



Sunday 10th May 2020

Notes from our Sunday Morning
Pre-recorded Worship

Opening Welcome

Hello! It's lovely to be with you all. We hope that you are well and coping under the current circumstances; we know that some of you are bored and maybe even missing going to school! Perhaps you have found new hobbies and routines to keep you entertained.

This service continues our series on Building Family, focussing on being an obedient family.

Lord, we want to thank you that we can gather in this way, we want to open our hearts to you, and encounter you together as a church family. We open our hearts to you and we're excited by all you are going to do through this service. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song

Sing And Shout

Verse 1

Your cross Your cross it draws me to Your heart
It makes my spirit sing it makes my spirit sing
Your grace Your grace oh I hear it call my name
I'm waking up to sing
I'm waking up to sing

Interlude

Oh oh oh oh

Chorus

(Yeah) We will sing and shout yeah
Sing and shout
Open up our hearts and pour Your praises out
We will sing and shout (yeah) (oh)
Sing and shout
Open up our hearts and pour Your praises out

Verse 2

Because because because Your love came down
It makes me want to sing
It makes me want to sing
Because because because You call my name
I'm waking up to sing
I'm waking up to sing

Bridge

What could be better than a grace
That washes all our shame away
What could be better than Your great love
What could be better than a grace
That leads us home and makes a way
What could be better than Your great love
(REPEAT)

Ending

What could be better than a grace

Washes all our shame away

What could be better than a grace

Shout

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Reading: 1 John 2:3-14

Love and Hatred for Fellow Believers / An Obedient Family

3 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. 4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God[a] is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister[b] is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister[c] lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Reasons for Writing

12 I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

14 I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

Talk by Joy Bishop

Hi everyone, it's so great to be with you this morning. My name is Joy if you don't know me and I'm the Worship Pastor here at St. Saviour's. I've also recently got married to this lovely man called Dan, who also works here at the church. It's fantastic to be with you and I hope that you're doing well considering we're into, I think, our seventh, or eighth week now of this Coronavirus pandemic. I know for many of you it's actually very difficult and you're just feeling quite frustrated, and cabin fever is setting in now. And for some of us actually, we're just really enjoying it, and enjoying the one-off jobs we would not normally do. So wherever you are this morning we stand by you, we're with you. If you do need us for any reason, whether that's to pray with you, to listen to you, to chat, we'd love you to get in touch with us.

So today we're going to continue with our series looking at the first letter of John and I just want to pull out three things in the passage for us this morning.

And the first thing that I want to pull out is keeping Jesus's commands.

So we're currently in a season right now where there are many commands and directions which our government are giving us. One of them is to stay at home, to protect the NHS, and to save lives. And this is a really great command, which I'm sure many of us are really behind and we really appreciate what they're all doing for us. In many ways, again, this morning the word command is being thrown around, here, there and everywhere in this passage as we've just heard read by Adrian. I just want to hone in on verses three and four again and just read them out to you this morning. 1 John 2:3-4, "We know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says I know him, but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person".

So why is John saying this? Well, I would say there are two bits of fake news going on here. The first bit of fake news is that there are people who are saying I'm following Jesus's commands. I'm following him, but actually they're not living out the commands that Jesus would like them to follow. And the second is that there are whispers of how Jesus is actually not who he is and we know this to be heretical views from this group called the Gnostics. I don't have time to go into all of what they believe this morning, but basically, they're just spreading round some lies and some fake news about who Jesus is.

And so John here feels the need to remind the church to actually follow Jesus, if they're saying they're followers of Jesus, and also to not listen to the noise of the world, which is spreading lies about who Jesus is.

