

The Greatest Commandment

WORSHIP FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL THEME 2022/2023

SERVICE ONE: TO BE LED BY AUTHORISED PREACHER



Note to leader

This service should be led by a presbyter or local preacher. You may adapt it to suit your congregation. You can feature some all-age elements, or make it completely all-age by using both all-age options and omitting the sermon.

There are two all-age talks/activities: Loving God and Neighbour: Reflecting on Africa, and Ese ne Tekerema. If you are not preparing all-age worship, and you wish to use the first all-age talk, you may wish to select just some parts of that talk.

There is a choice of hymns to complement the themes. We also offer detailed sermon notes and suggestions for prayers. There is an accompanying PowerPoint [that you can download here](#).

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SUGGESTED SERVICE PLAN

CALL TO WORSHIP

Suggested form of words:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7).

Let us come to God in worship and thanksgiving.

OPENING HYMN/SONG

Choose from:

God is love: his the care (StF 403 or H&P 220)

God is love: let heaven adore him (StF 103 or H&P 36)

PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

[🔗 See Suggested Prayers](#)

READING

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

AN AFRICAN CANTICLE

[🔗 See African Canticle](#)

ALL-AGE TALK OPTION ONE

Loving God and Neighbour: Reflecting on Africa

[🔗 See All-age talk option one](#)

HYMN

Choose from:

Jesu, Tawa Pano (StF 27)

Jesu, Jesu (StF 249 or H&P 145)

READING

Galatians 5:13-26

ALL-AGE TALK OPTION TWO

'Ese ne Tekerema'

[🔗 See All-age talk option two](#)

HYMN

Choose from:

Brother, sister let me serve you (StF 611)

What shall our greeting be? (StF 691 or H&P 806)

READING

Matthew 22:34-40

SERMON

[🔗 See Sermon outline, with reflections and stories from Partner Churches and comment on the Bible readings](#)

HYMN

Choose from:

When I Needed a Neighbour (StF 256)

Love Divine (StF 503 or H&P 267)

OFFERING

Suggested form of words:

Dear loving God, with these gifts we offer our lives in love for you and in the service of our neighbours in this place and in this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

[🔗 See suggestions](#)

HYMN

Choose from:

Will you come and follow me? (StF 673)

Lord your/thy Church on Earth (StF 410 or H&P 774)

BLESSING FROM THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

May God's love strengthen you, as together we seek to love God by loving our neighbours.

Amen.

ALL-AGE MATERIALS

ALL-AGE TALK OPTION ONE LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOUR: REFLECTING ON AFRICA

By Andrew Ashdown, Partnership Coordinator for Africa, Global Relationships Team

You can use all or parts of the following all-age talk, adapting and editing the words to suit your context. You may want to break some of the sections up with hymns. After each section, there are optional suggested points for prayer and Bible verses.

Have available the following symbols (or use the pictures of them on the PowerPoint that accompanies these resources):

- bag of mangetout, green beans or an avocado
- a mobile phone
- a bar of chocolate
- a colourful piece of cotton (preferably African if you have one!)
- a hand-held musical instrument/shaker.

Introduction

Ask everyone:

- What comes to mind if we say 'Africa'?
- What kind of landscape/images/people come to mind?
- Do you think these are fair impressions?

Share some or all of the following:

- In 2020, 1.34 billion people lived in Africa.
- Half the population (49%) are Christian.
- Christianity was established in Africa (Egypt and Ethiopia) in the first century AD.
- The Bible tells us how Saint Philip converted an Ethiopian who took Christianity back to Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40). North Africa was a very important centre for the first Christians.
- In Ghana, people greet each other with the words "Praise the Lord" before a conversation.
- Most African cities are modern, cosmopolitan urban centres. Africa has many growing economies.

Today we shall use some symbols to think about the life of our Christian sisters and brothers in Africa and how we can pray with and celebrate our partnership with them.

1. Fruits of the continent/fruits of the Spirit

Symbol: A bag of mangetout, green beans or an avocado



Much of the continent of Africa is extremely fertile. The continent exports many fruits and vegetables to world markets, as well as coffee, tea, fruits and spices. For example, Africa, specifically Zimbabwe, is the world's biggest supplier of mangetout.

