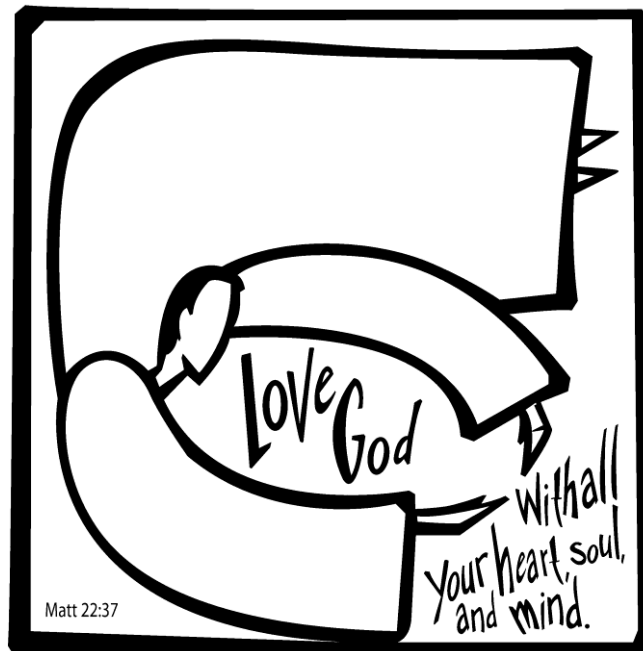


TAMWORTH CITY UNITING CHURCH
PENTECOST 21~ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25TH



Acknowledgement of Country

As you enter this time of worship, please acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Gamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land, and pay respect to their elders – past and present.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The joy of the Lord be with you all.
And also with you.

We are here because Christ has called us.
We assemble in response to His word.

Let us prepare to rise above our changing moods and various concerns, into the loving discipline of praise and worship.
With God's help, we will do so.

Give to God the best that you can!
We offer Him heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

PRAYER (based on Psalm 90:1-3)

Lord, you have been our shelter and security from generation to generation. You breathed creation into being, giving shape to mountains and form to the world. From everlasting to everlasting you are God whose grace enriches our lives and gives meaning and purpose to everything we do. Help us to worship the love that is boundless, endless, divine, so that we may, by your power, grow in that love and, by your grace, become part of your kingdom of love in this world and to eternity. Through Jesus Christ the expression of your love to us. **Amen.**

HYMN TIS 156 (Morning has broken)

1. Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing
praise for the morning,
Praise for them, springing
fresh from the word.
2. Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung from completeness
where his feet pass.
3. Mine is the sunlight;
mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play.
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's recreation
of the new day.

*Eleanor Farjeon 1881-1965
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PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Let us bring to God our prayers of confession:
O God, you call us to live fair and just lives. We do not always do that.
Forgive us, God, when we do not measure up.

You ask us to be concerned about the poor and the homeless, to speak
up for those who have no voice, to defend the rights of the powerless. We do not
always do that.
Forgive us, God, when we do not measure up.

Sometimes when we hear modern-day prophets calling us to change our ways, we
treat them as the people treated your prophets of long ago: we try to discredit
their words.
Forgive us, God, when we do not measure up.

You ask us to see everyone as our neighbour, to love them as we love ourselves. It's
hard. Sometimes we don't love ourselves, and sometimes we don't love others.
Forgive us, God, when we do not measure up.

(Silent confession)

Merciful God, forgive our weaknesses and strengthen us with your Spirit to love you
with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbour as we love
ourselves. Help us to know the peace of your forgiving love. In Jesus' name, we
pray.
Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Let us hear from Scripture the assurance of God's pardon:

'This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.' By the love of God in Christ Jesus let us know and rejoice that our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

WELCOME – NOTICES - INTRODUCTION

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND ADORATION

Eternal God, we worship you with hearts full of praise and adoration. You existed before all else and yet, because you are a God of love, you are with us now in Jesus Christ and through the power of your Spirit. Our minds find it difficult to grasp the extent of such love and such grace. You, who created this world with its diverse and colourful landscapes, have shown how, in Jesus, you care even for the landscapes of our hearts, our souls and our minds. Gifted with his life, our lives flourish and grow in ways undreamed of by the psalmist, and fear of withering and dying has been taken away. May our worship, our witness and the service of our lives reveal the extent of our gratitude for these blessings so lovingly bestowed upon us. This we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

READINGS

Psalm 90: 1-6, 13-17

God's Eternity and Human Frailty

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You turn us back to dust,
and say, "Turn back, you mortals."
- ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.
- ⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
- ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
- ¹³ Turn, O Lord! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.
- ¹⁶ Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.

¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

Matthew 22: 34-46

The Greatest Commandment

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Question about David's Son

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

SERMON

“THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT”

Some 15 years ago, I saw an interview with Archbishop Carnley, then Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia. He was asked about his concept of God, and I waited for some complex theological statement from this PHD from Cambridge; but his answer was simply, ‘God is love.’ Apart from anything else, I feel that he was saying that Christianity is not, and never was intended to be, a complex philosophy; rather is it a declaration of the truth that, behind the whole of life is ultimately the power of creative, enduring love, and we all have the chance to be recipients of that love and to grow in the life it promises.

