**Sunday 19 February**

**Epiphany 7**

***Prayer before worship:***

*As we arrive for worship, let us remember that love is not an optional extra for disciples; for we are called to love God, love our neighbour as ourselves and love our enemies. Total loving, just as You Lord are totally loving. Shape our motives and deflect our eyes from this world’s vanities. We love because you have first loved us, Amen.*

**Welcome**

**Call to Worship**

Don’t you understand that you yourself

are each a temple of God,

for within you God’s Spirit

chooses to live.

***O God, turn my eyes from focussing on vanities,***

***give me a life that is set in your ways.***

You are to be generous like your Father in heaven,

who gives the sun to rise on both rogues and the righteous,

and sends refreshing rain on both the just and the unjust.

***O God, teach me the heart of your statutes,***

***and I will then follow it to the very end***

**Songs of Praise:** Come, now is the time to worship

Light of the world

**Let me say how much I love you**

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, the words we have sung are powerful...

We have sung that we love you, and that we are willing to share your mercy and grace. May it be so. May we truly seek to live in the shadow of Your beauty;

Able to see You face to face.

No matter what goes down, no matter how hard it gets, may we choose to love you,

our Saviour, Lord and friend.

And Lord may we take the time this morning to hear your whisper

To hear You gently call each one of us by name

So that we may see Your power and Your glory and feel Your Spirit’s flame

So that we do find You in the desert places of our lives –when things are dry and life is hard... and so those very places that are so difficult become the places that are holy, because in them we discover You afresh.

Because it is in those moments Lord when we surrender ourselves to You

And find ourselves caught in this passion of knowing such amazing love and grace

As we come to know what it means to be Your beloved children.

Lord as we open ourselves to you this morning we ask you to speak to us the words you would have us hear. Challenge us where we most need it and bind the wounds that hurt us the most. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**Birthday basket**

**Offering and Dedication**

Holy God, you give generous blessings and fill our hearts with gratitude. Empower us to respond joyfully, sharing in ministry with those who are hungry for food and those who thirst for spiritual refreshment. May our community of faith reflect more fully the priorities of the kingdom of God. Receive and bless our gifts and offerings for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Time with the Children** The love of God

Take a craft stick and draw on the bottom of one all black –show that one... and say you are going to hand out one each, but the special chosen one has a star instead

(–on each of other sticks draw... draw with a star )

Hand them out secretly and let them all look at their own...

If you are the one with the star, keep it a secret... and then when I say, wave your arms, and yell out –I have got the star... I am the special chosen one!

Okay... go!

☺ God loves all of us!

As a child, you might sometimes feel like you get in the way –I know I did –and still do sometimes... but I want you to know that you are never in the way to God –God loves you... you are all chosen and you all have a special place both here and with God.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Song:** God loves you

***Children leave for Young Church programme***

**Powerpoint Reflection:** Psalm 119:33-40

As we hear the words of Leviticus, let us remember that these are the words leading us into confession... so let the phrases linger in your minds and hearts and challenge you as to where you have fallen short of the call of God on your life this week...

**Bible Reading:** Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-18

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| --- |
| 1 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. |
| 9 “‘When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.11 “‘Do not steal. “‘Do not lie. “‘Do not deceive one another. 12 “‘Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.13 “‘Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. “‘Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. 14 “‘Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. 15 “‘Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. 16 “‘Do not go about spreading slander among your people.“‘Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord.17 “‘Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 “‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. |

**Prayer of Confession**

Well aware that we are sinners, yet sinners who have a Saviour, let us relax our spirits in the grace of God, and pray.

In our wilful wandering, in cul-de-sacs where we have become stuck,

and in dark times when we have missed the right turn and know ourselves to be lost, there is the loving Spirit-Friend who always comes looking for us.

Find us Lord.

In our arrogance and our stubbornness,

in our impatience and clumsiness,

in our bad days of sulkiness or open rebellion,

there is always the loving Spirit-Friend who waits for us to come to our senses.

Transform us Lord.

In the hour of keen self awareness and shame,

in our regret for injuries inflicted or love denied,

in situations where we have failed You most miserably,

there is always the loving Spirit-Friend who forgives and restores us to the peace of salvation.

Forgive us Lord.

Whether our need for confession is due to our behaviour or our thoughts, our treatment of those we love or our treatment of those we don’t care about

We come before you and ask for forgiveness

For a new beginning

And a new strength to live lives worthy of your call on our lives.

In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

God in love seeks our reconciliation and offers forgiveness to each one of us, as a step toward wholeness and abundant life.