More than 60% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa are small-scale farmers and about 23% of Africa's annual GDP comes from agriculture. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a country or continent during a year. But climate change is having a huge impact on production and making it hard for people to get enough food to eat in several areas of the continent.

Bible verse and points for prayer

- Give thanks for the fruits of Africa and the contribution that African foods make to our diet.
- Pray for all who seek to ensure fair trade.
- Reflect on how we bear fruit in our lives that work for equality and justice in the world today.
- "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all!" (Psalm 104:24).

2. Trade and injustice

Symbol: A mobile phone



Did you know that more than half the world's supply of cobalt comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Cobalt is an essential ingredient in the production of electronic batteries, copper wires and microchips. It is present in all our mobile phones and computers and is essential to modern communications. It is an industry worth billions of pounds, but Africa sees little of that wealth. The wealth goes to multinational companies that mine and manufacture the products in which cobalt is used.

Bible verse and points for prayer

- Pray for the implementation of economic justice by governments and corporations, that they may ensure the welfare of those communities and nations that produce resources that are essential to modern life.
- "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

3. Trade and environment

Symbol: A bar of chocolate



Over the last 50 years, the Ivory Coast in West Africa has lost 80% of its rainforests. These have been replaced with cocoa plantations to meet the developed world's demand for chocolate. The Ivory Coast and Ghana are the world's largest producers of cocoa, producing more than 50% of the world's supply.

The world's demand for palm oil has had a similar environmental impact as large areas of tropical rainforest and diverse habitats have been destroyed to produce vast palm oil plantations. These have benefited the economies of the countries, but have severely impacted the environment. The economic benefits are rarely experienced by local people. It also means huge risk for local farmers who are dependent on single crops and are vulnerable when crops fail due to climate change or changes in prices.

Bible verse and points for prayer

- Pray for all efforts at reforestation.
- Pray for the restoration of agricultural diversity and economic benefits to local farmers.
- "The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1).

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4. Culture and community

Symbol: A colourful piece of cloth (preferably African).



Africa is a continent of huge diversity. There are more than 3,000 different communal and ethnic groups, who speak 1,500-2,000 languages. The peoples of Africa have a wide range of traditions and beliefs, and the use of African music, dance, art and culture are vibrantly embedded within the worship and life of the Church in Africa. There are strong historic and cultural traditions within the ethnic groups that continue within the daily life of African Christians, and which echo the call to community in the Early Church.

Bible verse and points for prayer

- Give thanks for the rich diversity of African culture that contributes to the life of the Christian Church in the continent.
- Pray that we may discern how to learn how culture and community can relate to and enhance our own understanding of the Christian gospel.
- “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

5. Worship/love of God and the other

Symbol: A hand-held musical instrument/shaker.



African Christian spirituality is rooted in lively, dynamic worship and a profound sense of the presence and love of God for God’s people. Worship is at the heart of any Christian gathering across Africa. Despite the many challenges and hardships that people face, African Christians constantly praise and thank God for the gift of God’s provisions and are focused on reaching out to the local community to share the message of God’s love. Witnessing to that love by reaching out in loving service is central to the life of the African Church, especially by providing education, medical and pastoral care to all who need them.

Bible verse and points for prayer

- Give thanks for the life of the Methodist Church across Africa and for the vibrancy of worship.
- Pray for all the Methodist institutions and initiatives that serve the needs of local communities and seek to fulfil Christ’s call to ‘life in all its fullness’ for all God’s people.
- Pray for our mission partners serving across the continent and for all that we can learn from our partnership in the gospel.
- “Let everything that breathes, praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6).

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Application: What can we do?

- Pray for and give thanks for our Christian sisters and brothers in Africa.
- Support the work of partner Churches and mission partners.
- Be aware of, and give thanks for, the contribution made to our lives by fellow human beings in Africa and other parts of the world.
- Deepen our awareness of global contexts and issues and the part we play in them.
- Ensure that companies and governments operate fair trade policies.
- Support and lobby for policies that mitigate effects of climate change.

