

Order of Service 10.00 a.m.

WELCOME:

CALL to WORSHIP:

PRAYER (Adoration and Invitation):

PRAISE: 51 Be Thou my vision O Lord of my heart

PRAYER (Confession and thanks):

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

CHILDREN'S TALK: 'God wants us to be friends and help each other'

PRAISE: 411 Let there be love shared among us (x2)

PRAYER (Intercession):

READING 1: Acts 2: 42-47 (page 1094)

READING 2: Philippians 2: 1-11 (1179)

PRAISE: King of Kings, Majesty, Lord of heaven living in me

SERMON: 'Real Fellowship'

OFFERING AND PRAYER:

PRAISE: 456 Make me a channel of your peace

BENEDICTION: The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; be with us all evermore.

Fellowship.

Intro:

I was frozen to the spot. Too frightened to move. I reeked of new leather. I hated that. My collar was so stiff I could barely move my neck. I couldn't even use my hands properly because my sleeves were so long. My trousers itched and my hair was too well combed. It was like being back at church on a Sunday morning. At least there I knew people. At least there someone wasn't going to suddenly make fun of me, punch me or steal my money. At least there it was quiet and I wouldn't be knocked to the ground in a stampede when the bell sounded. At least there I knew where to sit, when to speak and what to say. Suddenly going to big school didn't seem so exciting. I felt so alone...

"Hiya Michael!" The voice made me jump. I looked round and there was Mackie. Suddenly the fear vanished, my best mate was here too. What do you wreckon then? he asked. About what? I replied. "This place you muppet." "Beats Primary school any day." I lied. "Come on there's the bell."

1 We were made for fellowship with God:

I don't know what your first day was like at big school but I'm sure at some stage you've felt all alone. God says loneliness is not good. We're not meant to go it alone in this life. We've been created to share our lives with God and with each other. We're made to enjoy relationship with God and with each other.

Sadly, like our human ancestors, Adam and Eve, we're born with a bias towards living for ourselves and according to our own standards. As a result, our relationship with God is not how it should be; it is broken. Instead of having God as our friend, we find that we have offended Him to such an extent that we have become estranged from him. But thankfully our relationship to God is so important to Him that he deliberately went out of His way to restore us to Himself. God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to take the punishment for our sins that we might be reconciled to God. God wants a relationship with you so much that He planned His own sacrifice. Make no mistake, the cross was no accident. It was part of the original blueprint. The moment the forbidden fruit touched the lips of Eve, the shadow of a cross appeared on the horizon. He intentionally planted the tree from which the cross would be carved. He willingly placed the iron ore in the heart of the earth from which the nails would be cast. He voluntarily placed Judas, His betrayer in the womb of a woman. He deliberately set in motion the political machinery that would send Pilate to Jerusalem. Jesus was born to die so that we might be reconciled to God. God longs to share your life. He's travelled miles so that you could be together. Don't close the door in his face. Take time each day to talk to Him in prayer. Take time each day to listen to Him as you read the bible.

2 We were made for relationship with one another:

Not only does the cross reconcile us to God, it brings us into special relationship with one another. John Stott says, “God’s purpose is not to save individual souls but to build a church.” In the bible, the church is described as a family in which we are all brothers and sisters, a Kingdom in which we are fellow citizens, a building in which we are the bricks, and the Body of Christ of which He is the head and we are different parts working together. As Christians we not only belong to Christ, we belong to each other. God has made us for fellowship with each other. At its simplest level, real fellowship is about relationships that really matter. It’s about an intimacy and commitment that really counts when the chips are down. God’s desire is that we would grow in our relationships with each other.

In the film ‘Good Will Hunting’ Robin Williams plays a maths professor struggling to mentor a brilliant young maths student who was abused by his parents. At one point in the film, the young student Will, connects with a group of peers who form a gang. They terrorise and steal in the local neighbourhood until eventually they come to the attention of the authorities. In one scene, Williams angrily confronts his student with his actions. “I don’t understand, how can you do this?” he asks. I’ll never forget the student’s haunting reply. “These guys love me.” And you know what, they did. They were like blood brothers. Yes they led him astray. Yes they almost ruined his chances of ever making anything of his life. But Will would have sacrificed it all because they cared. They were the first people in Will’s life who had taken the time to get to know him. They were the first people in his life who gave him friendship and self-worth.

