

Call to Worship (Matthew 18:3)

And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

James reads a story:

The Rabbit Hutch, from *He was in the World*, by John L. Bell. Wild Goose Publications, 1995

HYMN StF 663 I the lord of sea and sky <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS2Z41nN6ew>

1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3 I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L. Schutte (b.1947)

Prayer

Lord, let us learn from you how to see things in a simple way, and to bring wishes true. How can we do this? Help us to stop thinking about ourselves so much, and help us also to make what other people need as important to us as what we ourselves want. So, Lord, next time we find ourselves wanting something, help us balance that by thinking of what someone else wants or needs. So, when we are hungry, or would like something nice to eat, let us think of other people whose need for food is much greater; people who feel that ache inside when their stomachs are empty; people who, unlike us, cannot get good and delicious food; people who become ill because their food is wrong. And that is just one subject; there are many others to do with health, with a lack of family and friends, and a lack of school.

So, Lord, help us to want good things for others, and to do practical things to help, like giving to the food bank, or giving to our toilet twinning project that enables people to avoid terrible diseases. Make us your good helpers.

And now, we say the prayer Jesus himself taught us.

**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.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.**

Amen.

The Thwaite Debate

Thwaite thinks about his image. <https://youtu.be/xFNfGy4cy4k>

Junior Church prayer and hymn

HYMN StF 61 Our God is a great big God <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt4ssBmX4y0>

*Our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
and he holds us in his hands.*

He's higher than a skyscraper,
and he's deeper than a submarine.
He's wider than the universe,
and beyond my wildest dreams.
And he's known me and he's loved me
since before the world began.
How wonderful to be a part
of God's amazing plan!

Jo Hemming and Nigel Hemming

Blessing as our young people depart for their own activities.

Prayers of Approach & Confession

Lord, let your spirit meet us here, to mend the body, mind and soul; let us pray.

Ordinary days, maybe even dull ones. The same streets, the same windows and doors; stones and bricks, grass and trees. How easy it is to discount the everyday things which surround us. We go to work or to the shops, and we come back. Sometimes we notice nothing at all; our appreciation of the world is stuck on automatic, colour filtered out and grey scale selected.

Then, perhaps, we are provoked by some little thing; we hear a blackbird, or voices of laughter, and the colour comes back, a door is opened; sun strikes the wall; a cat runs up the tree; the ripples on the water are bright; even the buses are a deep and beautiful red.

Everything, every tiny, insignificant thing, has its beauty. Ordinariness is just the numbing effect of familiarity, a grey cape we hang over a world of amazing artistry. A world in which, too often, the only colour noticed is that which we meagrely select, not that freely available.

Lord, open our eyes to your world; a river, or a drop of water; an apple, or a crystal of salt. Give us receptive senses for all things, natural and made, for tiny things in their tininess, for the precision and intricacy of every living thing, for birth, and growth; for golden hair and for grey hair; for music, made in celebration, and for the music of the natural world; for the magnificence of everything huge, for cliffs and deep shadows, for thunder and the sea; to sheer abundance and variety, for the millions upon millions of things that make up your world; for the beauty which love reveals, and for the beauty which love makes.

In all these things we are blessed; we walk unknowingly and carelessly in the freedom of your love; let us be guided in our daily lives by your brightness, let us go out with you in the morning, and return from our work and travel and from the shops with you, and never lose touch with your presence, which gives us these days as the market days of heaven, where God keeps open house.

Bless the lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name, *blessed art thou O God*

Amen.

Reading Acts 3:1-16

¹ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Reading 1 John 3:1-12

¹ See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

HYMN StF 470 Lord, for the years <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkkYUEcN234>

- 1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.
- 2 Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.
- 3 Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care ;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.
- 4 Lord, for our world ; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain ;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.
- 5 Lord, for ourselves ; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne ;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.1926)

Sermon

“How not to sin” is the message of our reading from the first letter of John. On a superficial reading, he says, sin is lawlessness, and you may say, “Yes, so it is. If you go around pinching things and living immorally and driving when drunk, you are both lawless and sinful”. So far, so good. Few people are going to disagree with that statement of the obvious. But let us pause a moment and say, “What is the law being referred to?”, and you might reply to your own question, and say, “the Ten Commandments¹, of course”. Let us just remind ourselves of their content:

1. “You shall have no other gods before me.”
2. “You shall not make yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God are only worthy of worship, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
3. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”
4. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”
5. “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

¹ As found at Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

6. "You shall not murder."
7. "You shall not commit adultery."
8. "You shall not steal."
9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."
10. "You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's."