It is tragic that often, over the ages, Christians have not seen this as the central point of their religion and, indeed, some do not see it today. They have emphasised the righteousness of God and consequently have used this to judge and condemn certain behaviour which they see as evil. A lot of what such people say cannot be denied! We humans are flawed, prey to weakness and sin, and as such deserve to come under God's judgement. But this is not what human beings need to have thrown at them by the Church! There is another message for us to realise and to proclaim to all humankind, one of love and hope, and it is contained in today's Gospel reading.

Matthew describes Jesus in Jerusalem in the last week of His earthly life. He spent much of His time at the Temple, speaking to the crowds there, telling parables

which contained strong criticism of the religious leaders, their teachings but especially their actions, how they were preventing their people from truly knowing and relating to God, their heavenly Father. Matthew says: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they realised that He was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded Him as a prophet." Tensions ran high in the crowded city at this time of the Passover, and the religious leaders did not want this itinerant country preacher from Galilee causing trouble. And so they tried to discredit Him by asking Him questions, hoping to trick Him into poor or false answers. After Jesus more than satisfactorily answered several questions, one of the Pharisees came up with another: "Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?" Perhaps they hoped that Jesus would slip up by picking one commandment and thereby belittle the importance of the others - after all, there were 613 statutes that He could choose from! But Jesus did not select any of the ones they would have expected - not even one of the Ten Commandments! No, He chose words from Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Then He said: "A second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.", quoting from Leviticus.

And so, a question, apparently intended to be destructive, resulted in the most positive of answers. As Jesus said, "All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.", indicating that what undergirded all the Law, giving meaning to it, was "love". This still is true for us today, as individuals and as the Church. These two commandments were not just a good answer to a difficult question, to be left at that, great theories but useless in the real world; No, they go right to the core of how we relate to God and to other people!

The first commandment is that we shall love God sincerely and unreservedly. This is to be the cornerstone of our Christian life! But how can we - human as we are - render such love to our heavenly Father? Well, of ourselves we cannot, but, that love is given to us by God Himself as we open ourselves to Him! The Bible assures us that God is love, and the good news is that we can know God and so we can experience His love, not because we are entitled or worthy to do so, but rather because God makes Himself known to us, again and again in so many ways and at so many times in our lives, and He does this because He loves each one of us! As Dieter Uchtdorf says: "Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely. ... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken." It is this love of God, freely offered to us, that invites us to accept it and return it in all of our life. This is how we are able to carry out the greatest commandment - as 1st John says: "We love because He first loved us." And so, it is that today, we turn to Jesus, God in human form, as the One to know in our daily lives, the One whom to know is to love. Jesus promised: "If you know me, you will know my Father also." Growing to know Jesus in our life, we realise more and more God's love for us, and we are enabled to open ourselves to that love so that it spreads through all aspects of our lives - and we can not only return it in gratitude to Him but show it in our actions to others.

We are called to love God "with all our heart" - with all our feelings. Our culture, including our religion, tends to frown on extravagant expressions of emotion. Yet we are emotional creatures - our feelings lie at the "heart" of our actions and

relationships and determine their degree of sincerity. Jesus gave Himself to life unreservedly, feeling pleasure in the company of others including children, knowing sorrow, disappointment, pain, always concerned about the situation and needs of others and always committed to His mission of revealing a loving God. Truly loving anyone or anything in this world involves heartfelt feelings, and this is manifestly so in our relationship with Jesus: joy, hope, confidence, humility, awe, reverence, doubt, even anger - the whole gamut of emotions experienced in a lifetime connection with the One who grows ever closer to us as we journey with Him!

But emotion alone is not enough! God gave us minds as surely as he gave us hearts. On the one hand, reasoned thinking can be vital in curbing religious emotional extremes that have led at times to the worst of human behaviour. On the other hand, widening our knowledge in open, honest inquiry and hard work, in fields religious and secular, can lead us to enjoy the adventure of learning new things in company with Jesus the "Teacher", a term by which He was frequently described in the Gospels. No, the mind was not given to us by God to be hostile to Him, but rather to see clearly, and appreciate, evidence of His sovereignty and providence towards us!

Jesus also said, "Love God with all your soul." This means that we love God with our will. Without willpower we'd all be at the mercy of our emotions and intellects, becoming mental rationalizers or emotional jellyfish. The will is the backbone of the Christian faith. It is the will that gives us the courage and the strength to continue to hold on to our faith, despite opposition, to seek God's presence in all things, even at the most difficult of times - and to serve Him, come what may. Our relationship with God is a very personal one in which our identity is established as one of God's children, and as a result we persevere in our resolve to hand all our life, right to our very soul, to Him, so that our will, in all things, becomes His will.

