

Moses and the Israelites in deeds of power (v7); and just as this God remembers the dust of our creation (v14), so we do well not to forget God's presence and power (v2). Meanwhile, even if we can't perceive precisely what lies in store, the Psalmist affirms that it is simply not in God's nature to consign us to everlasting reproach (v9).

Above all, though, it seems that mindfulness of the present is the order of the day. Perhaps we find its echo in the summons of Jesus – who told a parable of a great banquet for which the invitation said “Come, for everything is ready NOW” (Luke 14:17). A banquet for which the host accepts no delays or deferral.

Prayer

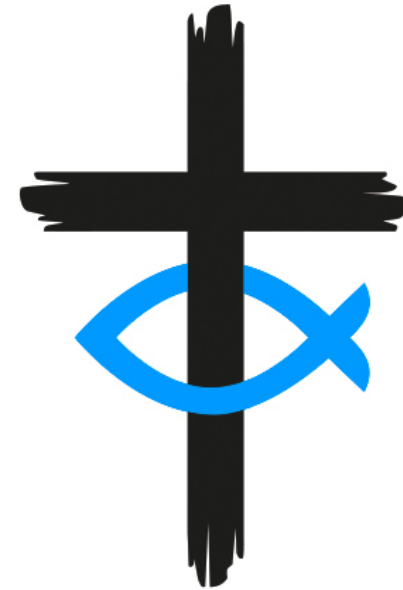
This day, Sovereign God, open my eyes to your wonder,
open my ears to your voice,
open my whole being to your presence.

Draw forth from me, O Lord,
thankfulness for all that has been,
confidence for all that is to come,
but above all, wholehearted praise for this present moment.

And may my praise be joined
with the worship that all creation offers. Amen.

Daily Devotions from the URC

The Lord's Prayer



I John

5th- 30th June

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19 God’s kingly rule is over all;
In heavèn he has set his throne.
20 O you his angels, praise the LORD,
Strong ones by whom his will is done.
21 O praise the LORD, you heavenly hosts,
His servants who perform his word.
22 Praise God, his works throughout his realm,
And you, my soul, O praise the LORD!

Reflection

The practice of mindfulness – bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment – is not new. Whilst increased prominence has come through popular authors and popular apps alike, its roots go back centuries.

Over the last forty years, mindfulness has played a part also in therapeutic approaches to a range of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and even psychosis. Studies have indicated it can significantly reduce the kinds of rumination and worry that too often lead to poor mental health. A focus upon the present can be powerful indeed.

Today's Psalm is in the form of a “note to self”, but the invitation is to all of us to identify with the Psalmist in a kind of holy mindfulness. Here is a litany of praise and thankfulness in which our attention is drawn above all to the “now” of God's gracious disposition towards us. “The LORD forgives... heals... rescues...” - therefore our response of worship is likewise brought forth right now, not assigned to some arcane schedule.

Not that the Psalmist is oblivious to the place of past and future in God's dealings with us. The LORD who is perceived today in acts of righteousness and justice (v6) is the same LORD who ministered to

5 He satisfies your deep desires
From his unending stores of good,
So that, just like the eagle's strength,
Your youthful vigour is renewed.

6 The LORD is known for righteous acts
And justice to downtrodden ones.

7 To Moses he made known his ways,
His mighty deeds to Israel's sons.

8 The LORD is merciful and kind,
To anger slow, and full of grace.

9 He will not constantly reprove,
Or in his anger hide his face.

10 He does not punish our misdeeds,
Or give our sins their just reward.

11 How great his love—as high as heaven—
Towards all those who fear the LORD!

12 As far as east is from the west,
So far his love has borne away
Our many sins and trespasses
And all the guilt that on us lay.

13 Just as a father loves his child,
So God loves those who fear his name.

14 For he remembers we are dust,
And well he knows our feeble frame.

15 Each human life is like the grass,
And like a meadow flower it grows.

16 Its place will never be recalled
Once over it the tempest blows.

17 But everlasting is God's love
For those who fear him, and their seed—

18 For those who keep his covenant,
And carefully his precepts heed.

Introduction

I, 2, 3 John

1,2 and 3 John are generally thought to have been written by the same person though scholars disagree as to who that person was. The first, and longest, of the three reads rather like a sermon designed to encourage faith possibly in the aftermath of a church split. The second is to an “elect lady” maybe one who hosted, or led, a church in her home, the final gives warnings about one excommunicated from the Church. Whilst written almost 2,000 years ago they look at themes still relevant in our lives now.

Wednesday 5rd June

The Rev'd Julian Macro, Retired Minister, Member of Verwood URC

Reading: 1 John 1: 1-4

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Reflection

When we moved to a new area and found that we needed to find some tradespeople to do a number of jobs that we could not do ourselves, what did we do? We could have looked at *Yellow Pages* or

some other directory, or *Checkatrade* which claims to have unbiased reports on local firms. However, we chose to ask around – people at our new church and our neighbours, those who seemed to us to have similar interests and standards. In this way we looked for personal recommendations (or even warnings) which would be so much more significant than the other sources of information available to us, and we were very grateful for the guidance thus received from trustworthy sources.

Such is the witness, indeed the personal recommendation that John gives as he introduces his pastoral guidance, “our theme is the Word which gives life” as the Revised English Bible puts it. He could share personal experience and wanted to do so in a way to which his readers and hearers could relate.

How effective am I, are we, at sharing personal faith in ways to which our contemporaries can relate? The fault may have been mine but over the years there have been a few times when I have cringed at some of the testimonies I have heard from seemingly over-earnest Christians – but at least I could understand what their witness was about; too often I suspect that my witness has been bland at best, or even apologetic, so that others could be forgiven for not understanding how important my Christian faith is to me.

When it is relevant to a situation shared personal experience from those whose credibility we trust is so effective when we can report with John, “what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands” – and as in so many ways, “Actions speak louder than words.”

