



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

25TH OCTOBER 2020

LAST AFTER TRINITY

<u>READINGS FOR TODAY</u>		PARISH OFFICE: Monday & Friday 9 – 30 am to 11 – 30 am TEL: 01252 331161; e- mail: office@saint-peters-ash.org.uk BOOKINGS OF WEDDINGS & BAPTISMS – phone for an appointment on 01252 321517 or 331161 WEBSITE: www.saint-peters-ash.org.uk
Leviticus	19 v 1 – 2, 15 - 18	
1 Thessalonians	2 v 1 - 8	
Matthew	22 v 34 - end	



Love God and your neighbour as yourself

COLLECT FOR LAST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THIS WEEK

WEDNESDAY HOLY COMMUNION 9 – 30 am

CARE AND SHARE - If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk, tea, coffee etc. for the shelves outside church, please bring items to church with you or leave them on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING - Congratulations to Philip Rose and Maria Luff who were elected to serve as our churchwardens. Also, to Charles Stokes, Barbara Rose and Val Crow elected to the PCC. The next PCC meeting will be on Thursday 12th November at 7 – 30 pm on Zoom.

ALL SOULS – next Sunday we shall be remembering by name the departed. Please PRINT the names of those you wish to have read out, on the sheets provided.

Our Annual Bereavement service for those who have died in the past year will be online only at 4 pm next Sunday.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY - on Sunday 8th November our Communion service will be at 9 – 30 am NOT 10 am.

SHOEBOX APPEAL

Shoebox time is here again! There are some ready to fold boxes and leaflets at the back of the church. **NO** toothpaste, sweets or 4 suit cards please, **BUT** homemade stuffed toys are allowed if stuffed with proper toy stuffing. Boxes can be made on line for £20, which includes the 'postage' and you can choose items from a limited list. There will be a box for donations in church but no big packing party this year, unless the rules change. Thank You. Barbara Rose

CHILDREN'S SOCIETY BOXES & CHRISTMAS CARDS

Our boxes have so far raised £1475 – 00 this year. Thank you all. Today is the last call for any outstanding boxes.

I am selling Christmas cards again this year. Please pick up or ask Mary for an order form for The Children's Society Christmas cards which may be seen on their website. As this contains some other cards, please only order from the 26 cards on the list. I have just a few catalogues for viewing if you have no internet. Please pay cash with your order or cheques made out to Mary Lamont. Thank you.

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – ALL SAINTS DAY

Revelation 7 v 9 – end; 1 John 3 v 1 – 3; Matthew 5 v 1 – 12

Congratulations and good wishes to everyone celebrating their birthday this week, especially: **GEOFF WELSMAN (30TH)**

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY:

WYN LONG; RICHARD STOKES; EDNA PEARSON; JUNE MIDDLETON; LIAM MURPHY; JULIE QUANTRILL

MEMORIES OF JULIE QUANTRILL – the family are putting together some memory boxes of Julie for Jamie and Ailsa. If you have any memories/photos of Julie and family please let Clare Boud have them or Fr Keith. e-mails or hard copies are both acceptable.

keithbristow1956@outlook.com clairehboud@gmail.com

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 This is a confidential service.

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

- 1 O Lord our governor, ♦
how glorious is your name in all the world!
- 2 Your majesty above the heavens is praised ♦
out of the mouths of babes at the breast.
- 3 You have founded a stronghold against your foes, ♦
that you might still the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your
fingers, ♦
the moon and the stars that you have ordained,
- 5 What are mortals, that you should be mindful of
them; ♦
mere human beings, that you should seek them out?
- 6 You have made them little lower than the angels ♦
and crown them with glory and honour.
- 7 You have given them dominion over the works of
your hands ♦
and put all things under their feet,
- 8 All sheep and oxen, ♦
even the wild beasts of the field,
- 9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea ♦
and whatsoever moves in the paths of the sea.
- 10 O Lord our governor, ♦
how glorious is your name in all the world!

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn is said or sung:

Thou, whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight;
hear us, we humbly pray,
and, where the Gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
now to all humankind,
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight!
Move on the waters' face
bearing the gifts of grace,
and, in earth's darkest place,
let there be light!

Holy and blessed Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might;
boundless as ocean's tide,
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide,
let there be light!

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) Let us call to mind our sins and confess them to Almighty God:

All Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.

All now say 'The Gloria':

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

*We now say the collect for the Last Sunday after Trinity
(see first page)*

*Read Leviticus 19 v 1 – 2, 15 - 18 followed by Psalm 1
concluding with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2 v 1 - 8

(L) *Alleluia, Alleluia*

I am the light of the world, says the Lord.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness
but will have the light of life.

