**2nd February 2025**

**Call to worship**

God is love.
Those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them.
Let us receive afresh the love of God for us and for those around us.

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God,
your love is immeasurably more than we could ever understand.
Draw us deeper into the truth of your love for us
and help us to reflect that love in our daily lives.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Almighty, eternal, everlasting God,
you are love, you are truth, you are merciful and just.
We come to worship you.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Holy God, you are full of love for all your people,
even though we do not always appreciate it
and respond as we ought.
Holy God, your persistence and patience amazes us –
you go on loving us even when we know we don’t deserve it.
Holy God, your generosity overwhelms us.
Holy God, you are beyond our imagining
– you are so much more.
Holy God, may we learn to be closer to you, to listen more,
to feel more, to know more of the immensity of your love.
Holy God, this is our prayer.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

We are sorry, God, that we are often weak and helpless.
**Come O God, you are our Saviour, forgive us.**
We are sorry, God, that we do not always like to hear the truth because it hurts.
**Come O God, you are our Saviour, forgive us.**
We are sorry, God, that we so often lack motivation
to speak out about the way of life and the gift of love you give to us.
**Come O God, you are our Saviour, forgive us.**
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God, who is full of mercy, hears our confession,
knows our penitence
and forgives us our sins, our wrongdoing,
our outbursts and our silences.
Thanks be to God.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Almighty, everlasting God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
so much of who and what you are has been gifted to us by those around us.
**We give you thanks and praise.**
So much of our relationship with you and our spiritual growth
has been gifted by those who worship with us.
**We give you thanks and praise.**
So many of your examples of love comfort us, uphold us, sustain us
and create in us a yearning to love more as we are loved.
**We give you thanks and praise.**
**Amen.**

**How do I measure up? W E**

**Reflecting on our actions**

You will need: [‘Love is …’ sheet](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/27886/wt-how-do-i-measure-up-2-feb.pdf); pens.

* The famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is often preached at weddings, with a gentle reminder to the couple to practise being like this. But in day-to-day life we often fail to live up to it.
* Give everyone a ‘Love is …’ sheet and ask them to prayerfully reflect on how they have matched up to these verses in the past week, or the past month. (There is space to add  thoughts on where you exercised these virtues and where you failed.) Remind people that this is not an exercise in beating ourselves up, but one to lead us into relying more on God’s  grace to help us be more like Jesus, who was the perfect model of these virtues
* Lead people in a prayer of confession and forgiveness:

Lord, we are sorry for the times we have failed
to show your love, patience or kindness to others.
Forgive us for the times we have been irritable, resentful and boastful.
Help us to rejoice not in wrongdoing but in the truth.
Thank you for your grace and everlasting love.
Amen.

**Luke 4.14-30**

Our gospel reading this week picks up where we left off last week.

Jesus has just gone into the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth and unrolled the scroll to the prophet Isaiah and read a passage that was associated with the messianic hope. The spirit of God has anointed to preach good news… Then Jesus says what you have heard read is now fulfilled – here I am.

Then there is a reaction. The folk in the synagogue are amazed and say ‘‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?’

But then Jesus upsets them by saying ‘no prophet is accepted in his home town’ and shares some stories from scripture that infuriates them to the point of trying to throw Jesus off a cliff.

Lets unpack what is going on here and try and make some connections maybe with our own lives.

Ill take these two verses that I’ve quoted and expand on them

**‘Isn’t this Jospeh’s son?’**

A while ago I was invited to preach in the church in Burnley where I grew up. It was their anniversary service and they were welcoming one of their own back to lead them in their celebrations. Before that congregation heard me, they already knew me. And they knew all sorts of things about me – particularly from my childhood. So as I get ready for the worship one of the senior members of the church comes up to me and says ‘eee Simon it’s rete good having you back. I remember when I’d help your mother out by laying you on my lap and changing your nappy whilst she sang in the choir.’ I said I’ve grown up now I can manage my own pants thanks.

Visual memories that are a little distracting when you are trying to convey the Word of God!

Based on verse 22, it appears there was immediately a double-reaction: some were amazed and part of their amazement at his "gracious" speech gets expressed in the line "Isn't this Joseph's son?" But that question seems to cut two ways, and Jesus' subsequent words indicate his awareness of this. The question "Isn't this Joseph's son" CAN be a source of genuine wonder and appreciation-look how far our local boy has come!

