



Opening Doors

**A Lent course to help the people of the Diocese of Chichester
in knowing, loving and following Jesus**

**Session 4 – written by Paul Redparth
and edited by Rebecca Swyer**

Theme for session 4: Opening doors of service

This week we reflect on Christ's example and see how we might break down some of the barriers that exist in our own communities and neighbourhoods. What are 'works of mercy'? Are we called to come to the aid of our neighbours in their bodily and spiritual needs? Is this the true meaning of 'charity'?

Suggested opening prayers (10 minutes)

Prayers and psalms can either be said 'responsorially' (i.e. a leader leads and others respond), or 'antiphonally' (i.e. two groups of voices, each saying alternate verses). Music / hymn / song suggestions are made, but whether or not to include them, and at which stage, is entirely up to you.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

and also with you

Glory to you, Father, who forgives our faults
and heals our infirmities.

Your mercy endures forever

Glory to you, Lord, merciful and kind,
slow to anger and abounding in mercy

Your mercy endures forever

Glory to you, Lord; you who are a
tender Father toward your children.

Your mercy endures forever

Psalm 145 verses 9-19 (this translation is from the Common Worship psalter):

The Lord is loving to everyone and his mercy is over all his creatures.

All your works praise you, O Lord, and your faithful servants bless you.

They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your mighty power,

To make known to all peoples your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages.

The Lord is sure in all his words and faithful in all his deeds.

The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all those who are bowed down.

The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season.

You open wide your hand and fill all things living with plenty.

The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving in all his works.

The Lord is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

A prayer

King of the universe,
you show the bright glory of your reign
in acts of mercy and enduring love;
raise the spirits of the downcast
and restore those who have fallen away,
that we may sing for ever of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymn/song suggestions: Brother, Sister, let me serve you / When I Survey the Wondrous Cross / The Servant King

Introduction / Recap (15 minutes)

- What was your experience this past week of 'opening the doors of witness'? Did you discover any opportunities to engage with someone you encountered? How did it feel as you did so?
- Have you discovered anything that might be holding you back from these kinds of opportunities?
- If you prayed the prayer about sharing God's love last week, were you conscious of any changes in your attitudes, or any actual opportunities that arose over that time?

- Have you visited a 'stretching place' yet? Or are there plans to do this in the week ahead? There'll be an opportunity to reflect on this visit in the final session.

This week we shall think more about opening the doors of our hearts and minds – as we seek to follow Christ's example and break down some of the barriers that might exist in our own communities and neighbourhoods.

Bible reading (10 minutes)

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,

I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'

Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Matthew 25:31-46

'Lectio Divina' – a way of approaching scripture (slightly modified for this course):

First, have somebody read out the passage.

Next, keep silence so that each can ponder.

Then, take turns to read out the sections, with each person highlighting one word of their section. Keep a little silence after each.

Finally, have the passage read again by another voice. Those listening may wish to close their eyes.

First reflection (5 minutes)

Commenting on Matthew 25, Pope Francis says:

We cannot escape the Lord's words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison ... if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these "little ones," Christ himself is present.

Misericordiae Vultus, 15

This is a hard calling. In fact, apart from God's grace, it's an impossible one. But the truth remains that through our baptism we are called to be agents of God's mercy, helping *all* those in need. When Jesus speaks of 'the members of his family' he is not expecting his disciples to become part of a withdrawn sect, simply caring for one another. Jesus wants his followers to go out into the world – and with a joy and a real desire to serve the world and its needs in his name.

But this is not something we can do as a duty or a job. To be seen and experienced as authentically ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ this can only be done out of love. It requires the giver to have first received. Even Jesus cannot command us to love. We can only fall into it. And if we do, we shall be transformed into a new state of being which can only be expressed through action. For nearly two thousand years Jesus’ disciples have heard the call, and day by day have answered that call, by paying attention to two very simple yet profound words from Jesus: ‘Follow me!’

