

LIP

Readers' Service

Sacrificial Love

by

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ORDER OF SERVICE

CALL TO WORSHIP:

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

HYMN: HP 42 O love of God, how strong and true

PRAYER:

Let us pray

*Bread of Life; feed us
Light of the world; shine on us
Door of the fold; be open to us.
Good Shepherd; lead us;
Resurrection and Life; lift us up
True Vine; quench our thirst.
As Way, Truth and Life; be with us, now and always. Amen.*

*In the silence let us confess our sins;
sins against our heavenly Father;
sins against our neighbours and each other; our evil thoughts; our unkind words; our selfish deeds.
And all the good we have wilfully neglected to do.
We confess in penitence and faith. [Silence]*

Now let us hear the gracious words of our Lord for our sins are forgiven: 'Now go in peace.'

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 63:7-14

Isaiah recounts the unfailing love of God.

THE EPISTLE: 2 Timothy 2: 8-13

Timothy is reminded of the theme of the Gospel.

HYMN: HP 173 My song is love unknown

THE GOSPEL: Luke 9: 18-27

Jesus spells out what it means to be one of his followers

SERMON (SEE ATTACHED SHEETS)

HYMN: HP 532 Lord Christ, we praise your sacrifice

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND DEDICATION:

Let us pray: [We shall use the following response after each section: '*Lord hear us; Lord graciously hear us.*']

Let us pray for the life of the Church, remembering that there is a price to pay. Let us pray that the Church may discover what is the will of God for it in mission, in unity, in fellowship and in service. [Silence]

Let us pray for the work of the Church in urban areas and great cities. [Silence]

Let us pray for the work of the Church in rural areas where congregations may be small. [Silence]

Lord hear us; Lord graciously hear us.

Let us pray for the world.

Let us pray for the world as it faces issue of race and colour. [Silence]

Let us pray for the world as it discusses ethical and medical issues. [Silence]

Let us pray for the world as it considers the issue of poverty. [Silence]

Lord hear us; Lord graciously hear us.

Let us pray for those in any kind of need. [Silence]

Let us pray for those who are ill in hospital. [Silence]

Let us pray for those who work in health: doctors; nurses; psychiatrists. [Silence]

Let us pray for the emergency services: fire; police; ambulance. [Silence]

Lord hear us; Lord graciously hear us.

Let us pray for ourselves: that we may serve Christ even though it cost us; that we may serve Christ with joy. Amen.

And so may we joyfully take up the Cross and follow our Lord even though we may suffer many things. And grant we may know that further joy of knowing Christ in his resurrection Glory. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN: HP 267 Love divine, all loves excelling

BLESSING:

Go forth in faith; rejoice always in hope; never cease to love.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen.

SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Our theme for today is a theme which we find in our readings especially in St Luke's Gospel. It is **suffering**.

One commentator [Howard Marshall - II/349] writing on this section of Luke's gospel has this to say, '... two themes interact throughout the section, the revelation of Jesus as the mighty Son of God, who must nevertheless tread the path of suffering, and the call to the disciples to follow the way of the Lord, both in missionary service and in **readiness for suffering and humiliation**.'

I want you to notice that - '**readiness for suffering and humiliation**'.

The theme is also found in the phrase in the collect - '**grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it to be the way of life and peace**.' Again, please notice - 'walking in the way of the cross.'

As has just been said, the theme for today is suffering but it is not the suffering of pain or sickness, it is the suffering caused by discipleship. It is that kind of pain which all followers of Christ must reckon as a part of their discipleship. That is our theme and it raises the question as to what kind of sacrifice it is to which we are called and to what kind of sacrifice do we respond.

As soon as we begin to think about the subject there is a danger. It is the danger of the 'martyr' syndrome - the feeling that we are badly done to - the feeling that we are missing out somewhere and, in so doing, we let others know that we are suffering or sacrificing and we become, of all people, most miserable. Now we are **not** talking about that. Nor are we talking about the other extreme, the case of those who go out to **seek** pain and suffering. Sad to say, some of the saints have done that. They set out to hurt their bodies and seek out punishment and then hailed it as part of their discipleship. I don't think that is what we are talking about either. What we are talking about is that element of sacrifice which is called for from every disciple. It is that readiness to suffer for the cause of Christ and the Kingdom because Christ and his Kingdom is a bigger cause than any sacrifice.

