



EMMANUEL CHURCH – WORSHIP FOR 6TH SEPTEMBER 2020



Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 6th September 2020.
If you are able, watch this small service via the Emmanuel Church website: www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk.

Welcome and Gathering Words

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, maker of all that is, we draw near and enter your holiness.
Your presence welcomes us; your love enfolds us; your power sustains us.

We bring our love to you.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, we draw near and come to you.
Your example challenges us; your love forgives us; your peace restores us.

We bring our love to you.

Holy Spirit, God around and within us, we draw near, united by your power.
You lift our hearts in joyfulness; you guide our ways in obedience; your love enriches our love.

We bring our love to you.

Accept our worship, accept our praise; accept our dedication; for your holy name's sake. **Amen.**



Reading: Matthew 18:15-20 'Gathering Together'

¹⁵ 'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.'

¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

Address: 'Two or Three plus One'

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer:

Eternal, ever-living God, we pray for those who this day need our prayers:

those we see around us... those we have left at home... family and friends near and far...

strangers and communities we will never meet or know, but whose peril we hear of and see on our screens...

those whose life is ebbing away, consumed by old age, frailty, illness or neglect...

those who grieve deeply for lives and loves lost...

those who cause grief and chaos in society and who live seemingly with different values from ours, for them and their victims and their families...

those who are forgotten, unnoticed, unloved, unmissed...

Lord God, in your abundance of mercy, hear these and all our prayers. **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: 'Two or Three plus One'

2 or 3 + 1 = ?

This Bible passage was the passage set for the Sunday when I led my first service as a minister in Eastbourne. It was a United Service in the Greenfield building, on 7th September 2014. I had more hair, and less of it was silver – but I forgive you! I am tempted, in the spirit of exam results, tests, and being back at school soon, to ask if anyone can remember what my sermon was about that day... don't worry I had to look it up too!

Jesus says: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'. Now the classic sermon on this verse says: don't worry about the decline of the church and its numbers, don't worry if everyone leaves you for the church with the smoothie bar at the end of the road – because even if you have two or three left, it's OK. I've heard *that* sermon before! The revisionist sermon on this verse tends to say – hang on, that's a nonsense: Matthew is writing this *specifically* about church discipline and conflict, about dealing with problems and that it's a good idea to have two or three involved in the process. In other words if in the 21st century members are leaving your church in droves, *don't* use this verse to justify doing nothing - you risk inertia and irrelevancy to those outside the church. With God's help, do something about it!!

Today at Emmanuel is holding our first Sunday morning worship since 15th March – 176 days ago, and we have only 40 people allowed to attend this service... and God is there. On Thursday 30 of us gathered for Margaret Bibby's funeral service, and I believe that God was present among us. Today we are 40 and I believe God is present among us. We've approached 150 a couple of times here for a Carol Service that was heaving, a wedding, and one Easter Sunday – and I believe God was present among us. Whether you are more comfortable saying God is present with us, or Jesus – and this verse of Matthew is making these are the same: Jesus saying he is there among them, is the same as God being among them. That's what's meant when we say: Jesus is Lord.

'Two or three' might mean thirty, forty, more, or even less. At the beginning of the lockdown Eastbourne Crematorium were allowing only ten into funeral services. How many families have grieved and suffered, how many have been prevented from being able to attend to give thanks? I took a number of services where there were less than ten – and I knew God was there among us. One service I took there were no family or friends present at all, just me and Paul the funeral director, who sat with me while I told him about the person who'd died, and said the words I would say at any funeral service. There were two of us, and God was there. Many of us are very fortunate, with families, friends, email and Zoom. But we know that there are many who will have been deeply isolated in the last six months. When there is only one, then God is also there.

In the piece of Psalm 27 that we had earlier, that phrase from the Psalmist saying 'Lord, do not hide your face from me' (Psalm 27:9) is a common expression in the Psalms that comes up again and again. The person writing has felt so troubled it feels as if God himself is hiding away from his people. No matter what we have been through in these last six months. Whether we have endured a deeply troubling time, suffered losses and isolation. Or whether we have made the most of an enforced break, or lifestyle change for the better in some way, God is with us and never hides his face from us.



As these times ahead unfold, we can be confident that – whether you interpret Matthew 18 fairly narrowly, or take it as a more general statement – that God will be with us in everything we do. We just need to rest in his presence, take a moment to pray, to ask, to share, and to keep God's love for us at the centre of all we do as God's people – Emmanuel – in Eastbourne.