Prayer

Gracious God, we give thanks for those whose witness and example has helped us on the path of faith, and who by have helped us find Jesus as our personal Saviour. May we have the courage and sensitivity

Perhaps, then, we need to concentrate on discerning God’s will, so that we can get our prayers ‘right’. On the other hand, God clearly knows God’s will and it’s God who will be answering our prayers. Surely, then, what we need to be identifying are the people, places and situations that God wants us to pray about and leaving the details up to God. Yet how often do we ask God for guidance on what we should be praying about?

The other aspect of this is how our prayers will change us and the way in which we respond to people and situations. Is this why we are urged to pray for forgiveness for others? Will that help us to forgive them ourselves and to include them fully in our fellowship? If our first prayer is to ask God what we should be praying about, then our second prayer needs to be to ask God how we can begin to answer our own prayers.

Living and Loving God, help me to know deep within myself that you hear my prayers.

Give me the confidence to be bold in prayer.

Show me the people, places and situations that you want me to pray about.

Open me to your will for them.

Guide me in how I can begin to answer my own prayers.

Thanks be to God! Amen

[Sunday 30th June Psalm 103](#)

The Rev’d Dominic Grant, Minister at Trinity URC Wimbledon

1 Praise God, my soul! With all my heart

Let me exalt his holy name.

2 Forget not all his benefits;

His praise, my soul, in song proclaim.

3 The LORD forgives you all your sins,

And heals your sickness and distress;

4 Your life he rescues from the grave,

And crowns you in his tenderness. 45

actions inspired by you, by the life your Son led on this earth.
So that all may see the witness we have to offer
the witness of your love for us, and your saving grace Amen.

Saturday 29th June

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Moderator of the Mersey Synod

Reading: 1 John 5: 13 - 17

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

Reflection

Our reading today starts with what sounds like a conclusion to 1 John, telling us why it was written. Then we have the postscript urging us to have the confidence to be bold in prayer. It reminds us that we know that God hears our prayers and so we have obtained the requests that we have made, so long as they are in accordance with God's will.

That is a very powerful claim. We don't need to spend time looking for the answer to prayer, because our prayer will be answered. That doesn't mean that our prayer will be answered at the time we expect, or in the ways that we might anticipate, or even in ways that we can recognise. Nevertheless, we can pray in the confidence that God will hear us.

needed to give to those who trust us the witness and example that will help them find their personal faith. Amen

Thursday 6th June

The Rev'd Dr Nick Jones, Minister, Heswall URC & St. George's URC,
Thornton Hough

Reading: 1 John 1: 5 - 10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Reflection

This is a familiar passage for many of us because it is often a go-to text for prayers of confession (see, for example, Rejoice & Sing no.3). We are all sinners, and if we claim not to be we are lying to ourselves - being Christians doesn't stop us being as flawed as any other group of people. And yet God loves us all, and so if we confess our sins we will be forgiven, because God is faithful and just. Which is of course wonderful good news and a magnificent statement of God's all-encompassing grace.

The only problem is that a little later in the same book the author 'John' – whoever that might have been – writes that those who abide

in Christ do not commit sins, and in fact anyone who commits sin has not really known him. (1 John 3.6) So which is it? Are we sinners who are forgiven, but carrying on making mistakes, or does becoming a true disciple mean leaving sin behind?

There are arguments worth exploring about whether these statements can be reconciled or not, but on the face of it this seems to be a huge contradiction. Should this bother us? Perhaps. On one level, it's a reminder of the dangers of taking any one verse from scripture out of context and without considering how it fits into the bigger picture. But going further, wouldn't it be more surprising if, in explaining the wonders of God's revelation, none of the writers of scripture ever got confused or contradicted themselves? Accused of inconsistency, the American poet wrote "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." That's true of all of us, and is certainly true of Scripture.

Prayer

Gracious God,
we accept that we make mistakes.
Sometimes we deliberately act to hurt others
and sometimes we stand by when other are in need.
We ask you, in your justice and faithfulness, to forgive us,
and we resolve to follow your ways more closely
and to forgive others for their faults.
Amen.

Friday 7th June

The Rev'd Colin Hunt, retired minister worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

Reading: 1 John 2: 1 - 2

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Reflection

This single, strong powerful testimony. That is all we need written on our hearts.

Many of us, I'm sure, will find the concept of 'testimony' daunting. But that's on the assumption that a testimony is simply standing up in front of lots of people saying how they came to know Jesus. Not an easy task. Particularly if, like me, you grew up in the church anyway, and/or you struggle to pinpoint an exact time at which you first came to know Jesus. But this delivery is the most common association with the word. Testimony as a word is actually far simpler than this. Deriving from the Latin word 'testis' (yes, I chuckled too!), but meaning 'witness'. Best to leave that there... But that's really all it is, a witness!

The testimony of God is manifested through Jesus Christ. The life Jesus lived was a witness to God's power, glory and love for the world. The 'ultimate witness' was seen at Eastertide. The biggest sacrifice that could have been made, was made by God, giving his only son. This is the very testimony we must tell. We must be witness to the living God. It's important that the life we live out, the life others see, is a testimony. Others need to see the Jesus in us, see us living a Christ-like life, imitating him closely.

We don't need to be confident at public speaking to 'do' testimony. We are all testimonies through our everyday life. Some may find that daunting and pressurising, perhaps feeling watched, or judged? But rest assured, similar to my encounters in the gym, people will actually only pay attention to the bits that you do well! So make those good bits shine, make your Christ-like characteristics shine!

Prayer

Living God, help us to be the confident person in the gym, help us to let our actions be visible₄ and be known₃

So the bald statement “his commands are not burdensome” may turn out to be more than wishful thinking. If we could just escape the human logic that links loving and liking too closely, we might recognise that within the company of believers, for all our shortcomings, there is something powerful at work as we try to align ourselves with God’s loving purposes. Even here, there may just be glimpses of that “victory that conquers the world!”