I don't know if many of you had pets growing up, but I had a gorgeous golden retriever called Archie and he was just a delight. He sadly passed away last year and we terribly miss him as a family, but as he was growing up we taught him commands, as you do, to sit and to lie down, and we'd do this with treats, we'd do this with fun encouragement and like, "Come on Archie, you're doing so great" and all this kind of stuff as you do to a dog and you feel very silly doing it, but it's just lovely to encourage him to do those things, and do them well. And as he grew up we started to lessen the treats and we'd hope that when we asked him to sit, he'd sit. But Archie didn't always do this and I'm sure many of you at home are also thinking 'my pet doesn't always do this when I ask them to'. Archie's desire to do them waned and in the mundane, everyday life and he just didn't care as much. If you told him to sit, sometimes he'd just do his own thing.

So why am I telling about my dog? Well, I think many of us are like Archie when it comes to following God. It's very easy for us to follow Jesus when we first come to know him and when we're going to church on a Sunday, and when we're being encouraged by those around us. But it's actually really hard in our everyday life, in the mundaneness and the everydayness of it to keep following Jesus. And

actually, we can end up straying away from Jesus and not being obedient to what he's asked us to do and John's aware of this.

In verse five John says, if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. So here, John's actually deeply challenging that to be obedient and also to love is this connected and interlinked thing, which is very natural and it actually makes us fully alive and complete and whole in our love of God.

However, I think as we've been thinking about the word obedience for many of us the word itself can be a very hard word to hear and I think at its worst we can hear the word obedience and think of a subservient nature or even this dictatorial edge to the word. You sort of have to do whatever someone asks you to do. I think culture has sort of encouraged us to think like this perhaps. Often in culture it's very just normal for us to see freedom and personal freedom as the main goal, the highest goal in this world and we can kind of just do what we want to do as the world says, and this will make us happy and fill us with lots of joy and pleasure and delight, all this kind of stuff.

However, as Christians we know that actually this kind of freedom, it doesn't bring true freedom. It brings another type of slavery even. But if we're looking at obedience perhaps in the kind of more negative way, which sort of seems like someone's actually just telling you what to do and you have to do it, is this the way we should be thinking about God when we think about obedience? And what really are the commands that God is asking us to follow? Should we follow them, and are they actually worth obeying?

And John speaks right into this in verse seven. He says that he's not writing a "new command, but an old one which you've heard since the beginning". So we see here that the word command, or the command itself actually, is both old and new and Jesus asserts this when he's challenged by the Jewish leaders and teachers at the time when they say what is the greatest command and Jesus says in Matthew 22:36-40, if you want to look it up. "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commands."

So here as we can see, the greatest commandment, according to Jesus and the command that John is asking us to obey here and to follow is this command that Jesus has given us to love God with everything we have and also to love one another. So, if this what Jesus is asking us to be obedient in, it's actually participating in God's love and God's love for the world.

What kind of love does Jesus display for us? Well, he displays a love for us on the cross where he lays down his life. He freely does this, he delights in doing this, he sees the joy set before him on the cross that we would know him more fully, we would come into relationship that was way deeper and a more intimate and full of life and abundance. To me, this kind of love that Jesus displays is not a power-hungry dictator saying you have to do this, you have to follow me. No, he actually makes himself so vulnerable on the cross. He's beaten, he's wounded, he's pierced in his side. He's nailed, his hands are physically nailed to a wooden structure of a cross and he dies there for us, but more than that, he is raised to life again in three days time as we've heard a few weeks ago in the Easter story. And that's amazing, that we have a Saviour who not only dies because he fulfils his promise to us that he'll save us, but also he rises again, saying, I have victory over death itself.

So if we see God in this light, if we see Jesus and his love in this light, showing this kind of love, obedience doesn't seem like a dirty word after all because instead it becomes an invitation to love God, to be part of his love and we see a God that fulfils his promises in Jesus and never fails us.

And the second theme I'd like to pull out the passage is his call to love one another.

In verses 9-11, John says, "Anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light and there is nothing in them to make them stumble, but anyone who hates a brother and sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they're going because the darkness has blinded them".

