

Call to worship

Dear Lord Jesus,
we don't have to see you
to know you are with us.
You bring us all together,
as a community,
in your love.

Praise: Let us build a house
Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
*All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All Age talk

In the reading this morning, Jesus stresses just how important it is for believers to watch after each other in love, encouraging one another when things are going wrong, and to keep pointing them to the values of God's kingdom. We know that sometimes it's a real struggle to be a community that supports each other and works together, particularly with what we've been going through over the past 5 months. However it's wonderful to hear news of how supportive we've been to one another – that's what being part of a church community is all about!

Clare Armagan has prepared a video quiz for us this morning. In it you will be shown various clues of places in Haydon Wick which play a special role in our community. See how many you are able to identify!

Community video quiz

Praise: For I'm building a people of power
For I'm building a people of power
And I'm making a people of praise
That will move through this land by My Spirit
And will glorify My precious name

Build Your church, Lord. Make us strong, Lord.
Join our hearts, Lord, through Your Son
Make us one, Lord in Your Body
In the kingdom of Your Son
Build Your church, Lord. Make us strong, Lord.
Join our hearts, Lord, through Your Son
Make us one, Lord in Your Body
In the kingdom of Your Son

Prayers

O Lord our God,
we sometimes tremble as we think of who we are and who you are.
Bring us now, in this moment, to know you.
See us as we are, and see our yearning to be more like you.
May we lay aside anything that hinders our journey with you,
and with our friends and neighbours.

In the higgledy-piggledy ways of life, Lord,
with challenges and changes pulling us this way and that,
we sometimes find it hard, in the heat of the moment,
to know what is right and what is wrong.
Forgive us for our failings and wrongdoings.
Forgive our insensitivities to the ways of others.
Forgive anything that cuts us off from each other or from you.

God of the vastness of all that is,
of all peoples and communities,
here we are, part of this place;
gathering to worship and adore you,
marvelling at your love and care and your persistence with us.
You are beyond our imagining.
Again and again, we are engulfed in your vastness and love.
How can we do anything but praise you, again and again?
Amen.

Reading: Matthew 18:15 – 20 (Rachel)

Message: Part of the family

A Peanuts cartoon shows Linus watching television all alone. In storms Lucy. She demands that he change the channel to what she wants to watch, threatening him with her fist if he refuses. "What makes you think you can just walk right in and take over?" asks Linus.

She blurts back, "These five fingers! Individually they are nothing. But when I curl them together into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold!" "Ah, Ah, which channel do you want to watch?" quivers Linus. Then turning away he looks at his own fingers and says under his breath, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

One of the things that you quickly learn about when growing up in a family is conflict. I can remember mother saying to the three of us siblings - "If you cannot say something nice do not say anything at all." In other words if you have a problem with someone, keep it to yourself, because harmony—even the *illusion* of harmony—is the most important thing, more important than telling the truth, more important than your feelings, and more important, finally, than you.

Jesus response is very different here, suggesting that in the household of God, when your brother sins against you, you must go and talk to him, and if that does not work you must keep going back-taking other people with you next time—doing everything in your power to get your brother back again.

There are two curious things about Jesus' advice.

First, he puts the burden on the *victim*, on the person who has been sinned *against*. Second, he seems much less interested in who is right and who is wrong than he is in getting the family back together again.

The important thing is that we listen to each other, he says, but if a member of the family refuses to listen over and over again—if the doors to communication stay firmly shut—then we are not to pretend that nothing has happened. We ought to try our level best to heal the wound.

When someone crosses me, my strategies are usually quite different, and my hunch is that yours are too. The first one, the one that comes most naturally, is to pretend that nothing has happened. Just forget it. Just let it go. No need to get upset. Things will eventually settle down....

A second strategy is the cold shoulder. You never tell the other person what is wrong because that would be impolite, so you just shun the offender. You simply cross them out of your mind, and when you walk past them it is like no one is there.

Yet a third strategy is revenge—the silent, deadly kind— where you never admit any ill will toward someone but you let it leak out all over the place, never missing an opportunity to question the other person's character or tell a little joke at his expense. You embark on a private smear campaign, telling yourself that it makes you feel better, telling yourself that over and over and over again because the truth is that you do not really feel any better at all.