God of inordinate patience, we thank you for forgiving not just us but our friends and enemies alike,

We thank you for sending sunshine on saints and sinners,

and blessing with rain both the just and the unjust.

We thank you that we have been included in the amnesty of your saving grace and the opportunities of the new age brought in by Christ Jesus.

Holy are you Lord God, your goodness endures forever, Amen.

**Song:**  Oh to see the dawn

**Bible Readings:** Matthew 5: 38-48

1 Corinthians 3: 10-11, 16-23

**Sermon** Discipleship 3: How we love as disciples

**Hymn:** Love divine, all loves excelling

**Prayers of Intercession**

A fellow clergy and friend who recently moved to a parish in Christchurch is living in Cashmere. I knew via facebook that she and her family were possibly in the way of the fires on Wednesday… On Friday Sylvia Purdie shared these words about her experience…

Cashmere Fire Report
from Silvia Purdie, Minister, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Christchurch 17/2/17

*Wednesday 15 February 2017 won't be easily forgotten by the people of Cashmere. The fires had started on the summit of the Port Hills on Monday afternoon. By Wednesday morning the focus of fire-fighting was over the hill as the fires pushed down towards Governors Bay. Smoke billowed up and over the top, down over Cashmere. Our home is at the head of Bowenvale Avenue, and by lunchtime the valley was filled with smoke, and ash was drifting. You could hardly see the top of Sugarloaf. The smoke billowed, thickened and spread south; by mid afternoon the entire Port Hills were under the most hideous cloud I've ever seen. The colour was indescribable, not grey - a sickening orangey pinky vomit colour.
The wind changed to a fresh easterly, which cleared the smoke and was good news for us in Bowenvale as it pushed the fire away from our valley. But bad news for Cashmere and Westmorland. When darkness fell the helicopters stopped work, and without the monsoon buckets of water falling on them the fires burst up. The flames crossed the road up into our precious trees in Victoria Park. And they pushed down the hill towards the city.
Those living high on the hill were evacuated.
By midnight this was the sight that greeted my family as we fled our house and looked back to the hill - a continuous line of blazing light, from Victoria Park all the way to the south above Hallswell. The most terrifying sight of my life.*

*Some of our church members evacuated, but most stayed put. No one got much sleep, whether or not they were in 'the line of fire'.
Leona described to me how she sat at her window all night, watching trees burst into flame in the valley above Princess Margaret Hospital. She saw a house completely engulfed in flames, then the flames died away and incredibly the house was untouched by the fire; Leona realised that she had personally installed a watering system around the house!*

*After the fire, some thoughts ...*

*1. Fire is terrifying. It's a central metaphor for the Christian faith, but what are we messing with?? We love to contain fire, embroider flames on banners. But if God is like fire, God is utterly outside our control, a power that leaves us trembling.*

*2. I did not enjoy evacuating my home. I was shocked at how attached I am to all my stuff, as I went round the house imagining everything being reduced to ash, choosing a special dress, a necklace, a photo album, to stuff in the car, half saying goodbye to every book, bowl and shoe. Today it is all still here, and I wonder how Christ feels about all my stuff, whether I let it get in the way of my heart's true calling.*

*3. We are all enormously grateful to those brave, faithful men and women who fought the fires on our behalf. How hard they have worked, volunteers alongside professionals, in the trucks and in the helicopters. Our parish Administrator, Gail, has been at the fire station much of the week, dishing out tea and sammies and smiles. Her husband and sons have been out facing the smoke and flames, every hour of day and night they can.*

*And as for the helicopters, they have swooped over our heads in every hour of daylight. As I write this early on Friday morning I can hear them starting up again, for the 5th day. Leona described how 4 of them danced in synch to stop a leading edge of flame, dropping their water with precision, immediately flying back for more water. Those men are the heroes of the hour.
One of them gave his life for us. Stephen Askin. Son of Baptist pastors. Spoke at my son's youth camp last year. What kind of man loves fighting fire from a tiny metal box hovering in the air?? What kind of a woman lets her husband do that?? All I know is, that is closer to Jesus's words in Mark 8:35 than I've ever been or want to be! "Those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, with save it."*

*So, today, after the fire, our church will care for our people, be there for others. We're part of a good network and response systems. I'm thinking a community BarBQ would be good. But there's not really much we can do.*

Sylvia, as a woman with a deep love for the psalms, then shared a prayer she had written for her people, based on Psalm 61.

I want to invite you now to hear and share these words of prayer and let them become our words too...

