**Morning Praise @ Home 18 May 2025**

**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 John 13: 31 - 35

### Reflection from Sue *Leaving a legacy*

When you know that, perhaps after a long illness, or a clear physical decline, you don’t have much time left on earth, it matters to be able to see those you care about. There may be particular things that you want them to hear and there’s not much time. And when someone is close to death, what they say has a particular urgency and importance – it is a legacy likely to be remembered.

Today’s passage occurs just after Judas has left to go and tell the authorities where to find Jesus. The Lord’s only got a couple of precious hours before he’ll lead his beloved followers to the Garden of Gethsemane, which he will exit under arrest. In about 12 hours he will be strung up on a cross. There isn’t much time.

Christ is torn between not wanting to leave his disciples leaderless and rudderless, knowing that they will face confusion and despair when he is sacrificed, and also wanting to accomplish his mission, the events which his entire ministry have led up to. His vocation is rushing to its conclusion and he knows that the next 60 hours will reveal his and his Father’s glory in an amazing way.

Jesus is in the borderland between the travails of the world to which he came, where sin and death have had dominion, and the New Age of salvation and hope, forgiveness and eternal life, which he will inaugurate. He has to go there alone and forge the path through death but, once he’s ascended and his Spirit is released to believers, they too will become citizens of God’s New Kingdom.

So he’s reassuring the 11 remaining disciples that God really *will* be working out His plans in the following desperate days, that their leader *won’t* be defeated, but exalted, through what’s about to take place – the events of Easter which we celebrated just a month ago. What happens to Jesus and how he responds will display God’s glorious love and holiness, his justice, mercy and truth. That’s Christ’s legacy.

But he wants his followers to have a legacy too – that of being known for their love towards others.

What Jesus was called to do was unique – God reconciling humanity to himself. But it modelled truths significant for all believers.

* The way Jesus lived, obeyed his heavenly Father and humbled himself for the sake of others brought glory to God because it displayed the Father’s love and sovereignty.
* *Our* behaviour, our interactions with others, our devotion to God and obedience to what he has called us to be, should bring glory to the God who created us. In v 35 Jesus says: ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’
* Take a moment to consider: *Right now, how is God being glorified by the way I live?*

Our love for others is our witness, our identifying mark as Christians, our way of being a beacon of God’s light and life. God’s big picture is not that we love others just to be ‘nice people’, but in order to serve God’s salvation purposes. So if others come to regard us as *un*-loving (and sadly, the Church doesn’t have a great record in this) we negate the Gospel that we claim to stand for. Jesus wants his legacy of love to be recognised in all his followers – and it’s a non-negotiable command.

What does it *mean* to love one another? Christ’s disciple John pondered his command over many decades, writing in a later letter: ‘Let us not love [just] with words or tongue but with actions and in truth’ (1 John 3:18). Love is about action and commitment, not emotion alone. It is all about the other person and should naturally overflow into serving their needs.

To exemplify Christ’s love involves making ourselves vulnerable – because, yes, we might encounter rejection. It entails loving without any expectation that we’ll get something back. So loving as Jesus asks is not always safe or comfortable!

Now, the injunction to love had featured way back in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18) so what makes it a ‘new command’ when Jesus asks it of his followers in that upper room? It is those telling words: ‘As I have loved you’.

How do we see Christ loving others in the Bible?

* He was caring, demonstrating love in practical terms as well as by his acceptance of people;
* he laughed and cried with them, sharing life, food and fellowship;
* he supported, explained to and guided those he encountered, encouraging rather than criticising them.

*Can we love like this?* Might each of us living here on the Wirral open up our homes and souls a little more freely, rather than limiting our generosity to trusted acquaintances and family?

But Christ’s love goes further. It involves actively reaching out beyond our zone of comfort, seeking to restore others through the Gospel, forgiving rather than condemning, humbling ourselves and being self-sacrificial for another’s good. Not so easy!

Yet in that upper room, Jesus’ legacy was to give his followers a new motive to love – not to fulfil an ethical demand but as a response to the enormous love which he had already shown, and was about to further demonstrate, to them.

*Who* are we meant to love? Down the years Christians have so often shaped Jesus’ command to their own inclinations. We have defined ‘one another’ so tightly that it means only ‘love the people who reinforce your own sense of who you are.’

