

Service 3rd November 2024

Prayers of Approach

God of love,
you call us to come to you with love in our hearts.
We all have our own ideas and experiences of
what love is.
From the human to the divine.
From the smallest flicker to the greatest flame.
We offer ourselves to you now, seeking to learn
more about the depth and breadth of your
amazing love.
We need to know how to put that love into
action,
share that great warmth with our neighbour,
every day of our lives.
Still us before you now and enable us to receive.

God of love,
you are so much more than anything we could
ever imagine.
Abundant love flows from your very being.
We know your love is the greatest of all.
We bask now in that love, making our small
offering in return.
We love you with all our heart, all our
understanding,
and all our strength – and always will.

We praise you for your words, written in
scripture, for all the ages.
We praise you for your living word, your son Jesus
Christ, showing us your love and your way.
We praise you for all your saints who have gone
before us, following in his footsteps.
May we too follow faithfully that we also may be
counted among their number in your kingdom of
love.

Amen.

*Hymn For all the saints, who from their labours
rest (R&S 658)*

Readings: Psalm 24:1-6
Mark 12:28-34

Introduction

Just before the Israelites entered the promised
land Moses reminded them of the Laws which
God had given on Mount Sinai. Over the years the
laws were passed down, interpreted, studied and
debated, and it was not unusual for a Rabbi to be
asked which was the most important. When a
scribe, a Jewish teacher, asks Jesus about the

most important of Moses' commandments, Jesus
gives the 'correct' answer from the perspective of
Jewish Scripture, but also offers an addition,
giving a clear insight into what lies at the heart of
his spiritual mission. The scribe takes Jesus'
answer to mean that love for God and neighbour
is more important than Temple worship, and
Jesus commends him for his wisdom. Jesus sees
love for God and neighbour as the hallmarks of
true holiness and tells the scribe he is not far
from the kingdom of God.

*Hymn Your words to me are life and health (R&S
321)*

Sermon

The original setting for Psalm 24 is generally
thought to be the occasion when David brought
the ark of the covenant to the hill of the Lord in
Jerusalem and in early Israelite worship it was
probably used at the autumn festival in the
Temple in Jerusalem. The question and answer
section encourages worshippers to consider how
faithful they have been to God's commands and
his expectations of them. Christians have often
interpreted it as asking are we good enough to
enter the kingdom of God and it is quite
appropriate therefore that it is one of the
readings set for 'All Saints Day' in the lectionary.

All too often though, like many Jewish people
before us, we fall into the trap of trying to tick all
the boxes, I've done this, I've kept that, I
pray/read the Bible/give to charity/go to church
regularly etc. etc. and we ask, 'can I count myself
among the saints?' The scribe who came to Jesus
in our gospel reading was probably asking a very
similar question. Unlike many of those who came
demanding answers of Jesus however, the scribe
wasn't asking a trick question, it was a genuine
sounding out of Jesus' opinion. With 613
acknowledged statutes of the law an easy to
remember summary of them was always
something to be sought after and was eagerly
debated.

This story is also told in Matthew and Luke's
gospels but only Mark has Jesus giving his answer
by announcing the first commandment beginning,
'Hear, O Israel...' In doing this he unequivocally
identifies his response with the 'Shema', the
declaration of faith recited by pious Jews every
morning and evening, quoting the first
commandment given to the Israelites through

Moses. It is a conventional and uncontroversial reply as to which is the greatest/most important commandment but Jesus' then goes on to sum up the rest of the law in a second commandment quoting from Leviticus 19:18, 'love your neighbour...' While it's not the most conventional follow up this too is not a radical interpretation. What is a little more surprising is the scribe's reaction, 'well said teacher' and his response that to 'love your neighbour... is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices'.

The idea that love is more important than sacrifice ran counter to Jewish rabbinical thinking that piety depended on three things of equal importance – the law, the sacrificial system and expressions of love. To put any one of them above another completely subverted commonly accepted ideas of Jewish piety and proper observance. That takes us back to our Psalmist's question, 'Who can approach God's presence, who can enter his kingdom?' which isn't so different from asking 'Who are the saints?' The answer might be 'the company of those who love God and their neighbour – those who come humbly and sincerely to seek God's face.'

Jesus commended the scribe for his insight declaring 'you are not far from the kingdom.' The Beatles sang, 'All you need is love' and while it might not be quite all we can probably all agree with Andrew Lloyd Webber that, 'love, love changes everything.' What does it mean to love someone 'with all your heart'? How can you show your love for God, for yourself, and for your neighbour this coming week?

Hymn *Seek ye first the kingdom of God (R&S 512)*

Prayers of Intercession

Love God... and love your neighbour as you love yourself. Lord, we pray for those for whom the world seems lacking in love.

We pray for countries where poverty or conflict have taken away all hope and opportunity: where children have no hope of schooling; where families have no hope of secure housing; where adults have no hope of employment; where whole communities have no hope of peace.

We pray for our local community... for those who find all doors are closed and all pathways blocked by prejudice;

for those who work in this area to open opportunities for more people; for those existing on the margins of our society.

for those who have lost a loved one; for those who face illness; for those whose dreams have been suddenly snatched away; for those known to us who need support at this time...

We pray for our own lives – where we are not fulfilled – where we know our lives could be richer: in the decisions we have to make this week; in the responsibilities that we will bear this week; in the expectations people will have of us this week.

We are the saints whom God has called. May we stand alongside all those who have gone before us, May our daily living be part of the coming kingdom of God, Where the earth is filled with the love of the Lord, and all dwell in plenty and peace.

We offer these and all our prayers – those spoken out loud and those whispered in the quietness of our hearts – in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn *The kingdom of God is justice and joy (R&S 200)*

Blessing

May the word of God, who kindles the flame of your love in the hearts of the saints, dwell in our hearts, in our minds and in our actions, every day of our lives. Grant us the same faith and power of love, that as we rejoice in their triumphs, we may profit by their examples.

Give us grace to follow the saints in humility, righteousness and peace. And may the blessing of the God of hope, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, go with us and remain with us, always.

Amen.

Prayers and other material (adapted) © Roots for Churches Ltd. Used by permission.