Prayer

Loving God though we are challenged by your commandments may our love for you be real and may that love be reflected in the life we share as children within your family. Amen

Friday 28th June

Dan Morrell, former URC Youth Assembly Moderator, member of St Andrew’s, Roundhay

Reading: 1 John 5: 6 - 12

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Reflection

Recently, I have been re-reading C S Lewis’s classic “The Screwtape Letters”. On reflection, I wondered whether the format of this classic work was inspired by John’s pastoral letters to the young churches of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey and Syria)? In the Epistle, John, an elderly, widely experienced Apostle writes to the relatively inexperienced young church members.

John writes with real affection for these congregations addressing them as “My little children.” Initially, in this passage he reassures them that when they do sin it is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who provides the means of forgiveness through His sacrifice at Calvary. Now we all sin, but generally speaking we later seek forgiveness. The difficulty comes when we continue to sin in the same way as before, so much so that we begin to value that sinning behaviour higher than anything else in our experiences of life. In reality, this continual sinning means that we are not at all sorry for what we have done wrong, but rather we have just gone through the motions of sorrow in order to kid ourselves that we are forgiven and, therefore, our thoughts and actions are insincere.

The sacrifice that Jesus made is the only means of our being forgiven, no action on our part can achieve such a redemption. John places this redeeming action as being available to all people right across the whole world. Later in this letter, chapter three, John goes on to describe what he means when he writes about sin. He makes it clear what is the nature of sin and what has been done about it through Jesus’ love for humanity.

Prayer

Compassionate God,

we still prefer our ways
rather than yours.

We still haven't learnt from our past mistakes

so we seek your forgiveness

open our hearts and minds

to truly worship you. Amen

Saturday 8th June

The Rev'd David Coaker, minister of Grays URC and a chaplain to the
Moderators of General Assembly

Reading: 1 John 2: 3-6

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

Reflection

We could argue about which Commandments are the 'true' ones. What it means to 'know' Jesus and who are the liars with no truth within them and who are the obedient, loving, perfect ones. We could use this passage to divide, to raise ourselves up and push others down, or to make ourselves feel worse and place others on pedestals.

This passage is an argument for the impossible. It argues that we can be sure of knowing Jesus if we behave exactly as he would and thus be perfectly loving as God is. On that basis, can anyone be 100% sure?

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Reflection

What, to the apostle, seem logical steps may seem a lot less clear to us. If you love God, then you'll love his children. The problem is, that children aren't necessarily like their parents. You may well have good friends whose children you have always found stubbornly unlikeable. Love the parent, Yes! But the children, No!

So far as life in God's family is concerned, there are going to be times when it's hard to feel warmly towards those we are commanded to love. When I ministered in Yorkshire I sometimes heard the phrase "Chapels and choirs: nowt but strife" – and I think not always uttered by the outsider looking in. Having significant things in common sometimes accentuates those human differences that mark any community, and which in church life result in what we should experience as a school for saints becoming at best a much-needed hospital for sinners.

Yet it's within this sometimes fractious community (and remember that John is writing to church members: they know what it's like) that we may just learn that what at first seemed impossible can somehow be achieved. Without necessarily all being the best of friends, we realise that we can work together, listening to one another and learning from one another, and discover together what God may be asking of us in our particular time and circumstances.

Well, you know that Church Meeting you're planning to kick up a fuss? Perhaps re-read what you're going to say, so you can truly say it in love. You know that person who always parks in your space at work? Perhaps consider how appropriate the note on their windscreen is. That homeless person you pass every day on the way to the newsagent? Perhaps consider whether you really need the loose change in your pocket.

This is love, I hear you say, but how is it Christian love? Isn't Christian love about praying? Well, says James' Epistle, "...*faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*" Jesus, in His earthly ministry, didn't spend all day praying for others from within the Synagogue - He got out and about and helped those He came across: we love because He first loved us.

It seems that our faith is shown through our actions, and our actions are shaped by our faith.

Funny how things work out, really.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
at times, we forget that showing and sharing Christian love is the cornerstone of our faith.
May we, empowered by Your grace and mercy, be ever ready to share that love with others, 'using words if necessary'. Amen

[Thursday 27th June](#)

The Rev'd John Durell, retired minister and member of Waddington Street URC, Durham

Reading: I John 5: 1 - 5

Well, just because something is impossible is no excuse not to try! In the life of Jesus, and the affirmation of the Resurrection, we are given the example that perfect love can be humanly possible. Just because humanity abundantly fails to achieve it on a regular basis is no reason for us not to strive after it, celebrate it when we experience it, and encourage it when we recognise it before us. That has no chance of happening if Christians don't step out, seeking to walk as Jesus walked, striving to love God, each other, and ourselves.

So let us not use this passage to divide. May we support each other as we walk the Way of Jesus, know that we are all beloved within the perfect love of God, act in ways that affirm this, and be ready to encounter Christ within ourselves, each other and through Creation.

Prayer

Living God, assure us of your love, lift us up within your perfection, and urge us along the better path.

Brother Christ, make known your Way, guide our steps, and ignite your abiding love within us.

Eternal Spirit, fill our hearts with love, inspire our minds with truths, and open us up to the opportunities that are ever before us.

May we love, abundantly as God loves, as we walk the Way of Christ.

Amen

[Sunday 9th June Psalm 100 Pentecost](#)

Walt Johnson, Elder, Wilbraham St Ninian's URC, Chorlton, Manchester.

1 Shout to the LORD with joy,
all who to earth belong.

2 Adore the LORD with joyful
hearts

and come to him in song.

3 Know that the LORD is God;
he made us as his own.

We are the sheep for whom he
cares—

his people, his alone.

4 Enter his gates with praise,
his courts with thankfulness.
Your praises gladly sing to him;
his name for ever bless.

his love is ever sure.
His constant truth and
faithfulness
through every age endure.
5 For God the LORD is good;

Reflection

Today is Pentecost Sunday, and Psalm 100 is a good thematic match.

In services today, we will probably hear Acts 2, when God's Church burst into life! The excitement in that reading is palpable. How do we respond? Psalm 100 gives us inspiration.