There is another way to love God, one that comes after the first commandment. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." In Luke, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, which explains that our neighbour is anyone who needs our help, regardless of differences. In a bitterly cold winter in Birmingham, Alabama, a woman was walking down the main street, when she saw a small boy. He was poorly clothed, barefooted, and standing over a heater vent in the pavement, trying to keep warm, with a bundle of newspapers that he was endeavouring to sell to passers-by. The woman said to the boy, "Son, where are your shoes and socks?" "Lady," he said, "I ain't got none." She took him to a nearby department store and bought him a pair of thick socks and a pair of heavy shoes. On leaving, the lad asked, "Lady, are you God?" "No, son," she said, "I'm not God. But I am one of his children." He replied, "Well, I knowed you must be some kin to him." It is true that love shown to others is a mark of our relationship with God.

When Jesus talked about loving God and loving neighbour, He wasn't saying anything new to the religious leaders of His day - after all, they were steeped in the law - but the words had become tabulated on scrolls rather than written on their hearts. Jesus was trying to prise the words loose from their legal bindings so that they might be realised in people's lives. Perhaps we need to have the words prised loose from the way that today's society views personal value and worth and be reminded that the worth of someone, including ourselves, is not measured by status, wealth, attractiveness, colour or sporting prowess; our worth is that we are loved by God and we are all made in His image. Each one of us! Equally!

Our love, like God's, should not be selective. Loving family and good friends may be easy, but, "If you love those who love you, what reward have you?" "Neighbours" is intended to include people whom we would readily avoid, or dislike if we were left to our own earthly human love. Jesus is not telling us just to tolerate our neighbours. We are challenged to love them as we would love ourselves. That is some challenge!

I don't believe this refers only to our personal relationships. It also points to our wider view of life. We see deep divisions in the world today and our views on such things can reflect our prejudices. Here in Australia we are not immune from such divisions. There are groups of people to whom little love is shown: our first peoples, the disabled, the homeless and long-term unemployed, groups within the same sex marriage debate, immigrants or refugees, different religious groups. To love your neighbour can seem such a difficult thing! And yet it is what Jesus is calling us to do!

"Love your neighbour as (you love) yourself," Jesus said. There is a kind of self-love that is negative because it is self-centred. However, there is another kind of self-love that is desirable. It is called self-esteem, and acceptance that we are persons of worth because God is our Father and we belong to God's family. It is a balancing act, to love ourselves and others equally, and balancing can be difficult (certainly for me, old, and set in my ways!). There will be times when we will over-balance, favouring one side or the other. And yet we can get better at it, for we are relying not on our own strength, our own ability to love, but rather on the love which comes from God, the One who is love.

This is what the Apostle John meant when he said, "We love because he first loved us". You know, we sometimes make things far more complicated than they really are! There's nothing confusing about what God wants us to do. He wants us to love – to love Him, to love others, and to love ourselves. Let us ask ourselves: How have we been doing at that? AMEN.

HYMN TIS 589 (Jesus calls us)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying, 'Christian, follow me':</p> | <p>of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep
us, saying
'Christian, love me more.'</p> |
| <p>2. as, of old, Saint Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and
kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.</p> | <p>4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and
pleasures,
'Christian, love me more than
these.'</p> |
| <p>3. Jesus calls us from the worship</p> | |
| <p>5. Jesus calls us! By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.</p> | |

Cecil Frances Alexander 1818-95 alt.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious God, we make our offerings in response to your great love for us. We offer our lives because we love you with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind. As we go from here to love our neighbour as ourselves, may we go in the power of your Spirit to love as Jesus loves and to serve as he served. This we pray in his name.

Amen.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION *(Judith Archbold)*

God of all healing and hopefulness

we turn to you with our prayers for others.

We pray for those we know who especially need your help this day.

May they know your healing touch, may they understand your love for them, and the assurance that you are with them always.

We pray for all who serve in your name

to bring your love to a very needy world.

Help us all to share the good news of salvation, especially where people are hurting, or despairing.

Lord, you gave us faith that leads us at time to many doubts, yet it is also when we explore those deep doubts that we are so often lead to a larger faith. So, we ask that you would be with those who would say that they have no faith and often despair, and also with those who hunger to know you more deeply.

Loving God, we pray for our nation, especially lifting before you the many who are disadvantaged.

We pray that Australia will truly become a nation where every person has the means to live with dignity.

Where First Nations people are honoured, and valued, and genuinely given a voice, and where our leaders seek to serve the common good rather than only focusing on specific interest groups.

Lord, we travel many journeys in our life - the journey we take with our family, our careers, our friends, our community involvements. Help us to place you at the centre of all our journeys.

Most importantly, on this journey that we take as your people on Earth,

guide our steps, and teach us to love more fully, because that is surely what you ask of us so that your peace and your love will be realised throughout our world.

May we ever be the bearers of love and peace in your name. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are confident to say:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your Name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as it is 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.

HYMN TIS 699 (A new commandment)

A new commandment I give unto you
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another;
by this will others know that you are my disciples
if you have love one for another.

(Source unknown)

BENEDICTION

Go into the world
strengthened by the great love of God,
enfolded in the compassionate love of Jesus Christ,
filled with the active love of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

HYMN TIS 220 (This, this is the God we adore)

1. This, this is the God we adore;
our faithful, unchangeable friend;
whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end.
2. 'Tis Jesus the first and the last
whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
we'll praise him for all that is past,
and trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart 1712-68 alt.