In this section of this passage, it's really clear again the contrast between dark and light and there's this metaphor of walking in the darkness, stumbling in the darkness when we enter into our sinful ways, particularly here of hating one another.

And when we talk about brothers and sisters here in this passage John is actually referring not to our blood relations, but he's referring here to fellow believers in Jesus. And I think it's really sad actually from thinking about this passage more and more that this even has to be said and stated, but unfortunately it is true that we do hurt one another and disappoint one another at times. And perhaps even, when we hurt one another, when we believe in Jesus, it's more hurtful from those who actually follow Jesus than when it's from someone that doesn't follow Jesus. There's this kind of dissonance and discomfort in this hurt which John talks about in verse 8 when he says, "the new command its truth is seen in Jesus and in us". If that is true, the truth is in us as well as Jesus, then we know that as church we should really be much more to one another.

And I know that for me and perhaps many of us, there are people in our lives that have actually walked away from Jesus because of words or ways they've been treated in church or by a Christian, and this is obviously really sad. And I am actually, really sorry on behalf of the church if this has been the case in your life or in a friend's or family's life and I just want to say sorry because that is not how the church should behave or be. We should be much more like Jesus to one another.

On the other hand, we have fallen, I think, into this kind of culture in church at times of just elevating those on platforms to this ridiculous level of perfection and sometimes even idolization dare I say it or celebritization, and then when the broken humanness of these people starts to leak out in whatever way that takes, it creates a huge amount of disillusionment and distrust as well from those that see that happen, because we've created this huge gap between us and those that are speaking or preaching or leading worship, and we just need to keep a check of how we view people, because people are not perfect. We're all just trying to follow Jesus and become more like him.

So this is where for us character and integrity really is key, that we shine brightly for Jesus, so we avoid the darkness and minimize the amount of hurt that we create and cause one another. We must also regularly know how to say sorry and how to forgive one another. How to extend grace to one another.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was once asked in a television interview what's the best piece of advice he could give to people. And he said, "To give as much slack to others as we give ourselves." And we will inevitably disappoint one another from time to time, perhaps even dislike one another or even at worst still, we may even actually start to really hate one another in our hearts. And we're not perfect, but we are being transformed so there is loads of hope and we can practice, as Desmond Tutu says, extending grace and extending giving slack to one another.

And Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:43-44 to, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your father in heaven". So as children of God, the first thing that Jesus is saying to us is to pray. So we're praying for those who are against us. We're asking God to give us his perspective of them in order that we can love them more. And when we pray, you just can't pray for someone unless you want to align yourself with God's heart and as you do that you'll start to grow in love and grow in understanding more of his love and his heart for that person.

Jesus also says in John 15:12-14, "My command is this. Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command".

And if we love like this, if we lay down our lives for each other, if we push aside our pride, push aside our greed, any hopes, any desires of any outcome, if we just simply love in that moment one another, if we learn how to do this and to embrace this godly love then this is where we will see change in the way we view one another and in the way that we respond in these times which are hurtful and difficult.

And I love this quote and drawing by Charlie Mackesy, as many of you probably have seen his drawings before of the mole, the horse and the boy. They're just beautiful drawings and just have the lovely quotes as well over the top. So the quote in this picture is. "So you know all of me?" asked the boy. "Yes," said the horse. "And you still love me?" "We love you all the more".

I love this picture and this quote. I just think it's such a picture of God's heart for us, but also it's a picture of what the church can be. And despite knowing each other's flaws and despite getting irritated by one another at times or going down that road where we end up hating one another, actually there's a call here just to love each other more and more and to press into that love that we do shine brightly as church in a very, very different way to what the world would do. So perhaps I just want to encourage you to spend some time in prayer this week. Just simply perhaps even asking God just to increase your love, increase your compassion for others in your lives. There might also have been people that have just come to mind very naturally as I've been speaking, and I just suggest that you just bring these people to God in prayer this week. Spend some time asking God to just change your perspective towards them, ask for his heart towards these people. And if you yourself need to say sorry to God for whatever you've done towards these people, or you need to on the other hand ask for healing from God then I would just encourage you to do this. I know for me many times in my life this has been a really great thing to do and my relationships with people have just changed from that point. I think another way of doing this is just to simply ask God to bless the person that you're finding difficult because that's also another way just to embrace God's love for that person because you're just wanting the best for that person.