This Psalm has inspired many hymns/songs through the centuries: e.g. "All People That On Earth Do Dwell" (Old 100th), "Jubilate, Everybody!" (Fred Dunn), "Jubilate Deo" (Taizé)...

In 2019, 'worship' is an unfamiliar, 'religious' concept to many. Psalm 100 offers an understanding...

Who? Verse 1 identifies all humankind.
The message at Pentecost began the Church's mission to fulfil the desire within the Psalm.

Whom? God is the object of our worship (Verses 1, 2, 3, 5).
The materialism in our world offers us the short-term: today's TV heroes are next year's 'Z-list' celebrities; how many models of iPhone have there been? God is long-term.

What? How? The Psalm encourages us to do 7 things: shout, adore, sing, know, enter in (come together), praise and bless. Ask folk how they feel after going to these things: sports event, musical concert,

that He will direct my thoughts and deeds.
Help me to give to those with so little who also abide with You, Amen

[Wednesday 26th June](#)

Michael RJ Topple is training to be a Lay Preacher, and is a member of Chappel URC, Essex.

Reading: 1 John 4: 16 - 21

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Reflection

This is quite a reading. On first glance, the reader may well pass over it, thinking it to be 'yet another mushy reading about love'. But read on, and we'll find it packs more of a punch than first we realised.

Having a younger brother, I know how hard it is to love our siblings all the time, yet love them we must; and that doesn't just mean our biological siblings, but all those we come across from day to day. Christian, or not. Friendly, or not. Man or woman; rich or poor; young or old - there is no exception in God's eyes.

But what does this mean for us?

Reflection

I simply can't abide ... How often have we all thought that? A negative attitude and the first one the dictionary gave me when I looked up "abide". Let's change it to a positive and marvel that Jesus abides us, He abides me; and I deserve nothing but He knew this and sent His Spirit to help sort me out.

We abide in God and God abides in us. Sometimes when life is good it is easy to accept that we abide with God. What about people who do not have all that we have? Do they abide in God and does He abide in them? John does not suggest that abiding in God has anything to do with wealth or success but is it all to do with attitude and acceptance of the truth of Jesus. We can look at Christians who have a lot less than us and see them rejoice in their faith and their abiding in Jesus. Our faith is not a transient thing but a lifelong experience. The United Reformed Church has a programme called Commitment for Life that links us with people in other places who lack the material wealth that most people in the UK have. It is the word "Commitment" that matters here, if we are truly committed to abiding in Jesus then we will also be committed to helping those who need our help and prayers.

"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us". What a marvellous statement from John and one we can relate to as if we had not known that love we would not be reading this (or writing it). God's love changes us from people who we probably could not abide into people who abide in God because He abides in us.

Prayer

Almighty and loving God,
Thank you for abiding in me, for not rejecting me.
and transforming me so that I also abide in You.
I confess Jesus as Lord
and ask that He will be Lord of every part of my life,

political demonstration, church service. The Psalm speaks of joy and gladness. God did not gift us with these emotions, only for us to dismiss or discourage them in our church worship.

Where? Those who worship God should come together (v.4)

When? "for ever" (v.4)

In contrast to the transience of the human world, when we get caught up in God's story, our part in it has no end.

Why? Verses 3 and 5 speak of the nature of God.

We are God's creation: our Creator longs for relationship with us with a love that has no limits and knows no barriers.

At Pentecost, believers heard and understood God's message in their own language and the world changed.

Through the Reformation, believers experienced the Scriptures in their own language and the world changed.

How can the people of the 21st Century encounter God and the world be changed?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, Comforter, on this day of Pentecost
we celebrate Your presence.

As Jesus promised, You give us the joy
which endures deep within,

a joy which carries us even in times of trial.

You do not impose, You come to strengthen us,
defending the dignity of each person.

And in our great diversity, it is in You
that we find unity and peace. Amen.

(Prayer by Brother Alois, Taizé)

Monday 10th June

Ann Barton Member of Whittlesford URC and former Facilities Manager at Church House

Reading: I John 2: 7 - 11

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

Reflection

The more I'm involved in church work, the more convinced I am that many people have forgotten the basics of our faith. I don't feel so unhappy about this, however, when I read this text, written sometime in the latter part of the 1st Century, because then I realize that the problem is not something new to us; but was epidemic in the Early Church as well.

Listen to people around you, to the television and the radio, and to preachers far and wide, and you will get a dizzying array of opinions, facts, and suppositions on the Christian faith.

The real test of Christianity isn't how much we give. God's not looking at how many days a week we are in church. It doesn't matter if we are a Baptist, a Presbyterian, an Anglican or if we wear any other badge. What matters is our faith, and the basis of our faith is love.

to the hungry? Voice to the silent? Do we seek to be rewarded for the love we offer or do we love because we cannot help ourselves. Victor Hugo once said "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving". God's love is all encompassing and was present even before we realised it. He gave without counting the cost when he sent his son for us. How can we respond but with love for all without the need for the spotlight, or secret agenda of payback when needed. Love should be unconditional, absolute and available to all. God has shown us how, and, as Isaac Watts reminds us "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all"

Prayer

God of Love, thank you that you first loved me, so that I may know I am loved completely.

Lord of Love, help me to love without looking for reward.

Help me to love my neighbour –friend or stranger – that your love is reflected through me.

Spirit of Love, inspire my actions

that they may all be guided by love

so that you live in me and my life is of you. Amen

Tuesday 25th June

John Collings. Lay Preacher and member of Rutherglen URC

Reading: 1 John 4: 13 - 16

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

to see your truth written through succeeding years;
you are with me in tender love.
Thank you.
May I know this in the here and now.
May I share this through your Spirit.
Amen

Monday 24th June

The Rev'd Ruth Watson, Minister of Patricroft and Worsley Road URCS

Reading: I John 4: 7 - 12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Reflection

"You can have the sound of a thousand voices calling your name..." sang Shinedown; the song continued, "The one thing you leave behind is how did you love?"

