

Worship Service - "Where is the Love?"

Easter 7, Year C,

29th May, 2022

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 NIV / John 17:20-26 MSG

Prelude

Opening Music [Video] [Jesus Culture - Make Us One](#) ft. Chris Quilala

written by Chris Quilala, Joshua Silverberg, Ran Jackson, Ricky Jackson CCLI SONG # 7091349 Copyrights: 2017 Capitol CMG Amplifier (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Capitol CMG Genesis (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Jesus Culture Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Red Red Pop (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Tunes of Jesus Culture (Admin. by Capitol CM Publishing) Be Essential Songs (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Modern Hymns and Sacred Songs (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Richmond Park Publishing (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20251246, posted to YouTube by Jesus Culture

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Hymn

Here in This Place 6

Call to Worship [responsive]

One: Only the hungry search for bread. Only the thirsty look for water.

All: **This is a place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.**

One: Only those who ache for meaning will pursue it. Only those who yearn for a deeper life will seek it.

All: **This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.**

One: So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst, our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings.

All: **and let the God of life satisfy our souls.**

Invocation

You reveal yourself in Jesus, your Beloved Child who gives us a glimpse your glory and invites us to share in the unity of all that is Holy: the holiness that is You, your creation, your people, united in the Spirit that breaks through all boundaries of fear and injustice. Meet us here today, O Unity, and teach us to be one: One in love for each other, One in love for Creation, One in understanding with all who find in Jesus the Way to You, One in peace with all who find other paths to your Truth. We ask all this in the name of Jesus, whose fervent prayer was ever: "May they all be one." Amen

Scripture Reading - Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21 NIV

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

Hymn

Renew Your Church

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A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

To the One who calls us Beloved, We bring hurting hearts to you this morning, Our fearfulness, and our worry. Our anger. Our world is not as it should be.

The ones with power make decisions for their own benefit, while their actions or lack thereof fail to address the ongoing violence and tragedy. The proud and the comfortable say, “Everything is fine. There is no problem.” But those without privilege know better. They hunger, they weep, they bleed. They wait for your justice to vindicate them – before it’s too late!

In a world where hate is a virtue and exclusion a way of life It is hard to hold on to what unites It is tough to find common ground Our humanity is lost in the scuffle.

Those of us who wish for peace forget how to make it Or where to begin And fall into hopelessness, cynicism or despair We too begin to feel powerless in the face of widespread suffering and systemic evil

Even our planet seems ready to crack under the pressure of forces that are beyond us
Your planet and your people groan. **Come, Lord Jesus, we pray.**

When will you come? When will you make right? We are not strong enough, not wise
enough, not good enough To make peace, to bring healing **But you are,** You are the
one who planted peace in our hearts, You are the one who will make it come to pass.

Come, Lord Jesus. Strengthen the bruised reed. Make weapons into ploughshares.
Comfort the weary and heavy-laden. Make a home for the homeless. Still the waters.
Calm the storm. **Come, Lord Jesus, you and your kingdom,** Come. On earth as it is in
heaven. Your will be done. Amen.

Gospel Reading

John 17:20-26 MSG

I'm praying not only for them But also for those who will believe in me Because of them
and their witness about me.

The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—Just as you, Father, are in me
and I in you, So they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe
that you, in fact, sent me.

The same glory you gave me, I gave them, So they'll be as unified and together as we
are—

I in them and you in me. Then they'll be mature in this oneness, And give the godless
world evidence That you've sent me and loved them In the same way you've loved me.

Father, I want those you gave me To be with me, right where I am, So they can see my
glory, the splendor you gave me, Having loved me Long before there ever was a world.

Righteous Father, the world has never known you, But I have known you, and these
disciples know That you sent me on this mission.

I have made your very being known to them—Who you are and what you do— And
continue to make it known, So that your love for me Might be in them
Exactly as I am in them.