And the final theme we're going to explore together today is the theme of encourage, encourage, encourage.

I don't know how you find encouragement, whether you find it really hard to receive or really easy to give, or really hard to give even, but John he seemingly loves to give encouragement as we can see in verses 12 to 14. And he's being quite repetitive as well about this encouragement, about why exactly he's writing to this church.

And whenever I gave encouragement to my dog, Archie, it would somehow give him this new sense of life or excitement or joy, and he just loved to do whatever I encouraged him to do again. This is unsurprising as James says in his book, because our words have power to either bring life or to bring death. And again, in Proverbs, we hear that "gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" and if you like literary characters, Albus Dumbledore also says, "words are in my not so humble opinion our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable in both inflicting injury and remedying it".

So our words can bring life and they can bring healing, and they can also, at their worst, bring death and destruction.

So do we know how much power our words really have? When we look at God, he speaks the world into motion. When we look at Jesus, he speaks and people are healed and lives are changed and restored.

And in one of Paul's letters to the church in Corinth he talks about how a word from God, or as some of us call it, prophetic words, should be tested as encouraging, comforting and strengthening.

So our words in many ways can be seen through this lens of bringing God's kingdom, his truth, his light into people's lives.

On my way to church one day, I was in a multi-story car park and I saw this girl bashing her fist against a wall and I just spoke out, "Hey stop, are you okay? Can I help?" and after chatting to her for a while, a friend came along and started taking her away and I hadn't quite got into enough conversation with her, but I just felt a sense that I needed to say something and speak some life into her life and I just said to her, "You are more valued and loved than you'll ever know". And there was something in that moment, where her face just changed and there was hope and there was life again.

Our words have so much power to bring life, to change lives, and to bring light into the darkness.

And John he does this in his letter, in three ways, he reminds the church they're forgiven, he reminds them that they've known God for ages, if they're mature in their faith, and he reminds the young in their faith that they've already overcome the enemy in their lives. And he's writing to each age group to encourage them because we all need encouragement, young and old, we all need the sense of being behind one another and saying keep going.

So, let's be the voice of hope in this time of uncertainty because this pandemic too will pass and let's encourage one another and let's go beyond ourselves, go into the world and let's bring Jesus' hope and life and truth into the world that so desperately needs him.

So, keep hanging on in there. Keep Jesus' commands, keep loving one another and encourage, encourage, encourage.

Thank you so much for having me with you today. It's been great to be with you and I really hope you stay safe, you stay well and that God blesses you abundantly this week. So, take care.

Reflection

Before we continue with our worship, let's pause and have a time where we can just open our hearts to the Lord. Let's pause together. Perhaps put a hand on your heart and invite the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh this morning. He knows what sort of a week you've had, what you need, your ups and downs, the ebbs and flows of your life at the moment. He loves you, He's for you, and He's with you. Why not pause and wait on this God of love.

