

## 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020 10am Song of Songs chapter 2

Service led by Kim Matthews, talk by Lindsey Attwood

Reading by Jenny and Kim Matthews, intercessions by Jeremy Bryans

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### **Introduction**

[Kim Matthews:]

So good morning everybody. So Jenny is going to be joining me in a bit to do our reading and Lindsey is going to be bringing us our message later. And for those of you that don't know, I'm Kim Matthews, one of the wardens here at St. John's and everybody, whether you're usually with us or visiting us, you're all most welcome. Is it very windy around you, Lindsey?

[Lindsey Attwood:]

It was very, very windy in the night. I'm in my studio because Andrew's doing a talk downstairs to Knights' Meadow. So we've got two going on at the same time. So I'm in the little room at the top.

[Kim:]

So the internet connection could be under strain this morning then?

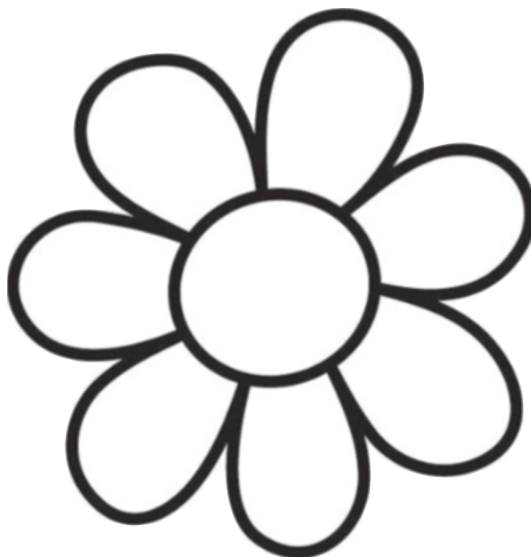
[Lindsey:]

It could be, we hope not. It should be okay.

[Kim:]

Well, as as always, we need to start with a few notices. So just to be ready for the service later, hopefully you've all got a flower like this cut out ready.

If you don't have a flower then you can do the activity with a normal piece of paper. And I'll show you that in a bit. But you might like to cut out a square of paper ready for that later. Just hopefully you've had a chance to look at the notices as they were running through before the service. Just to highlight that six o'clock this evening we'll have our healing and refreshing service on the same YouTube channel. And on Wednesdays at lunchtime at 12 o'clock there's a Bible study that you can all join in with. You will have all received by email, if you're on the list, a set of activities for this morning, and the notice sheet and do let us know if you would like to be added to the mailing list for those things. So now, let's take a moment of quiet and just listen to some open-



ing words. Oh, sorry, no, I forgot there is a notice which will be played for us. Just now a clip about a service called Molly's meals.

[Video:]

Hi there, my name is Molly and I'm the founder of Molly's meals, which is a daily delivery meal service and that's free to any elderly and vulnerable residents within Kenilworth that need a hot home-cooked meal every day. So I started the service back in March before the lockdown officially started. And my reasoning for this was, I knew with shops shutting, with cafés closing down, that the people that were most negatively affected during this would be the people who couldn't get out and the people who couldn't cook fresh meals for themselves. So I started cooking meals myself and delivering them around to anyone who would ask to be on their list or who was referred from the COVID-19 group, or from their children or neighbours, and I was cooking it myself, delivering it round and then eventually I started to get offers from people who wanted to help, so people who wanted to cook or drive and now we're 13½ weeks later, and I've got a team of about 15 volunteers who do the cooking, do the delivery driving, and it's a more smooth system now where the meals get picked up directly from the cooks, delivered round and they follow a list that's been safeguarded so no names or contact details on that, just the address and any dietary requirements.

[Kim:]

So if you are interested in helping with that activity of delivering meals to those that need them, then do please get in touch. And I'm sure that would be appreciated.

So as we come into God's presence, let's acknowledge that this is His time, and that we're here to worship Him. And

Grace, mercy and peace  
from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you

*All* **and also with you.**

This is the day that the Lord has made.

*All* **Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

And as we come into God's presence, we become conscious of the things that we've done wrong, and so just a short prayer, to bring those things before God and put ourselves in his mercy and grace.