Here is a description of an early second-century Eucharist (from the Greek word for ‘thanksgiving’):

The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us urging everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray. When we have finished praying, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks as well as possible, and the people give their assent by saying: ‘Amen.’ Then follows the distribution of the food over which the prayer of thanksgiving has been recited; everyone present receives some, and the deacons take some to those who are absent. The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution – they, themselves, decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home.

Justin (c.100-165)

Questions for group discussion (15 minutes)

1. Can you think of any situation in which you have been tempted to feel that being a Christian seems like a duty or a chore? If so, what might be the remedy?
2. How might we experience that idea of ‘falling into’ the love that Jesus asks of us?
3. A frequently-used ending to the communion service is: ‘Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.’ For whose benefit, then, do we celebrate the Eucharist?
4. (if time allows) In what other ways can we equip ourselves to ‘follow Jesus’?

Second reflection (5 minutes)

The Holy Spirit was described by St Augustine of Hippo as the ‘bond of affection’ or the ‘tie of love’ between the Father and the Son. The Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then make up a ‘community of being’ – bound together by Love. This image of how God can be both three and one is useful because it shows how God is essentially all about relationship: a perfectly self-sufficient community of three Persons, inter-relating without losing their separate identities. Don’t worry if this picture makes your head spin, we’re trying to use words to explain God – who is beyond words!

About the author of these reflections:

The Revd Dr Paul Redparth SSC is Priest-in-Charge of Kirdford with Plaistow. Before ordination, he worked in the music and civil aviation industries.

But the important point to realise is that the image we have of God does not stay with this self-sufficient communion of divine Persons. In a great outpouring of sheer creative Love, God chose to reach out of himself to create our universe. Out of pure Love God created creatures like us to return that Love. Out of pure Love God’s embrace enfolds the whole of his Creation, until ‘as a plan for the fullness of time,’ he will, ‘gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Ephesians 1:10).

In other words, the God we worship is a God of outpouring love – a God whose very essence is living for the other, in profound and deep relationship. This is the God we see in Jesus, and this is the image of God that Jesus calls his disciples to follow.

The way we can do that is through charity. Charity can be defined as the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God. So we see that none of this is to be done in our own strength – it is through grace acting in us. Imagining we could do it on our own would at best lead to dutiful service – and at worst might well lead to cold resentment. And so, as disciples of Jesus we heed his own words: ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love’ (John 15:9).

Questions for group discussion (20 minutes)

5. Archbishop William Temple once famously said that 'the Church is the only society on earth that exists for the benefits of its non-members.' What is your immediate reaction to this statement?
6. What might it mean for the national church, or your home church?
7. (if time allows) How might you allow the Holy Spirit to help your church community resemble the image of the Trinity more closely? What might be holding you back?

For the week ahead

If you have not already done so, identify a nearby place with which you are not familiar, outside your 'comfort zone'. It could be a place where reconciliation is needed, or a place where different views or ideas are expressed. It might be a place of particular need, or where the people who gather there are not represented in your congregation. Discuss and arrange a visit to this place – either individually or in groups. Aim to open the 'door of service' to this place of pilgrimage before the next session.

Concluding worship (10 minutes)

Three things to ponder in silence:

- What issues have been raised for you in this session? Offer them to God now, asking for the Spirit to guide you.
- How do you feel God might be leading you to experience a greater sense of his mercy? Pray for the grace to receive this mercy.
- Who are the people in whom you have seen the face of Christ recently? Pray for them now, and ask for the grace to increase in charity.

This is love, not that we loved God,
but that he loved us and sent his Son.

He is the sacrifice for our sins,
that we might live through him.

If God loves us so much
we ought to love one another.

If we love one another
God lives in us.

As a group, offer prayers of intercession for the church and for the world, each time ending with:

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer

The prayers of intercession may be concluded as follows:

Merciful Father

A prayer

**Heavenly Father,
 as we celebrate this year of mercy
 open the doors of our hearts and minds
 that we may show forth in our lives the mercy and compassion
 that we see in the face of your Son Jesus Christ
 who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit
 one God now and for ever. Amen.**

The grace

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

Optionally, close with a hymn or song

Copyright notices:

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise marked, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is included in this course, is copyright © The Archbishop's Council 2000