

Circuit Zoom Service for Sunday 19th June 2022, the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prepared by the Revd. Alan Haine

Call to Worship: There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus. As we worship now, let us seek the Spirit of God so that we may truly be one body in Christ, but also so that as individuals we may be at one with ourselves and at one with God.

Hymn: 94 (Singing the Faith) or 463 (Hymns & Psalms) To God be the glory!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

<p>1 To God be the glory, great things he has done ! So loved he the world that he gave us his Son, who yielded his life in atonement for sin, and opened the life-gate that all may go in : <i>Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord ! Let the earth hear his voice ! Praise the Lord ! Praise the Lord ! Let the people rejoice ! O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son ; and give him the glory — great things he has done !</i></p>	<p>2 O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, to every believer the promise of God ! And every offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives :</p> <p>3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has done, and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son ; but purer, and higher, and greater will be our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see :</p> <p>Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)</p>
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Welcome: The theme of our service today is the love of God that seeks to do away with all barriers.

Prayer of Adoration & Confession:

Father God, we praise You this morning because the old familiar message is still true, despite all the years that have passed since Jesus' ministry in this world: the message that Your love still reaches out through Jesus seeking to overcome every barrier and to bring together those who have been divided by hatred and jealousy. We rejoice today because that love is still waiting to enfold every person, no matter how unworthy they may feel. Indeed, we thank You that that love is there for each one of us, no matter what our situation and no matter how we may feel as we share in this service. Help us today, as we believe that we are loved by You, to know the help of Your Spirit so that we may pass on that love to others and become more truly one with the people we meet and whom we seek to serve day by day. For we know that during His earthly life, Jesus never stopped radiating Your love in all that He did: He never ceased breaking down the barriers that human beings had raised against each other and against You. In the end on the Cross the ultimate barrier was removed as He offered Himself in love for all the world. But Father, You know only too well how much we each need Your forgiving love: for sometimes we have been the ones who have erected barriers against other people, treating them as inferior to us or perhaps ignoring them and their needs. Even as we have shared within the Church we have not always welcomed others as You have welcomed us. And what is more although we may like to give others the impression that we are at one with ourselves and at one with You, sometimes we have actually known turmoil in our hearts and we have not always been so close to You as we have pretended. May each one of us allow Your amazing love to break down our resistance, so that we may know that oneness with You and with each other that is Your will & then be able to serve You & our fellows more effectively. We ask all these prayers in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Declaration of Forgiveness: The Lord Jesus says to each one of us: "Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more". Amen. Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

Introductory Talk: Abba Father

Here's a rather strange question for you. Can you think of the names of any pop groups that are mentioned in the Bible? I expect some clever person can think of several, but I can only think of two and the first of those only comes in some versions of the Bible and, in any case, is not the right spelling. That is the Beatles, but the right spelling in the Bible is "Beetles" and that only comes in some very old versions. Yet I think I am on safer ground with "Abba", the Swedish pop group from the 1970's who have recently been in the news. In St. Mark's Gospel we are told that the name "Abba" was the name Jesus used to call God Father in the language called Aramaic that he usually spoke. On the night before Jesus died He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray and began His prayer. "Abba, Father".

"Abba" was the word people in Jesus' time used to show that they were close to their father—a bit like "Dad" or "Daddy" for us today. When Jesus gave us the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer, He began it with the word "Father" and meant by that not a Father who was very strict and serious and not very loveable, but instead a Dad that He could easily talk to and be close to and really love.

Today is Fathers' Day and many of us can be very thankful that we have had fathers that we have been close to and who have loved us as well as us loving them. Sadly there are some people who have not had that experience in their lives, but the good news for everyone is that Jesus came to show us that God is not only a loving Father to Him, but to us all, whoever we are and wherever we are. The chorus we are going to sing next reminds us how Jesus called His Father Abba and how we can do the same and discover that God loves and cares about every one of us.

Hymn: 439 (Singing the Faith) Abba Father, let me be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiVrwVV3Liw>

Abba Father, let me be
yours and yours alone.
May my will forever be
ever more your own.
Never let my heart grow cold,
never let me go,
Abba Father, let me be
yours and yours alone.

Dave Bilborough (b. 1965)

1st Lesson: Galatians 3, verses 23 to 29

--This lesson reminds us that because of Jesus Christ, all those who have faith in Him can be at one with God. The Jewish Law in many ways erected barriers between those who were Jews and those who were not, but now because of Jesus all such barriers have been overcome and God's love can be known by everyone.

Responsive Reading: 804 (Singing the Faith--Part of Psalm 22)

Introduction to Reading: This psalm begins with a sense of being separated from God in the words Jesus used as he died on the cross, but by the end of it the psalmist has come to know God's salvation and praises God, calling on all the world to join him in turning to God. For God's love is meant for all nations.

