



**Birstall and Rothley Methodist Churches**  
**A Service for the 5th Sunday of Easter: May 2nd, 2021**



This service has been prepared for use at home.

### Call to Worship

Jesus calls us to love each other.

With the incredible power,  
and the unfathomable depth,  
of God's love for us,  
we can - we must -  
love one another.

And it is in our love for one another,  
that the world will know whom and what we worship.

Come, children of God;  
let us love one another.

### Hymn

H&P 220

1 God is love: his the care,  
tending each, ev'rywhere,  
God is love, all is there!  
Jesus came to show him,  
that we all might know him!

*Sing aloud, loud, loud!  
sing aloud, loud, loud!  
God is good! God is truth!  
God is beauty! Praise him!*

2 None can see God above;  
neighbours here we can love;  
thus may we Godward move,  
finding him in others,  
sisters all, and brothers:

3 Jesus lived here on earth,  
hope and life brought to birth  
he affirmed human worth,  
for he came to save us  
by the truth he gave us.

4 To our Lord praise we sing,  
light and life, friend and King,  
coming down, love to bring,  
pattern for our duty,  
showing God in beauty.

*words: Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)*

### Prayer

Let us give thanks for the remarkable gifts  
of God's creating and redeeming love,  
the loving that casts out all fear.

For the love that frees us to ask questions and explore,  
to frame doubts and investigate new possibilities,  
to build theories and then cross-examine them.

***We thank you, God of adventurous love.***

For the love that enables us to marvel at our own existence,  
to ponder and remember,  
recognize our own needs  
and affirm our own knowledge and purpose.

***We thank you, God of determined love.***

For the love that helps us to communicate with one another,  
to express trust and respect,  
share heartaches and visions,  
to convey love and mercy.

***We thank you, God of reconciling love.***

For the love that inspires us to warmly encourage those around us,  
to affirm and build up, comfort and enlighten.

***We thank you, God of nurturing love.***

For the love that liberates us to celebrate the world around us  
in poetry and song,  
to delight in shapes and colours, intricacies and patterns,  
awesome forces and deep mysteries.

***We thank you God of visionary love.***

For the love that encourages us to express something of our faith;  
for creeds and prayers, hymns and readings,  
discussion groups and sermons.

***We thank you, God of creative love.***

Above all else we thank you for the love  
that allows us to admit that we have no words  
in which to adequately describe the process of faith in Christ,  
the awesome worship of our God,  
and the holy wonder of the Spirit.

We thank you for that point where  
our love becomes wordless adoration.

Through Christ Jesus,  
who is the pure glory of your loving.

***Amen!***

**Reading:** 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**Litany** (*inspired by 1 John 4:7*)

God calls us to a ministry of love.

***Beloved, let us love one another.***

We are called to love our parents and our children,  
our friends and our neighbours.

***Love is from God.***

We are called to love the neighbour that hurt our feelings,  
the parent who was cruel,  
and the co-worker who is selfish.

***Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.***

We are called to love even the people we cannot see....  
in the hospitals of India,  
in the prisons of Iran,  
in the war in Afghanistan.

***Those who love God must love their sisters and brothers also.***

May we accept God's call to this mysterious ministry.

***Amen.***

**Prayer of Confession**

Merciful One,  
you know when we are afraid to love;  
you know when we are too cowardly to show mercy.

Remind us again that perfect love casts out such fears.

Surround us and strengthen us with your perfect love,  
and fill us with a love so strong  
that we may cast aside our pride  
and embrace the power of love.

Here we find God's word,  
God's way,  
God's love,  
and God's forgiveness.

***Thanks be to God, we are forgiven.***

***Amen.***

**Hymn**

StF 620

1. Thou God of truth and love,  
we seek thy perfect way,  
ready thy choice to approve,  
thy providence to obey:  
enter into thy wise design,  
and sweetly lose our will in thine.
2. Why hast thou cast our lot  
in the same age and place?  
And why together brought  
to see each other's face?  
To join with loving sympathy,  
and mix our friendly souls in thee?
3. Didst thou not make us one,  
that we might one remain,  
together travel on,  
and share each other's pain;  
till all thy utmost goodness prove,  
and rise renewed in perfect love?
4. Then let us ever bear  
the blessed end in view,  
and join, with mutual care,  
to fight our passage through;  
and kindly help each other on,  
till all receive the starry crown.
5. O may thy Spirit seal  
our souls unto that day,  
with all thy fulness fill,  
and then transport away!  
Away to our eternal rest,  
away to our Redeemer's breast!

