**Westfield URC 10.30am 10th January 2021**

**Call to worship Psalm 118**

Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, and his love is eternal. Let the people of Israel say, ‘His love is eternal,’.......

Let all who worship him say, ‘His love is eternal.’

**Reflection:**

I don’t know about you, but the pandemic that we are suffering has really tested my faith. I am driven to question God in so many ways, and what is life really about? I see so many individuals, in this country and all over the world, suffering much greater hardships than mine. So what’s it all about?

 I feel fortunate to have been born in Wyke. My father was the Manager of Griffe Road Co-op and I had a happy childhood. Our next door neighbour, Mr. Little, was the Superintendant at the Moravian Sunday School, so through him we became Moravians.

But why was I so fortunate, compared with the many starving individuals in the world. And, during this pandemic, help is at hand for us, but I worry about those who will not get the same help.

My personal needs, and those of others, are a constant worry, but we are all urged to turn to God for re-assurance. So I would like to share with you a favourite hymn of mine, which is in the Moravian Hymn Book, and sung to the tune Palmyra **(Mission Praise No. 693)**

I look to thee in every need,

And never look in vain;

I feel thy strong and tender love,

And all is well again;

The thought of thee is mightier far

Than sin, and pain, and sorrow are.

Discouraged in the work of life,

Disheartened by its load,

Shamed by its failures or its fears,

I sink beside the road;

But let me only think of thee,

And then new heart springs up in me.

Embosomed deep in thy dear love,

Held in thy law I stand;

Thy hand in all things I behold,

And all things in thy hand;

Thou leadest me by unsought ways,

And turn’st my mourning into praise S. Longfellow 1819-1892

**Family Prayer**

Dear Lord, we look to you in all our needs, and you never let us down. We thank you for the many blessings we enjoy, and we thank you that we can turn to you at all times.

We struggle with the problems that this pandemic has caused, and we fear for our families and friends. We ask your blessings on us all, and we pray that your Holy Spirit will sustain us in all aspects of our lives.

Gracious Lord, we praise you that day by day you are at work in our lives, changing us beyond our expectations. We praise you for the way that, despite ourselves, you have called us to faith, breaking through our doubts, our stubbornness, our selfishness, and our pride, drawing us closer to Jesus Christ.

Help us, Good Lord, to keep a firm hold on the conviction that you can continue to change us. That whoever we are, whatever we do, whatever we have to face in this life, we are never outside your redeeming power and grace.

Lord, help us, individually and together, through our words and actions, to speak out in your name. To show the world how you have changed our lives so that we, in turn, may change the lives of others. Continue to change us, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Hymn No. MP 59 Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:

O 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 submission, perfect delight,

visions of rapture burst on my sight;

angels descending, bring from above

echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,

I in my Saviour am happy and blest;

watching and waiting, looking above,

filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

**Reading: 1 John 4: 7 – 21 Good News Bible - God is Love**

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

And God showed His love for us by sending His only Son into the world, so that we might have life through Him. This is what love is;

It is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us.

We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.

If anyone declares that Jesus is the Son of God, he lives in union with God and God lives in union with him. And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us.

God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with him. Amen.

**Hymn MP 450 Love lifted me**

I was sinking deep in sin, sinking to rise no more,

Overwhelmed by guilt within, mercy I did implore.

Then the master of the sea heard my despairing cry,

Christ my Saviour lifted me, now safe am I.

 ***Love lifted me! Love lifted me!***

 ***When no one but Christ could help, he lifted me!***

 ***Love lifted me! Love lifted me!***

 ***When no one but Christ could help, love lifted me!***

Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves;

He will lift you by His love out of the angry waves,

He’s the Master of the sea, billows His will obey;

He your Saviour wants to be, be saved today!

When the waves of sorrow roll, when I am in distress,

Jesus takes my hand in His, ever He loves to bless.

He will every fear dispel, satisfy every need,

All who heed His loving call, find rest indeed.

**Talk:**

1 John 4: 7 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes

 from God.

Some Bible Commentators suggest that, if you are looking for theology, read Paul’s letters. If you are looking for ethics, read the letter from James. But if you want the heart Christianity, you should read the writings of John. The Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the brother of James, wrote his Gospel and three Epistles, and some theologians believe he wrote the book of Revelation.

