

14th May, 2023

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.



Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

The Sermon by Val Lucas: Matthew 5:27-37 The King's heart.

How amazing was the coronation last weekend of Charles 3rd. We were all relieved that it was such a Christian service in the beautiful Westminster Abbey. Originally the site of an 11th Century monastery dedicated to St Peter.

An historic moment was made when Charles, 70 years after his mother, made his oath, before God and 300 million people that he is a faithful Protestant and will govern the people with equity, justice and mercy and uphold the Anglican Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Serving with loyalty, respect and love. He laid his hand on the bible and kissed it saying God of compassion and mercy whose son was sent not to be served but to serve, give grace that I may find in thy service perfect freedom and in that freedom knowledge and truth.

An oath is a solemn promise, invoking God, as a divine witness to a person's future action or behaviour. There is an implication if this oath is not kept there will be divine

retribution. Swearing an oath before God is a very serious thing. Even today, any false statement under oath is a criminal offence and can result in heavy fines and even imprisonment.

Knowing the importance placed on oaths it's rather confusing to read in today's passage in Matthew 5:34 "But I say to you, do not take an oath at all. Ending with "Let what you say be simply yes or No"

Jesus knew that the swearing of oaths had degenerated into a system where oaths had become divided into two categories. Those that were binding and those that were not. Those where God's name was mentioned became binding, as God would be seen as a partner in the transaction however those oaths that mentioned swearing by heaven, earth, on someone's life, or on their own heads were not. It's rather like a young child who crosses their fingers behind their backs when lying to Mum that they never stole the biscuits. The Jews exploited the use of oaths.

Today we live in a society where lying is common, expected, tolerated and in some professions deemed acceptable. Today people readily lie about their age, marital status, income on tax returns, grades, examination results even golf scores! On job applications it's difficult to separate fact from fiction. It's only after intense questioning and evidence of the facts that the truth may be ascertained. Even referees are often in on the lie! Many politicians, companies and institutions employ spin doctors, communicating a specific message to have a desired outcome, neglecting the full truth of the situation. Techniques include careful timing in the delivery of information, selective presentation of facts, using words that evoke certain emotions, choice of sound bites, redefining terms and phrases. The most important thing is votes and if spinning the truth is a way of getting them then it's deemed okay as the number of votes is the success criteria.

Churches are not immune from spin either; the use of attendance numbers, activities, finances that can be seen on carefully designed web sites and social media to create an illusion of a successful vibrant church.

Jesus is saying why lie, when God sees and hears everything. Why swear on your own head when you can't even determine the colour of your own hair, unless of course you use L'Oreal hair dye, but then the roots will catch you out anyway.

God knows your heart and exactly what you have said or what you have not said, or chosen to half say. Jesus was telling the Jews and us today what we already know that the world should be built on Justice, truth and peace. As it says in proverbs the liar, the hypocrite, the scoffer and the slanderous are far removed from the presence of God.

Our character and reputation should make oaths completely unnecessary. A member of God's family, having God's heart growing inside them should never be

untruthful. We should be authentic, honest, people of integrity. Personal integrity is an important factor as we live in an unchristian world. Lack of it or failing in it will impact our witness and testimony. Allowing our yes to be yes and our no to be no reinforces who we are in Christ. We cannot afford to be hypocritical when sharing the Good news. Our whole being should be a place where the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth reigns every day.

These teachings of Jesus are not meant to dishearten us but to refresh us especially those who are weary and burdened. In following Gods truths with help from the Holy Spirit, prayer and reading the bible will result in blessings and life in all its fullness. They are not meant to make us nervous as they did to the Pharisees. Jesus exposed the loophole on oaths just as he questioned their interpretation on the laws on adultery and divorce.

It was common practice for a man to issue a certificate for divorce to his wife for very trivial offences. It was said a man was allowed to divorce a women for her poor cooking skills when she burnt the food. Some women were reported as having 10 certificates. By having a certificate, protection was offered to the woman as she could then remarry. Marriage gave a women protection and financial security, therefore to send a women away without this certificate was cruel. This was not righteous and apart from the reason of being unfaithful created an illegitimate divorce, as when she marries again she is actually still married and commuting adultery. The husband may have kept to the letter of the law issuing a certificate but has violated the spirit of the law. Jesus made it clear that he expected men to treat their wives properly with integrity, honour, righteousness, faithfulness, love and grace. This is the heart God wants us to have when we commit to one another. The business of breaking marriage vows by issuing a certificate for any trivial reason was unjust, ungodly and needed to stop. Jesus was not afraid to question the injustice of this act. This would not have been popular with those around him.

Jesus had much more to say on adultery. Just like murder, beginning with an ill thought, adultery begins in the heart with a small action.....lust. Jesus makes the exaggerated statement that if your eyes or hands begin to lead you into temptation then gauge the eye out and cut off the hand or any other part of the body that will lead you into sin. Do anything you can to turn away from sin. Turn off the Tinder type dating sites on your phone or chat sites on the computer. Make your browsing sites accessible to all. Avoid temptation by killing it in the heart before it becomes a behaviour destined to cause damage to your salvation and ruin relationships and lives for many years.

Jesus does not allow for any loopholes in adultery, divorce and oaths. There are no get out clauses. Only Jesus can meet Gods perfect standards and Jesus teaching

encourages us to cultivate the heart of his father, the King of kings. Jesus shifts our attention away from behaviours we must avoid to characteristics we must cultivate to lead a righteous life and become Christ like. We are given the Holy Spirit, the bible and communication through prayer to the King to help us.



With the Kings heart we are able to live life in all its fullness, not just for ourselves but for all those around us. Like King Charles said at his coronation I have come not to be served but to serve.

Let us pray,

Lord help us to cultivate the heart of a King to show compassion, love, grace, forgiveness, commitment, loyalty, trust: integrity; truth, wisdom, justice, self-control, humility and patience. Help us not to look for get out clauses, excuses and loopholes but be accountable for our every action to you. Amen.

Collect: Sixth Sunday of Easter: God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son: grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat & Bowls: Wed. 17th May at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 24th May at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise TBA.
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays.
- COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.