

The Greatest Commandment

WORSHIP FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL THEME 2022/2023

SERVICE TWO: A LOCAL ARRANGEMENT SERVICE



Note to leader

This service can be led by a worship leader, steward or other church member. Please read it through before giving the service, as some elements are optional.

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SERVICE

WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP

Suggested form of words:

Welcome to worship today. We will be thinking about this year's presidential theme, 'The Greatest Commandment', from a global perspective.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, it says: *"And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love"*.

HYMN

Give me joy in my heart (StF 76 or H&P 492)

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

A prayer of praise; let us pray:

Almighty Creator God

We come with our prayers of praise with all our heart.

With every beat of life within us we bring you praise, remembering the intricate way in which you have made us.

We come with our prayers of praise with all of our soul.

That which makes us, 'us' praises you Lord – our spirit is moved by your Spirit in a communion of praise.

We come with our prayers of praise with all of our mind.

Every thought and motivation we give to you and worship you through them, using our gifts and talents to bring you praise in all areas of our life.

We praise you. We love you with all that we are. Amen.

A prayer of confession:

Lord God, parent, Son and Spirit,

As we draw near to you and we know that you are close, we come and confess.

We confess those times when our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength have not been used in praise of you.

When we have neglected our neighbours around us.

When we have spoken, thought and acted in ways that do not reflect the person of Christ whom we follow.

We are truly sorry.

Forgive us Lord.

(Silence)

Thank you, God, that as we come and confess our wrong to you, we are assured of forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ. That we can receive again the promised counsel of your Holy Spirit

And live a life centred on and surrounded by you, Creator God.

In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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FIRST (ALL-AGE) TALK

A tale of smelly goats and a king

**A story by Grace Pratt Morris-Chapman,
one of our mission partners**

It was the royal festival day. It was the happiest day of the year – every family got to meet the king and to present him with a gift. The celebration lasted the whole day, with music, dancing and a grand royal feast to which everyone was invited. On this particular day, there was so much excitement that no one noticed the absence of the goat herder's family. No one, that is, except the king. He noticed and he stopped the party. There was to be no feasting without the goat herder's family.

"Where is the goat herder's family?" the king asked but no one knew where they were. The truth, you see, was that nobody really liked them.

Do any of you keep goats?
Do you have any idea what goats are like?

Well, first of all they can be very noisy, they eat everything they see and then there is the smell. Goats are smelly and spending too much time with goats means that one gets a bit smelly too and that means very few friends, if any at all.

It didn't help that the goat herder and his family were outsiders – they looked strange, they had strange habits, strange food, strange everything really and so they were treated as strangers, it did not matter one bit that they had been living in the community for over twenty years. The only one who seemed to care about them was the king.

The king insisted that the goat herding family had to be at the feast. And so the king decided that the royal feast should take place in the fields with the goat herder and his family. What a shock! But no one dared question the king. So it was that the feast took place in the fields, with the noisy, smelly goats and their astonished herders.

What does this story remind you of? It makes me think about the birth of Jesus – God chose to send a whole host

of angels to announce the birth of his son to some sleepy, smelly shepherds in a field, they heard the angels sing (something that very few people in all of history have ever experienced) and they got front row seats at the manger – they actually got to visit Jesus! Isn't that totally awesome?

God in his love made all the peoples of this world, all of them, and the Bible tells us that we are all made in the image of God. That is really, really amazing isn't it? God loves us all so much and wants us to love each other – that simply means always wanting what is best for others. Now that can be a bit difficult, can't it, when we do not really know someone very well or if they do not like us at all?

It may be easier and more comfortable to love people who are like us, and who like us; but Jesus taught that the most important thing of all was to love God and love our neighbours. Now this word neighbour can be a bit confusing, it's not just the family next door – we are to love everyone. That sounds a bit too much doesn't it?

God knows that we can't love him and love others on our own, it's impossible really; but what is impossible for us is not impossible for God. If we allow him to, God will fill us with his presence and will teach us day by day how to love Him and love others. God, present with us in his Holy Spirit, will help us to live our lives in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Now just think about that for a minute. If we can all live like this, wouldn't our world be amazing?

HYMN

Choose from:

God loves you and I love you (StF 614)

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

If there is a Junior Church, dismiss them with these words:

Let us pray: *Dear God, as we learn about you in different parts of this building, may we always know you, your love, and your welcome for all. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

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READING

We shall now have a reading from Mark 8:28–34.

REFLECTION



The presidential theme this year is 'The Greatest Commandment'. I will now read a reflection from the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Graham Thompson.