Prayer

*O God of unconditional love for all people,
we give you thanks for the diverse peoples,
cultures and landscapes of Africa
and the blessings which they contribute to the world.
We pray for all who work for economic,
environmental and social justice
and rejoice in the life and ministry of
our Methodist Church partners in the continent.
May we celebrate our unity, made whole in diversity.
Bless all initiatives that seek to serve those in need
and witness to your healing love for all of creation,
that in all things your will may be done
and your kingdom come.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.*

ALL-AGE TALK OPTION TWO ESE NE TEKREMA

By Grace Pratt Morris Chapman, mission partner

Have available pictures of: a needle and a camel; some shiny coins; sheep, a young man with some pigs; a table set up for a feast; a lamp; a person scattering seeds; a donkey, some bandages, oil and wine, the *Ese ne Tekrema* symbol.

You can find these images on the PowerPoint that accompanies these resources, which can be projected or printed out.

Opening question: Can you tell me which stories in the Bible these pictures remind you of?

Show the pictures, one set at a time, and give the congregation time to say which stories they belong to.

- A needle and a camel (Mark 10:25).
- Some shiny coins (parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30, or the parable of the woman who lost a coin, Luke 15:8-10).
- A sheep (parable of the lost sheep, Luke 15:3-7).
- A young man with some pigs (parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32).
- A table set up for a feast (parable of the wedding banquet, Matthew 22:1-14).
- A lamp (parable of the ten virgins, Matthew 5:14-16).
- A person scattering seeds (parable of the sower, Matthew 13:1-9).
- A donkey, some bandages, oil and wine (parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37).

In many parts of the world people share and teach important things using symbols. I have a picture here of a symbol from West Africa (show the picture of the *Ese ne Tekrema* symbol). Does anyone know what it is called and what it means?

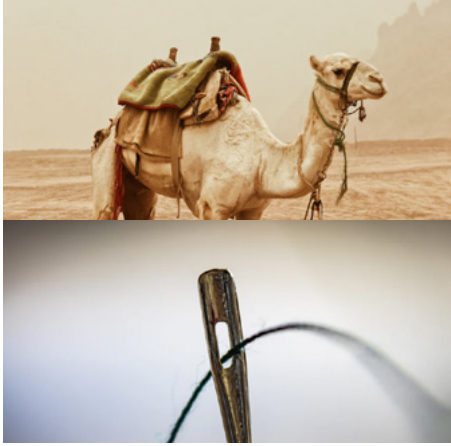
The *Ese ne Tekrema* (teeth and tongue) is part of the Adinkra Symbols of the Akan people of West Africa. Each symbol, which is more of a puzzle than a literal picture, contains a message. The symbol is there to raise questions that will lead to discussion and learning. The *Ese ne Tekrema*'s message is simply that we need each other. We need to accept each other, share what we have with each other and work together to make life better.

Our world is full of many different kinds of people – some are just like us and others are not like us at all and we find it difficult to get along with them. Teeth and tongues are nothing like each other are they? One is soft and muscular and the other is hard with sharp edges. Yet God has put them together to help us with speaking and chewing. Life is much, much better when we accept each other. More importantly, God expects us to share the love that he has showered on us with others.

God's love changes us; it helps us learn to love God and helps us see ourselves and others through God's eyes of love. Then we begin to see that our differences are not so bad after all: they are really special quirks that God can put together, if we let him, to help us make each other's lives and the world around us super wonderful with the love of God.

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1. Mark 10:25



2. Matthew 25:14-30 or Luke 15:8-10



3. Luke 15:3-7



4. Luke 15:11-32



5. Matthew 22:1-14



6. Matthew 5:14-16



7. Matthew 13:1-9



8. Mark 10:25



9. Ese ne Tekrema

SUGGESTED PRAYERS

Prepared by Sheila Norris, Partnership Coordinator
for Asia-Pacific

PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

Loving God,
We praise you for your love which created the universe
We praise you for your love which sent Jesus to live
and die for us
We praise you for your love which gives your Holy Spirit to
strengthen and encourage us.

Loving God,
Thank you for the times when we feel surrounded
by your love
Thank you for the people who show your love to us
Thank you for the opportunities we have to show your love
to other people.

Loving God,
We are sorry that we do not always love you with all our
hearts and souls and minds
We have worshipped you on Sunday, but forgotten about
you during the week
We have been quick to ask you for what we want, but slow
to thank you for what you give us
We have promised to serve you, but put ourselves first.