Paul tells us "I could speak in the tongues of mortals or of angels, but if I have not love, I am just a noisy gong" (1 Corinthians 13:1) Love is mentioned 13 times in today's passage encouraging us to love one another as God has loved us and because God has loved us from before we came to love him. So how do we love? Do we offer comfort to the bereaved? Hope to those in despair? Welcome to the stranger? Food

If our faith is based on Christ, then our faith is based on love because Christ is love. Christ is love in person! If we are to understand the very bedrock basis of our faith, then we need to understand love. John calls us back to basics today, he tells us to return to the basic commandment of Christ - and that commandment is love. Indeed, love has been part of God's plan throughout eternity.

Prayer:

Father of love, who in Christ, showed us the way to love others; open our hearts to the needs of others. Let us not be too hasty to make judgements lest we too, are judged, but give us the patience to hear and to show others that they will receive a welcome. God is love, God is truth, God is beauty – Praise Him!

Tuesday 11th June

The Rev'd Jo Clare-Young is minister in the North Yorkshire Coast URCS

Reading: I John 2: 12-14

I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven on account of his name.
I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young people,
because you have conquered the evil one.
I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young people,
because you are strong
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

Reflection

If you are an insomniac like me you might have seen the “infomercials” that run on certain channels late at night. Watch long enough and you will find yourself wondering how you ever managed to navigate life without a solar-powered-salad-spinner. The infomercials’ sales pitch works hard to convince you that their product is for everyone, absolutely everyone, especially you.

The writer of 1 John lets us know that Scripture is for everyone: young children, teenagers, grown-ups and those that refuse to grow up. That this is written for little children, young people and mature people. If Scripture is for everyone, then of course the Church also needs to be for everyone.

This passage goes further than inclusivity and *affirms* all those people; for their wisdom or faith or understanding or strength. Do we recognise what people of all ages bring to our faith families? The equally valuable contributions made by little children, young people and mature disciples?

Infomercials usually finish with a deal, an offer that goes further to make the product extra enticing. Order today and not only will you receive one patented onion carving kit, but two, and the first 100 callers will also receive a free set of hand crafted soup skewers.

We too need to go further than just recognising the gifts of everyone in our faith families, we must affirm these gifts too. We must remind those who can no longer take an active role in volunteering how valuable their prayer is to our mission. We must affirm those that do all the little jobs, without which the big plans never happen. We must show the children that they are not the future of the church but a full and vital part of it today.

Jerusalem has been destroyed and the dust of her renown is mourned. Then the groaning gives way to trust and hope with the simple word ‘but’.

It is a small word, yet very powerful. It causes a pause; a moment to stop the tumbling words of pain and to think again.

We humans face so much pain, ‘but’...

Post-Brexit Britain is deeply divided, ‘but’...

We are judged, stereotyped and separated, ‘but’.

Social media can glorify eating disorders, suicide and hate speech, ‘but’...

Some folk can sit at home all week; seeing no-one, ‘but’...

I am so busy with family, work and everything else, ‘but’...

So many creative moments and times in our daily lives, full of potential, when we need to stop, to pause, to consider another truth; to change the narrative - ‘but... you, O Lord, are set forever on your throne’.

In these ‘but’ moments, receive the truth sent down the years

God hears us

God does not want groaning and wrath for us or for any.

God delivers us.

God loves us.

‘Let this be written down to teach a future race, so people yet unborn may magnify his grace: that from his holy place above the Lord looked down in tender love.’

Prayer

God, the depth of my being,

you cause me to pause and you fill those moments with such possibility;

to take a breath from anguished words,

to stop and see the flame of hope in the dark,

12 But you, O LORD, are set
Forever on your throne;
Through each succeeding age
Endures your great renown.
13 You will arise in mighty power;
On Zion mercy you will shower.

The set time now has come
To bless Jerusalem.

14 Her stones your saints hold
dear;
Her dust is mourned by them.
15 Nations will fear your name, O
LORD;
All kings on earth your praise
record.

16 For God will yet appear
In glorious might to reign;
The LORD in grace will build
Jerusalem again.
17 The prayers of the poor he'll
heed;
He will not spurn their cry of need.

Reflection

The direct clarity of these words allows the images to speak for
themselves – and deeply to us.

Verses 1-11 cry out with such anguish that we cannot but be taken to
the dark-side of our human condition and to recollections of worldly
and personal distress.

18 Let this be written down
To teach a future race,
So people yet unborn
May magnify his grace:
19 That from his holy place above
The LORD looked down in tender
love.

From heav'n he viewed the earth
Observing all mankind,
20 To hear the groans of those
In prison cells confined,
And to deliver from on high
A multitude condemned to die.

21 In Zion will be praised
The LORD's exalted name;
His praises will be sung
Within Jerusalem,
22 When peoples and their
kingdoms throng
To serve the LORD with cheerful
song.

Sometimes we all doubt if we are doing enough. We doubt if we are
good enough disciples, dedicated enough. John's words affirm
everyone, let us hear the words of the passage and be affirmed
ourselves.

Affirming God,
help us to value each other,
to notice each person in our church family,
to recognise the value in each member of your body,
to listen to every voice,
and to give joyful thanks for each contribution. Amen

Wednesday 12h June

Val Morrison - Hall Gate URC Doncaster and Former Moderator of the
General Assembly

Reading: 1 John 2: 15 - 17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father
is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the
desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes
not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire
are passing away, but those who do the will of God live for ever.

Reflection

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the
Father is not in those who love the world

Hang on! Hang on!

I thought we were meant to love this world in which we live, from
God's beautiful creation to all the messiness which we humans have

managed to generate. What about 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3:16).

Let's just take a deep breath and start again. Here we have words which, taken out of context, seem to be saying something contrary to the messages we find in other places. We can be confident from what we can read in so many places in our bibles that God loves the world and all that that involves. We can also be confident in saying that, through his Son, he calls us to love and care for the whole of creation. If we take the trouble to read the previous and the following verses, we find the context and we find some indication of some of the things which God really does want us not to love. We also find a call to do the will of God and so live for ever.