Look around you this morning. We’re blood brothers. Bought with the precious blood of Christ. Committed to the cause of Christ. Committed to the honour of His name. Committed to one another. That’s what Christian fellowship is all about. We’re one. When you hurt, I hurt. When you rejoice, I rejoice. When you have nothing, it’s my responsibility to share. When I’m out of line, I need you to pull me up. When I’ve hurt you, I need to ask for forgiveness. We serve each other, we pray for each other, we encourage each other, we learn together.

Such depth of relationship and commitment to one another takes time to form. It means taking the risk of getting close enough to others and allowing them close enough to us. It involves having the courage to accept that church is not just about me and God on a Sunday morning. God has not only brought us into relationship with himself, he has brought us into relationship with each other. His desire is that we allow those relationships to deepen.

I want to encourage you to make it your aim over this next year to develop deeper relationships with other people in our church family. What will such a commitment mean on the ground? It may mean taking time to speak to someone each week and get to know them rather than rushing away from church after the service. The foyer area of our new building will provide us with opportunities to facilitate this fellowship. It might mean committing your self to one of the organisations that meet during the week or signing up to help out in an activity that will involve other people. It might involve putting your name down for a church weekend or fundraiser. It might simply involve inviting a few folks round for supper or going to visit someone. What’s important is that we grasp the truth that this is what God wants for us.

He wants us to deepen our relationships with one another. Commit yourself to that and ask God what is the best way for you to fulfil that purpose.

3 We were made for fellowship with our heavenly family:

Not only does the cross, unite us to Christ and to each other, it brings us into relationship with the entire Christian family around the world and in heaven. It is an amazing privilege to belong to such an extended family. When we move to a new town or travel abroad, we can be sure that our church family will be waiting with open arms to support us and help us. Let me encourage you, wherever you go in the world, for whatever reasons, seek out your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is also a wonderful encouragement and source of hope to know that we are united with those who have gone on before us and who are now enjoying the splendour of heaven. When we gather for worship, we join with the hosts of heaven worshipping God around His throne. The writer of Hebrews tells us that as we live our lives for God, our brothers and sisters in heaven are cheering us on, encouraging us to keep going, to keep fighting temptation, to keep turning from sin and to keep looking to Christ for help and strength. In some sense we can experience that unity in Spirit with those who have gone before us. Maybe it's a brother or sister that you loved; a father or mother whom you admired; a wife or husband who was your best friend. You miss them so much it hurts. Let me encourage you that in Christ you are still united with them. You can sense that they are still alive, but somewhere else. As you visit a grave, as you bow your head in prayer, as you go about your daily tasks, remember them. And rejoice in the knowledge that God promises that one day you will be united in body as well as in Spirit. You'll be able to see them again. You'll be able to embrace them again. You'll be able to catch up on all the times you've missed together.

Conclusion:

“Well, how did you get on at school?” mum asked as I walked through the door. “It was great” I replied. It wasn't the prospect of studying new subjects, not even the excitement of playing cricket and rugby that made it great. It was the friends I'd made, the fun we'd had and the relief of knowing that whatever happened I wouldn't face it alone. God never intended for us to go life alone. He wants to walk with us, sharing every experience. Do you share your life with God?

God never intended us to go life alone. When we trust in Christ we become one with our brothers and sisters in Christ. God wants us to deepen our relationships with one another and be committed to each other. How can you be more committed to those around you in this church?

God never intended us to go life alone. In Christ we are part of a worldwide family who will always be there for us. In Christ we are united to our heavenly family, spurring us on, with us in Spirit, and waiting to welcome us with open arms when the gate of heaven opens.