our hearts by your Holy Spirit.

Lord, Have mercy x3

Christ, have mercy x3

Lord, have mercy x3

The Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth

Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father

Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of God the Father: receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the most high, Jesus Christ,
with the holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father, Amen**

Sentence of the Day

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to suffer death upon a cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy: grant us so to die daily to sin that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Micah 6:6-8

⁶With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 34

1 I will extol the LORD at all times:
his praise will always be on my lips.
2 I will glory in the LORD:
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
3 Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.
4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.
5 Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.
6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.
7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.
8 Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.
9 Fear the LORD, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.

10 The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

11 Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

12 Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,

13 keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies.

14 Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

Ephesians 5:1-7, 21-33

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." . This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

John 15:9-17

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

This is the gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Sermon - Ephesians 5: Walk in Love
Question Time

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Prayers of the People

Let us pray for the world and the church

Response: Christ Jesus, intercede for us, and in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Scripture Sentence

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive your trespasses. Mark 11:25

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

The Spirit of truth comes to convict us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. Let us open our hearts and confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Agnus Dei

Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.

Jesus, Redeemer of the world, grant us your peace.

Greeting of Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**
The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn – TIS 607 – Make me a channel of your peace

Make me a channel of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your healing power,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

Chorus

O, Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy. Chorus

Make me a channel of your peace:
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving to all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life. Chorus

Thanksgiving for Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have gifts to share. Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.
Blessed be God for ever.

The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

All glory and honour be yours always and everywhere, mighty Creator, everliving God.

We give you thanks and praise for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who by the power of your Spirit was born of Mary and lived as one of us. By his death on the cross, he offered the one true sacrifice for sin, and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that by your Word and Holy Spirit, we who eat and drink them may be partakers of Christ's body and blood.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate,

with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom, and in whom, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Holy Communion

As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread: so may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.

The gifts of God for the people of God

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord. Grape juice is available.

Please come to the Communion Rail if you are able, observing appropriate social distancing.

After Communion

Gracious God, we thank you that in this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love. Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and help us to grow in love and obedience that we may serve you in the world and finally be brought to that table where all your saints feast with you for ever.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen

Notices

Hymn – TIS 425 Come, Spirit blest, our hearts inspire

**Come, Spirit blest, our hearts inspire,
let us your influence prove, source of the old prophetic fire,
the fount of life and love.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, moved by you
the prophets wrote and spoke; unlock the truth, yourself the key,
unseal the sacred book.**

**Expand your wings, celestial dove,
brood o'er our nature's night; on our disordered spirits move,
and let there now be light.**

**God, through himself, we then shall know,
if you within us shine, and sound, with all your saints below,
the depths of love divine.**

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen**

Dismissal

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

Sermon - Walk in the way of love.

Last week, in Ephesians 4, we talked about living a life worthy of the gospel you have received. This week, in chapter 5, Paul takes it further. He talks about walking in the way of love. You will remember that there were 32 different do and don'ts in chapter 4 - commandments that Paul gave, but I said that it was not only important keep the specific commandments, it was also important to understand why Paul gave those commandments. Last week I argued that those commandments were to help us reflect the gospel we have received. The individual commandments were important, but reflecting the gospel in everything we do is more important. Our whole lives should reflect the gospel, should reflect the way God has saved us.

This week, Paul is giving a different, but closely related, perspective on the way we should live. This week he gives us commandments about walking in love. Paul says we are to follow God's example, as dearly loved children² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us. We are to walk in the way of love because Christ loved us first. Also, John's first letter tells us that God is love, so walking in love is the same as living a life worthy of the way God has called us, as we were told last week.

In this week's chapter, Paul focuses on two aspects of walking in the way of love. First he talks about holiness, and then about our family lives.

So, first of all - what is holiness?

Can anyone remember the story of my holy tablecloth? Back in November last year I preached on the fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, which was also about holiness. I mentioned that when I shared a flat before I was married I had this tablecloth that would only come out when my mum visited. The rest of the time we didn't use a tablecloth. That table cloth was set apart, or holy, to my mum. Being set apart, or reserved for, is the idea behind holiness. When the Bible talks about holiness, it is talking about being set apart for God. For example, the first fruits, or the very best, of each year's crop were holy to God. They were reserved for God. They had to be the very best, and they couldn't be defiled by contact with less worthy crops, or with anything ritually unclean. Similarly, we are to be holy, set apart, for God, just as Jesus was a holy fragrant offering and sacrifice, set apart for God, given up for us.

Holiness is about being set apart for God, but that doesn't mean hiding your faith in a cupboard like my tablecloth and only bringing it out when someone important comes - even if I feel that is how some people treat their Christian lives. If anything, the answer is the complete opposite to that. We should live lives of devotion to God, and live it out in the public and private spheres.

