

Better Than Right



Eaglesfield 28th January 2024

Order of Service

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Call to Worship	No Judgement
Hymn	CH4 739 The Church's One Foundation
Approach	False Righteousness
Address	Creed
Hymn	CH4 484 Great God Your Love has Called
Readings	1 Corinthians 8:1-12 Mark 1:21-28
Hymn	CH4 484 Great God Your Love Has Called Us Here
Intercession	Uncertain World Lord, in an uncertain world <i>May we speak your word</i>
Hymn	CH4 21 Lord teach Me All Your Ways
Sermon	Better Than Right
Offering	Enlightened Moments
Hymn	CH4 511 Thy Hand O Lord Has Guided
Benediction	Be Better

Call to Worship No Judgement

Here to this place our Father calls us
Not for judgement
Nor punishment
Nor to make us feel small
Here to this place our Father calls us
As his children
To teach us
That here we belong
Here to this place our Father calls us
To know that we are loved
And to praise him for that love

Hymn

CH4 739 The Church's One Foundation

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

Called forth from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till, with the vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
With God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won,
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we

Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee:

Approach

False Righteousness

God of all truth, God who knows all
Who knows our innermost thoughts
Who hears our doubts and fears
Who sees our deeds and actions
We gather in praise and awe before you
For we cannot truly comprehend you
You are everywhere and we are just here
You are eternal while we are dwellers in time
You see our limitations
You know our faults and flaws
Yet you love us
And for that above all we praise you
We know that we are limited
That we so often get things wrong
And yet we sometimes stand in judgement
Of people whose circumstances we do not know
We are sometimes so sure that we are right
That we despise those we think are wrong
We take up arms against our brothers and sisters
So sure that our cause is just
We look down on the addict, the beggar
And think that we would never come to that
We are quick to see the speck in our brother's eye
And ignore the plank in our own
Father forgive us...

Forgive us and help us see
That self-righteousness is a trap
Guide us away from it
To bear with one another
To forgive one another
As we are forgiven

Address

Creed

Show me you creed
Let me tear it apart
Show me the beliefs
That lie dear to your heart

Wait! You believe that?
You're kidding me, right?
Reject it! Forget it!
Come to the light

Here let me edit it
Through these words draw a line
For yours are the wrong words
The right words are mine

These words condemn you
And Hell is your end
It's a shame that I called you
at one time my friend

Hymn

CH4 484 Great God Your Love has Called

Great God your love has called us here
As we, by love, for love were made
Your living likeness still we bear
Though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed
We come with all our heart and mind
Your call to hear, your love to find

We come with self-inflicted pains
Of broken trust and chosen wrong
Half-free, half bound by inner chains
By social forces swept along
By powers and systems close-confined
Yet seeking hope for humankind

Great God, in Christ you call our name
And then receive us as your own
Not through some merit, right or claim
But by your gracious love alone
We strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
And find you kneeling at our feet

Then take the towel and break the bread
And humble us, and call us friends
Suffer and serve till all are fed
And show how grandly love intends
To work till all Creation sings
To fill all worlds, to crown all things

Great God, in Christ you set us free
Your life to live, your joy to share
Give us your Spirit's liberty
To turn from guilt and dull despair
And offer all that faith can do

While love is making all things new

Readings

1 Corinthians 8:1-12

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him. Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as in fact there are many gods and many lords-- yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they

obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Hymn

CH4 468 Son Of God Eternal Saviour

Son of God, eternal Saviour,
Source of life and truth and grace,
Son of Man, Whose birth incarnate
Hallows all our human race,
Thou, our Head Who, throned in glory,
For your own will ever plead,
Fill us with your love and pity;
Heal our wrongs, and help our need.

Lord as you have lived for others,
So may we for others live;
Freely have your gifts been granted,
Freely may your servants give.
Yours the gold and yours the silver,
Yours the wealth of sea and land
We but stewards of your bounty,
Held in trust at your command.