Sadly, we often find it so much easier to make a judgment based on the first words which present themselves - particularly if they are words with which we agree. I think there is a lesson here for us all. It is about taking time to listen and understand, the nuances and the backstory whether that is as we read the Bible, as we listen to the media or engage in conversation with friends. That way bridges are built and the world will become a more loveable place.

Prayer

Loving God,
Snap judgments are so easy
forgive our lack of patience and care.
Help us to understand the full story,
to take the time to listen carefully
and to share your love for the world
Amen

One of our denomination's leaders has pointed out that we are not called upon to be successful, but we are called upon to be faithful. Or maybe it is that an authentic spirit enables us to see success in God's terms, rather than the world's. Those are surely the only relevant criteria.

Prayer

O Lord, we are so busy,
we don't like to waste a moment, with so much to do
and we feel virtuous after we've done it;
how out of order is that?

What we don't seem able to do, Lord, is to stop;
to stop and listen to the spirits,
to welcome the authentic ones, and reject the attractive spurious ones.
Lord, teach us again to recognise the ones that indeed come from you.

[Sunday 23rd June Psalm 102: 1-22](#)

The Rev'd Martin Knight, Minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon

1 LORD, listen to my prayer, And hear my cry for aid.	An owl midst tumbled stone, 7 Or bird upon a roof— I lie awake, alone.
2 Hide not your face from me, For I am so afraid. Incline your ear to me in need; And, when I call, be swift to heed.	8 My foes revile me all day long; My haters mock my name in song.
3 Like smoke my days are gone; My bones are burned away.	9 For ashes are my food; I weep incessantly
4 My appetite is lost; My heart is parched like hay.	10 Because in your great wrath You have abandoned me.
5 Because of my incessant groans I am no more than skin and bones.	11 My days like evening shadows pass; I wither like the sun-dried grass.
6 I'm like a desert owl,	

the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is; greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Reflection

We Christians like to be very nice, and can be very sentimental while we're at it. But this is a passage calling us to be discerning, and, yes, discriminatory, even critical; we don't find ourselves comfortable with this. There are a lot of attractive things and ideas out there, but not every attractive impulse is of God. We have to exercise our judgement, and that is not always easy.

There are insistent spirits, pulling us in all sorts of directions, not all of them helpful. There are the membership statistics to increase - or a decrease to stem. A few more socials, or meals, should do the trick. Nothing the matter with this, of itself. But the cart goes behind the horse, not in front. Bible Study can be boring, but it should lead, not follow. A fellowship spiritually forged can well be cemented by bands of fellowship and food, but it doesn't often work in reverse order.

The story of the Sheep and the Goats is a salutary one. There are far too many starving people around, certainly for a nation as rich as we are. It is an authentic spirit which leads to support Food Banks, and also to ask why they are needed. But if we let this take over, the authentic spirit becomes a siren voice, which can lead to political action becoming an end in itself, rather than a proper consequence of Christian witness.

Thursday 13th June

Daniel Harris - Student Minister at St Neots URC / Ordinand at Westminster College

1 John 2: 18 - 25

Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

Reflection

My first recollections of the Antichrist were from the 1970s horror film "The Omen". I was a kid then, and such talk gave me nightmares for days. Are such threats real?

Firstly, let's nail down what a Christian might be. We can use many definitions, but theologian N.T. Wright's characterisation of loyalty to Christ is compelling. Jews, including those in the first Century, are defined by their loyalty to the One God. This continued in the embryonic Jesus movement through their loyalty to the One God through the Messiah.

An anti-Christ - either a movement or an individual - can be defined by their opposition to the reign and status of Christ. I would hypothesise that they would be loyal to their cause too. We should be mindful of such opposition, be it veiled or in the open, and the threat that they may present to the modern day Jesus movement.

But the tone of today's reading is not one of hopelessness or despair. It is a reminder that such threats, real as they may be, do not have the final say. We are reminded and encouraged to continue abiding in God's love through our relationship with his Son, Jesus. The ultimate gift to us is eternal life - a quality of life, empowered by the Spirit, and extending out into the next life. Any earthly threats that we face, no matter how large, cannot annihilate Christ's love for us.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have ultimately defeated all threats that we may face.

We are hopeful of the ultimate rule of the Kingdom of God.

May we draw strength and encouragement from abiding in you, from dwelling daily within your love and care.

We thank you, in Jesus' name,
Amen.

Friday 14th June

The Rev'd Elizabeth Gray-King, URC Education & Learning Programme Officer, member St Columba's URC

Reading: 1 John 2: 26 - 28

I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught

in this term *love*. Often, however, we major on whether we like someone or not. Of course it's good if we like those we encounter in our daily lives, in our workplaces and in our churches but whether, or not, we like them is irrelevant to the command to love.

The writer of 1 John sees the command to love as being on a par with the command to believe in Jesus. That's quite something. Often in our credal statements - classic, from the Reformation era or contemporary - we focus on beliefs, finely honed words to reflect our deepest theological ideas. Yet we rarely, if ever, focus on our behaviour as a facet of Christian belief. Maybe if we did we'd find a third way between those who, rightly, focus on the importance of sound doctrine and those who, again rightly, focus on the importance of living well.

Prayer,

God our lover,

help us to love even those we don't like.

God our lover,

help us to be faithful to you

in our beliefs and in our actions,

that the world may believe in
and love you. Amen.

Saturday 22nd June

Ed Strachan, Lay Preacher, Heald Green URC

Reading: 1 John 4: 1 - 6

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus[a] is not from God. And this is the spirit of

As God's love for us was put into action through the sacrifice of Jesus; how can you demonstrate in practical ways the love you say you have and the truth you stand by? Don't let your ego and what you say distract you from having a love that is far more than word or speech.

Prayer

God of compassion,
in this moment I seek your greatness.
Consume me with your presence
so that I can love in truth and action.
A love that is more than word and speech.
Amen

Friday 21st June

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is a minister in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster serving congregations in Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton.

