



## ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH

JULY 30<sup>th</sup> 2025

### PRAYERS AND REFLECTION

Based on Matthew 5:43-48



#### Love for Enemies

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

#### Opening prayer

God of peace and love, I take this moment of my day to sit with you, the one who loves me, forgives me and guides me. Lord, release from me the burden of anger and resentment that weighs heavily on my heart and mind. Help me to embrace the spirit of forgiveness, recognising that holding hate and grudges serves only to hinder my spiritual growth and a peaceful existence.

Grant me Lord, the strength to let go of past grievances, remembering that I am a flawed child of God and in need of your grace. Fill my heart with compassion and understanding, enabling me to see others through the lens of love rather than misunderstandings and judgment.

May I find the courage to extend forgiveness, even in the most challenging situations, and to open myself to the healing power of your presence. In this sacred moment we share together, I commit to creating a community of peace, where grudges have no place and love reigns supreme.

Guide my thoughts and actions, O Lord, as I strive to reflect your mercy in all our dealings. I ask for your blessing on this endeavour of quiet prayer and reflection and for clarity in my heart to embody the forgiveness that you have so generously given to me. In your name I pray, amen.

#### Prayer Point Of Thanks And Praise

- ❖ Thank you for your fairness which is something that we mortals are unable to do
- ❖ Thank you for the opportunities to change, to transform, experience a renewed spirit that isn't hateful or engaged in revengeful behavioural patterns
- ❖ Thank you for your eternal love and blessings to be shared within communities.
- ❖ Praise God for the season of winter, a time to spend reflecting on your Word and what it means in my life.
- ❖ Praise Jesus for the teaching of a love that extends beyond just those whom you love and care about – extend my capacity to love those who rub me up the wrong way.
- ❖ Praise the Holy Spirit for showing us how aim to become better people than we are at present – ‘be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

## **Prayer Points of Confession**

- ❖ Forgive me Lord, for holding on to negative thoughts and grudges concerning those whom I am building relationships with.
- ❖ Forgive me Lord, for seeking to be rewarded for the good deeds I do
- ❖ Forgive me Lord, for not loving each other equally, for having favourites, and for not loving you as much as I should and could.

## **Words of Grace**

God is love. Through Christ your sins are forgiven. Take hold of this forgiveness and live your life in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

## **Reflection**

I start with a story today about a father who had to go away for a while from his young family. Prior to his leaving he sat down with his son and had this kind of conversation ‘When I’m away, I want you to think about what I would normally do around the house, and you do it for me.’ He had in mind, of course, clearing up in the kitchen, washing up dishes, putting out the garbage, and the like.

On the father’s return he asked his wife what his son had done to help her around the house and her reply puzzled him just a little bit. Because her answer went like this: ‘it was very strange because straight after breakfast he made himself another cup of coffee and proceeded into the living room, put on some loud music, and read the newspaper for half an hour on his phone.’ Naturally the father was a bit puzzled and wondered if the son had listened to him and taken him a bit too accurately.

What we need to remember from the passage is that we are told to watch what God is doing and then do the same ourselves. And, here the puzzle deepens, Israel, the chosen people, are challenged to realise that God doesn’t have favourites. If they’re chosen, doesn’t that mean they are God’s favourites. Israel isn’t chosen in order to be God’s favourite people at the detriment of the rest of the world’s population. They are chosen to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. Israel is chosen so that through Israel, God can bless all people.

But in our world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where hate, revenge, division and violence is knocking on so many doors we ask ourselves how we can achieve what Jesus is asking of us. This reading calls us to a radical form of love that challenges conventional normality. Jesus is teaching us to love not only those who love us but also our enemies. Yes, we’ve heard it all before, read this passage through many times so we know it’s tough to live out.

Loving our enemies requires us to engage in radical inclusion where loving the enemy requires us to expand our definitions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. In a globalised world, where misinformation and fear often are the catalysts and provocateur of division our loving response can be to practice love by seeking to understand those we are in disagreement with. This means engaging in open conversation, listening actively without shutting down others, and trying to see humanity in others, even if we fundamentally oppose their beliefs or actions.

Often empathy and compassion are seen as a weakness, however in today’s context, loving our enemies means attempting to grasp their perspectives and the reasons behind their behaviour. This

could involve recognising the pain or suffering that may have shaped their actions. By cultivating empathy, we can respond to conflict from the aspect of Christ like compassion and creating a more peaceful and understanding environment where positive moves forward can be achieved and divisive thoughts and actions can be removed.