All Alleluia.

*Now read Matthew 22 v 34 – end Here are some thoughts on
today's readings from Mary Lamont:*

When I was young, I used to think that 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself' was a new commandment that Jesus was giving us but, as we heard today in our first reading, it comes from the laws in the book of Moses called Leviticus. This book was a Priestly manual for the conducting of services and worship and daily life and for making the

people of Israel 'Holy' to the Lord their God. Because God is Holy, he gives instructions to his people stating how they ought to behave towards each other. So, Leviticus Chapters 17 -26 are devoted to laws which govern Israel's life as a holy people. The commandments and laws were given so that people could live together peaceably in love for God and each other and in doing so they would be 'Holy'.

Several times the Pharisees and Sadducees questioned Jesus about his teachings and the authority for his ministry. He was popular with the people and he was unconventional in his actions, not always in line with the petty restrictions that they put upon people when interpreting the law. They heard that he silenced the Sadducees when he answered their question about the afterlife, so now the Pharisees think they will have another go at trying to trip him up. You might be able to imagine the scene. They say to each other, - 'We'll get him on this one, we have put down so many others using this question. After all, there are over 600 laws to choose from. Let us see if he can come up with one which is greater than any other and, whatever he chooses, we will be able to dispute it and finally silence him.' So they ask him 'What is the greatest Commandment?'

Again, his answer amazes them. They should have realised that he would say 'You should Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This forms part of the prayer that they said every day. But what they don't expect is that he goes on to say that the second greatest is 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. In saying that, he sums up all the other commandments and they cannot argue with him.

Some people would say 'But I don't love myself.' They might think that they shouldn't claim to love themselves as it seems selfish and it is wrong, but I would challenge that. We are God's children and we have been born with a self-preservation gene. We may not always like ourselves much, particularly when we have done something of which we are ashamed, but our underlying love for ourselves remains.

So, who is our neighbour? At the time the law was given when the Israelites were living in the wilderness before they entered the promised land, 'neighbour' probably meant any other Israelite and the Alien who lived within their midst. By the time of Jesus, it probably meant more than that, in fact anyone and everyone. Jesus's message included 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you and pray for them; it included the hated Samaritans as 'the one who showed mercy to a stranger' in his parable about the good Samaritan when the rich man asked the same question. And so it is for us. Not just the people who live nearest to us, but also those who we may never see in the flesh but who we know about who need our prayers and our charity. What is important to remember is:- Don't do to anyone what you wouldn't like done to you. But this in itself is a negative thought. Far better it is to state the more positive approach first, 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you' and then 'What you're unwilling to receive, be sure you never do'.

When I started thinking about this sermon, I didn't expect to be talking about what Covid19 has taught us and the effect it has had on our lives. Yes, it has had devastating effects on all our lives and communities and I'm seriously hoping that it will not go on for much longer, but it has also made us more aware of our neighbours, their needs, and ways in which we can help others. It has brought out the best in people. There have been schemes to provide meals for some who could not go out: people who have done shopping for others who they didn't know; people who have stood in queues to collect medicines, again, for people they didn't know. In some areas there have been weekly food

parcels delivered to those who live alone or were house bound because they were a carer, and the elderly. Many of those who live on the streets have been housed, food banks have flourished and our 'care and share' empties each day.

The virus hasn't stopped us supporting others in ways we have done in the past, like Step by Step, and we will be sending shoebox presents again for children overseas who we will never know. And, of course, there are our heroes who put their lives at risk working in our hospitals; doctors and nurses in the NHS and many schoolteachers who kept going in lockdown for children of those who couldn't work from home.

On a smaller level but just as uplifting has been the phone calls from family and friends across the world who have shared their concern for you, and also the greetings one receives from people we meet in the street, who may also wait while we pass, so as to keep social distancing.

So, this week's answer to the opposition that Jesus suffered at the questioning of the Pharisees, is very like last week's conclusion. Put God first in everything, in our prayers and worship in the time we spend with God, and in all our doings and dealings with other people, treat them as you would like to be treated. In that way there will be peace and you will become part of God's Holy people.

But that wasn't quite the end of the conversation. Jesus asked his own question that none of them could answer. They could all say that the Messiah was David's Son, a title that we have sometimes heard used for Jesus during the gospel. The sticking point is, how is it that if he is David's son why did David call him Lord? As it says in Psalm 110 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstall.' This only makes sense if the first Lord here refers to God, and that the second one is more important than King David as David calls him 'my lord'. The implication is that this 'Lord' was divinely appointed God's Son, and that the Messiah was, therefore, God's Son.