In our devotion to God, both publicly and privately, we should seek to avoid everything that does not honour him and not not prepare us for the perfect, restored world to come. We shouldn't be defiled with anything that would make us unacceptable to God. We must avoid every sin. Paul specifically says there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking. These are unhelpful in themselves, but more specifically because they get in the way of our relationships with other people and with God.

Immorality, impurity, obscenity and greed are sins that defile the closest relationships that God has created for humans, the very first relationship, between Adam and Eve as husband and wife, before they were parents, before they had brothers or sisters before there was anyone else for them to be friends with. The Bible tells us Adam and his wife become one flesh, they were both naked, and they felt no shame. Genesis 2:24-25. Immorality, impurity, obscenity and greed spoil these relationships.

As I have said many times previously, relationships are important to God. God has existed for all eternity as relationship - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He created the world for relationship: the tri-fold relationship between and within God, creation and human kind. Anything we do that works against these relationships dishonours God, and has no part in the holy lives we should lead.

If only we were truly dedicated to God and his perfect ways, then we would truly and appreciate and enjoy his good gifts within their appropriate contexts - companionship within friendships, sexual intimacy within marriage, pleasures to the eyes, ears, taste buds in God's wonderful creation, and even fulfilment in useful work.

It is only when we get greedy, when we want more than what the all wise creator of the entire universe knows is good for us that we exploit our relationships with each other and creation, and spoil our relationship with God.

In these relationships, Paul tells us to use our wisdom in walking in the light. We need to carefully live not as unwise but as wise. This means we find opportunities to be light, but also to avoid things that impair our wisdom. That is why Paul tells us to not get drunk on wine. This is the danger of alcohol - not that it is wrong in itself, but drinking too much takes away our wisdom. Under its influence, we say and do things that harm our relationships with other people and God, and we don't look for the opportunities that build them up. I know some people completely forswear alcohol for this reason, which is not a bad thing, but other, equally holy people still drink, but are wise enough to know when they have had enough, and avoid unwise behaviour that tears down relationships.

In anycase, it is always wise to instead be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. To sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. These things always build up Christians relationships, and particularly your relationship with God, which should always be your priority.

The second aspect of walking in the light that Paul talks about is family life, particularly between marriage partners.

Before I move into the topic, I want to acknowledge that marriage relationships are complex. No doubt there are people here who have been in failed marriages, and maybe some who are struggling in the marriage they are in now. I want to acknowledge that I feel for your struggles. If you are struggling, or there are unresolved issues from a previous marriage, feel free to talk to me privately about it later so I can keep you in my prayers, and support you in other ways in your struggle.

Getting back to the passage, I know it is contentious. Paul's commandment to submit to each other, and particularly for wives to submit to their husbands. I know it is common to feel that partners are not worthy of your submission. Many husbands in particular do not appear to be wise or loving in the way they treat their wives, and wives are quite right to question the appropriateness or even the wisdom in submitting to their husbands in everything.

It is important, again with this commandment to understand the reason that Paul gives the command - read again verse 21: Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The point of the commandment is reverence for Christ.

At the very least, this gives the Christian wife permission to query where submission to her husband's requests really would show reverence for Christ. This is also true for a Christian husband if his wife wants things that don't appear to reverence Christ - whether it be in their marriage relationship, or their family, and especially if they have children.

Just as it would be right to question whether a leader in the church is really reverencing God in what they are saying when it appears that people may be harmed in some way, so it is right for marriage partners to question their motives, and even refuse to submit, if what is being asked appears to harm anyone or the relationship.

Paul also says ²⁵ Husbands are to love our wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. I don't think there is a particular reason he doesn't give wives the same commandment, and that not to do so was probably just a cultural matter of the time, and it was just assumed they do, or perhaps that husbands didn't see their wives' love as particularly important. All I can say is that in our culture, it is very important that both husbands and wives try to love each other, and to demonstrate that love as much as they can. For Christians in particular, this brings honour to God.

This chapter started with Paul calling Christians to walk in the light, and here, Paul is telling us the best help that we can have in walking in the light is the people we are in relationship with - our husbands, our wives, our families, and even our church families. We can all help each other walk in holiness in the light, to help each other be holy, cleansed by the washing through the word, that in the last days we might all be presented to Christ as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

This is the love we are to show, in our human families and in Christ's body, the church. Paul says this is what he is really talking about, he says in verse 32 that This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. Then he gives the big but: But he says, each husband also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

In conclusion, today, Paul has told us to walk in the way of love, following God's example, as dearly loved children just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Holy walking in the light, with wisdom, really brings reverence to God, particularly in our families, both human and church. As I have discussed, this isn't easy, particularly within some marriages, and we need to walk in wisdom, not just with simple submission to sometimes ungracious partners, but must consider how we can best reverence Christ, in every situation.