Come, Lord Jesus, reign among us,
King of love, and Prince of peace,
Hush the storm of strife and passion,
Bid its cruel discords cease:
Yours the prayer and yours the purpose,
That your people should be one,
Grant, O Grant our hope's fruition:
Here on earth your will be done.

Intercession Uncertain World

Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak your word

Father we are fragile

Human beings, we sometimes break

Because the wind changes

Or the earth falls away beneath our feet

Now in your presence we bring those who feel fragile

Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak your word to those who feel lost

Because there's an emptiness

Where someone they loved once was

Because there is pain or weakness

In a body that once felt so strong

Because there is loneliness

Where once there were parties and laughter

Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak to those we name in our hearts...

Bless them Father and strengthen us to care

Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak your word for those who are forgotten

Because they are are poor

And live from day to day on the world's scraps

because they are homeless

And don't know where they will sleep tonight

Because they have been lured away

By traffickers and those who exploit the weak

Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak your word of peace

Because this is a troubled world
Of folk caught up in war and conflict
Because this is a fearful world
That knows violence and hatred
Because this is a divided world
Where children are taught to hate
Lord, in an uncertain world

May we speak with this one certainty
With certainty that you are God
That we are your Church
That we are the body of your Son on Earth
This we ask in his name and ask
Lord, in an uncertain world

Hymn

CH4 21 Lord teach Me All Your Ways

Lord teach me all your ways
Reveal your paths to me
And lead me in your saving truth
Show me what I should be

Remember. Lord, your love
Your care from ages past
And in that love remember me
In kindness hold me fast

Forget my youthful faults
Forgive my sinful ways
Within the kindness of your love
Remember me always

God who is just and good
Shows all who sin his way
He leads the humble in right paths
Their teacher day by day

All pathways of the Lord
Are kindly, true and sure
To those who keep his covenant
And in his ways endure

Sermon

Better Than Right

**But when you thus sin against members of your family,
and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin
against Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:12)**

*You can't go wrong if you just go right 'cause right's the proper way
That's what my dear old Grandad always used to say
And that I will remember until my dying day
You can't go wrong if you just go right 'cause right's the proper way*

My, I had to dredge that up from the past. It's nice to be right, though isn't it? At least I assume it must be. I wouldn't know - I'm married. Let's admit it. When we've had an argument with someone, we sometimes get a smug sense of satisfaction out of being right, don't we?

That's part of what's going on in this passage. For context, this is a letter to the Corinthians. Of course it's to the Corinthians. It was always the Corinthians when stuff like this came up. Paul would get reports about what was going on in the church at Corinth and he'd think, "They're doing *what??*" and fire off a letter to them. He wrote at least four, two of which we have in the Bible and the ones we have often seem to reflect a church where one group were trying to lord it over another because of their social status, or the spiritual gifts they were displaying or, as in this case, just being smug in being right.

What's going on here is this. Corinth was a major trading centre with ships coming in from all over the Mediterranean and it was chock full of temples to gods and goddesses from all over the place, each of which would contain a statue of the deity. Folk would sacrifice animals to these statues and the meat would be sold in the city's markets. One group in Corinth are saying that it's perfectly OK to buy and eat this meat and they're feeling smug in their certainty that they are right

Paul agrees but he knows the Corinthians too well to stroke their egos. He's worried that with people who are a bit weaker in their faith, or who don't fully understand the reasoning involved, they may get to think, "Well if eating meat sacrificed to an idol is OK, then maybe a wee libation on the altar is OK too," and back they'll go sliding into worshipping idols.

That's why our text is important. What Paul is saying to those folk who eat meat from the market is, you think you're right, don't you? Of course you do. Everyone does. But OK. You're right. But being right isn't enough. There is something better than right and that something is compassion; the compassion you should have for those you think are wrong; the fellowship you are meant to have with them and the duty of care you have not to make them feel small or stupid. Better than right is loving.

