

A song to sing or to read: In Love We Choose to Live

Refrain: Love is patient, love is kind
love is ready to forgive
In our love new hope is found
in love we choose to live.

May love be our home
rest to soothe tired bones.
May love be healing for our wounds.
May love speak the truth
free us from our fear.
May love be the heart of our anger! *Refrain*

May love be the sun
shining in our darkness.
May love fill the lives of our children.
May love be our strength
to live a life of justice.
May love be our call to live the Kingdom! *Refrain*

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Closing Prayer

In the power of the Holy Spirit we go forth into to the world
to fulfil our calling as the people of God, the Body of Christ.
We go in peace so the Word of God continues to stir our hearts and
minds; the love of Christ Jesus continues to light our path each day;
and the power of the Holy Spirit will continue to uphold us.
Give to us every spiritual blessing both now and forevermore.
Amen

With thanks to Dan Eaton for preparing today's reflection



A Gathering

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

Forever God, we praise you knowing that that you never stop loving us.
Searching God, we praise you knowing that you never stop seeking us.
Father God, we praise you as your children, knowing that in your love for us there will be no first or last to that chosen time.



Forgiving God, we praise you for letting us to serve you willingly, it is in our repentance we will share in your kingdom.

Loving God, we praise you as your loving tenants in your vineyard accepting your invitation to know, love and accept your Son, Jesus into our lives. We praise you that you never stop loving us.

Amen

A Prayer of Confession

When we treat our faith as nothing more than a self-help system and You, God, as simply a cure for whatever ails us. **Where is the love?**

When we use the gifts our planet gives us with little care for our wastefulness and destruction. **Where is the love?**

When we deny and disdain truths and practices that others hold dear. **Where is the love?**

When we ignore the sickness, the loneliness, the struggle and the vulnerability of others, because it doesn't affect us. **Where is the love?**

When we berate ourselves for our failures, or hold ourselves to impossible and trivial standards. **Where is the love?**

Forgive us, Lord, and teach us and our world what it really means to love.



First Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

Reflection

In this reading, Paul is acknowledging that his earlier, but brief, time in Thessalonica has left those recent converts with little support against the opposition to and persecution of the new church. Paul seeks to encourage the new converts in their trials, giving further guidance to godly living and bearing further witness to the light in the Word of God. It was not an easy time and Paul was offering comfort and urging others to stay on the path.

Without doubt the events for 2020 have been challenging: so much so that physical *and* spiritual exhaustion could leave many of us and those we know with rising uncertainty or increased worry. Nobody likes the possibility of some impending, future darkness. Paul's reminder is to recall the messages of the Gospel as told by him, Silas and Timothy - to be assured that God's message is faithful and true. In this letter there is the underlying urging to stir up one another to love and do good works; to never neglect to meet together; and to be encouraging to one another.

In our reflections today, we do not confront the kind of danger those people did. Still we need one another no less than they did. As they could draw strength mutually from the faith and courage of one another, so can we. By sharing this week's Church in a Bag, we are giving encouragement and support to one another in one of the historic essentials of Christian faith and fellowship - the meeting together of the people of Christ. God is pleased for the ministry of your presence.

Second Reading: Matthew 22: 34-46

Reflection

Millions of words, thousands of books, hundreds of songs have appeared about love, but one sentence says it all. Perhaps it's a bit like this story:

A man once observed a young boy out in a field flying a kite. He noticed that there was something odd about the way the boy was standing and holding on to the string. He walked up to the boy and then learned that the boy was blind. He said, "Do you like flying kites?" The boy said, "I sure do." This piqued the man's curiosity and he asked, "How is that when you cannot see it?" The boy answered, "I may not be able to see it but I can feel it tugging!"

We may not always be able to identify the love of God in this world. Like the little boy, we may not be able to see love but it has a tug that lets us know it's there.

What does the word Love mean today? How do we define it? Here are a few thoughts from the unencumbered minds of our children:

Karl, age 5, says: "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving lotion and they go out and smell each other."

Elaine, age 5, says: "Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford."

Mary Ann, age 4, says: "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day."

Tommy, age 6, says: "Love is like a little old man and a little old woman who are still friends even after they know each other so well."

Bobby, age 5, says: "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

Jenny, age 7, says: "There are two kinds of love. God's love. Our love. But God makes both kinds."

That last answer is worthy of a philosopher. Maybe we should listen to children more than we do. They see the world around them with clear, fresh eyes, and interpret it with clear, fresh minds.