Hymn

How Great Thou Art

Verse 1

O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made
I see the stars I hear the mighty thunder
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed

Chorus

Then sings my soul my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art how great Thou art
Then sings my soul my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art how great Thou art

Verse 2

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze

Verse 3

And when I think that God His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die I scarce can take it in
That on the Cross my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Verse 4

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home what joy shall fill my heart
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim my God how great Thou art

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Song

Build My Life

Verse 1

Worthy of ev'ry song we could ever sing
Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring
Worthy of ev'ry breath we could ever breathe
We live for You

Verse 2

Jesus the name above ev'ry other name
Jesus the only one who could ever save
Worthy of ev'ry breath we could ever breathe
We live for You
We live for You

Chorus

Holy there is no one like You
There is none beside You
Open up my eyes in wonder and show me who You are

And fill me with Your heart
And lead me in Your love to those around me

Bridge

I will build my life upon Your love
It is a firm foundation
I will put my trust in You alone
And I will not be shaken

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Reflection

Let's be mindful of what God is seeking to do in our lives. This season has been tough, up and down, and challenging. God is bringing great growth into our lives through this challenge, and into the life of the church. Be encouraged and know that God is moving powerfully in your life, bringing new and fresh things, and imparting to you a whole host of things that you haven't heard before. Do what you can to let these things grow; identify, develop, and nurture them by waiting on God and resting in His presence, being people of prayer, and being people who respond and step out into the things He's calling us to. Don't feel forgotten by God; He is birthing fresh things and new things into your life, and strengthening you, building resilience for the next chapter. Remember that He who began a good work in you does bring it to completion – be encouraged by that.

Prayers

Father, as we continue to live through these extraordinary times and try to find different ways to strengthen our Big Family, help us to dig deep and explore new imaginative ways of creating a sustainable community. We know that we may be moving to a "new normal" and pray for the opportunities that might offer. Show us Lord how to reach out and connect with our parish, our neighbours, the lonely, the technologically challenged, and our wider world; bringing the sort of hope, light, and love that John talks about in his letter.

We pray for our Government and Boris Johnson as today they introduce measures to ease the lockdown. We pray for insightful and wise discernment of the scientific studies. We pray that plans put in place would continue to ensure containment and eventual eradication of the virus. We pray too that the advice given would be sensible and fair to all. As we come out of this pandemic, may the decisions made create a fairer value system for society in which we do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

You know, Lord, what each one of us is feeling at this time – our fears, anxieties, losses, our hopes for a better, kinder world, our gratitude for the blessings of creation, family and friends, our tears for the loneliness, suffering, pain and so many things; you know. We ask for your comfort and your guidance at this time, help us Jesus to be more present to you to listen to your promptings, to find you in all things. Thank you that you are always present to us.

Finally, we pray for those who are sick and their families who are worried about them. And we pray for your comfort and strength for those who are bereaved

Silence is kept

A prayer from the Iona Community worship book:

We thank you for all engaged in the ministries of healing and reconciliation

For those who work in hospitals and hospitals,

For doctors and district nurses, for carers and counsellors,

For peacemakers and peacekeepers

God our Maker, Jesus our Healer,

Holy Spirit of love and life, hear our prayers

To those who seek you, to all who need you

To the world you cherish; bring wholeness, bring healing, bring peace

Amen

Family News

Our Alpha course starts on Monday 11th May – contact the church office (01483 455333) to sign up. It's a series of seven evenings for anyone interested in exploring spiritual issues and questions. The first talk is entitled 'What is life all about?' Do you have a think about who you can invite!

We have our liturgical morning prayer services (9am) and weekly prayer meetings (8pm) each Wednesday. If you would like to join these (requiring an internet connection), please contact the church office.

If you would like to give to the work of St Saviour's during this time, please visit the giving section on our website (under "Get Involved") or contact the church office.

Contact us for details of our children's videos and provision for young people.

Song

In Christ Alone

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found

He is my light my strength my song

This Cornerstone this solid Ground

Firm through the fiercest drought and storm

What heights of love what depths of peace

When fears are stilled when strivings cease

My Comforter my All in All

Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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Close & Blessing

Let us pray:

Lord, we want to thank you for this time together. We thank you for your goodness and faithfulness. We want to pray that we're blessed people, blessed by you; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Thanks for joining us in this act of worship. We look forward to seeing you soon! Next week, we'll continue our series on Building Family, and we're excited that next week we have Lucy Webb joining us to speak.