Let us pray -

*Hear our cry, O God!
You listen, you hear
the anguish of those whose homes are ash,
the loss of a good, good, brave man,
our tiredness, our stress,
our cry of fear.
Our hearts are faint, O God.
Lead us to the rock that is higher than the flames.
You are our refuge, the strong tower against our fears.
We crawl into your safety in the shelter of your wings.
Your steadfast love and faithfulness watches over us,
you have carried us through.
So we will praise your name,
and find courage and strength in you,
this day, and tomorrow, and the day after that.*

And now let us extend our prayers to the wider world...

Holy Friend of the earth, if we could take the entire world’s needs and sorrows to heart, we would become crushed by their enormity.

So we ask You to guide us, to discern those things we can achieve, and give us the wisdom to leave the remainder in your providential and redeeming hands.

Loving God, please bless those hordes of people who are hungry, homeless, without family or homeland.

Please bless the injured and the diseased, the handicapped and those who suffer grievous mental or emotional illness.

Please bless the lonely people, whether they stand isolated in large crowds or whether they timidly hide away from others.

Please bless the pained souls who exist without any faith or hope, the dying and those who sit with them, and those who mourn.

Please bless all those people of good will, who try to rectify the world’s ills, and sometimes get abused for their trouble.

God our most Holy Friend, be to all of us a strength in weakness, a light in darkness, a peace in anxiety, a courage in upheaval, and a robust joy in our happiness, Through Christ Jesus our inspiration and guide, Amen.

**Hymn:** Trust and obey

**Benediction and sung Amen** Throughout the long day, may you know the solid ground of God beneath your feet.

When you go to sleep, may the Spirit mend your body, mind and soul.

And as each new day dawns, may the grace of Christ be at your side.

Go on your way, knowing that through Christ

all good things are now yours.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you, now and always, Amen.

**Sermon** Discipleship 3: How we love as disciples

 Matthew 5: 38-48 and 1 Corinthians 3: 10-11, 16-23

Three weeks ago we began looking at discipleship... talking about being a disciple as being a learner –a follower of Jesus, learning to live the way he wants us to. Then we looked at discipleship as starting on the inside rather than starting with a list of behaviours expected of us… that as Christians we see through the eyes of Jesus to the world we live in. And then last week we looked at the kind of behaviour that comes with discipleship. Living with integrity, that starts from our thoughts and decisions and gets translated into action.

And today we come to the particularity of how we act –it is about how we love.

I guess the most obvious place to start if we are looking at how to love, would be to turn to 1 Cor 13... you know, love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.  It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.  Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.Love never fails.

And yes, that is a wonderful definition of love –the way it reminds us how big and amazing love is. But instead we have these other readings this morning…

We find ourselves back on the mountain with Jesus… listening to more of his teaching. -The new Moses, on the mount, interpreting the Law for a new group of exiles. And we sit alongside disciples and Pharisees as Jesus speaks of the way people have become disconnected from God and one another. He offers a reinterpretation of the law that will bring life and completion. He wants to go deeper and higher. Like Moses leading the Hebrews from the slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land, Jesus is creating the first signs of a new community in the midst of the old one.

He continues with those –you have heard… but I tell you… statements -Now it is –you have heard it say an eye for an eye –but I tell you do not resist an evil person.

You have heard it say love your neighbour and hate your enemy, but I say love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you.

It is important to recognise though, that what was said in Leviticus -that the people were not to retaliate with more violence –was a significant move forward to a better society. It had been a life for an eye… a clan for a life, and a tribe for a clan…

An eye for an eye was radical justice. It moved from revenge to retribution. And if we read further we would see the law caring for more than just the neighbour –it was about caring for the foreigner too. It was a huge step forward, from which Jesus would take another huge step.

But how far have we really come?

I watched an interesting conversation on facebook yesterday where people were talking about what they would do if a burglar entered their home… it certainly wasn’t the *do not resist* approach that was being advocated… there was no sense of offering them the other cheek.

It reminded me of the bit in the movie Les Miserables… so I decided it was worth seeing it –perhaps for the first time perhaps for the tenth… either way, it is a reminder I suspect we all need as the Matthew passage is lived out

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQO5qw7EUN8> (3 mins 42 secs)

That is the love that Jesus was describing… love that is costly and undeserved. It is the profound love that is described in Corinthians, but it is not just to those you choose to love. It is not just about what we say at weddings –it is how we respond to our enemies.

