

**ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH**  
**Transcript of ZOOM: Service Sunday 9<sup>th</sup>, May 2021, Easter 6B**

Ed. 09.05.21

**Introduction and Prayer – Martin**

*Good morning, wherever you are. It's good to speak to you again. "We are not gathered in the same building, but we know that, as we worship together, from where we are, God can hear us all.*

**A Prayer:**

In our separate places we join together as friends of one another, and as friends of Jesus, to worship and serve the one who, because of his great love, gave his all for us. Amen.

**Hymn 716** Come and Find the quiet centre

**Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

From our own special places,  
 we join with others here, and throughout the world,  
 to bring praise and prayers, and to commit ourselves afresh  
 to one another, and to our Lord Jesus Christ.  
 We give thanks that he has chosen us to be his friends,  
 and invites us to share in that friendship with his people in all the world.

May we live as Jesus lived, serve as he served, and love as he loved,  
 to the glory of his name.

God of relationships, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
 draw us together as one people so that we may draw others, and serve others.  
 Help us to obey your command to love as you have loved, that we may inspire others.

We acknowledge that, when our lives are easy, we readily forget about God,  
 but, in our hurry to turn back to him when things get difficult,  
 we forget about our commission to help other people.  
 Trusting in the renewing grace of Jesus Christ, who forgives, redeems and blesses us,  
 may we commit ourselves anew to his service, and to love and support others,  
 especially those in difficulties of any kind.

God of all,  
 we give thanks for the gift of friendship:  
 for the giving and the receiving;  
 for opportunities and challenges, laughter and tears;  
 for conversations and silence, moments and memories.  
 Draw us deeper into your love, and bless us with the confidence  
 to proclaim Jesus as our friend, teacher and Saviour.  
 All this we ask this in his name, as in his words we pray:  
*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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
 and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

**Readings: Hugh will read for us this morning.**

**1st Reading:**

**1 John 5:1-6 (NRSVA): Faith Conquers the World**

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

**Hymn 528** - Make me a channel of your peace

**2nd Reading:**

**John 15:9-17( NRSVA)**

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

*Amen. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.*

**Message:**

Somebody said that St. John's Gospel is "A stream in which children can wade and elephants swim."

Immediately accessible, but with deeper messages.

In today's reading, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he must leave them; trying to comfort them, because they are confused and worried. He repeatedly emphasises the essentials of his teaching. See how often he uses the word 'love': the love of Jesus for the Father; the love of the Father for Jesus, and through him, for all those who love him; the love of Jesus for all those who follow him.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. (Ch. 15: 10)

Is Jesus speaking only to the twelve, or do his words extend to include all believers? I think they do, because he keeps switching from addressing his disciples, to generalisations about others – "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit" (15:5).

Jesus is talking not only to his immediate circle, but to all believers. To you and me. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. And your joy will be complete! (15: 10-11)

What an offer!

Here we have the three-way connection: the love of the Father for the Son; the love of the Son for believers, and the love of believers for one another.

In the same way, there are close connections between obedience, love, and joy:

"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (15: 11)

Lasting joy comes through obedience to Jesus Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Jesus's words about the depth of his love have become so familiar to us that they are in danger of losing their meaning. Listen again, and savour the words:

"Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (v.12-13)

That's the depth of Jesus's love. He did lay down his life for his friends.

That's what is on offer; what Jesus gives for those he loves. For his friends.

Who are his friends? We are – or we can be.

"You are my friends if you do what I command you." (v. 14)

"You did not choose me," he says – "but I chose you." (v. 16)

We are no longer his servants. We are his friends.

Believers are not those who have chosen Jesus. They are those who have *been chosen* by Jesus. This all sounds a bit strange. Surely we did choose to follow him? Surely it was our decision?

Jesus points to the deeper truth that God draws people to him. God prepares the way as they come home to him. Looking back over how they came to their faith, Christians can often see the hand of God at work – that "Divinity that shapes our ends", as Shakespeare had it; the influence of God that led them to discover him.

We are believers because we are called to be believers. We are meant to be believers.

Jesus offers us his love, his friendship, and joy that is complete.

Sounds too good to be true. But it is true.

True. No catch - but there's a bargain to be made and kept. Not cheap, and not easy. It takes a commitment, an investment on our part. But we don't hear anybody complaining about the return on that investment!

What do we have to do? Jesus said:

- keep my commandments (v 10)
- love one another as I have loved you (12)
- go and bear fruit (16)

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another (17)

Love one another? Some people are difficult to love.

It's very hard to love people you don't like.

We need to learn to love everybody.

In a previous career I had to sign an annual undertaking that I would not discriminate against anyone on grounds of age, sex, race, colour, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief. I resented the implication that I needed to sign an undertaking to what seemed to me to be basic Christian behaviour. We are all different, and we are all God's children. We may not agree with certain people – for example, I'm very suspicious of people who seem to believe that they have a monopoly of religious truth, that they can tell you what is the will of God: but they are entitled to their views.

I would be surprised – disappointed - if everybody agrees with everything I say to you. But if disagreement with me makes you think afresh about certain things, or, better still, take down your Bible from the shelf, maybe I'll have done something worthwhile.

Does God love the sinners – from murderers, paedophiles, terrorists, to government ministers fiddling their expenses?

I don't know. I do know that "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 6:8).

I do know that:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

No mention here of exceptions - of Catholics, Protestants, skin colour, minority groups.

I know that the son that God sent into the world said:

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. (Matt. 7:1)

Love one another, Jesus says. The people you like, the people you don't like, and the people you don't agree with. It's hard. But we have to try.

How much are we to love one another? "Love one another as I have loved you".

We know how much that is:

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends".

We hope we never have to do it, but that's the standard. That's the depth of the love we have to aim at.

Because he did it for us.

Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

**Hymn 502** -Take my life, Lord

### **Prayer for Others and Blessing**

We bring to God our prayers for people around us and in the wider world.  
We pray for the people and the situations that play upon our minds, trouble our conscience;  
where we want to help, but hesitate to begin.

We pray for people and circumstances we don't understand or comprehend;  
for people who make us ashamed because of their words or behaviour.  
In these strange times, we bring to God things that frighten and confuse us, bewilder and perplex us.

We pray for people who carry the burdens of illness and injury;  
the scars of prejudice and injustice;  
for those who feel unloved, uncared for, unwanted,  
and for all who are abused, neglected and cast aside.

We pray for those who fear their future, and see no way to change it;  
people who see no hope; who share no love; who know no joy.

As the Pandemic continues, we pray for people everywhere who are in any way affected,  
thinking especially of India and other places  
where medical services are overstretched and overwhelmed.  
We pray that medical supplies and vaccines may be made available.

We pray for those seriously ill;  
for others who pass their days in an agony of worry and waiting;  
for those drained by grief, bereft without their soul-mates.

We bring to God all those known to us whose needs hang heavy upon us today.

*Pause*

Almighty God, in your love, reach out  
to all whom we hold in our thoughts and prayers. Amen.

Now as you return to everyday things,  
may you stay safe in the way of Christ,  
honouring him by obeying his commands,  
seeking always in your lives to reflect his love  
by being a friend to others;  
and may the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you, and remain with you,  
now and always. Amen.