Even if they suspected that that was what Jesus was implying, they knew they would be on dangerous ground if they started up that kind of discussion with Jesus. They knew they would lose the argument, just as they had lost in all the tricks they had asked him.

Now pause for your own reflections.

(L): We affirm our faith in the words of the Creed:

All I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

We now say together:

All You show mercy to our ancestors,
and remember your holy covenant.

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All You show mercy to our ancestors,
and remember your holy covenant.

Our prayers, today, are written by Ceri Hurcombe:

To our God who is always among us we give you thanks and
praise for the wonderful gift of your son Jesus Christ.

We rejoice with the whole church in celebrating your love for
us.

Let us give thanks for our Bishops and local church leaders
for all they do and for the enthusiasm they share. We ask for
your blessing upon all churches across Britain who aren't
able to come together at this time due to Covid restrictions.
We pray for strength and creativity to find new ways of
engaging with each other and the communities we serve.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for all those living in fear, caught up in war or
violence. We remember those in desperate financial need,
those who are homeless and those who live their lives in fear
or anxiety. We pray for all those throughout the world who
are neglected. During 2020 we have seen a sharp increase
in domestic abuse. We pray for your light to guide those
people out of fear and into safety.

We are living in a time of heightened anxiety with so much
uncertainty. We pray for those who are suffering with mental
health challenges including those either fearful of the virus
and how it will affect their health or the financial impact it
will have for their family. We can all play our part in
providing support, whether in a practical way providing
donations to local charities or by reaching out a hand of
friendship. Lord help us to be there for others in the best
way we can.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

As half term begins we give thanks for the teaching staff at
our local schools and pray that they have time for personal
refreshment over this week. We give thanks for the immense
effort that has gone into reopening schools in a safe and
secure manner. We pray for pupils who have been adjusting
to school again after a long break and we ask for you to keep
them safe during their time off.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We give you thanks that nothing can separate us from your
love. We ask for your blessing upon all who are unwell or
awaiting treatment at this time. We remember friends and
family who are in hospital or struggling at home and we pray
for all those caring for them and the medical staff at local
surgeries and hospitals. We take a moment of silence to
reflect on those known to us who are in poor health at this
time.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We remember all those who have died recently and those
whose anniversary of death comes at this time. We pray
especially for WYN LONG; RICHARD STOKES; EDNA
PEARSON; JUNE MIDDLETON; LIAM MURPHY & JULIE
QUANTRILL

Lord, grant those who have gone before us the gift of life
and joy eternal.

Father we ask for support for those who are mourning. Loss
of a loved one is challenging at any time but with separation
from the usual support of other loved ones at this time is
leaving many feeling alone. We bring before you especially
our friends Pete, Jamie and Ailsa as they adjust to life
without Julie.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your
Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

Father, Lord of all creation,
ground of being, life and love;
Height and depth beyond description,
only life in you can prove:
You are mortal life's dependence:
thought, speech, sight are ours by grace;
Yours is every hour's existence,
sovereign Lord of time and space.

(Continued)

Jesus Christ, the man for others
we, your people, make our prayer
help us love, as sisters, brothers
all whose burdens we can share
where your name binds us together
you, Lord Christ, will surely be
where no selfishness can sever
there you love the world may see.

Holy Spirit, rushing, bringing
wind and flame of Pentecost
fire our hearts afresh with yearning
to regain what we have lost
may your love unite our action
nevermore to speak alone
God, in us, abolish faction
God, through us, your love make known.

Let us pray:

Merciful God,
teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty,
that trusting in your word
and obeying your will
we may enter the unfailing joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God,
we thank you that you have brought us safely
to the beginning of this day.
Keep us from falling into sin
or running into danger,
order us in all our doings
and guide us to do always
what is righteous in your sight;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,

All: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of
God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us, and
all who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

A lamp or candle may be lit.

- 1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stock of
Jesse, ♦
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- 2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, ♦
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- 3 The spirit of counsel and might, ♦
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- 4 He shall not judge by what his eyes see, ♦
or decide by what his ears hear,
- 5 But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, ♦
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.
- 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, ♦
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.
- 7 The calf, the lion and the fatling together, ♦
with a little child to lead them.
- 8 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy
mountain, ♦
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the
Lord

as the waters cover the sea.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 127; Tue 135; Wed St Simon & St
Jude 119 v 1 - 16; Thurs 138; Fri 145; Sat 1 ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ,
and share in the feast of your kingdom.