Guyana is a beautiful country on the northern mainland of South America. It is known as the land of many rivers by those who live there and those who visit. It is also a nation that has experienced historic tensions and difficulties. First the Dutch, and then the British, occupied the land and began to exploit it. Slaves from Africa and indentured labourers from India were brought to work in the sugar cane fields. Now the descendants of these (mainly) forced immigrants make up a substantial part of the population, along with the nine indigenous groups of the region.

What is particularly impressive for any visitor to witness is how these many peoples live, work and socialise together. There is a sense of unity despite the significant divisions – historic, ethnic, religious or economic – of the past. Testimony to this is that nowadays over 17% of the population identify themselves as 'mixed race Guyanese'.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment he pointed people to the Jewish Law, citing Deuteronomy 6. But also quickly added, "And a second [commandment] is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), quoting from Leviticus 19. For there

to be any kind of unity in our communities we need to acknowledge that Jesus was right when he called on us to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Although Guyana is made up of many peoples, today it is still mainly a Christian country where the principles that Jesus espoused are evident in everyday life. This is not to paint an idealistic picture – gang-related crime accounts for most of the murders that take place here. However, their example of unity against a background of division, is a reminder to us that we are called to love our neighbour.

Loving our neighbour also involves loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). In so doing, we begin to break down the barriers that exist and allow the possibility of unity to be experienced within our communities.

Within the Church we need to model the ways of love and unity. We need to be beacons of hope in a divided world. The love we should be showing and sharing with neighbours, including our enemies, is the love that God has for us all. Love that brings transformation and hope as we live in accordance with God's commands.

HYMN

In Christ there is no east or west (*StF* 685 or *H&P* 758)

REFLECTIONS FROM MISSION PARTNERS

I will now read a series of reflections from some of our mission partners in Africa on this theme.



Gina Oliver works as Methodist mission partner in Zambia, serving as Health Secretary for the United Church of Zambia (UCZ). She writes:

The UCZ manages seven clinics, most with maternity facilities, and two hospitals, in a country over three times the size of the UK. The UCZ was created in 1965 from several denominations including Methodists.

I came to Zambia in September 2021 as a Methodist mission partner. Before then, I lived for the past twenty years as a UK citizen, assimilating to the culture of the UK, learning English customs, nuances and ways of doing things. As a Zambian by birth and upbringing, it is both a joy and a challenge to serve my Lord as Health Secretary for the UCZ. I have already travelled many, many miles. The UCZ health establishments are rightly in the most remote, challenging and needy areas of Zambia.

A big part of my work, which will continue to take time and energy in the years ahead, is to enable local UCZ members to express the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind [...] You shall love your neighbour as yourself".

I know from being able to speak people's first language and from understanding the culture that a deep love for God is so evident. Love of our neighbour is currently blossoming and expressed by the creation of health

committees in all nine provinces in the country. These health committees include people with different jobs such as carpenters, electricians or plumbers. They all give their time to visit rural health clinics once a month to help with basic maintenance and to explore ways of providing a steady monthly income for the Church's health facilities. Meanwhile in Lusaka, the capital city, four congregations are working in partnership with Discover Health to provide services including HIV testing and counselling, antiretroviral therapy, clinics for under-fives and COVID-19 awareness.



Image: Morning devotions, Mwandi, Zambia

Keith and Ida Waddell are mission partners in Mwandi, Zambia. They write:

One of the privileges of working on a traditional mission station is that you are allowed to share in both the joys and sorrows of those people you live and work with. In obedience to the command to love God and our neighbour, we have become immersed in the world in which we live and work. Each day, we identify with and love those who are suffering in various ways by bringing them words of comfort. In such circumstances, you find that you are often God's eyes and heart.

This week, two different workers came to see me on separate occasions with family problems. Their sons had been arrested and detained by the police for drunkenness, physical and sexual assault. All I could do, on both occasions, was to listen and then offer understanding, compassion and prayer. All the parents, and their children, whether perpetrators of the violence or its victims, needed and still need love.

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Together, we looked beyond blaming and shaming, beyond the causes and reasons and tried to see what love could do in the circumstances to help those families and their individual members in crisis. It is all too easy to attribute the problem to lifestyle choices of their own making. Fallen humankind likes to find something or someone responsible, but we need to move beyond that and get to the heart of the suffering with compassion and, in prayer, find an appropriate response.

Jesus simply asks us: Do you love me and love them? If so, what can you do to help?



Revd Sylvester & Revd Rachel Deigh are serving as mission partners with the Methodist Church Sierra Leone (MCSL).