Holy God we admit to you our weaknesses and confess our sins, that we might receive your forgiveness and strength, through your mercy and grace. Please give us a growing deep desire to please you, and to be changed day by day, more into the likeness of your dear son, our Lord Jesus Christ,

**Amen.**

## **Activity**

[Kim:]

So, for our activity, we're going to take this flower [see page 1]. Or if you prefer, you could take just a square piece of paper. And what I what I'm encouraging you to do is to just write in the middle a few words or a simple sentence, that just describes something about expressing your love for God. So something that expresses your love for God, or perhaps thank Him for something that He's done for you.

And we will come back to that later in the service. In the meantime, if you'd like to colour or draw around that, then please use that as something to focus you. If you want to use a square of paper, then just instead take a rectangle, fold the corner across like this



and then cut this piece off that like so. And you will be left with a square and you can do the same with the square. Just write something on there that you want to thank God for, and then we'll come back to use that later on. And there are, of course, other activities for the children in the in the sheets that was circulated.



So if Jenny would like to join me, we're going to now read our reading for you. This is taken from Song of Songs, chapter two.

## **Reading: Song of Songs 2**

### **She**

<sup>1</sup> I am a rose of Sharon,  
a lily of the valleys.

### **He**

<sup>2</sup> Like a lily among thorns  
is my darling among the young women.

### **She**

<sup>3</sup> Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest  
is my beloved among the young men.

I delight to sit in his shade,  
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

<sup>4</sup> Let him lead me to the banquet hall,  
and let his banner over me be love.

<sup>5</sup> Strengthen me with raisins,  
refresh me with apples,  
for I am faint with love.

<sup>6</sup> His left arm is under my head,  
and his right arm embraces me.

<sup>7</sup> Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you  
by the gazelles and by the does of the field:  
do not arouse or awaken love  
until it so desires.

<sup>8</sup> Listen! My beloved!

leaping across the mountains,  
bounding over the hills.

<sup>9</sup> My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.  
Look! There he stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
peering through the lattice.

<sup>10</sup> My beloved spoke and said to me,  
'Arise, my darling,  
my beautiful one, come with me.

<sup>11</sup> See! The winter is past;  
the rains are over and gone.

<sup>12</sup> Flowers appear on the earth;  
the season of singing has come,  
the cooing of doves  
is heard in our land.

<sup>13</sup> The fig-tree forms its early fruit;  
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.  
Arise, come, my darling;  
my beautiful one, come with me.'

### **He**

<sup>14</sup> My dove in the clefts of the rock,  
in the hiding-places on the mountainside,  
show me your face,  
let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet,

Look! Here he comes,

<sup>15</sup> Catch for us the foxes,  
the little foxes  
that ruin the vineyards,  
our vineyards that are in bloom.

and your face is lovely.

### **She**

<sup>16</sup> My beloved is mine and I am his;  
he browses among the lilies.  
<sup>17</sup> Until the day breaks  
and the shadows flee,  
turn, my beloved,  
and be like a gazelle  
or like a young stag  
on the rugged hills.

### **Talk**

[Lindsey Attwood:]

Thank you, Kim and Jenny, thank you for reading that actually. It's really lovely to have both of your voices, because it is two voices in the Song of Songs.

Now, I don't know about you, but do any of you like to read love poems? It's not something you often talk to your friends about. I don't tend to read them but I have enjoyed work by people like John Donne and Shakespeare sonnets. I don't know if you have remembered the one that says - it's a very famous one - "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate." And I can imagine many of you are in marriage relationships. I'm sure you say this all the time to your partner! I'm sure you speak in love language. Are you a romantic at heart? Or are you sort of a bit sort of shy or you do shy away from things like that? It's a very interesting thing to think about.

I wanted to start with this reading from Song of Songs. Andrew has asked me to do the talk today, and he just said to me, "Is it possible that you could talk a little bit about your own journey with God yourself?" So actually, earth things, it's not just about preaching words, it's actually about, you know, how do we live these things out. It's really important to know that this is something we live out, not just what we say from the front.