Message – *Where is the Love?*

Why can't we all just get along? That's a cliché I'm sure we've all heard at one time or another. But it is a valid question. Why can't we all just get along? What is it that drives us apart, that causes us to be unable, or unwilling, to live in harmony with each other? Certainly we have our differences with other people, things that make us unique as individuals. We all have our own life journeys that are specific to each of us, that give us our own perspectives and points of view.

Our background is full of factors that influence the person we become: our family situation, our cultural background, our gender and sexual identity, as well as the many relationships and interactions with other people. All have an effect on who we become, and the outlook we have. If we accept that our own perspective is uniquely our own, then it only makes sense that those around us each have their own unique perspective as well. But even accepting that reality, we still sometimes find ourselves at odds with one another's point of view. What is it that makes us draw a “line in the sand” that makes another's outlook unacceptable to us? What is it that drives us away from some people and leads us to exclude them?

In his book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, New York University professor Jonathan Haidt, writes about how our brains are built to conclude that “half the people in this country live in a different moral universe.” Haidt argues that the building blocks of society rely on morality (a belief in what is right and what is wrong). A shared morality helps humans to bind together into cohesive social groups, and that allows us to live more productively and effectively. Inherent in this socialization process, however, is the division of individuals into groups to which we either belong or do not belong. Those who belong become our comrades; those who do not, our adversaries. As social creations, we're hard-wired in a certain sense to associate with those who share our sense of morality, and avoid those whose moral compass differs from our own. So we have this inclination to favor some over others.

In Haidt's book, he describes how our gut feelings about ideas inherent to our own group practices tend to be positive. Moreover, our feelings are powerful, primary, and difficult to change. Because of the primary and leading nature of gut intuitions of "right" and "wrong," our reasoning and thinking mind takes on the job of rationalizing our intuitions after the fact. In other words, the feelings come first, and the reasoning comes second.

Further magnifying the power of our gut feelings is a process known as confirmation bias. In this process, the human brain automatically and skillfully works to confirm that which we already believe by poking holes in the logic of that which we do not believe. Yet we lack a natural ease in questioning our own ideas or opening our minds up to those that do not mesh with our already-held beliefs, with some being more hard-headed than others. That means it can be excruciatingly hard to change your own mind—or to change somebody

else's. But the question is, do we have to be of the same mind to get along? Or is the act of finding ways to get along with others who think differently the bigger priority?

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus is concerned indirectly with just that. This is the end of his final discourse to his disciples, and he is trying to impress upon them the importance of not only their unity, but the unity of this new movement going forward. He stresses that unity, this idea of getting along with each other, is something that is divine, of God. He points out in his final prayer, "Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are—I in them and you in me."

There is a sense that being able to get along is more important than whatever differences there may be between them. And differences there were. It's clear from the rest of scripture that they certainly did not agree on all topics. Paul, and to a lesser extent Peter, embraced bringing uncircumcised Gentiles into the fold, while James and others were initially stringently against that. The Jerusalem church clung to the Jewish dietary restrictions while Paul helped the Gentiles in the Roman world justify eating meat that was sacrificed to idols.

It's clear that even at the very beginning, there were divides in thinking among the earliest believers about what was the correct moral path to take. But they found a way to continue forward together. Fundamental to their walk together was forbearance. Forbearance is defined as showing restraint and tolerance. It's the ability to recognize that we don't always agree with our sisters and brothers, but that we can continue walking together with them, and tolerate those issues which we may have differing opinions of.

The author I mentioned earlier, Jonathan Haidt addresses this as well in his observations. He points out that once we understand the ways in which our brains are wired, we can begin to approach our in- and out-groups a bit differently; we can even absorb news and engage in conversations with comrades and adversaries in new ways. But even better, is to actually engage in real conversation, where you actually listen to each other. But to actually listen means to allow the other person to express their point of view, without sitting there formulating your response. It means having an open and clear mind, and really making an effort to understand the other person's point of view. It means making that effort a priority, not just being rigid in your own point of view.