Elsewhere Paul writes to someone he disagrees with saying, "I am in the right here and I hope one day you'll see that. Until you do let us go along together in what we share." If only we'd better than that down the centuries. As it is, as soon as the Church got its hand on the tiller of state under Constantine in the 4th Century we were suddenly knee-deep in arguments over heresy and couldn't get enough of wounding each other's consciences in the assumption that we were right and they were wrong.

Sometimes it provoked massive splits in the church, one side denying that the others were members of Christ's body at all, and sometimes over things we can't possibly know for sure. My favourite? The inclusion of the word filioque in the Nicene Creed which literally split the Church in half over whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or from the Father and the Son. I don't know. I'm not sure I even know what the question means, but it was so important to be right, even if it mean wounding a few consciences

Sometimes it's a bit more local. We wounded each other's consciences over whether folk should swear an oath to the king, or whether the state should be responsible for getting people to church. On an even more local level I heard of one church in America that split over where they should put the teas and coffees after services.

This is what Paul's getting at in our text this morning. It doesn't matter how right you are - or even whether you are right; if your need to be right causes you to turn away from your brother or sister in Christ, or if the way you treat them when they are wrong causes them to turn away from you, then you're missing the point. In we wound each other's consciences in our weakness then we miss the point. What saves us isn't whether we are right or wrong over some point of doctrine or worship. What saves us is the love of God in Jesus Christ. What saves us is faith in that love, whether we are right or wrong because in that love we are neither strong nor weak. We are simply loved.

Maybe that's what we are meant to communicate as the Church now in the 21st Century: that better than right is love. If we can reach across the boundaries of denomination and dogma to embrace each other as brothers and sisters in Christ; if we can reach across the divisions of disagreement and tradition to love one another as children of God; if we can learn that better than right is love and live that way, then we have a precious gift for the world.

The gift of hope. The hope that in a world riven by divisions and, it seems, perpetually at war, that love will ultimately, somehow win. Not because we are right (spoilers - we are) but because we love one another and our neighbours, whoever they are

Father we will always disagree with each other. When we are right let us not be proud. Let us not use that to lord it over each other. Let it not divide us. Rather let us serve one another in love

Offering

Enlightened Moments

Lord we thank you
For those enlightened moments when we realise
That being loved is better than being right
That pride can be left behind
And dissolved in the simple joy
Of loving one another
We thank you that in Christ you came to us
And that he humbled himself
Walked the road of self-sacrifice and the Cross
For us
Not because we were righteous in some way
But to bring us home to you
We thank you for all that we have at your hands
The times we do not let the sun set on our anger
The times we find forgiveness
In simple bonds of love
Father we bring these offerings
And we bring ourselves with them
We ask you to bless them and bless us
To rededicate and rededicate us
To making your Church a place
That does not judge
That does not cast out
But which welcomes all your children

Hymn

CH4 511 Thy Hand O Lord Has Guided

Your hand, O God, has guided
Your flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
Full clear, on every page;
Our fathers owned Your goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness,
“One Church, one Faith, one Lord.”

Thy heralds brought glad tidings,
To greatest, as to least;
They bade men rise, and hasten
To share the great King’s feast;
And this was all their teaching,
In every deed and word,
To all alike proclaiming,
“One Church, one Faith, one Lord.”

Through many a day of darkness,
Through many a scene of strife,
The faithful few fought bravely,
To guard the nation’s life,
Their Gospel of redemption,
Sin pardoned, man restored,
Was all in this enfolded,
“One Church, one Faith, one Lord.”

Your mercy will not fail us,
Nor leave Your work undone;
With Your right hand to help us,
The victory shall be won;
And then, by men and angels,
Your Name shall be adored,

And this shall be their anthem,
“One Church, one Faith, one Lord.”

Benediction **Be Better**

Go now to be better than right

Go to be caring

Go to be compassionate

Go to do what's right

Above all to love

To witness to the love of God in the world

By being that love

A love that humbled itself to the Cross

And which goes with you always