Loving God,
We are sorry that we do not always show your
love to other people
We have thought and said unkind things
We have kept things for ourselves instead of sharing
We haven't noticed when other people are left out.

Loving God,
Forgive us.

Forgive us for the opportunities we have missed
to share your love.

Forgive us for the times we have forgotten that you love
each person equally, and that your love includes ourselves,
the people we like, and the people we don't like, because
each person is our neighbour.

Help us to know that we are loved by you, and that
you do forgive us when we say sorry, and help us to
try to do better.

Fill us with your love, and help us to show that love to
other people every day through kind words and gentle,
helpful actions.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the Lord of love.
Amen

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AN AFRICAN CANTICLE

This is a traditional prayer, every effort has been made to trace the original source.

Invite the congregation to join in with the words in bold print.

All you big things, **bless the Lord.**
Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,
The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,
Fat baobabs and shady mango trees,
All eucalyptus and tamarind trees,
Bless the Lord.
Praise and extol Him for ever and ever.

All you small things, **bless the Lord.**
Busy black ants and hopping fleas,
Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,
Flying locusts and water drops,
Pollen dust and tsetse flies,
Millet seeds and dried dagaa,
Bless the Lord.
Praise and extol Him for ever and ever.

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SERMON OUTLINE

Note to preacher

Below you will find reflections, a comment on the Bible passages and some questions to consider as you form the sermon. Choose what suits you.

REFLECTION

From the Revd Graham Thompson, President of the Conference



At Lamanai in Belize you will find the ruins of the former centre of the Mayan people. Their settlement by the New River Lagoon lasted for three thousand years. They established a thriving trading centre and were well-settled in an area stretching for ten miles on one side of the river. There were usually between forty and sixty thousand people living there with their customs, religion and the vast temples they had built over the years.

The Spanish attacked this community in 1534. The Maya repelled them but then made the incredible decision to leave. They knew the Spanish would be back with larger forces and strange diseases. We don't know how quickly they decided to leave or whether some stayed behind for a while but we know that, eventually, they all moved on. Their homes and temples were left to the elements and overtaken by the forest.

The Maya sacrificed everything they had established over three thousand years. They did not cling to the past but, in order to guarantee some kind of future for the generations that were to come, they made an incredible sacrifice. They moved into the hills and survived. Now, the Maya are one of the six indigenous groups that make up the majority of people in Belize.

In Matthew 22:36, some Pharisees ask Jesus, "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied that it is to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. "This is the great and first commandment," said Jesus. "And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

We see God's great love for us in God's self-giving. God set aside the glory of heaven and came to us as Jesus. God in Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. John 3:16 reminds us that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life". God gave us Jesus.

As we seek to express our love for God, what are we giving? The quality of our worship; the time we give to learning more about our relationship with God; the care we offer to our neighbours, particularly those in need; and the way we share our faith with others are all expressions of our love for God and for our neighbours. We, who have received so much from God, have a great deal to offer. This will require some personal sacrifice, but this is as nothing compared to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the sacrifice of the Maya community as they sought to secure a future for their people.

How do you express God's love as you seek to fulfil the greatest commandment? Is it obvious that you love God because what you give and who you are all point to the One who has given everything for love of you?

REFLECTION

From Anthony Boateng, Vice-President of the Conference



Catherine Kandayana prepares lunch for the residents at Mwandishi Mission Hospital.

The presidential and vice-presidential focus for this year is the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:27-39). Its source, and the fruit that adherence to it bears, is nothing less than love itself.

Active love is at the heart of Methodist life and mission and is the primary fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

As Christians, we face many challenges in the world today. The life of the global Church can often provide insight, example and inspiration into how we might respond to the common challenges that we all face. Among those challenges is how to respond theologically and practically as Christians to issues of social, political and environmental injustice.

The United Church of Zambia is seeking to respond both theologically and practically to such challenges. Motivated by Christian love, the Church runs clinics and hospitals across Zambia, to attend to the physical wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in some of the remotest corners of the country. These clinics serve tens of thousands of people in hard-to-reach areas, providing medical care and facilities that would otherwise be beyond the reach of the rural poor.