 It is also thought that John’s mother, Salome, was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in which case Jesus and John were cousins. The bible tells us that John was the ‘beloved disciple’ and it is logical to conclude that John’s writings should contain many of the deepest thoughts and sayings of Jesus. From John we learn much about the Holy Spirit, and that without Christ’s Spirit dwelling in us, we can do nothing, for it is through his Spirit that his love is made complete in our lives.

John had come a long way! He may not have been born with a loving heart. After all, some people find it easier to love than others (How about you?). We read that John was sensitive, but, we are also told he was capable of anger. He had a temper, and he was impulsive at times. In Mark’s Gospel it is recorded that he and his brother James were named ‘Men of thunder’ by Jesus. (Mark 4: 17).

By trade, like many of the disciples, he was a fisherman, following in his father’s footsteps. So he grew up in the family business. It must have been a successful operation, for we are told that they had hired servants. But John appeared to be restless. And so, when he heard of a prophet in the wilderness, a man who was baptising his followers in the River Jordan, he asked his Dad for time off, and he went, with his friend Andrew, to hear what the preacher had to say

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And it was through John the Baptist that the reality of Christ’s mission on earth was revealed. He told the people, ‘The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.’

You can imagine that it wasn’t easy for John to believe that this man would be Jesus. If they were indeed cousins, well they would probably have visited each other’s homes, and played together as children. But it appears that from the first announcement and through the subsequent talks with Jesus, and indeed, to the very end, John was an unfailing believer.

 In his own Gospel he is not called by name. Again and again he is called ‘The disciple whom Jesus loved’. He sat by Jesus at table from where he reports what he saw and heard. He heard Jesus say ‘And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another’

It is not known when John wrote his first epistle or to which church he sent it. Perhaps he intended his letter to be sent to several groups of followers. But John emphasises that through His love for you and me, God sent his Son into the world to give his life for us, the ultimate expression of love.

One day, John had been on a preaching mission, and something he saw disturbed him. He went back and reported it to Jesus. ‘Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group’

Jesus replied, ‘Do not try to stop him, because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able, soon afterwards, to say evil things about me. For whoever is not against us is for us (Mark 9: 38-40). So John, humble enough to take the rebuke, says it over and over again, ‘Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God’ (I John 4:7).

So in his letter, John doesn’t just say that God loves (which obviously he does) he says that **GOD IS LOVE**. It is in his very nature to love. So, the message that ‘God is love’ is the great news of the Gospel of Christ. This is so different from the other religions of the world. God is indeed the creator, but we are also taught that God is love.

Can we find about love just by reading about it? I guess not. We must experience it for ourselves to know love in its true sense. In the same way, we must experience God in our hearts if we are to truly know him

And not only that. We are told we must love God as well as our brothers and sisters and our neighbours. And it is not enough just to receive love, we must also give it. Think of a water pipe. If there is a blockage, no water will flow out of the bottom of the pipe. And perhaps more significantly, no more water will be able to flow in at the top. We are, I would suggest the channel through which God’s love can flow into the world, and we can also be guilty of blocking that process.

I am a great fan of the TV programme ‘Dr. Who’ and it’s good to see that the programme continues to be filmed. The first Dr Who was in 1963 with William Hartnell playing the doctor. The basic recipe is still used. The doctor and his assistant enter The Tardis, a Police Box, and they can travel backwards or forwards in time. Unfortunately they don’t appear to have much control over where they will finish up.

As a Moravian, I would love to have the opportunity to travel back in time to 1727, to experience at first hand the love that was experienced at a service in Berthelsdorf, in Germany. Major divisions were healed and the people were united by the spirit, strengthened in the love of God and of each other. And in John Hutton’s book about the early brethren he tells of the love and inspiration that was felt by all those, including John Wesley, who visited the congregation in Herrnhut.

Or perhaps, we should attempt to go further back in time, to give us the chance to talk to the Apostle John. He had that unique relationship with Jesus Christ. It would be wonderful to talk to him about his writings, and to witness him encouraging his followers to love one another.