- 1 Great and wonderful are your deeds, ♦
Lord God the Almighty.
- 2 Just and true are your ways, ♦
O ruler of the nations.
- 3 Who shall not revere and praise your name, O
Lord? ♦
for you alone are holy.
- 4 All nations shall come and worship in your
presence: ♦
for your just dealings have been revealed.

All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb ♦
be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.

All All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ,
and share in the feast of your kingdom.

Readings:

Monday 2 Chron. 33 v 1 – 13; John 15 v 1 - 11
Tuesday 2 Chronicles 34 v 1 - 18; John 15 v 12 - 17
Wednesday: SS Simon & Jude Jeremiah 3 v 11 - 18;
Jude v 1 – 4, 17 - end
Thursday: 2 Chron. 35 v 1 - 19; John 16 v 1 - 15
Friday: 2 Chron. 35 v 20 to 36 v 10; John 16 v 16 - 22
Saturday: Isaiah 40 v 27 – end; Revelation 19 v 6 - 10

Gospel Cantic: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All You have filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit
rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on
his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the
Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his
name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation
to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All You have filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

(On Wednesday St Simon & St Jude this special collect:

*Almighty God,
who built your Church upon the foundation
of the apostles and prophets,
with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone:
so join us together in unity of spirit by their doctrine,
that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;
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.)*

This hymn may be said or sung:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near,
Joining in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy heart's wishes have been
Granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee!
Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend thee;
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do
If with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
Let the amen sound from His people again;
Gladly for ay we adore Him.

Let us pray:

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known

in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God,
the source of all good desires,
all right judgements, and all just works:
give to your servants that peace
which the world cannot give;
that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments,
and that, freed from the fear of our enemies,
we may pass our time in rest and quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

SERMON FROM THE DIOCESE

Loving God, neighbour AND self

Sermon preached by Bishop Jo for the Diocese
27th October 2020 - Matt 22:34-46

I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where someone asks for help, at a moment when you've nothing left to give. You find yourself replying, 'I'm sorry, I just can't come over right now' – not because you've anything in the diary, but in order to get a bit of time to yourself. Which you end up spending in a tussle of emotional exhaustion and nagging guilt. Because 'you're supposed to be a Christian' – as if that means teetering on the edge of physical burnout, psychological manipulation and relentless guilt. We act as if torn between just two options – altruism or selfishness – living for others, or living for myself. Whereas today's gospel, I think, offers us a third way. Jesus talks about self love.

"Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus is asked. And he replies, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Jesus is asked for one commandment and he answers with two – the first from Deuteronomy, the second from Leviticus.. And then urges three objects for our loving: God, neighbour, and self. Let's move through each of these as we seek to hold them together, as we explore how to juggle them.

First our loving starts with God – suggesting, perhaps, we won't grasp what it means to love unless we begin with God. Notice Jesus says "Love the *Lord your God*." Hear each of those words, words which are utterly foundational to the Old Testament. This isn't a distant abstract God who set the universe in motion and then took a long lunch break. This is the *Lord*. That's the God whose name was so holy they couldn't say it out loud, whose face was so wondrous they couldn't look upon it, whose heart was so passionate they wrote book after book about his constancy in the face of Israel's faltering response. And this Lord is *your* God. The whole gospel is in that little word *your*. Your God means the God who shaped his whole life to be in relationship with you, not just in the good times but when you've completely

messed up and when it's all shocking and embarrassing and humiliating and sad. Think of the tiny child who screams out the words Daddy or Mummy at the top of their voice in a moment of pure joy or need, matched by complete confidence that the parent is entirely present and entirely devoted to him or her? We're as close to God as that child to their parent. That's the power of the word *your*. Jesus doesn't talk about God, he talks about the *Lord your* God. God's life is so shaped as to be yours. Love the Lord your God, reciprocate with the Lord who is *your* God, the One who is for *you*.

Then, in the light of loving that God, *our* God, we're invited to love our neighbour as ourselves. Clearly there's something foundational about the divine axis that then bears out along the human axis.