Theologically, the United Church of Zambia has joined with eight other Protestant churches to initiate a nationwide Theological Education by Extension programme, to “prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service” (Ephesians 4:12). This provides not only theological training, but seeks to address issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and climate change.

The Church has also partnered with the Government to train inmates, prison chaplains and other prison staff in the areas of pastoral care, gender-based violence, sustainable development, counselling and preaching among other things, in order to transform the lives of offenders and ensure their safe rehabilitation into society.

Christianity in Zambia accounts for more than 90% of the population of 16 million. Yet, whilst churches are spread across all nine provinces of the country and continue to grow rapidly, in some parts of rural Zambia, one pastor can serve up to 50 congregations (approximately 15,000 people) and cover areas with a radius of 80km. Most pastors walk many miles on foot, sometimes for days, to provide pastoral care to their flocks. It is in this context that theological training, especially for hard-to-reach areas of the country, has become a key aspect of ministry in Zambia: to train pastors to share the gospel effectively; and to address the challenges of the modern world from a Christian perspective.

In everything, the United Church of Zambia seeks to adopt an integral approach to social justice issues that affect most of the rural populations who live in severe poverty. Current mission priorities are to provide theological, education and church community services that provide a holistic approach to God’s mission.

These two important areas of ministry by the United Church of Zambia are in addition to the daily worship and pastoral care of the circuit congregations and the connexional leadership. All of them are expressions and outworkings of the greatest commandment, which are, in turn, inspired and enabled by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley said: “God would first, by the inspiration of his Spirit, have wrought in our hearts that holy love without which none can enter into glory.” The Spirit daily plants in our hearts the love of God and gives us the grace and strength to respond and reach out to a world in need.

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Throughout the world, the ministries of the church reflect God's love and the response of God's people to the greatest commandment. Such actions transform the lives of individuals and communities. All of them are signs of hope and light and witnesses to the possibility of Christ's healing in a troubled world. May we be inspired by them to do likewise, wherever God has placed us.

REFLECTION

From Sri Lanka

Prepared by Sheila Norris, Partnership Coordinator for Asia-Pacific



The Samaritan Journey is a project by the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka to offer help to the people who are suffering most because of the economic crisis and recent violent changes in government. In Sri Lanka now, prices are rising and shops have little to sell. It's hard to find medicines or petrol to buy. Food is so scarce and expensive that many people can only eat two small meals a day. The Church has appealed for help to provide relief packages, educational assistance and medicines.

However, the Samaritan Project doesn't only ask for help from people overseas who can spare some money. It also calls on the members of the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka many of whom are very poor themselves, to do what they can for others.

The project is introduced as follows:

"The Methodist Church, Sri Lanka has embarked on a programme entitled The Samaritan Journey, for we believe that the current situation will continue to affect people at least for the next twelve months. As we journey through these difficult times, we will find many people fallen by the roadside struggling for life. Our Christian discipleship demands we become their neighbours, by interrupting our routine life's journey as we encounter them, share what we have with them, bind their wounded souls, provide care and sustain them until their sufferings are overcome.

Through the Samaritan Journey programme, the Methodist Church, Sri Lanka proposes relief to the most severely affected families in order to assist them in their day-to-day life for at least one year. The needs are enormous and the numbers of seriously affected people are increasing. However, we can alleviate the suffering of the neediest."

The project has nine commitments. The first commitment is the Prayer Campaign, which has three tasks:

1. We are encouraging the Methodist community to commit to pray three times, daily, at a convenient time for:

- the country
- the affected people
- the decision makers.

2. To daily pray for at least five severely affected families by name.

3. To pray for the Church and its members to express their compassionate love to affected people by sacrificial commitment.

The last commitment is the 7 x 7 Campaign, which says:

We are encouraging the formation of groups of seven members in the congregations in every neighbourhood to adopt three severely affected families around them.

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Each group supports families by:

- Praying specifically for these families
- Sacrificing a meal a week to share it with such families
- Giving up one of their essential or favourite activities to share it with these families
- Helping coordinate other relief obtained from elsewhere for these families
- Visiting such families regularly.

The appeal ends with the words of Jesus found in Matthew 25:35-36, 40:

"The Lord says, '...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me. [...] Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.'"