He would be able to reassure us that the proof of God’s love was that he had seen the Son in person and he was present at his death and at his resurrection.

There is a legend about John. When he was so old that he could not walk unaided, his friends used to carry him to his place of worship. Time and again he was asked to speak. But all he would ever say was ‘Little children, love one another’.

One day, someone plucked up the courage to ask him why he said nothing else. John replied ‘Because if we fulfil this new commandment from the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing more is needed’.

What is the secret then? How do we grow into his love? How do we become, as John said, beloved of Jesus? Is it believing in Him? Or humbling ourselves before Him? Having courage to follow Him, or standing up for Him? Well, it is all of these, but there is more. The secret of growing in love, of becoming a loving person, is not found in the intellect but in the heart. And that is not to discredit the intellect.

John had an amazing grasp of spiritual truths, and he had great insight. In the opening words of his Gospel, John explained to us the mystery of the incarnation as no one else has done, because he understood the coming of the Son of God into the world. He wrote that magnificent passage, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’.

The secret of growing in love is not found through education but through personal experience. Yet John, who was not trained as a Rabbi, gives the most eloquent explanation of Christ and his teachings.

His love grew through experience, the experience of the presence of God. This lifted John above the others through his dedication to truth, to God and to Christ. His walk in the light as he is in the light was the way he grew in love.

I am as guilty as any in not displaying my faith. And at times we show little conviction? We read the New Testament, but do we take sufficient time to understand it? We pray, but do we really commune with our Lord?

Let us strive to think about God, about why we are here, about where we are going, about the meaning of life. Let us think about Jesus Christ, His Cross, His purpose. And above all, His great love for each and every one of us.

It will be far more rewarding than reading your morning paper or watching your evening TV programme!

How great is God’s love! What a future we have in harmony with our King!

It is a road we can all take; if only grow nearer to Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Hymn MP 445 Lord the light of Your love**

Lord, the light of Your love is shining, in the midst of the darkness shining: Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us; set us free by the truth You now bring us - shine on me, shine on me,

 ***Shine Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father’s glory; blaze, Spirit***

 ***blaze, set our hearts on fire. Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with***

 ***grace and mercy; send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be***

 ***light!***

Lord, I come to your awesome presence, from the shadows into Your radiance, by Your blood I may enter Your brightness: search me, try me, consume all my darkness – shine on me, shine on me,

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness so our faces display Your likeness,

ever changing from glory to glory; mirrored here, may our lives tell Your story – shine on me, shine on me.

**Prayers of Intercession (by Nick Fawcett)**

Living God, we come to you, this morning, as the family of your people, those you have united in Christ. And as we come, remind us of that great truth.

We give you thanks for the families to which we belong.

Lord of all, **join us together in love**.

We think of the families among whom we have been raised – those with whom we have shared so much, to whom we are especially close, and who will always be uniquely precious to us.

Lord of all**, join us together in love**.

We think of the family of this church, here in Westfield – the fellowship that is found here, the friendships that have been made, and the encouragement that is given to each other. Lord of all, **join us together in love**.

We think of the family of the Churches here in Wyke, who are at one with us in Christ. Lord of all, **join us together in love**.

Loving God, we thank you that we share things in common with all people, near and far, our lives interwoven and interdependent. Help us, we pray, to recognise more fully what that means, to appreciate the responsibilities it brings and the opportunities to share, and so may we learn to love our neighbours as ourselves. Lord of all; **join us together in love, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord**. Amen.

**Hymn MP 760 When we walk with the Lord**

When we walk with the Lord in the light of his word,

what a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will,

He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.

 ***Trust and obey, for there’s no other way***

 ***to be happy with Jesus , but to trust and obey****.*

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,

But his smile quickly drives it away; not a doubt nor a fear,

not a sigh nor a tear, can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,

but our toil He doth richly re pay; not a grief nor a loss,

not a frown nor a cross, but is blest, if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love,

until all on the alter we lay, for the favour He shows,

and the joy He bestows are for them who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet, we will sit at His feet,

Or we’ll walk by His side on the way. What He says we will do,

where He sends we will go, never fear, only trust and obey.

**The Grace**