So, what does our continuing discipleship call for from us? Three things:

1. **First of all, a readiness to let our calling to discipleship take prior place in our lives.** That can be put in the form of a question. Who or what comes first in your life? Some people would answer that by saying that they put themselves first. They are number one - and as far as some people are concerned it shows. To put not too fine a point on it they are totally selfish. They say by their actions as well as their words, 'If I don't look after myself, no-one else will.'

There is no suggestion that there is anyone here like that. So who comes first in your life? Some of you would probably say, 'my wife, my husband, my family'. Well, it is right that they should have a proper place in your life, but should they come first? What happens if husband or wife is lost? What happens if family becomes estranged? Sadly such things can happen. So to think of it only in practical terms questions need to be asked. But for the Christian, while it's right that such considerations have their place, Jesus did call his disciples to leave their families behind. While that may not mean the leaving of families behind in a physical sense, we need to remind ourselves that, for the Christian, Christ has prior claim and that does mean a sacrifice on our part. It does mean readiness, at times, to suffer that loss, for some people are called to a life of celibacy. Walking in the way of the cross does mean carrying the cross of Christ high.

2. **Secondly, it means a readiness to let our calling to discipleship shape all our attitudes in life.** Christians come in different shapes and sizes. So does your discipleship to Christ. It shapes all your attitudes. Does it shape your leisure hours? Does it influence how you spend your time? If you are a member of the church perhaps you sometimes wonder if it shapes your leisure time too much. But seriously, does your Christian faith really influence what you do in leisure and how you do it? Does it shape your politics and the way you vote. Or do you just vote the way you do because of where you live or how you have been brought up or who will give you personally the best deal?

Leisure time and politics are mentioned because they are important parts of our lives. We should also be concerned about personal faith - what Christ means to us personally or how we read our Bible or say our prayers. There is more to life than the Christian faith. But - and here is the point - our Christian faith must influence our way of life. Perhaps the test would be what would happen to your life if your Christian faith failed. Would it collapse? Is your Christianity so influential on your life that without it nothing would be left? Strange

though it may be that should be the truth. So when we ask, 'what shape are you?' we are looking for you to say 'I am the Christian shape of me. I am me shaped by my discipleship. I am shaped as I am because I am seeking to walk in the way of the cross.'

- 3. The third thing is a readiness to let our calling to discipleship be the driving force in all that we do throughout our lives.** Are you baffled by the adverts on TV especially those advertising cars. Are we supposed to be looking at the car or the landscape or could it be the driver. But in some adverts there appears to be no driver, the car steers itself. No-one tells us what power the engine is. No figures are given about miles per gallon. Sometimes there isn't even a price - just a name. Could we be like that I wonder - no details of importance about ourselves - nothing except an outward shape. In fact, no driver. No-one really in control. Or is the driving force of your life a desire to be a true disciple of our Lord.

Is that the driving force throughout our lives? Let's hope it is, for the Christian should be one whose whole life is integrated around their discipleship. We need to be whole beings. When Jesus healed people it was not just to restore them back to what they originally were. Some were as they were from birth so they had known nothing different. When Jesus touched people he made them whole people and he seeks to do that still. He seeks to make us whole people as he calls us. No-one could accuse Jesus of being sick. He was no fanatic. He wasn't consumed by some odd passion that made him an eccentric. He was a whole man who could face temptation and resist, yet one who could weep on the death of a friend. He was one who got hungry and had to eat, one who became tired and slept in a boat. One who could be afraid to face the future yet who faced it with great courage. One who could fast and yet one whose energy could be taken away from him and so he died. For he was one who was one of us and as one of us he calls us to be like him - ready to suffer, ready at times to be humiliated, above all one who walked the way of the cross and found it to be the way of life and peace. It is to that way that he calls us every day.

Amen.