

# 21<sup>st</sup> 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:**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his  
blood.

This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my  
sight.

Angels descending bring from  
above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.



This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect submission, all is at rest.  
I in my Saviour am happy and  
blessed,  
watching and waiting, looking  
above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his  
love.

This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.

## The Sermon by Matt Senior: The King's love.

### Read Isaiah 5:18-24 and Matthew 5:38-43

When Jesus refers to “eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” he was referring to practical and straightforward laws in Exodus 21. In our passage Jesus does away with these laws. Why? An “eye for an eye” and the other laws in Exodus 21 are examples of retributive justice. Jesus is not in the retribution business. He's in the forgiveness business.

Jesus says “I tell you, do not resist an evil person.” Should we not resist evil? I think Jesus is drawing a distinction between an evil person and evil itself. In the examples Jesus gives the person is not being resisted, but the evil is.

“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”

A roman soldier could order a Jewish civilian to carry his baggage for a mile. Perhaps to save his energy but he might just do it to show that he can. The Jewish man would have to carry a significant amount of weight a significant distance. But when it was over, it was over.

To go a further mile would be an extraordinary display of generosity, but it would also change the dynamic of the situation. It's a resistance to the rule because it goes beyond what is required.

“Give your cloak as well.”

To give a tunic *and* a cloak would leave a man naked. Being naked would shame the uncovered person, but there would be even greater shame for the witness, who caused the nakedness by demanding the tunic. To stand in front of a naked man while holding their tunic and cloak would mean that your move to sue the other person has backfired significantly. The one who has handed over more than was asked has turned the tables.

“Turn the other cheek also.”

A slap on the right cheek is a dismissive, backhanded slap, suggesting that the person giving the slap is superior. To turn your left cheek towards to that person encourages them to strike you as an equal, a subtle but significant way of saying “I am not less than you.”

In these examples, the person who is taking advantage is not being resisted, they're given more than they asked for – but all of these responses challenge the context. Their actions say, “I am above this person.” Jesus' responses remind the other person that we have value too.

We often sing “I'm a child of God, Yes I am.” Jesus responses remind the other person, and us, that we are God's children, answerable to God and by choosing to offer more than is demanded, we demonstrate that clearly.

We are not being asked to make ourselves doormats. 6 weeks ago it was Easter. What happens to Jesus in Holy Week can look on the surface like a man

being pushed around by higher forces, but we know that the son of God offered more than any power of earth could have taken by force.

What happened on the cross wasn't anyone else's plan, but His. Jesus didn't resist a single person involved but, in allowing himself to be crucified, he resisted evil in the most powerful way in history.

Four weeks ago we read the beatitudes. In talk of turning the other cheek, and also in allowing himself to be crucified, Jesus demonstrates a couple of these beatitudes. "Blessed are the meek." Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is having power but having it contained and under control. It's not submitting because we have to, but because we choose to.

And by not seeking retribution, we pursue a path of peace. In the beatitudes Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" – we, God's children, are called to make peace with others.

Jesus' examples for not resisting an evil person were given to a Jewish people, living under Roman occupation. We are globally speaking hugely comfortable and privileged. The uncomfortable truth of reading these examples of people being belittled and treated as less, is that we have every chance of being the people treating others like that.

But when we sing the words, that we are "a Child of God," we must remember that this isn't because of anything we have done, but only because God called us into his family and kingdom. We may have already accepted the invitation, but the invitation is for everyone, and everyone is as deserving as we are.

Further on in today's passage, Jesus goes on, "You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'" But again, Jesus tells us to offer more, to love our enemies and pray for them.

As Jesus goes on to say, loving our neighbours -those who loves us - is the base standard, but that doesn't mean it's easy. Jesus calls us to ever higher standards, and as Christians we know that we are works in progress, with plenty of progress still to make.

The King of Kings sets the highest of standards, 'Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Jesus knows us and he knows we're not going to manage perfection in the ways that we love each other.

Some of us may find the word perfect so loaded that we can't even begin to contemplate trying to be perfect. Jesus expresses it in other ways. Instead of aiming for "loving perfection" you can aim for "doing to others, as you would have them do to you."

How do we get close to perfection, to doing to others as we would have them do to us? We start by recognising their worth, recognising that they are in no way beneath us or less than us. And we offer more and go beyond, even when it costs us or it hurts us to do so.

We're definitely going to need God's help. More on that next week, as we celebrate Pentecost.

**Prayers:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* (Philippians 4:4-6)



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, neighbours, and for family & friends.
- Pray for the Church.

**Collect: Seventh Sunday of Easter:** O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, 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. 21<sup>st</sup> June at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee and Questions: 24<sup>th</sup> May at 11am in Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise TBA.