Psalm 22 : 1-11, 21-31

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,
and are so far from my salvation, from the words of my distress ?
- 2 **O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer ;
and by night also, but I find no rest.**
- 3 Yet you are the Holy One,
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
- 4 **Our forebears trusted in you ;
they trusted, and you delivered them.**
- 5 They cried out to you and were delivered ;

they put their trust in you and were not confounded.

- 6 **But as for me, I am a worm and not human,
scorned by all and despised by the people.**
- 7 All who see me laugh me to scorn ;
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,
- 8 **‘He trusted in the Lord ; let him deliver him ;
let him deliver him, if he delights in him.’**
- 9 But it is you that took me out of the womb
and laid me safe upon my mother’s breast.
- 10 **On you was I cast ever since I was born ;
you are my God even from my mother’s womb.**
- 11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near at hand
and there is none to help.
- 12 **Save me from the lion’s mouth, from the horns of wild oxen.
You have answered me !**
- 13 I will tell of your name to my people ;
in the midst of the congregation will I praise you.
- 14 **Praise the Lord, you that fear him ;
O seed of Jacob, glorify him ; stand in awe of him, O seed of Israel.**
- 15 For he has not despised nor abhorred the suffering of the poor ;
**neither has he hidden his face from them ;
but when they cried to him he heard them.**
- 16 From you comes my praise in the great congregation ;
I will perform my vows in the presence of those that fear you.
- 17 **The poor shall eat and be satisfied ;
those who seek the Lord shall praise him ; their hearts shall live for ever.**
- 18 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
- 19 **For the kingdom is the Lord’s
and he rules over the nations.**
- 20 How can those who sleep in the earth bow down in worship,
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him ?
- 21 **He has saved my life for himself ; my descendants shall serve him ;
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.**
- 22 **They shall come and make known his salvation, to a people yet unborn,
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.**

From *Common Worship*

Gospel: St. Luke 8, verses 26 to 39

Introduction to Reading: In this passage Jesus heals a man who is completely divided in himself, apparently possessed by demons and out of his mind. Despite the fact that this man is a Gentile, Jesus helps him to become at one with himself and with God and bids him to share with others the unity and harmony that Jesus has brought him.

Hymn: 685 (Singing the Faith) or 758 (Hymns & Psalms) In Christ there is no east or west
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpITJOShix0>

<p>1 In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.</p> <p>2 In him shall true hearts everywhere their high communion find ; his service is the golden cord close-binding humankind.</p>	<p>3 Join hands then all the human race, whate'er your nation be ; all children of the living God are surely kin to me.</p> <p>4 In Christ now meet both east and west, in him meet south and north ; all Christlike souls are one in him, throughout the whole wide earth.</p> <p>John Oxenham, pseud. (1852–1941)</p>
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Sermon: Truly At One

When I was a minister regularly visiting the sick, I would occasionally meet a person who had a number of different ailments. So they would be sent to one specialist about their big toe, to another about their shoulder and to yet another about some internal problem. Maybe they would be given three different sets of tablets and sometimes the tablets given them for their shoulder would worsen the problem they had internally. Their difficulties were not helped by the fact that they had not been dealt with as one whole person, but just as a series of different ailments. Thank God, sometimes a good G.P. does keep their eye on the whole person and on the overall picture and so is able to keep track of the various treatments their patient is receiving, so that the overall effect will be beneficial and not harmful.

But sadly sometimes physically we can be treated as though we are just a set of different organs rather than one single person.

Sometimes also mentally people's lives can be divided. In our Gospel reading we heard about a man who was said to be possessed by demons, so that his mind was not his own at all. When he was asked his name, he said it was "Legion" and the explanation of that name often given is that a legion of demons had entered him. He seems to have felt as though he was being pulled in many directions and mentally he was not a whole person in any way. Now we may or may not believe in the existence of demons today. Personally I am not sure what I think about demons, but I am quite sure that I believe in the existence of evil. Whether you want to say that man was genuinely possessed by a demon or whether you prefer to say his mind was disturbed, either way the power of evil had him in its grip and Jesus was able to overcome that evil to bring him wholeness in mind and also wholeness of spirit.

2,000 years later many people still feel that they are not one whole person. Even those who are perfectly sane can sometimes feel that they do not have an integrated personality and that they are not all that they feel they should be. Instead they feel divided in some way from themselves as well as from other people.

Now it was Jesus' great skill during His earthly ministry to help people to overcome divisions within themselves and to feel more truly at one with themselves. He did this firstly by being ready to welcome everyone who came to Him, even those like the lepers and mentally disturbed that most of society tended to keep at arms' length. We may like to think that people like that are no longer treated so badly in the modern world, but I am not always so sure about that. I remember back in the late 1980's when I was part-time chaplain in a large psychiatric hospital in Ilford in north-east London. That was at the time when they were just beginning to break up those huge old Victorian asylums like the one in Goodmayes where I served. A large number of people had been shut away in that building for many, many years and it seemed as if society wanted to keep them well away from where "ordinary people" lived.

