

24th January 6pm Agape Meal

Service led by Andrew Attwood, talk by Andrew Attwood, reading by Felicity Hawke, liturgy led by Rob and Emma Latham, personal reflection by Steve Sutton.

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Greeting

[Andrew Attwood:] Good evening. Good to see you guys.

[Felicity:] Hi.

[Rob:] Hello.

[Andrew:] Nice to see you Felicity. Nice to see you Rob and Emma. Did you guys manage to get out in the snow today?

[Rob:] Yes, [Emma:] we went out for a walk, [Rob:] walked in the road.

[Emma:] Yeah,

[Felicity:] I only went out as far as feeding the birds on the table.

[Andrew:] Wow, it was very beautiful today, wasn't it. It was very nice. I think I managed to do about four miles in the snow today. But I think it's gonna be a cold one tonight though, isn't it?

[Felicity:] Yes. [Emma:] Snowing again. [Andrew:] Really?

[Felicity:] Not much above freezing tomorrow either, I don't think.

[Andrew:] I don't remember we got, I don't think we got snow last year, did we?

[Felicity:] I don't think so, really.

[Emma:] I think it's the first time for snow, since we've been here.

[Andrew:] Really? I saw I saw a young family walking down the road with a two-year-old who was agog, you know, and it was clear that that was a little two-year-old's first experience. Anyway, I will see you guys later and I'll just do a brief introduction to the service.

[Felicity:] Okay.

Introduction

[Andrew:] So, good to have you all with us here for this Agape meal. Just again to briefly explain for those of you who might be new to it or as a reminder, for those of you who were here last time, an Agape meal is where we use the elements of bread and wine. It's not a formal communion service but it is an opportunity for us remotely, in a legitimate way, to take bread and wine together to remember what Christ has done for us. The shape of what we will do will follow how we did it last time. There will be words of thanksgiving, in a short moment from Rob and Emma, and they will also lead us into a song that will be played for us on video, so we can join in with that. Then they too again will lead us into a time of remembering that God is forgiving by nature, which will include a moment for confession. Felicity will kindly read to us from God's word and remind us of Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper, then I'll bring some words in a short talk relating to an aspect of the Last Supper. We have a short video from Steve Sutton this time, describing what Christ's death and resurrection

means to him, and then after that point, I will encourage us all to take bread and wine, and we'll eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. Towards the end of our service, Rob and Emma again will remind us this time of resurrection life. After the death of Jesus follows the good news of His resurrection, and we will finish with me blessing, and then a final hymn. So we do hope that that is going to be helpful to you, and I hope that you will be able to join in with all the elements as fully as you can. So I'm now going to hand it over to Rob and Emma.

Words of Thanks for God's plan of Salvation

[Rob Latham:]

So we begin by giving thanks to our God.

Thank You, Lord, for Your infinite wisdom and Your infinite grace, as demonstrated in the plan of salvation. Thank You for bringing us into communion with You through Your wonderful, redeeming work.

We praise You, Father, for sending Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ to come to this earth and to be born into the human race, over two thousand years ago, so that by His death and resurrection we might be able to look to Him as our Rescuer.

Lord, we believe.

[Emma Latham:]

Thank You that Jesus Christ is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him.

We praise You that He continues to intercede for us, and His grace keeps us in relationship with You, our God.

Lord, we believe.

[Rob:]

Thank You, Father, that the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. Thank You that we have been adopted into Your family through the work of Your Son.

We praise You that we can be assured of our inheritance of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Lord, we believe.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Song: Mighty to Save (Everyone Needs Compassion)

1. Everyone needs compassion
A love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me
2. Everyone needs forgiveness
The kindness of a Saviour
The hope of nations

Chorus:

Saviour, He can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save
He is mighty to save
Forever Author of Salvation
He rose and conquered the grave
Jesus conquered the grave

3. So take me as you find me
All my fears and failures
Fill my life again
4. I give my life to follow
Everything that I believe in
Now I surrender

Chorus x 2

Bridge:

Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory of the risen King
Jesus

Repeat Bridge

Chorus x 2

Bridge x 3

Remembering God's forgiveness

[Emma :]

And now we remember that God is a forgiving God.

"You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you." ¹

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." ²

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us." ³

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' ⁴

In a moment of quiet, let us reflect on our lives before God, bringing to Him whatever needs to be confessed.