But it's not difficult to see that the same question could be asked with a real edge to it, with a sneer, with derision. "Joseph's kid? Good grief. He was a nobody back then and he's a nobody from a no-account family now. Forget him! Who does he think he is? He’s not the Messiah he’s just a naughty boy"

The gospels say elsewhere (Mark 6.1-6, John 1.46) that Jesus could do few miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Anyone who has felt held back by their background, the school they went to, the opportunities they had, may find some point of sympathy here. Families can be tremendously supportive but can also be oppressive. You can find yourself trapped in family traditions and attitudes that you’ve grown out of or that you take a different view of now. I know being the youngest in my family I often felt a bit squashed in the family dynamics and roles we had and leaving for university was freedom – space to express myself and develop my identity – but consequently I changed and became a different person with different outlooks which meant going ‘home’ wasn’t always easy.

Systems Theory in Family Counselling doesn’t just look at the behaviour of one person in the family, say the so called problem child, but at the behaviour of all members of the family and how that family works. Who makes the decisions and holds the power. The unspoken rules of the system. The implicit mottos of the family :’What would the neighbours think’, ‘don’t argue with your farther’ whatever. Then there are the roles you have in a family. Were you the clever one, the shy one, the strong one, the carer, the favourite, the scapegoat, the peacemaker. If you accepted those roles you can do it without resentment but if you weren’t comfortable with it you long for escape.

Some families have a tight bond and escape is very difficult. The family ties are tight and you stick together - keep it in the family– it can be a very caring environment but conversely it can also be a suffocating even abusive environment especially if you want to step out of the role assigned you.

From that enmeshed family system you can go to a disengaged family where everyone does their own thing and its like a bunch of individuals occupying the same space. It often needs a real catastrophe for them to actually pull together.

Most families occupy the space between those two extremes between being connected and being separated.

We don’t know much about Jesus family. The gospel hints that his brothers didn’t believe in him (John 7.1-7). There was a disruption in their system with Jesus now being empowered by the Spirit to take up his mission and become the Messiah.

We assume Jospeh the father had died , making Jesus the eldest son. In those traditional families in that age, the eldest would have been expected to take on the role of the father in providing for the family. Was Jesus abdicating this role now – much to the amazement and even disapproval of the folk in Nazareth?

*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?* Know your place Jesus.

You know sometimes at work you may get promoted. You are no longer one of the workforce but you have become management. Now you have to oversee what were your colleagues. That can create tensions and difficulties. You are not one of us now – you think you are management, but we know you better….

How do we find ourselves and our own identity? How do we find the freedom of faith – when the Spirit of God may change us and make us a new person – often that causes tension and difficulties with those who knew us before even unsettles them and threatens them.

I remember making the decision at the precious age of 16 to follow Jesus. The attitude of my parents was Ok you’ll get over it – just make sure it doesn’t affect your study and career prospects.

Jesus then goes on to suggest that maybe those very detractors in the crowd that day would be asking him shortly for an authenticating sign.

Of all the sayings of Jesus, one of the few things he said that appears in all four gospels is that a prophet gets no respect in a prophet's hometown. To put it another way, "You become an expert only after you move more than ten miles from home."

**No prophet is accepted in his hometown**

Although we have not as of yet been told directly by Luke of any particular work Jesus did in Capernaum, apparently he's been there and done some amazing things. Some scholars suggest there may have been friction between the two towns like there is with any neighbouring village or town. Nazareth was a small farming village. Capernaum was a more populous fishing centre. Matthew 4:12 notes: “Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum.” This adopted home might not have sat well with the folks in Nazareth. Also, Capernaum may have been home to a Roman garrison and a number of Gentiles. A little bit more cosmopolitan and less parochial. Perhaps some wondered: “Why would ‘our’ Jesus live among enemies and outcasts?”

There is always rivalry with local neighours. Them and Us.

My brother married late in life. His wife came from Darwen, just a mile down the road from Ewood Park the home of Blackburn Rovers the fierce local rivals of Burnley, the team my brother and I support.

At his funeral over a year ago I talked about his love of his football team. After the service one of his wife’s friends from Darwen came up to me and said ‘Huh – you support Burnley’ and spat on my foot! Local rivalries.

Jesus anticipates what they are thinking – ‘why don’t you show us what you are made of and do miracles here in your home town as you have done in Capernaum?’

But Jesus is no trained dog or dancing bear and he makes clear he's not going to do any such thing in Nazareth. Worse, he inflames people still more by saying that with the attitudes some were harbouring in their hearts at that very moment, the Nazareth populace was not worthy of a divine working. Instead, as in the feckless, sub-spiritual days of Elijah and Elisha, God would work his wonders elsewhere, outside Israel.

