



EMMANUEL CHURCH – WORSHIP FOR 30TH AUGUST 2020



Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 23rd August 2020.
If you are able, watch this small service via the Emmanuel Church website: www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk.

Welcome and Gathering Words: The Lord is here: **HIS SPIRIT IS WITH US.**

Opening Prayer:

Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us;
come as the wind to move us; come as the light to prove us;
come as the night to rest us; come as the sun to warm us;
come as the stillness to calm us;
Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us. **AMEN.**



Reading: Romans 12:9-21 ‘The Marks of a True Christian’

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Address: ‘Living God’s Grace’

Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer:

Loving God, accept these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, your son and our Lord. **AMEN.**

For those persecuted, blamed, ridiculed and imprisoned for speaking words of faith and love:
WE PRAY COURAGE AND STRENGTH FOR THEM, FOR THEIR WITNESS, AND OURS.

For those denied basic rights of housing, income, nutrition, medicine, education, protest:
WE PRAY JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR THEM, AND THAT WE MAY DEFEND THOSE ABUSED.

For those who spread chaos and disharmony, those for whom hatred is a ready currency:
WE PRAY FORGIVENESS FOR THEM, AND THAT WE MAY ACT TO BRING RECONCILIATION.

For those we know who are in pain – whether of body or mind, whether in spirit or faith:
WE PRAY HOPE AND PEACE FOR THEM, AND THAT WE MAY WALK CLOSELY ALONGSIDE.

Loving God, grant us your grace, that we may live lives of love for you, and for all. **AMEN.**

Blessing: May the love and power of God go with us today and every day. May the blessing of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, **AMEN.**

Address: 'Living God's Grace'



Some parts of the Bible need a great deal of work, careful study, and interpretation to draw insights into our living for today. Do contact me if you want my personal top-ten of impenetrable and confusing parts of the Bible, it's available on request! So when you hear/read a piece of Biblical text like Romans 12 about what a life looks like, if it is lived in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ – it's rather wonderful. You and I can read sentences like: 'Practice hospitality'; 'Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'; "If it is possible...live at peace with everyone" – and make immediate connections with our lives and our world. With a bit of prayer, and a bit of thought, it's not hard.

I think that it was the Roman world that Paul's letter was written into that would have had a much more difficult job receiving his letters than we might think. How does your average 1st Century Roman take a piece of Romans 12? You're talking about a Roman Empire infused with philosophies of Plato: splitting up creation into material and spiritual, a world of forms and ideas where the physical was all bad, spiritual all good. You're talking about a culture where Stoicism was one of the dominant forces guiding moral life. If you're called 'stoic' today, you might be considered pretty unemotional/hard-hearted even – multiply that by ten and you're closer to the ancient version! And after mentioning Platonism and Stoicism, don't even get me going on Gnosticism (if this was live in church you'd be trapped, and I could... on line you can skip forward!)

In a world that did not know Christianity, Paul is dropping a huge pebble into a lake and causing ripples. And for all of Paul's deep theological thinking, here is a piece of text which is about life, about love, about behaviour and how people live with one another. Some Roman heads would have nodded in agreement, some would have been mystified, others appalled.

I love the way that Romans – probably the most complicated of Paul's letters theologically speaking – also contains a passage like this. In the last few weeks 'A' Levels and GCSE have come out, and what a mess all of that was! I don't know who I feel most sympathy for: the children, parents, or the teachers. Exam results day is always a stress, because it all boils down to: what grade did I get? Did I get what I needed? Well, for Paul, the marks of a person of faith are not how schooled they might be in philosophical thought, how much they know nor what their grades are: it's whether God is in their life. These verses remind us that LOVE is the way to knowing God, understanding God. LOVE is the way of expressing that understanding. (I love the way Paul, a Rabbi, couldn't resist slipping in a quote from Proverbs 25 at the end, though too!).

Julia Jackson, the mother of Jacob Blake who was shot seven times in the back recently, said: "I have been praying for the healing of our country... God did not make one kind of tree, or flower, or fish ... how dare you ask him to make just one type of human who looks like you... no one is superior to another.". What a miracle of God's grace that she can call for healing, and peace at a time of such pain – and when the words of so many are inflammatory and cause division.

Paul's not asking us to change the whole world alone – he's asking us to let God in, that by the grace of God, his love may change US. That WE might be a people of peace, a people of friendship and forgiveness. Faith for Paul is never a paper-exercise, a test to pass, a grade to achieve: it's

the grace of God at work in each and every life, each and every day. Yes, we'll get it wrong sometimes; yes, we'll make mistakes; but by God's grace, we'll always feel his loving embrace holding us close, and then sending us to the people who need – through us – Gods' grace and love.