When it comes to neighbour, remember elsewhere Jesus is asked, "Who is my neighbour?" I wonder if you feel a panic at such a moment: as if this command to love is an invitation to be overwhelmed, overwhelmed by anyone who's in need. I can quickly jump from thinking about the people I know and encounter every week to the poor and vulnerable across the whole wide world. My prayer list can't cope! On the personal level there's a danger loving my neighbour becomes a recipe for either naïve sentimentalism or manic burnout. And on the political level, we have the Right talking about the responsibility for individual neighbours as if a shorthand for lowering taxes. While the Left suggests that loving your neighbour is something the government might do on our behalf.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbours as our selves. And what is there to say about our selves? Ever since Emmanuel Kant, the project of modernity has set about creating the kind of self that doesn't need God or neighbour, a free-standing self. How's this project going? I wonder. We're inundated by self-help apps to make us pause and become more mindful, or to help us exercise to re-shape our bodies: yet we don't *seem* to become any more peaceful or rejuvenated. Look at the progress of science and medicine to wipe out disease we used to say – until a pandemic struck that has flummoxed everyone. Meanwhile we have increasing affluence, yet fewer things to blame for the confused selves that we still are. As the poet Philip Larkin puts it, when there's no one else left we blame our parents for the mess of our lives: "They may not mean to, but they do. They fill you with the faults they had And add some extra, just for you." If it's nature, it's their genes that we blame; if it's nurture, we simply blame their being too strict or too lenient, too distant or too smothering. But the problem of self-love isn't sorted by having someone to blame. It seems the project of creating a self that doesn't need God or neighbour isn't going too well.

Where do we go with this, as Christians? I'd like to point to the one who is voicing these commandments: in whom God and neighbour come as a package deal. Jesus shows us what God looks like, the *Lord* God, whose life is shaped to be with us, the Lord *our* God, who's as close to us as a mother to her baby. And Jesus shows us what our neighbour looks like. The Good Samaritan parable comes alive when we realise it is *Jesus* who was beaten and bruised and left to die. That's what the cross did – it left Jesus dying by the side of the road, it made Jesus our neighbour. And it is *us* who walk past on the other side, then and now. When Jesus says, whatever you did for the hungry, the naked, the prisoner, you did for me, he's showing us himself in our neighbour. So when Jesus says "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... And you shall love your neighbour as yourself," *he* is the Lord our God, and *he* is our neighbour.

So, then, what of ourselves? I suggest we're left with just one place to stand, and that's face to face with Jesus. I am

not my wallet, not my house, not my car, not my A level results, not my job title –not even my family. I'm what Jesus thinks of me, because Jesus is God, and Jesus is my neighbour. You can never fully know yourself, but you can be fully known: Jesus knows you better than you know yourself. Jesus is hurt by thoughtless things you never realised you'd done, and delighted by unconscious gestures you never realised you'd made. He understands the fear that makes you cruel and the joy that makes you generous. He rejoices in the very thrill of your existence, is tender and close to you when you are turned in on yourself, is overjoyed in the very moment of your repentance, is exultant as you spread your wings to fly in his Spirit. Jesus is the heart within your heart. And he loves you. And encourages *you* to love *you*.

I wonder if you're any good at that? If you're one of those whose been told you should live for others and always put others before yourself or risk being called selfish, I'd like to suggest you try swapping the words around. "Love yourself as your neighbour." In other words, regard yourself as the first among all the neighbours God calls you to love. God's got a lot to be doing with the whole of creation, but the wonderful thing is, God's chosen to start with you. God loves every single one of us while still loving each of us as if we were the only one. We're able to love others because of the way God loves us. And to accept that love, we have to learn to love ourselves.

I wonder if you've ever worked in a restaurant or a café. It's hopeless starting a shift hungry because the very smell of food makes you crochety and bad tempered. If your tummy's rumbling as your serve up the dinner you aren't much help to your guests. Once upon a time I worked my holidays in a silver-service restaurant where they took the trouble to offer food first to all of us who waited on tables – because they found the team then did a much better job of serving their clients. You love others best by loving yourself first.

This is the work of self-love: to let yourself be loved by Jesus, and to be so energised and transformed by that love, that you love yourself as the first among all the countless neighbours God calls you to love. To learn to be their friend, you practice by being your own friend. That takes away the resentment of those neighbours, because they're not taking away anything that belongs to you. You've already been looked after, because after being loved by Jesus, there's nothing more to want.

If you find yourself looking elsewhere to bolster your self-regard I've got bad news for you: it'll never be enough. It'll be like pouring water into a jug with a leak at the bottom. Of course that's exhausting. In that economy, looking after yourself is bound to take away from looking after others. But when the love of Jesus has made you something and someone you never dared imagine you could be, when it's made you beautiful despite your blemishes, when it's made you good despite your betrayals, when it's made you true despite your lies, then self-love is simply a happy introduction to a story that isn't finally about you.