Now this book of poems is such an unusual addition to the Bible, as it's not a prophetic thing or about doctrine, it seems to be a really interesting sort of addition, nothing else quite like it. It expresses the human experience of love and desire. 'Song of Songs' is a bit like saying, 'Holy of Holies', or 'King of kings'. It's like the song of all songs. It's about seeking and finding, and shows the human longing to be desired by another. It's about intense attraction. And there's a whole sermon in itself here about marriage that can be beautifully explored. However, my reason for including it is to share my own walk with Jesus, and its relevance to me and hopefully you. Now I've, as an artist and calligrapher, I've often written out part of this text, which hopefully Michelle will share



on screen. And I've done it because, I don't know why, I think, as a calligrapher, you often do, Song of Songs have such beautiful words in it, you want to create and actually do something with so I thought I'd share this with you, something I did a long time ago. And I find it amazing how many people when they come to an exhibition or have a card really want this piece. So there is something about hope in this image, and hope in the Song of Songs. It's hope after a long winter, a lot of us often experience difficulty and things like that.

And actually, we just really need hope and I know at the minute with Coronavirus, and job losses and all those things, we really do need a sense of coming out of winter. So although Song of Songs is probably just a wonderful expression of human romantic love, it's important to know that Jesus is often referred to in the Bible as the bridegroom. And the Bible talks so much about the bride and the bridegroom, the wedding, the marriage feast, starting right back from Adam and Eve right back, going through into Revelation where we have this sort of idea of God eventually coming to get His bride. In the Old Testament, Israel is often referred to as a woman, and Yahweh was God as rescuer and protector. And we see through some of the parables, the idea of God searching and finding us, like in the parable of the lost sheep or lost coin.

In the last few years, I have really sensed Jesus personally calling me as part of His bride. And I'm realising that he wants me to know that He's my provider, and that He's the one who truly loves me, sacrificially, to the point of going on to a cross, and He's the perfect husband. Ephesians 5, verse 25, says,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

It's because of Jesus that the winter is now past, and He's prepared to give Himself up for His bride. It's important to know that you know, even if you are in a difficult relationship, that Jesus is that literally is the perfect husband.

I realised that before I can truly love others and serve Jesus, I really do need to know He loves me truly. Otherwise I might follow out of fear or duty rather than love. 1 John 4 verse 19 says,

We love because he first loved us.

I love [Song of Songs chapter 2] verses 3 and 4 which say

I delight to sit in his shade,  
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.  
Let him lead me to the banquet hall,  
and let his banner over me be love.

There is a sense of play in the poem, and also being invited out from the drudgery of winter:

'Arise, my darling,  
my beautiful one, come with me.

Now I know this might feel very strange: as a woman, you might think, well, this might seem appropriate to you, because Jesus is like male or into young people. Men might be thinking, "How do I actually, how do I enter into this? It doesn't seem very relevant." But I want to invite you and say this is an invitation to all of us to join in and leave the familiar. And if I'm quite honest, I know a lot of men who wouldn't admit to it, but they're quite romantic as well. And they need to be needed and loved. We all do. Young people need to be needed and loved, children need to be needed and loved. And it's a calling to adventure. It's not sentimental. I think with our modern day and age, we often think of, you know, songs, quite sentimental. This isn't sentimental. It's different and

scary and exciting. Are you, am I willing to allow Him to love me like this and for me to respond? It's really important: we know that we often cite the verse, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself,"<sup>1</sup> as a way we want to live and I know this is a really honourable way to live, it's really important we get this commandment right. But we need to remember, that in order for us to love, we really need to understand the Source of love itself.

The Song of Songs poem is a two-way relationship: Jesus' desire is for me to seek Him back. I have taken a long time to understand Christ's love, even though I've been a Christian for a very long time. I know it in my head, but I'm learning to how to let go and trust Him. I have 'L' plates on, sometimes I'm willing and I do it, and sometimes I can hide. Trust is a huge part of following Jesus. I need to do it, as following Him sometimes takes - well, it takes me off anyway - it takes us off the beaten track, and you can wonder where you're going. Isaiah 55 verse 8 says,

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,'  
declares the LORD.

