

## Introduction

In our act of worship for the 12<sup>th</sup> July we have the opportunity if we wish to share in a love feast (also known as an agape meal). As we have not been able to meet together physically for worship we have not been able to share in Holy Communion in our church communities for some time. The love feast is an alternative to sharing in Holy Communion together. It is a fellowship meal recalling the meals Jesus shared with his disciples during his ministry. The service expresses the 'koinonia' -the Greek word for sharing, belonging and fellowship enjoyed within the body of Christ.

See below for a little more background to the love feast and its place within the Christian tradition.

## Love-feast or Agape meal - a brief history

In the early church some celebrations of the agape meal and the Lord's Supper seemed to overlap however the two eventually became quite distinct with the Agape meal or love feast dying out in the fourth century.

While the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) has been practically universal among Christians throughout church history, the love feast has re-appeared at different times and among certain denominations. The modern history of the love feast began when Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians in Germany introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727.

The love feast quickly became a feature of the Evangelical Revival and a regular part of Methodist society meetings in Great Britain and became an important feature of early Primitive Methodism. Some rural communities have maintained an annual love feast. In recent years churches have revived the love feast or agape meal.

John Wesley recollected in his diary that he had shared in a love feast with Moravians in Savannah in August 1737. As Methodism grew Wesley recorded 'in order to increase in (the societies) a sense of all God's mercies, I desired that we might together 'eat bread' as the ancient Christians did, 'with gladness and singleness of heart'. At these love feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name as well as the thing which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed not only with 'the meat that perisheth', but with 'that which endureth to everlasting life' (Plain Account of the People called Methodists 1748).

The love feast, in common with other acts of worship includes prayer, praise, scripture, preaching and mutual fellowship and an offering. Traditionally it also included a time of testimony and the sharing of the love feast cake and the loving cup (containing water).

If you wish to share in the love feast this morning then make sure you have some water and cake (or bread) ready before you begin.

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020 A love feast**

**Order of service**

**10.20am slide and music**

**Tech brief - Peter/Mike**

**Gathering hymn: StF 52 He is exalted**

He is exalted, the King is exalted on high,  
I will praise him.

He is exalted, forever exalted and  
I will praise his name!

He is the Lord, forever his truth shall reign.

Heaven and earth rejoice in his holy name.

He is exalted, the King is exalted on high!

Twila Paris (b.1958)

**Steward's welcome**

**Opening words**

Come amongst us, by your grace, O Holy Spirit,  
come and inspire us to encounter you again,  
come and transform us, that together we may feast and love one another as you have  
called us to.

**Hymn: StF 76 Give me joy in my heart**

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,  
give me joy in my heart, I pray;  
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,  
keep me praising till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!*

*Sing hosanna to the King of kings!*

*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!*

*Sing hosanna to the King!*

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,  
give me peace in my heart, I pray;  
give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,  
keep me loving till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!.....*

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,  
give me love in my heart, I pray;

give me love in my heart, keep me serving,  
keep me serving till the break of day:

*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!.....*

Anon, adapted by A Servison and others

### **Opening prayers**

God in the calm. We take a moment now to be still before you.

To still our minds and bodies and hearts.

To rest in the knowledge that you look at us with love.

As we meet together to worship, we make room for your Spirit.

God in the chaos. In our busy weeks and in our busy minds,

we often forget that you are with us;

speaking to us, guiding us, walking alongside us.

We take this time to lay aside our busyness and draw closer to you.

God in our rejoicing. We thank you for all the good we have seen this week,  
for all the joy and love and belonging.

We worship you today as the source of all that is life-giving.

God in our sorrow.

We offer up the times this week that have been difficult.

Remind us that even in grieving and darkness,

you are holding us close, whether we feel it or not.

Today we bring our whole selves to you trusting in your mercy, forgiveness and grace.

God in all of life. Meet with us today.

Fill us with your Spirit, speak to us through your Word,

make us more like your Son, Jesus Christ.