Jesus’s hearers were waiting for God to liberate Israel from pagan enemies. In several Jewish texts of that time we find a longing that God would condemn the wicked nations and pour wrath and destruction on them. Instead Jesus edits the reading from Isaiah 61. He stops halfway through Isaiah 61 verse 2. He reads out loud only this bit of the verse ‘to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’. But the verse goes on: ‘and a day of vengeance of our GOD’.

That Jesus chose not to read this part suggests that he refused to meet the expectations of those who were longing for the violent overthrow of the occupying Roman armies. These were indeed words of grace but as they sunk into his listeners his own people turned on him. Jesus just manages to escape.

Does the crowd realize what it would mean to kill one of their own children? Is the gospel writer implying God’s intervention? One thing is clear for the gospel of Luke: the mission Jesus announced will continue to unfold on the edge and this doesn’t put him off from telling hard truths to people who don’t want to listen.

However much we speak of God’s universal love for all, there is often something inside us that makes us want to keep it for ourselves and away from the people we fear or despise. Charity begins at home. Which is why Jesus words may have been like saying that despite the Taliban killing many of our boys and despite there being millions jobless or deeply in debt in this country we’re going to give millions of pounds of our money to solve the Afghan problem or in foreign aid or support asylum seekers.

Talking about Elijah and Elisha helping other foreigners just rubs it in a bit more that God cares for all not just our own tribe.

There was a tension between the tradition in the scriptures and the people of Nazareth’s accommodation with it. It may be more comfortable to learn something new than to relearn one’s own tradition. The problem was not that Jesus wanted to take people away from Judaism but that he wanted to reclaim some uncomfortable aspects. The gospel is not taken to others because the original hearers rejected it. Rather it was the other way around. The gospel was for all but the original hearers hadn’t understood it, so Jesus confronts them and tries to open their eyes to the universal love of God.

I spoke last week about the confrontation between the Bishop of Washington and President Trump – when she asked him for mercy towards those who were scared in the United States especially on his war on woke. Which according to Trump is apparently now to blame for airplanes crashing. Shameless.

We despise people who challenge our cherished myths and kick us out of our comfort zones. The truth is that when Jesus sets about the task of saving us, he has to heal us of any myth or prejudice that is contrary to the spirit of Christ.

Billy Sunday was the Billy Graham of a previous generation. He was conducting a crusade in a particular city. In one of his sermons he said something critical of the labour conditions for workers in that area. After the service, several prominent businessmen sent a message to him by one of the local pastors. The message was this---Billy, leave labour matters alone. Concentrate on getting people saved. Stay away from political issues. You're rubbing the fur the wrong way."

Billy Sunday sent this message back to them: "If I'm rubbing the fur the wrong way, tell the cats to turn around."

What has to be said that only you can say?

Uncomfortable though it may be, we sometimes find ourselves in situations where we are convinced that a crucial point is missing from the discussion, or that a particular option is being wilfully ignored, or that someone is being badly treated by the group and no one seems prepared to speak up. So, it’s up to us!

This can be more challenging when we are one of the youngest or newest in the group, grateful for what others have helped us learn or welcomed us in, but now feeling compelled to offer our own opinion, humbly and honestly but with heartfelt conviction.

*Holocaust Memorial Day* was on 27 January. Extermination of difference or 'weakness' was the driving force behind genocide in Nazi Germany, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.  It was moving to hear Jews speak about their experiences at Auschwitz. They wanted the world to hear so that it may never happen again.

The next item on the news was about a million and half Gazans returning to their homes to find them totally destroyed and around 50,000 killed in the Israeli retribution towards Hamas atrocities.

No link between the two was offered – but it makes you wonder how the oppressed can become the oppressor.

Jesus spoke preferentially for those who were different to his own kind ('Israel'), which led to homicidal anger against him.

What needs to be challenged in our situations today? It can be really hard to make a stand for our beliefs and values amongst those with whom we have grown up, or within our own home. It is in these situations that faith can be compromised, spiritual growth blocked and respect for others undermined.

Bigotry and racism must be challenged. In groups which are full of self-righteousness, openness to learning needs to be introduced. In church as well as in other institutions, a commitment to truth and compassion for others has to be nurtured and resistance to the comfortable and the self-serving has to be shouldered.

But prophets are never welcomed in their own town.

May God help us all to be led by His Spirit to a new resolve in attitude and action to put into practice the agenda of Jesus.