This is quite a scary verse in a way, because by nature, I'm quite cautious, and I quite like handrails and everything. I've always been one of those people who hates going on fairground rides and all that sort of thing, and roller coasters. I'm a bit of a wuss, and my children are much more adventurous than I am, so is Andrew. I struggle with anxiety and fear. However, where I wander off sometimes to avoid in my head where I feel a bit safe and familiar, you know, you can do that sometimes when you're feeling a little bit cautious, you go to the place where I'll do what I know is familiar, I sometimes get a voice, Jesus in my head, just a very small voice saying, "You've gone astray - come back!" I get the distinct impression that Jesus does come to find me. And He invites me to join in with the work of His Kingdom. But He reminds me that as a bridegroom, it's Him who gets to lead if I let Him. I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself following God and following Jesus sometimes and then occasionally with a little bit of fear I'll grapple with the steering wheel or I'll try to lead again. And I can hear His voice asking me for the steering wheel back. Now the amazing thing is that Jesus doesn't grab control off us, He doesn't control us like a puppet on a string. We're not dangling off Him. And it's, you know, if you're becoming a Christian, it's not like suddenly you're being taken over. It's with permission. And He sort of waits until we give the control back, He sort of stays still. I think Jesus treats us as adults and with respect. He doesn't force us to follow Him. But He invites us to.

Sometimes during prayer, I've sensed Jesus saying, "You do have a heart condition." And initially I was a bit worried, thinking, well, maybe I've got a problem with my heart - I need go to the doctor. And I think He's sort of tongue-in-cheek and "No, you haven't understood it!" I'm a bit slow on the uptake and realise that I need to have my heart changed, you know, gradually bit by bit so that I can follow Him more and more. He wants the real me with all my faults and reminds me that all my debt is cancelled. No matter how hard I try, I can't really save myself. I might try - I like to try everything actually, I have always been a bit like that, I've always tried hard, tried hard at school, wanted to do well, and don't like it when I fail. However, the good news is, if I allow Him and follow His way, it's actually more achievable than mine. But I sometimes make it harder than it is, because I'm used to that: we're meant to try hard, jump through this hoop, pass this test. But Jesus says this, in Matthew 11, verse 29: He says,

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

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1 Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19, Matthew 22:39, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8 etc. etc.  
<https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Love-Your-Neighbour>

I mean, that's quite refreshing, that we go, "Hang on a minute. I thought it's meant to be really, really hard!" And Jesus says 'no'. You know, His yoke is easier often than what we have we put on ourselves. But we sometimes struggle - we almost want to do it our way.

Now taking bread and wine in communion is a symbol of the fact that we need to feed on Jesus. I know it's been difficult to do this at the minute because of the whole thing, the church being closed, it's hard to do that. You could do that in your home, take bread and wine as part of an Agape meal. But it's a picture of the fact that He's the best nourishment, more than wine, chocolate, coffee, whatever you like. And He's drawing me into following more closely than ever before, and wants to train me. I think that training is an essential part of being a disciple. That includes reading and studying scripture, as well as prayer, and then hopefully living out what I'm learning. But I've also felt a call to fast, and this is something I've never really been very good at. I really struggle with fasting: I'll be absolutely honest with you, I struggle with giving up things. I like my cups of tea; I like that sense, when I feel a bit stressed, have a glass of wine, but it's something that I really feel He's calling me into. And I get the impression sometimes, I don't know why, sometimes it's an act of spiritual warfare. I think that when we try and get close to Jesus or do what He says, I don't know if you found this yourselves, but the enemy will sometimes try and move in and distract or even accuse you or you know, or - I don't know - throw things at you and it knocks you off-course. And I can get a bit wobbly when this happens. So I sense Jesus often saying 'stand firm'. 1 Peter 5, verse 8 says,

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Now that sounds a bit scary, really, it's something that you don't really want to hear, I don't really want to hear that. I want to hear all the good stuff about Jesus being the bridegroom. Isn't that lovely? But then it's really hard when you're hearing some of the, "If you're going to do this with Me, there are going to be you know, you're going to have to actually know this, this is going to be tough as well, because you've got Me," but there is also principalities and powers that are working against Him as well. So it's just sometimes for myself, to be honest and say, I need to stop fighting sometimes with Him, when He asked me to, and I'm still learning to surrender and yield. I don't always get it right. I'm on a journey myself. And thankfully, God often says to me, this is a process. And it's a process by which you learn little bit by little bit, it's not all at one go. It's a slow learning to follow.

