

**Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home, 17 March 2024**

Service prepared by the Revd Eric Renouf

Hello! There are times in our lives that we would never choose. They are so challenging that we want to turn away from them and run away! Yet, when we see them through the rear mirror, as it were, we can see that out of that experience has come something positive and helpful beyond our hopes and fears.

Hymn StF 137

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu_RsnSMZk

- 1 New every morning is the love
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life, and power, and thought.
- 2 New mercies, each returning day
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.
- 3 If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.
- 4 Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.
- 5 The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask;
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.
- 6 Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
for perfect rest with you above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792-1866)

There's a prayer in the Methodist service of Daily Prayer which I say each morning and which expresses a hopeful response to the new day, similar to that expressed in John Keble's hymn, and I want to use it now as our prayer.

Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Giver of life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the opening of this day, you call us out of darkness into your marvellous light. Blessed are you for ever and ever. Amen.

Our reading from the book of Jeremiah speaks of a transforming hope for a people who had been in exile far from their home land for some seventy years.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour or a man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

People to whom Jeremiah addressed this message were living in a foreign land to which their grand-parents and parents had been taken in exile some fifty years earlier.

Many things happen in seven years, let alone seventy! Babies are born, people die, new ideas develop, old beliefs begin to fade away, many changes are experienced that reshape how we humans look at life and make something of it.

So it was for the Hebrews, exiled far from their homeland, away in Babylon. They had to manage without their Temple and that's when they started to gather locally on the Sabbath to read their scriptures and say prayers together, the beginnings of synagogue gatherings.

That was a momentous change for the Jewish people, as they became known, but Jeremiah said that even this new emphasis on listening to the reading of their scriptures needed to develop and change. He said that God would bring about a 'new covenant', a new, more personal, relationship with each person who was willing to respond.

Centuries later, Jesus clearly was aware of that call by Jeremiah, and he used that term 'new covenant' when speaking with his close friends during supper in the upper room the evening before he died on the cross.

He linked that promise to what he was about to do in giving his life by dying on the cross. Through the centuries since, Christians have recalled his memorable words as they have received the bread and wine of communion with their dear Lord and Saviour.

'In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:20)

Brian Wren's hymn, 'Great God, your love has called us here' expresses much of the wonder of the mercy and love of God that we can discover as we respond with heart and mind to him.

Hymn StF 499

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5DCp7dqpuQ>

1 Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed;
we come, with all our heart and mind,
your call to hear, your love to find.

2 We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.

3 Great God, in Christ you call our name,
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone;
we strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends;
suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

5 Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share;
give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do,
while love is making all things new.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Gospel Reading – John 12: 20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir", they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

Jesus replied, 'The hour' has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant

also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!'

Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" The crowd that was there and heard it said that it had thundered; others said that an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The men referred to as 'Greeks' were Gentiles, non-Jews, proselytes, or at least enquirers who had responded to the Jewish faith. They wanted to see Jesus! John tells us in a dramatic way of his response to them.

This was a moment in time pointing to a much larger, wide-spreading harvest, which would be at great cost and from which even Jesus recoiled. Yet he was encouraged at the prospect that his mission could be seen more clearly as not just for Jews but for everyone, us Gentiles included!

'*Unbounded Love*' is the Lenten theme for the Methodist Church this year, as we explore what it means to be followers of Jesus. Those two words, *Unbounded Love*, hold huge implications in what we mean by the love of God for us, and of our love for God.

No one is excluded, everyone is included! Furthermore, the 'unbounded' nature of the love of God means that every situation is included and none is excluded. This means that seeking justice for all arises from our trust in the love of God.

That's the good news, as it was in the beginning and is so for ever! That's how it was for the early Methodists, speaking and living the good news, so that ordinary people knew that they too were special, all because God loved them!

Charles Wesley had many ways of expressing our Lenten theme, '*Unbounded Love*'. Our third hymn has some of those breath-taking descriptions: 'sovereign grace' which 'extends to all', 'immense and unconfined', and that 'throughout the world its breadth is known, wide as infinity!' Wow!

The hymn begins with asking how we can love God and 'prove' in our own lives 'the length, and breadth, and height' of God's love. In the last verse is the opportunity for us, each one, to make our own response. Beware! To say 'yes' involves all that we are in all of our relationships, and in the world as it is in the here and now. Unbounded love of God, flow on, flow on!

Prayer of dedication

With wonder, dear God, we view the greatness of your love and gladly give ourselves, who we are, and what we have, to serve your purposes. **Amen**

Collect for Passion Sunday

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us with the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ, and serve you in holiness and righteousness all our days. **Amen.**

Prayers

Unbounded love of God, flow on, flow on, filling and overflowing the chasms of separation we make between ourselves and you, and between ourselves and others in so many situations..... Forgive us for our part in making or in not preventing such divisions. Soak up and deal with the bitterness and hatred which shatter our one humanity, bring us to our senses and help us to work with you so that justice and peace may

more fully reign. Unbounded love, flow on, flow on!

Unbounded love of God, flow on, flow on, into the crevices and emptiness of many a heart and mind that feels unloved, uncared for, whether young or old or somewhere in between.....
Forgive us for any way in which we make someone feel excluded or unloved. Let each person, whoever, discover their own worth, dignity and purpose in knowing that they are loved and precious. Unbounded love, flow on, flow on!

Unbounded love of God, flow on, flow on, freeing us all to be and to live as members of your one family, whether on earth or in heaven. So we entrust to your care those who have gone on before us and those specially on our hearts and minds in the here and now.
Unbounded love, flow on, flow on!

For them and for ourselves we say the prayer that Jesus gave us.

The Lord's Prayer

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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn: StF 463

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4VUgDQFIXw>

- 1 What shall I do my God to love,
my loving God to praise?
The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
and depth of sovereign grace?
- 2 Your sovereign grace to all extends,
immense and unconfined;
from age to age it never ends;
enfolds all humankind.

- 3 Throughout the world its breadth is known,
wide as infinity;
so wide it never passed by one,
or it had passed by me.
- 4 My trespass was grown up to heaven;
but, far above the skies,
in Christ abundantly forgiven,
I see your mercies rise.
- 5 The depth of all-redeeming love
what angel tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove
the gift unspeakable!
- 6 Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take
possession of your own;
my longing heart vouchsafe to make
your everlasting throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

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Bible readings are from the New International Version NIV 1984

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