**Prayers of intercession**

God of strength and gentleness, we bring to you in prayer:
those whose lives are really tough,
those whose homes have been damaged by storms or flood or fire,
those who have no homes and no resources,
those struggling to meet the needs of those they care for,
and those denied access to education and the basic joys of life,
especially the women of Afghanistan.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer**

We pray for all those called to speak tough words.
We especially pray for:
your Church throughout the world
that she would be the voice of truth and justice and mercy,
those persecuted for sharing the gospel,
and our fellowship of faith here, that we would be people of integrity and courage
as we tackle the challenges that face our communities and our nation.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer**

We pray for all those entrusted with making tough decisions:
we pray for our politicians as they manage budgets
and make policies affecting so many lives,
we pray for those in the NHS as they manage both crisis
and the day-to-day needs of patients,
we pray for all managing household budgets that are stretched
and for those overwhelmed with anxiety.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer**

We pray for those who have received tough news, particularly those we know who are:
struggling with illness, with redundancy, with the breakdown of a relationship,
with bad results, and those who have been bereaved suddenly and shockingly.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer**

We pray for those making tough journeys:
for the people of Gaza as they return home to rubble,
for those in the DR Congo fleeing their homes as violence rages in the streets,
for those being forcibly removed from their homes,
for those going to refuges who are fleeing abuse,
for those visiting loved ones who no longer recognise them,
for all those whose journeys end in tragedy, especially those killed in Washington,
for those going on their final journey and for those who journey alongside them.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer**

We pray for everyone struggling to cope with the tough headlines
we see on our screens and in our papers day after day.
We pray for those whose lives we glimpse and are moved by:
for all the young lives threatened by and lost to violence,
for all those impacted by the dark web,
for all struggling with the pressures of social media,
and we pray for one another and for all in need of your tough love today
- your challenging, affirming and transformational love.
**Lord Jesus hear our prayer
Amen.**

**Communion**Eternal Majesty,

before the ages began you formed the heavens and the earth,

the moon and the stars proclaim your glory,

and all that was created sings your praise.

You make humanity in your own image,

intending us to glorify and enjoy you forever.

Again and again, we turn away from your love,

despite the guidance of your Law and the warnings of your prophets.

In the fullness of time, you emptied yourself of all but love and dwelt with us.

O Jesus, our Saviour,

you proclaimed good news to the poor,

freedom for prisoners,

sight for the blind and liberation for the oppressed,

but we preferred to turn away from freedom

choosing the bondage of sin, and nailed you to the Cross.

Yet you defeated the powers of death and evil

and revealed a new life for all who follow you.

Before you were given over to the powers of your age,

you shared in the simplicity of a meal with your friends,

and, during that meal, you took bread, said the ancient blessing,

broke the bread and gave it to your friends, saying

Take this all of you and eat it, for this is my body which is broken for you.

Do this in memory of me.

When Supper was over, you took the cup of wine, again prayed the ancient prayer of blessing, gave the cup to your friends and said:

Take this all of you and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood,

the blood of the new and everlasting covenant

so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

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

Come, O Holy Spirit, on these gifts of bread and wine,

that they may be, for us, the body and blood of Christ.

Lift us into your presence that our faith may be renewed,

our commitment to follow strengthened,

and our understanding of Church deepened.

Bless those who serve the Church

that through prayerful discernment we may know Your will,

and that we might all be strengthened in our mission

of worship and witness, evangelism and service,

so that the bruised and broken find healing,

the proud and mighty find humility,

and the poor and lowly find their dignity.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, in the loving power of the Holy Spirit,

all honour and glory are Yours, O Most High, forever and ever, Amen.

These are God’s holy gifts for God’s holy people!

Let us eat and drink as we show forth Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross,

and acknowledge his presence here, risen and ascended,

for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

United with the entire Church on earth and in heaven,

we gather here to present our offering of praise and thanksgiving,

to renew the offering of ourselves,

and to rejoice at Jesus’ promise to come again in glory.

**Post Communion Prayer**

In our joys and in our sorrows,

in days of toil and hours of ease, in care and pleasure,

You still call us, Eternal One to love and follow You.

So we have gathered at this, Your table,

to remember Your love, discern Your call

and find strength for the journey.

Bless as we depart, that we may remember Your love,

respond to Your grace, and follow Your call. Amen.

**A prayer for all ages together**

God, thank you that you love us enough to say difficult things to us.
Thank you that you help us to change.
Please continue to fill us with your love
and to make us better at showing it to those around us.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Loving God, thank you for your great love for us,
love which is patient, kind, protecting and persevering.
Help us to take your love out with us this week
and show it to those who feel they are outside of your family.
Give us your heart for those who don’t yet know you.
We ask this in Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**