Recently the American vice president, a self-professed Christian, proclaimed that love meant that ‘first you love your family and then you love your neighbour and then you love your community and then you love your fellow citizens and your own country, and then after that you can focus and prioritise the rest of the world.’ A convenient way of justifying America’s overseas aid cuts!

Thankfully fellow Christians Rory Stewart and Pope Francis reminded him about the Parable to the Good Samaritan, and that ‘Nowhere does Jesus suggest that love is to be prioritised in concentric circles. His love is universal.’

We are called to love whoever we encounter, however they treat us and regardless of whether they are different from us. This is hard! Our upbringing usually shapes us to make judgements about others, whether related to their presentation, accent or occupation. I am ashamed that my mother’s assessments of people still spring unbidden into my head, despite asking Jesus’ legacy of love to override them.

Here, within this congregation, Jesus calls us to offer grace rather than judge others’ weaknesses. And, if we make that change, the by-product will be that our church body will be strengthened.

So, again, let’s pause and ask ourselves:

* *Do others notice that I am a Christian by how I love?*
* *Who is God calling me to reach with his love?*
* *Where or who am I currently* not *loving as Jesus loves?*

Some of us may have been coming to church for many years, some more recently, but please don’t think that the long-termers have got this love business sorted: it is humanly a real challenge! Thank goodness then that we are not left to our own devices.

* In his later letter, John reminds us that the courage to step out with love is initiated by God: ‘Let us love one another for love comes from God’ (1 John 4:7). Meditating on how very much our Father adores us and considers us precious can build our confidence to share that love.
* Just as a budding athlete takes protein drinks to boost their ability, so our love can be nurtured by feeding ourselves with regular personal Bible reading, prayer and contemplating the love of God demonstrated by Jesus.
* But an athlete also needs to train physically. Loving others is strengthened through practice – actively and repeatedly forgiving, regularly encouraging those we encounter, consistently and repeatedly serving others so that needs are met.

Christ’s personal legacy also makes all the difference:

* Only he could overcome sin and death, but now he’s given us the power to love beyond what is ‘humanly possible’ because every believer has inherited his legacy of the Holy Spirit’s guidance, light and everlasting life. Unlike those in the upper room that night, we are the other side of Pentecost, so let’s allow Christ’s Spirit to work through us!
* We’ve also inherited citizenship in Christ’s New Kingdom. As such, Jesus calls us to live alongside him now and love in the way that he showed us, without barriers, borders or bitterness. As John’s letter puts it: ‘We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other’ (1 John 3:14).

Jesus was a very practical person. He didn’t just talk about love but lived it out. His command to ‘love one another’ anticipates a practical response, which will itself demonstrate the spiritual truth: ‘if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us’ (1 John 4:12). Time again to ask ourselves: *How much do I trust in God’s love for me? Is it enough to let him develop my love for others?*

The love Jesus has shown each one of us is our motive to reach out to everyone, serving them and sharing the news of salvation; it is how the world may recognise the reality of God’s glorious reign and be caught up in his embrace; it is how we can individually glorify the Lord. We are the inheritors of an amazing legacy, and Jesus expects us to pass it on. We may not have much time.

**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 Tony**

As we set aside time to pray let us remember that the love Jesus has shown each one of us is our motive to reach out to everyone, serving them and sharing the news of salvation.

We pray for the work of Christian Aid and all other aid agencies working to relieve the suffering of others throughout the world.  We give thanks for the fellowship that took place at the Coffee Morning on Thursday and ask for your blessing on all who helped to make it a great success.

We pray for the volunteers and fund-raisers who support foodbanks in order to help those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to meet their needs. We pray for safety and good health for Nigel as he continues his walk in aid of foodbanks.

We pray for our local schools, the pupils and staff, including Bishop Wilson School, and those who, as governors, trustees and advisers, provide the means to enable children to learn and flourish.

In our prayers we ask God to be close to those within our church and our local community who are ill, anxious, in hospital or are receiving treatment.

We pray for Peace. As we reflect on the hostilities and aggression by nation upon nation that seem to surround us and how much blood has been shed and how many lives have been shattered, ask God to guide the steps of those in power and authority in the way of peace and justice that they might have the courage to say ‘no more war’ and find lasting solutions for all humanity.

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