But the Ten Commandments are not the sum total of the Law. The tradition is that God dictated the Torah, which means the body of law, teaching or instruction, to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that it contains 613 commandments, of which the ten I quoted are simply the best known. But when Jesus was asked by one of the religious lawyers which commandment is the first of all, he said:

Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

And then, although he had not been asked what comes next, he continued,

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."²

So Jesus gave what is by all accounts the first of the ten commandments, and then linked to it another from much further down the list. This may have been a radical move, but his questioner was clearly satisfied with the answer, saying, "that is far more than any burnt offering or sacrifice". Jesus responded, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God".

Therefore, Jesus would I think commend to us an understanding of living within the law which was framed by this definition: that we should love God, and love our neighbour as ourself. At first sight, this may seem to be a bit scanty so far as a code for behaviour is concerned, but I think it will become apparent that if you really do these two things, everything else will fall into place. As Jesus says, "all the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments".³

This is because to love God is to love God's standards, to love and respect those who God cares for, who are not only the good and the great of this world, but the lowly – those for whom Jesus showed a particular concern in his ministry on earth. And the measure which the other commandment adds is an index of your love for the other – be they never so unattractive – against how much you care for yourself.

The criminal, sinner or lawless person is one who cares for himself or herself more than anyone else. The criminal who looks at a bar of chocolate on the shop shelf and decides to put it in their pocket is making a judgement that things will be better if they take that bar of chocolate home and eat it, because their moral compass does not stretch much further than their own person; they do not think about who else loses out through their action. That is just a trivial example, but it would be easy enough to give serious examples of cruelty and destruction on a large scale which come about through exactly the same process: Saddam Hussein, for instance, believed that Iraq would really and truly be a better place if he wiped out the Kurds. The same may be true in Myanmar about the genocide of the Rohingyas, and in Rwanda concerning the Tutsis. Bank robbers, I imagine, think of their future wealth without balancing the loss of others against it. Drug dealers probably do not spend much time worrying about the lives that will be ruined by the addiction that comes from consuming their merchandise.

Of course, there are those who repent and change their ways, like John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace", who gave up his slaving ship, and wholeheartedly turned towards God.

² Mark 12:30-31

³ Matthew 22:40

So, to return to Jesus's choice from the Law, it is a matter of living for God and other people. One of the two is not enough, and indeed is impossible, because it is not possible to live for God and not for other people, or for other people and not for God. Everything that lives is holy.

HYMN StF 73 Fill thou my life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5VmFvI7A7Q>

1 Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.

4 Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak.

2 Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part:

5 So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.

3 Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)

Prayers for Others

Holy God,

Let us look with you at all who suffer today:

The sick, the deaf, the blind;

Victims of violence, prisoners, psychiatric patients;

The lonely, the aged, the hungry, those who suffer discrimination;

Those who are afraid, or cannot rest;

People who once had the peace we enjoy, but who have it no more;

Those who hate themselves, and can see no love in the world;

Those for whom your world has lost its glory, and is worthless,

for whom life is a chore, its beauties gone, like leaves in the wind.

Let us, who count ourselves your people, let us hollow a space within us, and take into it the suffering people of the world.

Holy God, open our hearts to them and make us aware of them.

Let the compassion of Jesus be in us to welcome them.

May someone they meet today show that there is light, that the struggle is worth it. Let your people in their lives speak of God to those who have lost hope.

Make us, and all who love You, a living network, give us the instinct, the will and the spark to do your work. Let your world be touched and healed, and where your people can help in this, give them the grace to do so, and to bring alive again your Spirit in those who suffer. May they feel your blessing.

Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, *Amen*.

HYMN StF 548 Blessed assurance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BE1a6K56Lo>

1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine !
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine !
Heir of salvation, purchase of God ;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.
*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest ;
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

Frances (Fanny) Jane Crosby (1820–1915)

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture burst on my sight ;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Blessing

May God, to whom light is as clear as day, guide your feet as you go.

May God, who is with you when you sit and when you stand,

Encompass you with love and lead you on.

May God, who knows your path and the places where you rest,

Be with you in your waiting, be your good news for sharing,

And befriend you every step of the way.⁴

Amen

⁴ Jan Such Pickard (adapted).