We long to feel your presence. Amen.

### **All age talk:**

I like stories. I like reading them. I like listening to them. I like short stories and novels. I enjoy getting lost in a book; the characters, the plot and the style of the author in communicating the story to me. I wonder if you have a favourite book? A favourite story? I'm not sure that I do. I enjoy reading different kinds of books by lots of different authors and I can't really pick a favourite. More recently I have read a lot of crime fiction but a few years ago I wouldn't have entertained such a genre. Reading habits can change over time.

Jesus told stories. I suspect that he was a very good storyteller. Many of the stories that he told were short and to the point and whilst they might have been entertaining they always had a moral to them that for some who listened they were

confronted by uncomfortable truths. A little like looking in the mirror, folk didn't always like what they saw when Jesus said the equivalent of 'Once upon a time....'

One of the ways to look at our life is to see it like a story. Not in the sense that it is fiction, but in the sense that our life and the life of God is about God's story becoming part of our story. The Bible is God's story of creation and out of love he gave human beings a special place and role within it. At times people didn't always do what they were supposed to and so God used different people and ways to try and help human beings in their relationship with God. Eventually God sent Jesus, His Son, to show and tell us how to live and after he died on the cross and rose again for us, God took Jesus back into heaven and gave us his Spirit so that the presence of Jesus could be in the world for all time. If we choose to believe in this story and get to know God for ourselves then our story connects with this bigger story of God's and we begin to see God working in our lives and in the world today. It's an exciting adventure story that is challenging and hard but one of great discovery and joy too. But ultimately it's a great love story - God loves us and we try and love God and show that same love to others.

Today, a little later in our service we have the opportunity to share in a love feast - a short time of eating and drinking together even though we are socially distanced from one another. The love feast, as you will be aware if you have had chance to read the background material, goes back a long way. In the past a traditional element of the love feast service was a time of 'testimony'. Testimony was an opportunity for anyone to share something about their story of faith - highlighting where their life's story had been touched by God's story. Some of us will be familiar with testimony being part of our worshipping life, others less so. Maybe today as we share in a love feast we might be encouraged to think about our life story and call to mind a particular occasion or occasions where we have known our story meet with God's in a special way and if we get an opportunity in the coming days and weeks to share this with someone else then may it be an encouragement to us and to those who might hear it.

**Hymn: 548 Blessed assurance**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:

O what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God;

born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:

*This is my story, this is my song,*

*praising my Saviour all the day long.*

*This is my story, this is my song,*

*praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture burst on my sight;

angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

*This is my story, this is my song....*

Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my Saviour am happy and blest -  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love:

*This is my story, this is my song,*

### **Bible readings: 1 Kings 19: 1-9 Elijah Flees from Jezebel**

**19** Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." <sup>3</sup> Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

<sup>4</sup> But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. <sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." <sup>8</sup> He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. <sup>9</sup> At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

### **Ephesians 3:14-19 Prayer for the Readers**

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

### **Sermon**

I love this little story that we find in 1 Kings 19:1-9 but it isn't a very popular story for commentary writers! I suspect that this is because lots of far more interesting and

swashbuckling stuff is happening around it! In the previous chapter Elijah has defeated the Priests of Baal in dramatic fashion by calling down fire from heaven. In the second part of this chapter we have Elijah's famous encounter with God at Mount Horeb, a place of great significance for the people of God, when God speaks to him from 'sheer silence'. But in the middle of this sandwich, we find Elijah in a different place and with a different mindset.

He's travelled into the wilderness because he's tired, hungry, depressed and fearful. In this state he asks God to take his life from him. But God doesn't. God knows what Elijah needs. He needs rest and sleep and he needs nourishment. The angel appears and directs Elijah to eat and drink - not once but twice. God knows how much Elijah needs to be fortified for what lies ahead. There is no assurance from God that all will be well or that life will even get easier for Elijah in the weeks lie ahead. If we read on then we see this for ourselves. But there is, in these moments, an assurance from God that God will provide for Elijah's needs. God will nourish and feed Elijah as he does his work.