*words: Charles Wesley (1707-88)*

**Reading:** Acts 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)

So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."

So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**Reflection**

At the beginning of Acts, Jesus declared that his followers will be led by the Spirit to be "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." As we read the book, we see it happening - from Jerusalem, out into Judea, and by chapter 8 the gospel has reached Samaria.

So now we can expect his followers to go to ends of the earth; wherever that is. If any readers are wondering just how far the church's witness might go and whom it might reach, this story has the answer - it will go very far, and reach every kind of person.

But it doesn't happen in quite the way we might expect!

For a start, Philip wasn't one of those who had been commissioned to take the Gospel into the world. No, Philip had been appointed to the team distributing food to those in need.

Fortunately, when God called him, Philip didn't say, "but, Lord, that isn't my job! I'm busy! Ask someone else!" Actually, Philip didn't know what he was being asked to do, but he set off anyway, and found himself in the desert, talking to an Ethiopian eunuch.

This man is a strange and exotic figure to us - an educated, powerful, wealthy black man from another culture - but one who worshipped God, even though he couldn't become fully part of the Jewish community because he was physically mutilated.

It must have taken courage for Philip to ask "Do you understand what you are reading?". But Philip was able to explain the prophecy, and to declare how, in Christ, people who were previously excluded were now welcome. And that specifically included eunuchs (see Isaiah 56).

And then - a miracle! Water in the desert!

The man was baptised, and went home rejoicing. When he arrived home, he must have spread the Good News, because there was a Christian church in Ethiopia long before there was a Christian church in Rome. The gospel is spreading to the ends of the earth - and all because Jesus' followers were willing to take risks.

*take a moment to reflect:*

*how many miracles (both large and small) can you count in this story?*

*Have you ever experienced any similar miracles?*

## Prayer of Thanksgiving

Ever-living God,  
we give you thanks and praise  
for those who take risks that others might hear the Good News  
and know for themselves how good you are.

We thank you for your Word,  
which takes root in different circumstances and cultures,  
inspiring people of different generations and cultures.

We thank you for your Spirit,  
leading us all into greater understanding,  
faith and courage.

May our thanksgiving overflow in lives of praise -  
in the Name of Christ we pray.

**Amen**

## Prayer of Intercession

We pray, loving God,  
for the blessing of your Spirit  
on all kinds of people, with their widely diverse needs.

**Your blessing, please,  
on the sick and those who nurse them,  
on workers and those who employ them,  
on the unemployed and those who support them.**

Your blessing, please,  
on the hungry and those who feed them,  
on refugees and those who welcome them,  
on drug addicts and those who treat them,  
on the sorrowing and those who comfort them.

**Pour your Holy Spirit on these for whom we have prayed,  
and also on the many who never catch our eye  
or make it into our prayers.**

**Through Christ Jesus, our Divine Brother.  
Amen!**

**Our Father, who art in heaven ....**

**Hymn**            Tune: *O Waly Waly* StF 287ii

1. Go walk with God in all you do,  
and may God's love bring joy to you.  
May gifts of peace fill all your days,  
and may God's truth guide you always.
2. O may the grace of Christ our Lord,  
the wondrous love that comes from God,  
the Spirit's fellowship now be  
God's gifts to you eternally.
3. We thank you, Lord, for life to share  
through learning, serving, praise and prayer.  
And when we say good-bye to friends,  
we thank you, Lord: Love never ends.

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## Blessing

Just as God's Word was sent into the world to heal and redeem,  
so God sends you into the world this day  
to be light and love, healing and hope.

Go now to be light for the world!

And may the grace and peace of God,  
the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer  
come upon you this day, and remain with you always.    **Amen.**