As followers of Christ, we're called to a higher expectation than the world around us. Jesus is telling his followers that our strongest witness to the world around us is how we interact with each other. It's not the us versus them that has always ruled the world. It's not in versus out, playing the blame game and picking scapegoats to pin all our problems on. It's to be a community based on love, not distrust and hate.

Jesus stresses that our witness to the world should be evidence “that God sent him and loved us in the same way God loved Jesus...so that God's love for Christ might be in us.” But that doesn't imply that we don't have moral compasses to guide our actions, that we can count on no hard and fast rules to guide how we live our lives. But again, our path is different from the way the world often works. Ours is a path guided by love. Is our gut instinct based on love, or something else? If it's not love, it is not of God.

1 John makes clear that God is love, and if love does not guide us, we are not of God. We live in a world that drifts further and further from using love as it's moral guide, as forbearance becomes an idea that seems to be part of our past. Instead of “we,” there seems to be only “us and them,” with more and more people becoming “them.”

The events of the past few weeks are prime examples of this mindset. We've seen the tragedy that can result from vilifying the “them.” Replacement theory is a prime example of codifying the opposite of God's love. Which is all the more reason our witness needs to be how we treat each other, and particularly those who differ from us. Followers of the Christ of the Gospels do not belittle each other for how they interpret scripture and apply it to their lives. Those who follow Jesus do not label foreigners as “bad hombres” simply because of where they come from or the color of their skin. When we choose our positions on moral issues, love is our guidepost. If we aren't showing love, then we do not show anything different than the world has to offer.

But what can we really do, as individuals, to address the hate and distrust so rampant in our culture. How can we make those who feel forgotten and left behind, feel valued. How can we undo the explosion of scapegoating conspiracies that seem to swirl all around us. Well, we can and should always start with prayer. We can pray for the people of our country and the world to seek more love and compassion for their neighbor, and less distrust and stereotyping and scapegoating. We can pray that we learn to talk and listen, really listen to those we disagree with. And most importantly, we can pray that we, as God's people, can live public lives of love, in all that we say and all that we do, so that there is no doubt that we are something different than the bitterness, hate, and distrust that emanates not only from the world in general, but the very halls of power that govern us.

I don't know about you, but I'm also getting tired of just hearing “thoughts and prayers” when yet another violent tragedy occurs. Prayer is certainly a powerful tool, but is that all we're called to? Is that the only cost we have to count? Or is there more expected of us? Perhaps the reason these events keep occurring is we are not answering the call to witnessing love that is put before us. Maybe we are expected to do more than give our “thoughts and prayers” Maybe we are being called to step outside our comfort zone, and take a stand against this violence, the weapons that cause them, and the industry that profits from them. Perhaps it's not our silent prayers but our loud voices that need to be heard.

What are we being called to as Christ's body? I fervently hope that we all can seek to live lives of love and compassion together, forbearing our differences and seeking to truly listen and understand each other, as a true community based on love and understanding. I sincerely pray that we find our voices, as individuals, and as Christ at work through us in this world, overturning the evil we find in our midst. If we can do that, we just might be something the world finds value in again. We just might answer our calling, and maybe take the lead to real kin-dom change in this world. May God make it so. Amen

A Call to Serve

Jesus prays that we might all be one: with him, with God, with each other. One way to respond to this prayer is to share our gifts for the common good and being the body of Christ in this world.,

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God, receive the gifts we have to offer, bless them and multiply them, that they may strengthen and unify the work of your Church here and around the Earth you love. In Jesus' name we pray: Amen.

Hymn

Bless'd Be The Tie That Binds **421**

BENEDICTION

Go now in peace, for Christ has called you to live in peace among your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Go now in courage, for Christ has called you from the places of your life to be agents of redemption and partners in healing.

Go now in joy and thanksgiving, for Christ is our light!

Go now as one body, to love and serve God as you love and serve the world!

(written by Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, and posted on the United Church of Christ's *Worship Ways* website. <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/>)