So today we have the opportunity to be fed. It isn't communion which is our usual way of eating and drinking together. But in the love feast we have a very simple reminder that together God is with us, God loves us and God knows what we need to get through today and the days and weeks that lie ahead. There will still be testing times and difficulties to work through in our churches, in our communities and in the world, but as we eat cake or bread and sip water we remember that we are not alone but called in to community with one another as Christ's followers today. Paul's prayer for the Christian community in Ephesus is that they may be drawn together and 'rooted and grounded in love' and filled with the 'fullness of God'. That is our prayer for one another. Paul also prays that they will be strengthened in their inner being by the Spirit. That is our prayer for ourselves that we will be fed, loved and strengthened by God in community with one another as we look to the future together.

### **Sharing our food and drink**

Charles Wesley wrote only one specific hymn for the love feast, 'Come, and let us sweetly join'. There were 22 eight line verses in the original! Verses from this hymn appear in StF 646 and our love feast prayer is adapted from these verses.

Let us pray:

We come together with one accord to give glory to God, who is our Lord and Saviour, we sing his praises and lift our hearts in union with one another as we celebrate this feast of love.

We invite Jesus as a dear expected guest, and we open our hearts asking that He would come, and rest in us.

Breathe your Spirit upon us, give us peace;

Breath of God move within us and make our feast a feast of love. Amen

*We eat and drink our bread/cake and water.*

Loving God, we thank you for the unity we share through our faith in you. We thank you for the different ways that you nourish us in our journeys of life and faith. Inspire us in our worship and stir our hearts to love one another just as you have loved us. Amen.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Let us offer prayers with all God's people through Jesus Christ our Lord who ever lives to pray for us.

Pray for the needs of the world.....

Pray for the Church throughout the world.....

Pray for those in trouble or distress.....

Pray for those who make a new beginning today.....

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayers.

May what we ask in Jesus Christ your Son

be done according to his word, who said,

'ask, and you will receive,

seek, and you will find,

knock, and the door will be opened to you.'

To you, merciful God, through your Son, in the life-giving Spirit,

be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn: StF 690 The church's one foundation or 72 How great thou art**

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 only bride;

with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Called out from every nation, yet one through all the earth,

her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth;

one holy name she blesses, and shares one holy food,

as to one hope she presses with every grace endued.

In toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,

she waits her consummation of peace for evermore;

till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,

at last the church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union with God the Three in One,  
and mystic, sweet communion with those who rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we,  
with them, the meek and lowly,  
in heaven your face shall see.

Samuel John Stone (1832-1900)

**Hymn: StF 82 How great thou art**

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder,  
consider all the works thy hand has made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:  
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:  
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander  
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:*

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,  
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in  
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
he bled and died to take away my sin:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:*

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
and take me home - what joy shall fill my heart;  
then shall I bow in humble adoration,  
and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:*

Stuart K Hine (1899-1989)

V1-2 and 4 based on *O store Gud* 1885 by  
Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859-1940)

**Closing words**

God of all grace, may we go from this place, to seek a world of wholeness, a world of harmony, a world where your grace is revealed to all people in all places.

### **Blessing**

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, and all those who we know and love, now and forever more. Amen.

### **Closing hymn: StF 476 One more step along the world I go**

One more step along the world I go,  
one more step along the world I go;  
from the old things to the new  
keep me travelling along with you.  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn,  
more and more about the world I learn;  
all the new things that I see  
you'll be looking at along with me:  
*and it's from the old.....*

As I travel through the bad and good,  
keep me travelling the way I should;  
where I see no way to go  
you'll be telling me the way I know:  
*and it's from the old.....*

Give me courage when the world is rough,  
keep me loving though the world is tough;  
leap and sing in all I do,  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*and it's from the old.....*

You are older than the world can be,  
you are younger than the life in me;  
ever old and ever new,  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*and it's from.....*

Sydney Carter (1915-2004)