Reading: 1 John 3: 23 - 24

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Reflection

I often think that as Christians we have confused the Gospel value of love with the social value of liking people. It's not helped by the paucity of English in trying to translate the various Greek words for love - we can mean the emotions we feel for our family, the affection we feel for friends, the power of eroticism and selfless service of others

you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.

Reflection

I'm going to let this writer off. 6 male pronouns in four sentences, when eternal God has no pronoun. This writer had a point to make. The point was that in Jesus, God did truly connect with humanity and indeed, in Jesus, was human. At the time of this writing, the early Christian world was having a heresy bazaar. All sorts of imaginative ways were being adopted to explain just how Jesus came to be God present on earth. For this writer, the most recent heresy was that Jesus wasn't really flesh, but spirit only. No wonder the overuse of a human pronoun.

For adults like me who are annoyed when called children, we'll also let this writer speak. To be a child of God is a Jewish faith deep truth; a profound knowing that we are so connected to eternal God that we share flesh and blood, thoughts and passion. We are utterly related. Jesus revealed this, and by the time of writing, this author knew Holy Spirit, present personally and in Christian friends and communities. We are so related that the mind of God reveals truth inside our own mind – the 'abiding in you' phrase of this lovely passage. We are so connected that we abide in God as God abides in us. God is inside and outside, holding us, giving us courage. When we know this as truth for ourselves, we can have the confidence we need, whenever it is needed, at our meeting with God whenever that is, and in our own time. When we absolutely know that we are so connected with God, we'll have the courage to walk the way of Jesus in any protest, in any trauma, in any place where love will transform. Amazing. "It is true and is not a lie." v27.

Prayer

Eternal God, I trust you.
I know you in Jesus.
I know you, Holy Spirit.
And I know how very human I am.
Give me patience to relax in you so that you are not restrained in me.
Let me love and act with generous confidence.
Strengthen courage and trust in me and in my faith sisters and brothers.

In the name of Jesus and in the power and presence of Holy Spirit,
Amen

Saturday 15th June

The Rev'd Dr Rosalind Selby, Principal Northern College and member of Didsbury URC

Reading: 1 John 2: 29

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.

Reflection

There are many jokes, proverbs, stereotyping sayings – whatever you wish to call them – that play on where people come from. As I was growing up in Derbyshire, I used to hear that people said of us, “Derbyshire born and Derbyshire bred, strong in t’arm and thick in t’head”. I guess we’ve all heard grim jokes about Irish people, and similar jokes are told in other countries but different peoples – the Greeks tell them about the Bulgarians, for example.

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

Reflection

As I prepare to attend and read through the papers for a residential synod meeting in a few days, I wonder where this passage sits? I have no doubt that the meeting will be flooded with words and speech. Some of this will be positive and encouraging, some will be frustrating and depressing. Some will, hopefully, be challenging and inspiring. Such events are always good opportunities to catch up and share experiences, discover and become more informed. However, what will happen when we leave and return to our respective pastorates? Will the papers be neatly filed or shredded with a brief summary report presented at the next elders’ and church meeting? Will it all just be words and speech?

We are really good at words and speech. We are also good at rituals, systems and creating importance. The problems arise though when all this drains us of energy, we sideline the influence and impact of that truth and we become too weary to act. What follows is the negativity of scepticism and criticism together with all those missed opportunities. Too often we need reminding that our perceived greatness is nothing compared with the actual greatness of God.

Today we once again read that it’s all about a love that should be both seen and experienced. We might say the right words but how willing are we to take responsibility and actually act on them and live them out?

than we love others then it is a backward step for us and the communities that we are part of.

God's compass of love is always pointing us towards others as he calls us to show his grace to them. We need to open our eyes to see those God is pointing us towards to love. We can be so preoccupied with ourselves that we don't even notice others or we may think that there will be other people who will love them.

When we use a compass and map to discover where we should go we often need to change direction to get to our destination unless we are adept at walking sideways or backwards. Likewise in our call to love others, we cannot stay where we are and will often find ourselves having to change direction in order to reach out to them. But it is worth it because it is the way to life as opposed to death. Although it is also costly. We are reminded that for Jesus the compass of love led him to death (as well as resurrection) and as we follow the call to love we are to be prepared to lay down our lives for the sake of others.

Lord, raise our horizons beyond
the preoccupations with ourselves.
Open our eyes to see who it is that
we are called to love today.
Help us when it means we have to sacrificially
change our understanding and our priorities
as we travel in new directions to the people
you have called us to love. Amen

Thursday 20th June

The Rev'd David Scott is Minister of Duke Street & Saughtonhall URCS
in Edinburgh.

Reading: 1 John 3: 18 - 22

In John's Gospel, knowing where Jesus comes from ("above", "the Father") is particularly important in understanding his person and his work. In this verse from the first epistle of John, we have a similar sort of theology in action. We are to be children of God, and how we behave and who we are is going to help others identify where we're from. We are born of the righteous Christ if we show his righteousness.

There's a question that gets asked of folk sometimes today when another seeks to understand them: 'where are you coming from?' What are the origins or your ideas? What is your belief system rooted in? Why do you do the things you do? And one of the most powerful, and actually one of the least scary, ways of talking about our faith today is when someone asks us for our motivation for doing something. Why do you work in a food bank? Why do you run this toddler group? These questions give us an opening to talk ... and I would say, isn't that what John is encouraging from us here? Act in such a way that people recognise you are rooted in Christ and that that is where you're coming from.

Prayer

God whose Holy Spirit bears fruit in us, encourage us to live out those fruits in ways that draw others into a curiosity that helps them explore who you are, and what your Son has done and what that might mean for their lives. Inspire us to play our part by truly being your children and living out this family life in all faithfulness. Amen.

Sunday 16th June Psalm 101 Trinity

The Rev'd Trevor Jamison, Minister, St Columba's United Reformed Church, North Shields

1 I'll praise your love
and justice, LORD;
I'll praise you cheerfully.
2 I'll strive to lead
a blameless life—
when will you come to me?