So following and yielding is what it means really to be a disciple and it is a response to the sacrificial love of Jesus. John 14:15 says,

'If you love me, keep my commands.'

And 14 verse 24:

'Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.'

I can only follow someone if I actually trust them enough to know their intentions are good. I don't know if any of you have been Christians for a very long time, but there was an old song I used to sing many years ago.

Trust and obey,  
for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus,  
but to trust and obey.

Don't know if you remember that song, it's a little bit, to say 'obey' is a very strange word now, it's almost quite controversial because it's almost against our own inclination or own culture.

But I don't know about you, but sometimes I think I'm cautious - it's that I know, I know it won't always be comfortable, smooth following. Jesus didn't promise an easy ride or that there would never be storms. But it's important to know that His motive is always love.

When I do doubt, I really sense the Spirit is saying, "Don't forget that I'm generous," and He is generous. And He encourages me to let go and trust. And He often says to me, when I'm sort of worrying about things, He says, "Don't overthink, don't worry."

So God has spent these past few years trying to in a way to woo me, so that I know He loves me, so that my heart hopefully will be softened, so that I can turn that outwards and share that Good News and joy with others. Can you imagine, Jesus wants to share with people that their deep desire and longing can be fulfilled in Him. His love is beautiful and life-giving. It is not tainted by selfishness and sin.

And He's also been talking to me again about 'harvest'. I may be praying earnestly about something else. But in my world, drops that into my head instead. And to be honest, sometimes I feel ashamed to say, I sort of ignore it. I can often see my own issues as more pressing. It's easy to see your, you know, just little things, things that come on: "I've got to pray for that, got to pray for this," but I know He keeps dropping it in my head. And I think this is His, what He sees, and He wants me to see what He's seeing. I think it's worth saying, you know, He loves people that much and wants to reach them through people like me, and hopefully you. Isaiah 61 says this, that "He was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." That was His manifesto when He was on earth, and I think He's wants to say, using the words of the Song of Songs again, "Arise, come my darling, my beautiful one. Come with me." And am I and are you willing to yield His calling? And go where He is going?

Amen.

### ***Prayerful Response***

[Kim:]

Amen.

Thank you very much, Lindsey. That was very helpful. I have to say I'm probably one of those men who finds the imagery of romantic love in my relationship with Jesus, a bit difficult to grapple with at times. But that's been really helpful and shows that there's a real, solid foundation to our love in Jesus.

So as we think about how about how we might respond to that in terms of "How do you want to respond to Jesus' love," you might like to take the flower that we prepared earlier. And having put something in the middle, you may wish to even add to it, that reminds you of Jesus' love to you. Just fold then the petals over. It works best if you don't fold them all the way down but just sort of to where they join. And as you fold the petals down, just think about God's love enfolding you, that His love surrounds you and enfolds you and as you seek to love Him, how much more He loves you.

And if you're working with a square of paper, you can try the same thing: all you need to do is just fold the corners of the paper into the middle and it works, it works just as well. Although maybe not perhaps quite so decoratively.



And then, having folded the petals over, if you have a bowl of water to hand, you might like to float the flower in the water as we sing our next song – assuming that it is going to work. Otherwise, you might like to hold on to the flower and do this later in the day. And as you watch the flower, be reminded of the verses,

<sup>11</sup> See! The winter is past;  
the rains are over and gone.

<sup>12</sup> Flowers appear on the earth;  
the season of singing has come,

And now we're just going see if we can sing our next song and turn our eyes to Jesus.