One very friendly lady I used to visit had been in that hospital for 60 years and she was what some people might uncharitably call "simple", but really she had no mental illness at all. She died and I was asked to take her funeral and I was appalled to discover that she had only been shut away in the hospital because, when she was in her late teens, she had given birth to an illegitimate baby. That had been the original reason why she had been closeted away in that institution for all those years. In effect society had rejected her and pushed her away.

But Jesus never did that to the people He met, even when they were as wild and forbidding as that man Legion. No, Jesus always welcomed people, no matter what their situation. Despite Legion's wildness and despite the fact that he was probably a Gentile rather than a Jew as he lived in a Gentile area, Jesus still

cared for him. So in Legion's case as in so many others, Jesus sought to bring to the person in need a sense of oneness with God. We don't know how Jesus did it, but that is what He did in this instance and on so many other occasions when He assured a needy person of God's forgiveness for them and presence with them. Legion was enabled to be at one with himself because he first became at one with God. That also meant that he could now be at one with his neighbours as he had never been before.

At one with ourselves, at one with our neighbours, at one with God: Jesus came to bring that oneness nearer for every person. So to begin to know that oneness today men and women simply have to turn to Him for help and recognise that they can't solve their problems on their own. In fact Jesus' great work was to do away with the barriers that we human beings erect between ourselves and God, between ourselves and other people and sometimes even between different parts of our own personalities. Jesus' death on the Cross symbolised very powerfully the breaking down of those barriers by the love and power of God. That is why we are told that the curtain of the temple was torn in two at the moment of Jesus' death, making clear that now all men and women could approach God and could know God in a way that had never been possible before. Similarly, from now on, as men & women lived by the grace of God, they could become more truly at one with each other.

Jesus' death is sometimes explained as being an "atonement". That word can produce some very complicated explanations of why Jesus died. But I like the word "atonement" itself, at-one-ment, because it reminds us that through Jesus men and women can be "at one" with God and also with themselves and with one another. Christian faith involves the belief that Jesus still offers this same oneness and harmony to us today and to our much divided world. Sadly, those of us who are religious and profess to follow Jesus can sometimes be the very ones who put up barriers against other people instead of breaking them down as Jesus did. We may think straightaway of the situation in Northern Ireland where the differences between Catholic and Protestant have sometimes been made to form such high walls between neighbours who are all supposed to be Christians. But before we point an accusing finger at others we need to look into our own hearts and see how we treat other people with whom we disagree or from whom we feel divided. Are the reasons for these barriers genuine or are they, at least in part, the result of our own prejudices and selfishness?

In our first Lesson, we heard that wonderful passage from his letter to the Galatians where Paul was talking about the way that the Jewish Law no longer has the power it once did because of Christ. In his own experience Paul had known the power of the Law when he was a Pharisee and such a strict upholder of the importance of keeping that Law. For Paul at that time there had been a great barrier in his mind between those who kept the Law and those who did not, between those who were Jews and those who were not. But once he became a Christian, Paul soon discovered that obedience to the Law with all its ritual requirements was not crucial. Instead at the heart of his life from now on was a living faith in response to God's love shown in Jesus Christ. For Paul as he grew up as for all Jewish people, the law had been like a tutor that a wealthy person employed to teach their children. But once the children came of age they no longer needed the tutor in the way that they did before. And that was how Paul felt about the Law. Now he had come to faith in Christ the Law did not have the importance it once did and he had come to discover what it means to be a whole person. Because of Jesus, the old divisions that had seemed so important no longer seemed to matter. Hence that great verse (Galatians 3, verse 28) "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male & female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

The divisions between Jew and Gentile, between slaves and free people and even the divisions between male and female had lost their ultimate validity. Imagine that, that even the division between male and female had been transcended by the importance of Christ. It must have been very difficult for Paul to say that and this is the only place in his letters where he does say that. We often carry in our minds (possibly with some justice) the picture of Paul as something of a woman-hater. What with him saying that women should keep silent in Church and that wives should be submissive to their husbands. Maybe he did have problems about the role of women, but to a large extent he was only a man of his time and we should not forget that Paul's view reflects the general outlook not only of his own time but for most of the next 2,000 years as well. Yet here in this verse in Galatians Paul showed a far-reaching vision of truth when he realized that in Christ even divisions between male and female have no relevance when it comes to being right with God.