Within my home the life I lead
will show a blameless heart.

3 My eyes will view
no worthless thing;
from sin I will depart.

I hate what faithless people do;
it shall not cling to me.

4 All wicked people I'll avoid;
from evil I'll stay free.

8 Each morning I will silence all who wicked deeds have done;
I'll cleanse the city of the LORD of every evil one.

Reflection

*Wanted! God's Representative on Earth Today.
Must lead a blameless life, evidenced by showing a blameless heart.
Must be prepared to depart from sin and not to tolerate its presence in
their household and wider community.
Sympathy with and support for God's faithful ones is a genuine
occupational requirement for this post.
This is a re-advertisement. Previous applicants should re-apply.*

ourselves and more especially with You. Give us the courage and will to
be honest when we consider the ways we conduct our lives. This we
ask through Jesus' redeeming love. Amen

Wednesday 19th June

The Rev'd George Watt, Minister, Reigate Park United Reformed Church

Reading: 1 John 3: 11 - 17

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we
should love one another. We must not be like Cain who was from the
evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him?
Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be
astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. We know
that we have passed from death to life because we love one another.
Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister
are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life
abiding in them. We know love by this, that he laid down his life for
us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does
God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a
brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Reflection

A compass is a simple instrument but very effective. When we have
lost our bearings we can be re-orientated. Throughout the Scriptures
we discover the 'compass' of God's love. Invariably it points away from
us. In this passage we read once more that our love should be directed
to others. We are mistaken if we think it should be pointed to
ourselves. On the rare occasion when we hold a compass and it points
to us then if we are to follow it we will end up having to walk
backwards – never a good idea! And when we love ourselves more

the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

Reflection

In today's portion of John's pastoral letter, he addresses the issue of sin. Firstly, he acknowledges that we all have a tendency to sin. In this discourse he raises two very different issues concerning sin. Firstly, he acknowledges two facts related to God. Initially, John acknowledges that God is without sin and then continues to state that true believers cannot sin. But then John develops his theme further by distinguishing how we react when we admit our wrong doings. Firstly, when we sin we also have the opportunity to seek forgiveness by acknowledging that sin before God and seeking forgiveness that is provided through Jesus' sacrificial death at Calvary and subsequently his resurrection.

However, he also looks at sin in relation to human nature. There are occasions when we do not just sin in the sense of a one off wrongdoing but the continually committing the same kind of sin time and time again. If that was not bad enough, when the nature of that sinning takes over the very essence of the individual's life, their thoughts and behaviour then that condition indicates that no matter how often we express regret for the continuance of the sinful thought or behaviour we are being at the very least insincere in our confession that John identifies with the work and influence of the devil. Today we are surrounded by all kinds of temptations but will we always resist? We frequently take shelter in our "comfort zones", but is that approach helpful or not? Repentance is about changing direction, abandoning those areas of our lives or thoughts that are a barrier to our relationship with God.

Prayer

Gracious God, ever loving and caring, so often we get things completely wrong. By your grace, enable us to be honest with

Whoever wrote Psalm 101 would not hesitate to apply for this job, but I would. I'm all too aware of the gap between what I want to be and how things turn out in practice. Is this just an aspirational Psalm? Is this optimistic public advertising language about a job; what we want, though, privately, we expect a lot less?

Still, the Psalmist makes a confident pitch for the post. These claims make contestants on TV's *The Apprentice* appear modest in comparison. They will praise God cheerfully, maintain a blameless life, avoid the wicked, keep company with the faithful, have nothing to do with deceit, and 'cleanse the City of the LORD of every evil one.' I admire them, but perhaps not as much as I fear them, especially were they to detect any evil or deceit in me.

Aim high, like this Psalmist, and I crash and burn. Step back, and I remain stuck with my many imperfections. Yet there's a chink in the Psalmist's optimism which gives me hope: 'I'll strive to live a blameless life – when will you come to me?' Even this most self-confident of believers admits to striving as well as achieving, needing God to turn up to make sure the job gets done. So ...

Dear God

I wish to apply for this job, which I am sure I can do, sometimes and to some extent ... though only with your help.

Prayer

Encourage me to aim high in how I live my life, O God,
And when I struggle or when I fail, come to me;
Comfort me and save me.
Amen.

Monday 17th June

The Rev'd John A Young is a retired URC minister in the Synod of Scotland and a member of Giffnock URC

Reading: 1 John 3: 1 - 3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Reflection

It isn't always easy to see the bigger picture, particularly when you find yourself out on a limb, or under attack. This is true of life, and of church life too. The writer of 1 John reveals earlier in his epistle that a drastic split has occurred in the church, and that he is one of the survivors. An influential group who claim they love God, and 'know' God in an exclusive way which puts themselves beyond reproach, spiritually speaking, have detached themselves. They feel no need of the rest of the believers. Does any of this sound familiar?

The writer of John's letter is not tempted to accept this meekly, and offers a spirited rejoinder. He sets out what 'love of God' really means to him, using the witness of John's gospel. Love for God entails love of our brothers and sisters in the faith. It is not merely we who love, but God loves through us. We have been granted the inestimable privilege of being called 'children of God'. This is not a right we can hold as our own, guaranteeing purity from the world, but a promise that one day we shall know God as Christ himself knows God. Our lives and relationships are blessed by that hope.

Later on 1 John lambasts those who separate themselves off from fellow Christians as 'antichrists', but that's still to come. Our little passage today reminds us that loving God and being loved by God permeates all our relationships for good. And that one day, which is not in our control, our lives will be caught up in glory.

Prayer

Gracious God

when we are tempted to close in
on ourselves
imagining that we have to harbour
our blessings for better days,
open us out to your love,
which in its generosity
can sweeten our lives
and the life of the world AMEN

Tuesday 18th June

The Rev'd Colin Hunt, retired minister worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

Reading: 1 John 3: 4 - 10

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. The children of God and the children of