The bar is set so high… Be perfect, Jesus says, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. It follows from our earlier reading from Leviticus –you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy, and there it is spelt out in terms of care for the poor and the immigrants. Live ethically, fairly, kindly, justly… don’t bear grudges or take vengeance. The bar was set high for the Jews and Jesus simply takes it even higher.

Turn the other cheek. Go the second mile –for a Roman soldier was allowed to command anyone along the road to come and carry his bag for a mile. Give the shirt off your own back. Show mercy, forgive enemies, pray for persecutors.

God doesn’t show favourites and neither should we.

Now this might seem okay when we sit reading it here in church… but when we take this out into life… it could really hurt!

It will be really difficult. This is no easy ask.

Generosity to the undeserving… –let’s put that in language we understand -

Who are the ones you would put high on the undeserving list?

…Have a think for a moment… -got some categories?

Now try putting a face to them…

They are probably different for many of us –but there will be some…

Now envisage real generosity to them… what would that look like?

Who might offer that kind of generosity to those people?

Could you do it?

Okay, so if you are anything like me –when you are really honest, this may seem like a pretty gigantic leap… Impossible, even…

And I guess I say at this point that it is only with God that we are going to ever be empowered to live like this. The Bible is clear –we have the image of God within us and so deep within us is the ability to love as God loves. It may be a tainted image but it is the one Jesus is working at repairing. Making us the people we really are.

We are loved and so we are able to love.

And that is what I absolutely believe –but I am also aware that many of us hear the se words of Jesus and think, *yeah right* –like it is some Tui advertisement…

With God I am going to be able to be nicer than I can ever imagine…??

So alongside this, maybe you want to add some pragmatism…

Let’s try taking it back a bit –just for a moment –and maybe we can work up to it…

Maybe start with loving someone a bit more than completely un-deserving… and get us heading in the right direction…

Perhaps some personalities will prefer step by step –moving toward really loving the ones we see as most undeserving.

And perhaps other personalities will want to grab the issue by the horns and challenge themselves into acts of love toward the most undeserving they see.

But however we decide to live out our calling as disciples to love though… one thing I can guarantee… we will fail. And that is okay –it is part of this thing we call discipleship –trying, failing and trying again… letting grace and love have their way.

Discipleship means that failure does not cause us to lower our sights where we can be comfortable, it instead pushes us on to the heights Jesus calls us to aspire to.

Jesus says, Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect…

And before the Type A personalities among you start to work out how they will strive toward this goal of perfection, and you others simply acknowledge what seems impossible, perhaps a better translation is needed.

Fred Craddock –a renown American preacher and New Testament scholar who died 2 years ago, clarified that the Greek word used for perfect is “teleios” and refers more to completion and maturity. This word is not referring to something flawless, but to something whole and complete.

Jesus is teaching the disciples about a path which leads to their well-being and which has the power to transform the world through love. Revenge and retaliation have the power to harm our well-being. On the other hand love and generosity make us whole and give life to others. In this way, love –as God calls us to - is the way to wholeness and completion.

Jesus is sitting on the mount teaching us about the kind of community the law imagines -a community of integrity and justice… this imagined world where the law is fulfilled, where everybody is treated well, and where reconciliation and love is the norm.

And it would simply be a nice idea, a wordy utopian vision, if it was not followed up with the cross. -With the willingness of Jesus to turn the other cheek.

But at this point I also want to comment briefly on this whole concept of turning the other cheek –because it is full of fish hooks.

Evil does still need to be resisted –simply to turn and walk away is not enough.

The scholar Walter Wink refers to this turning the other cheek as a way of shaming the abuser. Martin Luther King went further and emphasised that we are called to this non violent resistance, but that shaming was only a step taken in order to reach the ultimate goal of reconciliation.

We have a responsibility to resist evil –and such resistance is a work in progress, that is why we *practice* law rather than solve it… But perhaps the way of Jesus is not so much shaming as Craddock argued, but naming the evil. Calling attention to it rather that hiding it away as shaming often does. Exposing the evil –the very real need to name the evil we see and expose it –especially for the sake of the vulnerable. And then we are called to respond without like kind. Jesus is offering us a new way to live not just by the law, but above the law.

So together, we are called to live lives of love. And as in our reading from Corinthians explains… we are then building this community where the new way of living Jesus calls us to, is practiced, We are building the temple –the place where God dwells; the place where others will see who God is.

Each of us are part of this team of builders –each placing our own brick down… not because we are especially wise –but simply because we are disciples –learning the way of Jesus, and living this way of extraordinary love.

We together are becoming the place God dwells in the world.

Living out this amazing way of love that Jesus calls us to as his disciples.

So be it, Amen.