

Welcome

This day, we step into the river of prayer and worship, A river that is always flowing, Around the world and throughout the cosmos. For these next few minutes, we close our minds to the distractions of life, And worship you, O God of all things. Amen.ⁱ

Song

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou for ever wilt be:

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!*

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Great is thy faithfulness...

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness...ⁱⁱ

Prayers & The Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, you have called us to be your people and we come to worship you this day, stepping aside from the distractions of the outside world, to tune our hearts to love again. You, O Lord, have blessed us richly, with your unchanging faithfulness to us and your love for all people. Today, we give you our thanks, our praise, and our worship. Today, we come to you to seek to connect with the great spirit-of-life that is flowing through all creation, to be inspired, uplifted, reinvigorated, and reminded of your love for us. May we be a people who take that love with us in all that we do, this day, this week, and forevermore. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

We say together the Lord's Prayer:

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 this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to the Theme

Think back to the last time you ate. Did you wash your hands beforehand? In the Mark reading, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Jesus was saying people don't need to wash their hands before eating. Nope, that's not what he's saying – it's good to wash your hands and make sure they're clean from germs. Jesus was talking about a different sort of washing.

Some groups of Jewish people at the time had a lot of rules to follow and this included ritual cleaning – cleaning through certain acts as a way of showing how religious you were. But Jesus didn't expect his disciples to follow these traditions – made by people, but not expected by God.

This got him into a bit of trouble with some of the people who thought it was important. But Jesus stood his ground and gave a good reason. Just because you're doing such acts, it doesn't mean you're showing you're a good person. What makes people show their love of God is what's in their heart and how it comes from the heart – it is this that leads us to do good things.

Sometimes we can be the same. We can get caught up in traditions – things we always do – and think they're the most important things, but forget that it's the love in our heart that shows people the love of God. Sometimes things we do in church seem so important, but they're just human creations and not expected by God.

How shall people know we are Jesus' disciples? 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13: 35.)

It is through our love as a community that we show God's love to the world. How can we put this at the centre of all we do? How can we make sure we focus on what is in our hearts and the love we show to others more than the human traditions we think important?^{iv}

Readings

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." **(Song of Solomon 2: 8 – 13)**

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition..."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile..."

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." **(Mark 7: 1 – 8, 14 – 15, & 21 – 23)**

Song:

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

*Christ be our light!
Shine in our hearts,
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Christ be our light...

Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.
Christ be our light...

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.
Christ be our light...

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.
Christ be our light...^v

Reflection

Holly Adams

"Renovation of the heart"

The videos can be viewed at [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](#) & www.wandamethodists.org.uk
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

What are you called to be?

Two questions for you to consider today, as you reflect on Holly's words and the readings we've heard. How might you and your church community, through prayer, worship and fellowship – investigate the condition of your hearts and invite God's love to transform them?

How might you and your church community, through service and evangelism, intentionally testify to God's transforming love in words and actions? Let us reflect on those questions together and share with one another this week what some of our answers might be. Let us close with reminding ourselves of these words from Holly's reflection: "we have a God who pitches their tent in the ruins of human hearts." Amen to that. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God of renewal, we pray for the Church. Thank you that you call us to participate in your mission. Help us to speak more boldly of your presence in our hearts and lives. Equip and send out your Church to love our neighbours more faithfully and courageously. Make us builders and proclaimers of your Kingdom of justice and joy.

God, may your transforming love renew our Church,
In the name of Christ, hear us.

God of restoration, we pray for your creation. We know that this world testifies to your goodness and creativity. Forgive us, we pray, for all that we have done to destroy and defile your Earth. Help us to repent and to devote ourselves through prayer and action to protect and sustain the delicate systems of life on this planet.

Thank you that your good news story is big enough for each of us, and for all creation.

God, may your transforming love restore our world,
In the name of Christ, hear us.

God of redemption, we pray for humanity. Thank you that you look on us with love and forgiveness and compassion. Thank you that you offer abundance, not abandonment. Forgive us, we pray, for all we do to perpetuate systems of injustice and oppression. Show us the way to build your Kingdom through our living and our praying. We lift up the lost and the lonely – may they know your closeness today. We remember our leaders – may they be guided by your wisdom and mercy. We offer ourselves – you know the deepest truths of our hearts. Heal us, help us, send us. We pray for all those people on our hearts in the silence now.

God, may your transforming love redeem our lives,
In the name of Christ, hear us. Amen.^{vi}

Song

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,
Teach me to move in the power of your Spirit,
Teach me to walk in the light of your presence,
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,
Teach me to trust in the word of your promise,
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming,
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

You wrote the rhythm of life,
Created heaven and earth;
In you is joy without measure.

So, like a child in your sight,
I dance to see your delight,
For I was made for your pleasure,
Pleasure.

Teach me to dance...

Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes,'
A will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in your face,
Let my whole being praise you,
Praise you.

Teach me to dance...^{vii}

Blessing

Go and enter into the flow of love that is at work in the universe. Go and discover that God is out there, moving, transforming, touching lives and all creation. Go and encounter the Spirit of God. Amen.^{viii}

Reflection

Renovation of the heart

Holly Adams

Have you ever saved up enough money to buy something that you've been really longing for? Maybe a pair of shoes or an item of clothing? Or maybe something even more costly, like a piece of furniture, a car or a house! Remember how cautiously you guarded its condition to begin with – hoping the dog wouldn't eat it, or the cat wouldn't scratch it, or the toddler wouldn't be sick on it. Maybe for the first days or weeks or even months, you kept it in perfect condition. But then, one way or another, in more or less extreme ways, it ended up damaged or broken or just not quite as shiny as it once was. Perhaps there is a huge coffee stain on a once cream-coloured sofa. Or perhaps there is a dent in the car door. Our carefully guarded, once perfect belonging is defiled.