Both are circuit ministers in Freetown. Sylvester works within the Conference Office with responsibilities for the Church's strategic plan and training. Rachel is seconded as a tutor at the College of Theology and Management and Church Training Centre. They write:

The Methodist Church Sierra Leone is currently wrestling with how to overcome weaknesses in its existing training programmes, particularly for Local Preachers and Probationer ministers. The Church also recognises the need for ongoing training for all ministers and the training of lay office-holders. Gathering people together for training is costly and therefore increasingly hard to do.

Not everyone is able to access the training offered by the theological college in Freetown, either physically or academically. Local Preachers' training is dependent

on already busy and often ill-equipped Circuit Superintendents. However, through current work on MCSL's strategic plan (in partnership with All We Can and Cliff College), a creative solution is coming to birth. This is TheologyX, Cliff College's online learning platform, supported by the World Mission Fund.

Using TheologyX will enable a tutor in Freetown (or anywhere else) to deliver training to students in other parts of Sierra Leone. The creative use of technology will enable access to training in new ways, in a variety of languages, within students' own contexts and communities – thereby truly contextualising their learning. It is of particular benefit to those from oral traditions.

In time, the creation of district learning hubs will further connect the Connexion as people will be able to come together for training locally, as well as accessing it individually on their own devices. All this is designed to remove barriers to learning, reduce travel costs, and share learning in the widest possible ways. Similarly, theology from a Sierra Leonean perspective can be shared worldwide.

Such partnerships embody what it means to "love your neighbour as yourself" – sharing resources, expertise, technology and learning, to help all of us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our minds.

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Michael Tetley is a mission partner in Togo, West Africa, with his wife Joanna (also a mission partner) and their teenage daughters, Joelle and Janelle. Michael writes:

The greatest commandment of Jesus is also found in Luke 10:25-37, where Jesus demonstrated, through the parable of the good Samaritan, that love should be the greatest guide and example of all we do as Christians. Love should guide our work, our purpose and our lives. We are to love God first and our neighbours as ourselves. Love should be the epitome of our lives.

So, who is our neighbour? How do we love our neighbour as ourselves?

According to Jesus, our neighbour is anyone in a vulnerable – but not necessarily weak – position. Our neighbour is anyone who needs help to meet their needs, irrespective of who they are or what they believe in. Jesus encourages us to give water to anyone who is thirsty, to visit those in prison and the sick, to forgive seventy times seven. This is difficult, especially if done in our own strength, especially if the person is not 'our kind'.

My personal belief concerning Jesus' teaching of the greatest commandment is that people respond best to what they experience, instead of what they hear. People see and experience Jesus through our actions and reactions. If our lives show the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control – we can be encouraged that our act of loving God with all we have, will show through our actions and reactions. The 'stranger' may notice that in us.

Jesus reassures us that he will empower us with the Holy Spirit to enable us obey his commandment to love our God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and all our mind, and to demonstrate that by loving our neighbours like ourselves.

When we depend on Jesus to do his work, he promises he will be with us always.

NOTE TO LEADER

You might also invite someone in advance to give a testimony of when they have experienced God's love through neighbourly kindness shown by another person to them. You can find guidance on offering a testimony here:

www.thestoryproject.org.uk/resources.

Please give this guidance to the person in good time so that they can prepare.

HYMN

Choose from:

When I needed a neighbour (StF 256)

Jesu, Jesu (H&P 145)

OFFERING

Introduce with the words:

Your gifts for the work of God will now be gratefully received.

Receive the offering with this prayer:

Dear God, we offer these gifts in love for you; may they be used to proclaim your love and to show that love to our neighbours in Britain and throughout the world. In Jesus' name, **Amen**.

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PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Introduce by saying:

In our prayers of intercession, when I say the words, "We pray", please respond "Your kingdom come".

God of our salvation and hope of all the ends of the earth, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

That the world may know Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace; that all those who work for peace and reconciliation may know your blessing, grace and strength, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

That the Church may be one in serving and proclaiming the gospel; for the Methodist Church in Africa and in every place that it may nurture people in faith and serve all in need, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

That the Church may welcome and support all whom you call to faith; give us courage to proclaim the love of God for all people; bless those who minister in your name, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

That all who serve the gospel may be kept in safety while your word accomplishes its purpose; strengthen us to carry out your will in all we say and do; strengthen our partnership with our sisters and brothers in the worldwide family of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

That all who suffer may know the comfort and glory of Christ; for all who suffer the consequences of violence, poverty and environmental disaster, and all who work for relief and reconciliation, we pray:

Your kingdom come.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Note to leader: use the version that your church is familiar with.

Introduce with these words:

We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us when praying to say:

HYMN

The right hand of God (StF 715 or H&P 408)

BENEDICTION

We say together:

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.