So as a community, let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**All Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse *us* from *our* sins,
and restore *us* in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

¹ Psalm 86:5

² Psalm 32:1

³ Psalm 103:12

⁴ Matthew 3:2, no particular translation

Reading: Matthew 26:17-30: The Last Supper

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"

23 Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The Last Supper, Exodus and Passover: True Liberty

[Andrew:]

Thank you Felicity. Well, let's just have a moment of quiet before I speak and share some words. Let's just be still for a moment. Remember that Last Supper, that Jesus had with the Twelve.

Father God, would You help us to enter into the incredible mystery and power of what Jesus was doing that night with bread and wine. Amen.

So, the aspect that I wanted to explore this evening, when I was thinking about the Last Supper, was the theme of Exodus. Exodus obviously is the whole story of how the people of Israel were rescued. Why might Jesus have chosen Passover, as the particular festival where He would initiate this new covenant? Why would He choose this one? There were various other festivals He could have pointed to, and they all had significance. So why Passover? In simple terms, Passover was the ultimate sign of God's power and God's will to free His people from slavery, the ultimate sign of God's power and His will to free His people from slavery. And it was indeed, those of you who will be familiar with this, the nature of how Israel functioned, it was something rehearsed year upon year by the people of Israel rehearsing the story, all the time, and it was a defining story for them, so whole families would get together and even on a more frequent basis they would break bread and remember, and they would remember this moment of rescue, this extraordinary moment of God intervening in real time, in real history and setting them free.

Of course Passover is not a parable, it's something true. It was liberty from the oppressors in Egypt. Those of you who know the story of Genesis will recognise how the people of Israel, with Joseph in particular, ended up settling in Egypt for a while, and that whole extraordinary account of Joseph being exalted to a position of influence in Egypt, and the Israelites being favoured because of their connection to him. But time passed, and they became enslaved by

rulers who didn't know of Joseph, and didn't know of the stories connected to God's people. And so there was a captivity that settled in.

Captivity is a theme that we are familiar with in the history of the world. Captivity is in every direction. And in a small sense, even in the UK we are experiencing captivity right now, because of lockdown, we're limited in what we can do. But the thing is this: Jesus was adopting the story of Passover, because it was a pointer towards something else. You see, the original Passover was to do with liberty from powers in Egypt, but what Jesus was going to do was liberty from the powers behind *all* such systems: the power of Satan and the power of sin. You see, God in Christ was about to break the power of evil and sin forever. Those of you who are familiar with what happens at Passover, a lamb was killed, and blood was sprinkled. In the very first Passover they sprinkled blood on the lintels of the door. They kind of surrounded that entrance point with fresh blood, and it was to protect them from the Angel of Death that was passing over.

And they would re-enact the killing of the lamb, the sprinkling of blood, and they would eat, and they would eat in haste, because they were about to leave, they were about to leave captivity and head out towards freedom. Death was going to pass over, but this time with the re-enactment of Jesus, at His Last Supper, the punishment was going to fall not on a lamb, but on an innocent Man, on Himself. The whole story, you see, of Israel is recapitulated, is retold through Jesus again and again and again, and it was in this instance that Jesus was effectively going to be like the new Moses, He was going to lead the people out of the true Egypt, the oppression of wickedness and the captivity of our own sin, almost like taking us through a new Red Sea into a new true Promised Land. I don't know how you feel about that. But when I look at the bread, and I look at the wine, I'm seeing them as symbols of liberty, symbols of great celebration, because something has been broken, and we can walk into true and new freedom. Imagine smashing chains of slavery. Imagine being bound by something that holds you. And then the chains falling off.

It's very important to remember that the role of the people of Israel in the first Exodus was simply to gather their possessions and follow Moses out, to walk behind him, and to be led out. The people of Israel were not people of war, they didn't have spears and they weren't fighting their way out in their own strength. They were walking out because God unilaterally had set them free. And so it is when we celebrate the death of Christ, we are simply walking behind Christ, out of our slavery, our slavery to sin and Satan, we don't contribute to it. We walk out behind Christ, just like the people of Israel walked out behind Moses. So, when we eat and drink, you see, we are allying ourselves to Him, to the new Moses, to Jesus. And as a result, we are made free. This is the true liberty from the real lockdown. This is where we get to be truly emancipated, truly set free. And every single time we break bread and drink wine we celebrate our own freedom that Jesus Himself has won for us.