I wonder if we can think of our hearts in the same way. Once whole, perfect, intact – but through the process of living our human lives, inevitably, over time, no matter how well guarded, they can become defiled: broken by grief or rejection, stained by suffering or selfishness, dented by bitterness or anger.

In our gospel today, we heard that the Pharisees and some of the scribes ask Jesus why it is that they eat with defiled hands, without washing them. And Jesus calls them hypocrites, and quotes from Isaiah, saying: “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” He goes on to tell the crowd that what matters is not what goes into a person, but what comes from a person’s heart. This is where defilement takes place and propagates.

Jesus speaks of defilement and lists adultery, theft, avarice, envy, pride. Ironically, he is challenging the purity laws around consumption, but each of these sins is in its own way about consumption - born out of a desire to have, to own, to take. And so, Jesus shows us, how we hopelessly attempt to self-satisfy the hunger of our broken hearts.

Facing up to the state of our own hearts is not a comfortable thing to do. Looking honestly at what we find there takes vulnerability. Just as it was for the Pharisees and the scribes, it is an easier task to worry about things on the surface. Exploring the matters of your own heart is a more costly task.

Our epistle today is on the same theme and calls us to reflect on the condition of our heart, to rid ourselves “of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness”. James writes: “If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.” If our living – our words and actions - don’t match up with the deeper truth of our hearts, we are as hypocritical as the Pharisees and the scribes to whom Jesus spoke. If we pay lip service to God’s story, but our heart beats to the rhythm of our own story, our religion is worthless.

How might we, with self-care, investigate the condition of our own hearts, where rests a deeper truth than our words and actions. What brokenness, what defilement might we find there? What need, what desire, what love?

We might think the truths of our hearts are well hidden, but the matters of our hearts have a way of spilling out into our lives. James warns against this, writing that an angry heart, “does not produce God’s righteousness.” Our Psalmist today opens their song with the words “my heart overflows with a goodly theme.” The joy in their heart bubbles up into their living and speaking. Eventually, ultimately, the matters of our hearts are revealed in what we do and say, in what we prioritise, in the way we spend our time and resources, in what we celebrate and mourn. All these things are windows into our hearts and souls – into our true selves.

What is the story of your heart that overflows into your life? Is it one of peace, joy and love, or one of fear, anger, or desire? Are our lives defined by our defilement? And this isn’t just a question for each of us as individuals, but as communities too. What is our shared heart, what is the true identity of us as a group of Christians?

Our mission and our evangelism – both as individuals and as church congregations – deeply depend on our ability to do this work: with kindness and vulnerability to examine our hearts, and with repentance and humility to set our hearts right before God.

When we set our hearts right before God, our loves will follow suit. But sadly, it is not always so easily done. Because, like cream-coloured sofas, human hearts are so easily ruined and not so easily restored.

The good news is that we have a God who pitches his tent in the ruins of human hearts. The good news is that we have a God who is in the business of heart-restoration.

God sees our defiled hearts, broken by grief or rejection, stained by suffering or selfishness, dented by bitterness or anger, and God’s heart breaks for us.

Remember that thing you saved up for and took care of that eventually got ruined? How much more does God regard us, God’s precious children, with grief and heartache as God sees our brokenness.

We can try to self-satisfy the hunger of our broken hearts – through our insatiable consumption of things, of people, of our own energy – but in this way our lives will continue to be defined by our defilement. Instead, let us welcome Jesus as our guest into our hearts to pitch his tent of love there. Love which comes into the brokenness just as it is, with forgiveness and healing, and through which the loving is redeeming. Love which is powerful enough to restore each one of our spoiled hearts. Love which spills over in fullness into our lives and into the lives of the people around us.

If we want to know what living with a heart overflowing with love looks like, then we can look to the reading today in Song of Solomon. These verses are a testimony to the transformational power of love:

“...for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.”

These verses speak boldly of true love – in words of fruitfulness, abundance, beauty, creativity, flourishing. They testify to the out-workings of a heart defined by love and not by its own defilement. They testify to the possibility of transformation for the whole world – a mission which God invites us into.

As people of Christ, we have invited his healing, redeeming love into our broken hearts. We are called to let that love overflow into the lives and communities around us. We are also called to boldly testify, through what we say and what we do, to the goodness of God we have experienced. And as we do so, if we keep our eyes open, we might just notice the in-breaking of God’s kingdom of justice and joy as transformation happens around us.

ⁱ Written by Tim Baker.

ⁱⁱ Words by Thomas Chisolm, Music by William Runyan, 1951, Hope Publishing Company. StF 51.

ⁱⁱⁱ Written by Tim Baker.

^{iv} Written by Gary Hopkins.

^v Words and Music by Bernadette Farrell, 1993, OCP Publications. StF 706.

^{vi} Written by Holy Adams.

^{vii} Words and Music by Graham Kendrick & Steve Thompson, 1993, Make Way Music Ltd, StF 477.

^{viii} Written by Tim Baker.