In his book *The Great Divorce* C. S. Lewis paints a picture of hell that haunts me, because it bears such resemblance to where many human beings live. Hell is like a vast, grey city, Lewis says, a city inhabited only at its outer edges, with rows and rows of empty houses in the middle— empty because everyone who once lived in them has quarrelled with the neighbours and moved, and quarrelled with the new neighbours and moved again, leaving empty streets full of empty houses behind them.

That, says Lewis, is why hell is so big—empty at the centre and inhabited only on the fringes—because everyone in it chose distance instead of confrontation as the solution to a fight.

Dealing with the issue - that is what today's reading recommends, and it is also what most of us would do just about anything to avoid. The excuses rush to our lips. Who am I to judge? What is it to me? *Me go to her*"? *She* is the one that's messed up; let *her* come to me. *Tell* him my feelings are hurt? What if he just hurts them again? I would not know what to say. I would feel so foolish. And what is the use, anyhow? Things will never change.

Those are all great excuses, if you do not mind living on the outskirts of hell, but for those of us who are called to Christian community, they just will not do. For us, there is something more important than being right or wrong, and that something is keeping the family together.

The Jesus way goes like this - go to them, and tell them what is wrong, or what we think is wrong, because the best way to end a fight is to admit that we too might be wrong.

There are certain questions to be asked, such as: Am I sure I know what I am talking about? Have I given the other person every benefit of the doubt? What are my motives in confronting her with my feelings? Do I want to make him feel bad or do I really want peace? What am I afraid of? Is the relationship worth the risk?

That last question is a very important one, because the only reason to take Jesus' advice at all is to win back a relationship that is in danger of being lost. Once you have decided that is what you want, it helps to remember that you are working *for* the relationship, not *against* it; that your goal is *reconciliation*, not *retribution*, and that being right is less important to you than being in relationship.

Assuming you have made it this far, you are now ready for the final step, which is setting the lunch date, making the telephone call, sending that "what's on your mind" message or writing the email that will stop the spread of hell.

In a lot of ways, it is a real nuisance to belong to a family. It would be so much easier if we were just a bunch of individuals, loosely bound by similar beliefs but whose affairs remained an essentially private matter between us and God. However, our life together is the way God has chosen for being with us. Our life together is the place where we are comforted, confronted, tested, and redeemed by God through one another.

When someone crosses us we are called to be the first to reach out, even when we are the ones who have been hurt, even when God knows we have done nothing wrong, even when everything in us wants to fight back—still we are called to community with one another, to act like the family we are.

That is how we know God and how God knows us. That is what we are called to do: to confront and make up, to forgive and seek forgiveness, to heal and be healed.

Praise: Go peaceful

Prayer

Loving God, you have made us for peace and for friendship, but everywhere we see conflict and dissension.

Fill our hearts with a deep desire for peace, and inspire us to work for a fair world where all are respected and your peaceful justice reigns. Lord of life, grant us peace.

Teach us to value our communities
over our own victories.
Let being seen to be right be less important to us
than the healing of rifts.
Let 'saving face' be of less value to us
than the saving grace of reconciliation.
Lord of life, grant us peace.

Help us to put aside personal allegiances
for the sake of building stronger communities.
Teach us to listen,
and to be aware of what may be unsaid.
Remind us to carry Christ with us into difficult conversations,
to set aside our own agendas,
to be open to the healing work of your Holy Spirit
and to set no bar or hindrance where you would have us work for peace.
Lord of life, grant us peace.

In Christ Jesus you declared the peacemakers would be blessed.
Inspire us to work for peace in all our relationships.
Lord of life, grant us peace.

In Christ Jesus you returned violence with peace.
Instil in all our lawmakers a love of peace
Today we pray for all whose lives are damaged by violence:
for the abused and the abuser,
for the attacker and the victim.
Comfort those who suffer.
Change those who inflict suffering upon others,
turn their hearts from anger and from pride:
fill them with sorrow for what they have done.
Turn their hearts, and fill them with a longing for peace.
Lord of life, grant us peace.
Prince of Peace, make us merciful.
Amen.

Communion

Praise: Amazing Grace
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see
Was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed
Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far
And Grace will lead us home
And Grace will lead us home
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found

Was blind but now I see
Was blind, but now I see

Benediction