



Order of Service
31st October 2021

Introit: 584 (TiS) vv. 1, 2, & 6

Welcome:

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Acknowledgement:

Call to Worship:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my Soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoner free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 146: 1-2, 5-10)

Let us worship God.

Hymn: 136 (TiS) 'There's a wideness in God's mercy'

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Holy One, ground of our being and source of our life, you have been with us all our days. You are with us today. You will be with us in all the days to come.

Your love surrounds us like a safe dwelling. Your love guides us through every circumstance. Your love calls out the best in us.

Thank you for your steadfast love.

You provide for our needs. You entrust to us all that is precious and good. You desire for us that which makes us truly human.

Thank you for your steadfast love.

O God of love, we were created in your image with hearts to love as you love. Your steadfast love endures all for ever and your mercy is constant and unconditional.

We are to be compassionate, to deal fairly and justly with others.

But when our integrity solidifies into self-righteousness; when our self-control turns into control over others; when our humility crumbles into shame:

Loving God soften our hearts.

When we push people to the side rather than struggle together with them; when we put ourselves outside our interdependence with creation.

Loving God fill us with your love.



Loving God give us a firmness of conviction, a stable sense of self and a strong will for the common good.
Grant us a loving heart we pray. Amen.

Declaration of forgiveness:

The blessing of God be upon us, enfolding us in peace.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Doxology: 772 (TiS) 'Worship, honour, glory, blessing.'

Readings: Ruth 1: 1-18, Hebrews 9: 11-14, Mark 12: 28-34

Hymn: 217 (TiS) 'Lord Jesus, joy of loving hearts.'

Sermon:

The popularity of the movie Titanic I believe is due to the fact that despite the tragedy of the 'unsinkable' ship sinking and the lost of lives, there is a love story that happens during this fateful voyage.

I believe it is similar to the story of Ruth from our Old Testament reading.

Set in the days of the judges, the story begins with several tragic events for one Israelite family. Naomi and Elimelech and their two sons left Bethlehem (house of bread) due to a famine and settled in Moab on the East side of the Dead Sea.

Elimelech dies but the two sons married Moabite women. Then both sons die without children. This refugee household began with one woman and three men and ended up a household of three widows, none of them blood relatives.

Naomi wants to return to Bethlehem, but she is afraid of what awaits her since she left home to live in a country that is often hostile to her own. Would they receive her back?

Naomi loved her daughters in law shown in her soft and gentle approach. The daughters in law loved their mother in law shown in Orpah's crying.

Naomi believed that her daughters in law would be better off in the own home country where they could start a new life for themselves since she has no more sons to pledge to them.

There is a particular theological focus here on 'barrenness'. The house that once had three men and three women is now barren of land and of womb.

As the story unfolds Orpah returns home but Ruth clings to her mother in law Naomi.

The story takes another turn as we compare what Naomi says and Ruth's response. Naomi says that God has turned against her (v. 13), and she tells the women in Bethlehem, "The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me...brought me back empty...dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me" (vv. 20-21).

It is how Naomi interprets the events leading to her return to Bethlehem.

For Ruth it was different: She simply refuses to leave. She has no interests, it seems, on what God is doing or has done. Rather, Ruth is more interested in what she is going to do. Ruth will worship the God that Naomi believes abandoned her. She is going to do what Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion, and Orpah couldn't do – STAY! Not even death will get in her way.

"Do not press me to leave you or turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die..."

The love and dedication of a Moabite widow to her Bethlehemite mother in law is grace indeed.

As we learn later on in this story – the story of ‘barrenness’ turns into a story of life-giving seed. Throughout the second chapter, Boaz gives Ruth seed and more seed, barley to glean, parched grain to eat, an ephah of barley to take home.

Both Naomi and Ruth could not see the hand of God working here in their circumstance. Naomi doesn’t know where Ruth goes; Ruth doesn’t know where she is but as spectators upon this story, we can see the interaction between Naomi and Ruth, Boaz with Ruth, Ruth with both of them.

We watch in suspense how Boaz and Ruth express their mutual respect; Naomi begins to acknowledge divine kindness after all. Ruth and Naomi can eat their fill, but the story leads us to another beginning. The Moabite widow became Boaz’s wife, from them to Jesse, from Jesse to David, from David to Jesus.

True love reflects the love of God. It transcends cultural, traditional, and even religious expectations. The definition of that love is simplified in our Gospel reading from Mark 12: 28-34, when the scribe from Jerusalem agrees with what Jesus’s response to his question about the first and most important of all the commandments.

Jesus has united two commandments from the Law of Israel, that we must love the one and only Lord and God with our whole being (Deuteronomy 6:4) and that we must love our neighbour as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18).

For agreeing with Jesus, Jesus said this to the scribe “You are not far from the kingdom of God”. So close and yet so far. Such are those who can articulate and explain well what is most important in our relationship with God or well versed in the Law. But, unless one practices those two commandments as one commandment, one remains close but not yet there.

The greatest example, of course is Jesus Christ himself. He incarnates the love of God love for neighbour. He not only tells us, but he shows us. We cannot enter the kingdom of God through the correct observation of all the externals of the Christian vocation, the holocausts and the sacrifices. The kingdom is ours when we love our neighbour in a way which shows how much we are prepared to measure our lives by the words and by the lifestyle of Jesus of Nazareth.

Hymn: 499 (TiS) ‘O Love that wilt not let me go.’

Notices:

Offering:

May the gifts we share for the work of this community help us to make your presence known. These are the embodied hopes of your people. Bless them as blessings offered to the world.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People:

God of love and compassion soften our hearts to the needs of those around us. Help us to turn towards those who are suffering, rather than turn them away in our fear or judgement.

Help us to recall our own times of hardship and division, so that we can be present to others in love.

Teach us to know and share your love O God. Embrace us that we may embrace others.

We pray for those around us who are suffering, that we might serve them in their time of need. May we serve them in their hunger, may we serve them in their loneliness. May we serve them in their illness, may we serve them in their exclusion.

Deal gently with us, loving God, and show us how to serve in Christ. Amen.

Hymn: 654 (TiS) ‘When love is found, and hope comes home.’

Blessing:

Sending out: 779 (TiS) ‘May the feet of God walk with you.’