Love isn't just a feeling; it calls us to act, and Jesus has given us many examples throughout his earthly ministry. In the contemporary world, loving our enemies might involve becoming an advocate for those who are marginalised or oppressed, and using our voices and resources to promote peace. This is the point of the organisation Act For Peace and the Christmas Bowl which we contribute to each Christmas season. It can also manifest itself with peaceful protests such as the Palm Sunday march for refugees, each year, or even simple acts of kindness towards those we might normally dismiss and not give a second thought to such as those who are living with mental health problems.

One of the more difficult things to accomplish is to forgive those who have caused us hurt and letting go of grudges which can lead to a cycle of bitterness. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can process Christ's teaching by actively working on forgiveness, both for ourselves and for those who we consider have wronged us. However, this doesn't mean excusing harmful behaviour but actively and consciously making the choice not to let it take control of either your emotions or actions. It involves self-awareness and personal spiritual growth as you navigate in finding ways to heal and move beyond the hurt and pain.

This is where we get to the pointy end of modeling love such as Jesus calls us to do. As his followers of the teaching of 'love thine enemy,' we can be examples of what it means to love in a world that often looks loveless, calculatingly manipulative and divided. By expressing the fruits of the Spirit of kindness, patience, and love in our daily interactions with people we are well on the way to becoming inspirational ambassadors of Christ. Social media can be a powerful tool for spreading all kinds of messages of love, understanding, kindness, and reconciliatory messages as opposed to the insidious messages that only tempt people to be hateful toward others. It takes discernment and self-awareness to know which direction the author of the message wants you to take.

All along the way we base our day on prayers and reflection. We live in a fast-paced world, and it's important for us to take the time for introspection and prayer. Seeking divine guidance can help us navigate our feelings towards those we find difficult to love, reminding us of our shared humanity and the grace we all need.

As our time of reflection comes to an end, loving our enemies challenges us to choose compassion over conflict, understanding over fear, and active love over apathy. It's a call to transform our relationships and communities in ways that reflect the deep-rooted values of love and justice that Jesus exemplified.

### **Prayer for others**

Loving Spirit of God and Christ, guide my heart and mind as I continue to reflect on your words from your disciple Matthew whom you love and chose to be one of your followers. Teach me to love as you love, to embrace my enemies, and to pray for those who persecute all those who have chosen to walk the same path as Matthew and so many more of your faithful followers. Grant to each of us the strength

to embody compassion and kindness, that we may be like Christ's beacon of light in world that seems to have admiration for the darker side of humanities nature.

Help us to be perfect in love, just as you, as we have been created in your image. Help us on our journey to the Promised Land to cultivate a spirit of grace that reaches way beyond set boundaries and prejudices. May our actions speak for themselves as a reflection of your light, urging others to seek the goodness of your love.

In times of change, remind us that we are called to rise above, to mirror your infinite mercy, and to seek reconciliation. Empower us to be instruments of peace in a world that craves genuine, steadfast and long-lasting love but doesn't recognise it when it comes to them.

I pray in the name of the risen Christ Jesus amen.

### **Love Wins Over Revenge © V R 2025**

In the shadows deep where grudges play,  
A heart once bound in vengeful fray,  
Whispers of anger, sharp as a knife,  
Craved to reclaim a fractured life.

But in the stillness, a soft voice stirred,  
A gentle truth, though seldom heard;  
That love, a balm for wounds unseen,  
Could heal the heart where hate had been.

A garden blooms from seeds of grace,  
Where peace can thrive in every space;  
For every scorned and bitter thought,  
The warmth of kindness can't be bought.

So rise dear soul, let grudges fade,  
In love's embrace, let hope cascade.  
Forgive the past, let sorrow cease,  
For vengeance fades when filled with peace.

With every step, let light expand,  
Reach out your heart, lend a hand.  
In acts of love, revenge can die,  
And forgiveness, we learn to fly.

Embrace the joy, let laughter grow,  
Transform the pain, let kindness flow.  
For in the dance of love's sweet grace,  
We find our home, our rightful place.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3fuvCvid2E&list=RDP3fuvCvid2E&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3fuvCvid2E&list=RDP3fuvCvid2E&start_radio=1)

