

**Hymn: Abba, Father, let me be yours and your alone**

Abba Father let me be  
Yours and yours alone

Never let my heart grow cold,  
Never let me go.

May my will for ever be  
Yours and yours alone.

Abba Father let me be  
Yours and yours alone.

Dave Bilbrough  
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**Opening Prayers**

Parent God, we come to you with our hearts full of love. Love for our friends, for our family, for our church and for our community. We come, however, with the knowledge that we sometimes fail to open our hearts to those we find harder to love.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

We pray for our brothers and sisters in faith. We pray that they are safe and respected, whatever their faith.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

We pray for our country. For political divides and differences, and for communities ripped apart by conflict.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

We pray for marginalised communities who have been overlooked, taken for granted and received hostile, violent and prejudicial treatment.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

We pray for our church, for when it has not been a welcoming and safe space for all.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

We pray for ourselves. For when we have mistreated our mind, body or spirit and not felt worthy of love.

**God, help us to love with open hearts.**

Parent God, you give us two important commandments: to love you with all our heart and mind and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

As we worship today, help us open our hearts and fill our homes and communities with love and praise. Amen.

**Let us now say the Lord's prayer**

**Readings: 1 Thessalonians 2:1 - 8 Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica**

**2** You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, <sup>2</sup> but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we

had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.<sup>3</sup> For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery,<sup>4</sup> but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.<sup>5</sup> As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;<sup>6</sup> nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,<sup>7</sup> though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.<sup>8</sup> So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

### **Matthew 22:34 - 46 The Greatest Commandment**

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together,<sup>35</sup> and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”<sup>37</sup> He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’<sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

<sup>41</sup>Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question:<sup>42</sup> “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.”<sup>43</sup> He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,<sup>44</sup> ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’?<sup>45</sup> If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”<sup>46</sup> No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

### **Reflections on the reading from Matthew 22 : 34 - 46**

Today I would like to share with you a reflection from a book that I sometimes use as part of my private devotions. It is written by a lady called Judith Dimond and as I read it this week I found her thoughts quite challenging and I would like to share them with you. Particularly the first part of this short passage which is so familiar to us I felt it was good to reflect on what this really means for us in our daily lives. You might like to close your eyes and try to visualise what I'm describing.

**Gaze** on a religious community, set deep in the isolated countryside, where monks or nuns live together all their lives, and must learn to ‘get on’. Look around at the places set on the long refectory table, and place yourself there. Study the faces of the visitors: wayfarers, stopping in for a meal; people recovering from addictions, or a broken heart, or cancer. Young people are there, on the verge of breakdown, and elderly who are bereft and bereaved. Some are smartly dressed, but others wear stained jumpers or torn trousers. The person next to you smells and the one on the other side can't stop tapping her fingers on the table – her anxiety is palpable. The stranger opposite you starts up in banal chatter, when all you want is peace and quiet. Such communities test the meaning of the second commandment to destruction. Place God at this table.

**Consider** how Jesus has turned the tables on his detractors. They've goaded and tested him enough, first about Caesar and their taxes, then about marriage at the resurrection, and finally they aimed straight at the central laws of their faith. Jesus has batted the ball back, striking fours and sixes to their amazement every time. For when he's asked what is the greatest commandment in the law, the very first word of his reply is *love*. This love is a verb and not just a noun. He rejects neither human law nor God's law, but transforms and completes them. He says nothing exactly new but the combination is dramatic.

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Consider Jesus' great ability to disagree politely, and argue in a kindly manner, and talk softly to his opponents. Consider how you cope in an argument. Do you cringe and clam up, or do you too easily become aggressive and dismissive of the other's point of view?

Consider how Jesus coped with criticism – always calmly, often by a question, as he took the idea further and deeper than anyone expected, often in an entirely different direction. And now it's his turn to bowl a ball straight at them and see if they've the brains or insight to answer – 'What do you think about the Christ – whose son is he?'

**Contemplate** the best way of winning an argument, not just to score a cheap point and come out feeling on top, but really to effect a lasting change on another person's attitude. Bring before God one person or group with whom you disagree. Let God search out your motives, for we must be certain before we try to change another's mind. lodge deep in another's mind, and lead them to God.

***As you desire to imitate him***

I promise to love you, Lord God,  
With all my heart – all my compassion,  
With all my soul – all my prayer,  
With all my mind – all my reason.  
And with all these powers,  
I will love my neighbour as myself.  
Amen.

Taken from Gazing on the Gospels Year A by Judith Dimond

**Prayers of intercession**

Living God, we come to you, the church of 2020 here in this place. We come to invite you to show us how to be your people today. In a world that regards the church as irrelevant or outdated, show us how to love, guide us by your Spirit.

Living God, we hear the cry of injustice all around us: poverty, disease, the various impacts of Covid-19, homelessness, illness, pain and suffering affect so many. In a deeply unequal, unfair world, show us how to love, guide us by your Spirit.

Living God, show us how to be a church that responds to the issues of our time. So often we can be seen as detached, aloof or out of touch with the fast-paced world around us. As we continue to show God's love in the twenty-first century, Show us how to love, guide us by your Spirit.

Living God, help us to turn to you to find our strength. Help us to see in the life, death and resurrection stories of Christ an opportunity to transform the way we live and rebuild our society founded in love. Show us how to love, guide us by your Spirit.

Living God, we have no mission but to serve you – we recognise our calling in your invitation to love one another. May we be the answers to prayers around this community and this world in the days and weeks to come. As we seek to be sharers of liberation, Show us how to love, guide us by your Spirit. Amen.

**Hymn: Love divine all loves excelling**

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heav'n to earth come down:  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown:  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast;  
let us all in thee inherit,  
let us find the promised rest:  
take away the love of sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith, as its Beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
graciously return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy precious love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be:  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
'til in heav'n we take our place,  
'til we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Charles Wesley  
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**Blessing**

Go out to meet a God of love. Go out and find love at work throughout God's creation. Go out and seek to build a better, safer, more sustainable world, in which love abounds.

In Jesus' name. Amen.