### ***Song: Turn your eyes upon Jesus***

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace

Turn your eyes to the hillside  
Where justice and mercy embraced  
There the Son of God gave His life for us  
And our measureless debt was erased

*Chorus:*

Jesus, to You we lift our eyes  
Jesus, our glory and our prize  
We adore You, behold You, our Saviour ever true  
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to you

Turn your eyes to the morning  
And see Christ the lion awake  
What a glorious dawn, fear of death is gone  
For we carry His life in our veins

*Chorus*

Turn your eyes to the heavens  
Our King will return for His own  
Every knee will bow, every tongue will shout  
'All glory to Jesus alone!'

*Chorus x 2*

### ***Intercessions***

[Kim:]

So as we look to Jesus, we also want to bring before him things on our hearts and on our minds that may be troubling us. And Jeremy has prepared some prayers for us, which we will now share together. Perhaps as we wait for that, in a moment of quiet we can bring before God the things that are on our heart.

[Jeremy Bryans:]

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your so-great salvation. Thank You, Lord, for the work that You did on the Cross. Thank You too that the gift of Your salvation is available for all. Thank You, Lord, for the love that You have for all of us.

Lord, we all know people who don't know You, who have to meet the difficulties that this world throws up without Your strength. We pray for them. And we pray for Your enabling, to help us to be faithful and bringing Your love to them, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Father God, thank You that in Your Word, You tell us to pray for the government, for those in authority over us. Lord, we pray for the government of this country, this time. They face a lot of difficult decisions and challenges. Give them great wisdom, the ability to make wise choices every day, as they balance the competing needs that this country faces. We pray especially for those members of the government, and of the opposition, that know You and seek to do Your work at this time. We pray for integrity and courage for them, that they would do the right thing, knowing You, no matter what the consequences. Amen.

Father God, as we begin to move out of lockdown, we pray, first of all, that You would protect those in our country who are still vulnerable to the coronavirus. We lift up especially the elderly with pre-existing health conditions, and those that have to work in dangerous conditions. We pray that they would know Your peace, comfort and protection. Father, we pray for healing for those who are already sick. We all know people that are ill. We pray now for them, for strength and for recovery for each of them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Precious Father, thank You that the Bible tells us that church is Your house and that You dwell in the midst of Your people. We pray that we will be built on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ. May Christ dwell in our hearts through faith, so that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. You said that You would build the church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Lord, fill Your church with the security that comes from knowing we are protected by You. To You be glory throughout all generations, now and forever. Amen.

[Kim:]

Thank you, Jeremy. Unless we bring all our prayers together. Perhaps we can all join us. wherever we are, in saying the Lord's Prayer,

**All    Our Father in heaven,  
         hallowed be your name,  
         your kingdom come,  
         your will be done,  
         on earth as in heaven.  
         Give us today our daily bread.  
         Forgive us our sins  
         as we forgive those who sin against us.  
         Lead us not into temptation**

**but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

### ***Conclusion and Blessing***

So as we draw to the end of this service, and go into whatever the day has ahead of us, let's continue to seek Jesus' face, as we said in the words of the song. And what I'd like to do to end is, using words taken from scripture, to let each of us hear what Jesus would say to you, as part of His bride. You might like to close your eyes and just receive this as His personal message to you.

So Jesus says,

I will commit Myself to you forever.  
I will commit Myself to you in righteousness and justice,  
in steadfast love and tender compassion.  
I will commit Myself to you in faithfulness.  
I am familiar with all your ways.  
I am not distant and angry, but the complete expression of love.  
And it is My desire to lavish My love on you.  
But I am your provider, and I meet all your needs.  
Because I love you with an everlasting love.  
And I rejoice over you with singing.  
I will never stop doing you good.  
For You are My treasured possession.

So we go to the rest of the day and the coming weeks sure of His love for us to live and work, rest and play in the power of His Spirit.  
And may He bless us all, the bride of Christ the church, in Jesus name.  
Amen.

Thank you all.  
Until next week, goodbye.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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Turn Your Eyes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2tKVqZZiI4>

Original words (verse 1) and music by Helen H. Lemmel

Additional words (verses 2-4) by George Romanacce, Nic Trout, Kevin Winebarger and Nathan Stiff.

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