REFLECTION

From Tanzania



Image: The Revd Petro Kasululu teaching respect for people with disabilities in the villages.

The Methodist Church in Tanzania is a synod of the Methodist Church in Kenya Conference. It has grown significantly in recent years through the evangelistic and missionary ministry of the Church. The Church works with other churches, NGOs and government organisations to be 'salt and light' in a country where there is widespread

poverty, and the church helps to enable access to education, health care, nutritious food, clothing and decent living conditions. The Methodist Church has also led the way in Tanzania in promoting women's and children's rights.

In addition to supporting this wider ministry, the Methodist Church in Britain has been pleased to fund a ministry unique to Tanzania, supporting people with disabilities in the Mwanza region of north-west Tanzania, bordering Lake Victoria. For generations, communities have marginalised people with disabilities, who consequently receive little support and often live in extreme poverty. Many fathers desert their families if a child is born with disabilities, believing that the mother or child is cursed. Alienated by her family and the community, a mother will then find it difficult to support her family.

Funded by the World Mission Fund of the Methodist Church in Britain, the Revd Petro Kasululu has spent the last six years visiting over 50 remote churches in six rural provinces, supporting and encouraging people with disabilities and teaching them how to establish small businesses. By preaching in the churches about the love of God for all people, he has helped transform the lives of individuals and changed attitudes to disability in many villages.

He has also had some success in challenging rural communities' attitudes to Female Genital Mutation (FGM), encouraging a change of approach and support for girls who have been subject to the action, or threatened with it.

The healing of body, mind and spirit in both individuals and communities lies at the heart of Jesus' life and ministry. We read of him healing the paralysed, the deaf, the blind, the possessed. All were marginalised or anathematised in society at the time, and sadly, the same can still be said in many societies today.

But Jesus shows that none are beyond the love of God or unworthy of his care and the concern and support of their fellow human beings. The ministry that recognises the holiness of all God's people and brings transformation and healing to people's lives is central to our calling as Christian disciples and members of Christ's Church.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Reflecting on the Presidential theme, the Greatest Commandment, how can you help the congregation delight in the awesome good news of God's self-giving love in Christ?
- How can we express our love for God?
- Think about the context of the congregation. What opportunities are there for showing God's love to neighbours in the community?
- What opportunities are there to show God's love to neighbours further afield in Britain and in other countries?
- How can you use the President's questions at the end of his reflection?
- How can we learn from the holistic approach to mission of the United Church in Zambia as our Church serves in our society today?
- What can we learn from the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka about a service of our neighbours which is relational, prayerful and sacrificial?
- What can we learn about being more genuinely inclusive and respectful in our love for our neighbours from the ministry of Methodists in Tanzania as they engage with people with disabilities who have traditionally been excluded?

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Verse 4 marks the beginning of the Shema, taking its name from the first verse of this text in Hebrew, and which was to be recited twice a day. The passage opens by emphasising the uniqueness and oneness of God who is to be afforded exclusive loyalty, in contrast to the multiple manifestations of Baal.

Verse 5 speaks of love as an attitude that can be chosen (See Leviticus 19:17f for other commands that relate to attitudes), expressed through obedience to God's commands (Deuteronomy 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22). It is, though, always a response to God's loving actions, which come first (Deuteronomy 6:20-25). We are to love God with all our heart, which was seen as the place of thinking and will in Hebrew thought (cf. Deuteronomy 15:9); and soul, which is the person's self and which can be seen in their desires (cf. Isaiah 26:8f); and might, which speaks of a self-disciplined commitment.

King Josiah was commended for keeping this command (2 Kings 23:25); his love of God was expressed in an active commitment in life, and in giving himself in death (2 Kings 23:21-30). These words of commandment to love God are to be meditated upon (Deuteronomy 6:6; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34), not just blindly followed. They are to be taught to successive generations (Deuteronomy 6:7; cf. 4:9; cf. Proverbs 2:1), who are encouraged to ask questions of learning (Deuteronomy 6:20-25 cf. Exodus 12:25-27; 13:11-16); and they are to be spoken of at all times.