Personal story: What Christ's Death and Resurrection Means to Me

Now we're just going to have a short video from Steve Sutton, who will tell us what the death and resurrection of Jesus means to him.

[Steve:] Jesus's death speaks to me of the holiness of God, and the severity of sin, the offence that it is against the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin. Jesus took my sin upon Himself and it cost Him His life. That's the seriousness of sin.

But His resurrection, that speaks to me of the total victory that He won over sin, over death, over Hell, over all the works of evil, and that His death was accepted by the Father. And it covers both sins of the past, sins of the present, and, should there be any future sin, He covered that too: a total and utter victory over the works of evil.

Remembering His Sacrifice: Bread and Wine/Juice

Thank you, Steve. That is so good to hear. I thought before we actually break bread and wine, make sure you've got them to handle now, so that we can be moving to that point in our service, but I thought we could have a full minute of quiet, where we reflect on what Christ has done for us personally. So let's just be still for a minute.

So let me read to you again, some of the words from the passage Felicity brought to us. It says this in Matthew 26 starting at verse 26 this time⁵.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread,

So if you wish, join with me and take bread.

and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'

So take bread and do eat.

So the reading continues.

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. **28** This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

So take the cup and drink in remembrance of Christ.

Once again, a moment of quiet and a time to celebrate and reflect and remember what Christ has done for us.

I just wanted to conclude this section with some prayers for those who need still to sense and know and understand that the chains have been broken. So let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we remember Your choosing of Passover and Exodus as a key theme that You wanted us to understand.

For every one of us listening to this service who may feel bound in any way, in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray for the liberty of Christ and His Cross over each person.

If that applies to you, consciously bring to God now the areas of life where you feel unforgiven or bound or captive by anything, any habit any behaviour, anything from history, your history. Bring it to God now.

And once again I pray in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, may the blood of the Cross of Jesus set you free from all that holds you, that you may know the cleansing power of His sacrifice for you. And I do pray that you would be empowered by His Spirit to walk out into the freedom that He indeed has for you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

I'm going to hand back over now to Rob and Emma.

Prayers

[Rob:] So now we remember that Christ is risen and His power is available to us who believe.

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. **3** For God has

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done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-4. [RSV]

Please spend one minute silently asking the Holy Spirit to take the throne in your life, and to transform every part of you.

[Emma:] We pray that we would know Christ risen from the dead, and know the power of His resurrection.⁶

We have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer *us* who live, but Christ who lives in *us*; and the life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *us* and gave himself for *us*.

[Galatians 2:20, RSV, 'I' changed to 'us']

So please spend one minute enjoying the reality of Christ's living presence and allowing His resurrection power to renew you again.

[Rob:] So we commit ourselves into Your hands, Lord, trusting in Christ's death for us, and living in His glorious life, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Last thought

[Andrew:]

Amen. Thank you, Rob, and thank you, Felicity as well, for helping us with this service. Before we close with a word of blessing I just wanted to encourage those of you who may want to engage with bread and wine in different ways, away from these kinds of services. If you're part of a small group, I could encourage you to do exactly what we've been doing via Zoom. It's not a formal communion, so you have liberty to break bread and wine in that way, if you think that would encourage and strengthen you. Even within households, couples, families, if you would like to do bread and wine, do it, do it around the dinner table as a way of remembering Christ. And even if you're single on your own, I would just encourage you. Don't feel like you're separated from the body of Christ. We want you to feel that liberty and encouragement too. God bless you, if you want to take bread and wine. And remember what He has done for you as an individual.

Blessing

So let me just finish with a word of blessing now and then we'll have our final song afterwards. Do close your eyes if it helps, but let me bless you.

Lord Jesus, we remember Your lifting of the cup, and Your lifting of the bread. Lord Jesus, we remember Your lifting of the Cross and the laying down of Your life. Lord Jesus, we remember the raising of Your body, and stepping out of the tomb, into glorious life. We pray for all those who are present, listening, watching, either live or later, that the presence of the risen Jesus would be close to them and guiding them, and Lord of their lives over these next days. And I pray, Lord, that You would continue to lead each one into a true Exodus, into true personal freedom in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

So God bless you, and we'll have our final song now.

⁶ See Philippians 3:10