So often in the 2,000 years since Paul we religious people have hidden behind our own Laws, our own petty rules and regulations and have allowed divisions in society and in the world to continue almost as if they were part of God's will, when in fact the truth has been quite the opposite. For Christ came to bring a wholeness and a oneness to individual people, but also to every society and to the world as a whole. John Wesley understood that when he took part in the blossoming movement to end the slave trade and ever since

Methodists, when they have been most true to Christ, have always been those working to break down barriers in the world rather than build them up. We Methodist Christians today should continue to reflect this attitude in the way we live.

In conclusion, can I remind those of you who can go back that far of all the excitement and joy in 1989 when the Berlin Wall was at last torn down? Ordinary people had the enormous pleasure of themselves taking blocks out of that wall which was such a great symbol of oppression and division. That joy is similar to the joy we should all feel as we remember that Christ has broken down the dividing wall between God and human beings. All that separates God from humanity, all that separates human beings from one another, all that divides us within our individual personalities can become as nothing if only men and women are prepared to put their faith in Jesus. In our Gospel Legion did just that and the result was that through Christ his mind was calmed and he became truly at one with himself because he was at one with God. Now he was clothed instead of naked and clothed not just in his ordinary clothes, but, in Paul's words from Galatians, he was now "clothed with Christ". As a result he so much wanted to stay with Jesus, but Jesus told him instead to go home and tell his own people how much God had done for him. For Legion's task now that he was so much at one with himself & with God was to share that oneness with others, so that they too might know it and be changed by it.

Today, whoever we are, Jesus wants to continue making us whole people, as we begin to discover that oneness for ourselves. So we too cannot simply remain with Jesus all the time, for we have to share what we have found so that others can enjoy it too and find in Jesus Christ the love that breaks every barrier down changed by it. May God's Spirit enable each one of us to play our small but vital part in God's great work of making the whole world more truly one with God and one with itself.

Hymn: 556 (Singing the Faith) or 697 (Hymns & Psalm) Just as I am

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxA0TFe3-Uo>

<p>1 Just as I am, without one plea but that you died to set me free, and at your bidding, 'Come to me !' O Lamb of God, I come !</p> <p>2 Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings within and fears without, O Lamb of God, I come !</p> <p>3 Just as I am, you will receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve : because your promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come !</p>	<p>4 Just as I am — your love unknown has broken every barrier down — now to be yours, yes, yours alone, O Lamb of God, I come !</p> <p>5 Just as I am, of that free love the breadth, length, depth and height to prove, here for a time and then above, O Lamb of God, I come !</p> <p>Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871) <i>adapted by Jubilate Hymns (alt.)</i></p>
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Prayers of Intercession:

Response after each section:

Leader: We belong to Christ

People: Make us one in Him.

Leader: *"There is no such thing as Jew and Greek; ...for you are all one person in Christ Jesus"*.

Loving God, Three in One and One in Three, we pray for the breaking down of barriers between all people, but especially between Christians: barriers of race, barriers of culture, barriers of tradition.

At this time we pray for the barriers between the people of Ukraine and Russia, many of whom would call themselves Christians. We pray for the overcoming of all these barriers through the love of Christ.

Leader: We belong to Christ

People: Make us one in Him.

Leader: *"There is no such thing as ...slave and free person: ...for you are all one person in Christ Jesus"*.

Loving God, Three in One and One in Three, we pray for the breaking down of barriers between Christians and between all people: barriers of class, barriers of income, barriers of power. At a time when the cost of

living is rising sharply, we pray for a more Christlike willingness to share on the part of those who have plenty.

Leader: We belong to Christ

People: Make us one in Him.

Leader: *“There is no such thing as...male and female;...for all are one person in Christ Jesus”.*

Loving God, Three in One and One in Three; we pray for the breaking down of barriers between Christians and between all people: barriers of gender, barriers of age, barriers of physical and mental ability. We ask especially that the love of Christ may break down those barriers caused by the evil of sickness and disease, remembering especially any names known to us....

We pray that those who are sick may be enabled to feel at one with themselves again in body, mind and spirit as health and wholeness are restored to them.

Leader: We belong to Christ

People: Make us one in Him.

Leader: And so we ask that all of us may increasingly feel a oneness with our fellow-Christians, with our fellow human beings and with You, Lord, as well as a new desire to share with others all that You have done for us and for them in Christ. In Christ’s Name we pray as we ask You to break down all the barriers of fear, distrust and pride. **Amen.**

Hymn: 503 (Singing the Faith) or 267 (Hymns & Psalms) Love divine, all loves excelling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw5ZCZeS32M>

<p>1 Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesu, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art ; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.</p> <p>2 Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy life receive ; suddenly 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 perfect love.</p>	<p>3 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, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise !</p> <p>Charles Wesley (1707–1788)</p>
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The Blessing: May we all sense that now through faith in Jesus Christ we are all children of God, and so may we go out clothed in His Love to do His work in the world; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit remain with us always. **Amen.**