Verses 8-9 were later understood to require a literal writing of the commandments on scrolls placed in small leather phylacteries and bound to the forehead and left arm (cf. Matthew 23:5) during morning prayer, and in a wooden box, the mezuzah, attached to the upperpart of the right-hand doorpost; this is in contrast to the practice of placing images of gods on the doorposts (Isaiah 57:7-9). The reference to 'gates' is probably a reference to the city gates.

The vision of this passage is of a dynamic and interactive relationship that individuals, families and communities have with the commandment to love God completely.

GALATIANS 5:13-26

A church at Galatia had been established on the teachings of Saint Paul, but, it seems that sometime after one of his visits to Galatia (recorded in Acts 13 and 14, 16:6 and 18:23), other Christians had entered the region preaching a different message. Their message was that non-Jewish Christians needed to keep the law of Moses (Galatians 1:6f).

In chapters one and two, Paul sets out his authority as an apostle to the Gentiles, and argues that, if it is necessary to keep the law of Moses to be righteous before God, then Christ died to no purpose. In chapter three, Paul points out that Abraham, who lived before Moses, was reckoned as righteous because of his faith in God. God's vision of an all-inclusive family of many peoples has become a reality in Jesus, who, by being hanged on a tree, would be declared cursed by the law of Moses; yet he is our redeemer. The law of Moses was like a custodian whose role ends once the child has come of age.

In chapter four we see that as Christians, we are adopted as God's children; to insist upon obedience to the law of Moses is to return to a slavery to rituals. However, having stressed that Christians are free from the law of Moses, Paul is keen to emphasise that we are not free from having a moral compass in our lives. In 5:14 (cf. Romans 13:9), Paul says that the law of Moses is summarised in one essential commandment: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). It is this, rather than circumcision of the flesh and observance of certain days and seasons that is the path to fulfilling the law.

They are not to choose to be enslaved to the law of Moses (Galatians 5:1-7, 18), but they are to freely embrace life in a community of mutual, non-hierarchical (Galatians 5:26), service/slavery of love one for the other (Galatians 5:13). Living in the flesh is a part of our human experience (Galatians 2:20), but we must not gratify destructive desires, from licentious living to sowing seeds of division within the Christian community (Galatians 5:16-21); the missionaries insisting that the Galatian Christians must keep the law of

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Moses had sowed such divisions (Galatians 3:1-2; 5:7-12, 15). Rather, we are to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). It is the Spirit, and not the law, that enables us to avoid fulfilling the desires of the flesh. The fruit which the Spirit living within us bears is characterised by beautiful Christ-like attitudes (Galatians 5:22f). There are six lists of Christian virtues in the New Testament; the only word to appear on all of them is love.

MATTHEW 22:34-40

Whilst the Pharisees would have appreciated Jesus' reply to the Sadducees in verses 23-32, Matthew portrays them as again being hostile (Matthew 22:35). They gather together because of Jesus' silencing of the Sadducees. This may be a deliberate reference to Psalm 2:2, where the same language is found when speaking of the gathering of those hostile to God and God's anointed. It is a Pharisee highly trained in the laws of Moses who poses the question, addressing Jesus as 'teacher', as Christ's opponents often do Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is asked which is the great one of Moses's 613 commandments. Jesus, in his reply, quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 (for comment on Deuteronomy, see previous page), the words of which form the opening of the Shema.

In Matthew's account, Jesus has included the word mind, not found in Deuteronomy 6:5, emphasising the importance of knowing God. The use of heart, soul and mind, stresses the totality of our being. Uninvited, Jesus then adds a second commandment, to which he gives equal weight (verse 39), quoting Leviticus 19:18. Both commandments include the words, "You shall love"; Jesus is invoking a rabbinic practice of giving 'equal category' to passages that carry common words. Whilst we express our love of God through obedience and commitment, and express our love of neighbour by acting for their good and wellbeing, Jesus regards these two commandments as being equally grave. The Torah, says Jesus, cannot be fulfilled without obedience to these two commandments (Matthew 22:40). For Jesus' broadening of 'neighbour' to those of other ethnic groups see Luke 10:25-37; see also Matthew 5:43-48. The language of the law and prophets hanging on these two commandments evokes a picture of a weight being supported by two ropes (cf. Matthew 7:12). Whilst Jesus' answer was orthodox, he was emphasising that love of God is impossible without love of neighbour (cf. Matthew 10:40 and 25:31-46).

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