

**ABBAY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING**

**WORSHIP SERVICE**

**10.30 AM 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2025**

**REV DR JULIA BINNEY LEADING & SIMON BIRD PREACHING**

[www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk).

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**THEME:** 'We are Family 1... Fellowship (Acts 2:41-47

**A CALL TO WORSHIP:**

**We gather before God who spans the heavens.**

**We gather before God who makes each human cell.**

**We gather before Christ known across the centuries and nations.**

**We gather before Christ who meets with each one of us.**

**We gather before the Spirit who dances through time and space.**

**We gather before the Spirit who weaves our lives together as God's family.**

**We gather in the name of God who is eternal community.**

**We gather in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**HYMN MP 1192:** <https://youtu.be/P9ksZnAhIFU?si=RvXi00NgCFKXek-1Ds>

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son,  
In the name of the Spirit, Lord, we come.  
We're gathered together to lift up Your Name,  
To call on our Saviour to fall on Your grace. *(repeat)*

Hear the joyful sound of our offering  
As Your saints bow down, as Your people sing.  
We will rise with You, lifted on Your wings,  
And the world will see that:  
*Our God saves, our God saves  
There is hope in Your name.*

*There is hope in Your name  
Mourning turns to songs of praise*

*Our God saves, our God saves*

PAUL JOSEPH BALOCHE AND BRENTON BROWN © 2007 INTEGRITY'S HOSANNA MUSIC/ CAPITOL CMG PUBLISHING/ INTEGRITYMUSIC.COM

**A PRAYER OF PRAISE:**

God who dwells eternally in perfect, love, unity, harmony and community,  
**we praise and worship you.**

Lord with you everyone is invited into your fellowship of love,  
**we praise and worship you.**

We praise you that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we can be included into the life of God,  
**we praise and worship you.**

We praise you that in your love those who think themselves worthless,  
**find themselves called by name and welcomed into your Church.**

We praise you that by faith in you all our barriers are broken down,  
**and we are bound together by the Holy Spirit into your family of love and acceptance.**  
**We praise and worship you, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.**

**A PRAYER OF CONFESSION:**

**Forgive us that in our narrowness and limited understanding,  
we have overlooked the enormity of your love.**

**We have overlooked the needs of our neighbour.**

**We have overlooked our mistakes but dwelt on the mistakes of others.**

**Forgive us, restore us, renew us and build us up in love for Jesus' sake.**

**A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Lord, thank you for giving us a place where we are welcome and where we belong.  
**Lord Jesus, thank you for your church.**

For giving us all sorts of people to learn from, and to share with and somewhere to gather to worship you and learn more about you.

**Lord Jesus thank you for your church.**

For giving us a family all around the world, bigger than we can imagine, who share our love of you.

**Lord Jesus, thank you for your church. In your name. Amen.**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:** *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,**

**your will be done on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and for ever and ever. Amen.**

**FAMILY TIME:** Sticking Together

*(There will be an offering taken during the following song, and after the song the children will leave us for their own groups)*

**MP 99:**

Come on and celebrate!  
His gift of love, we will celebrate -  
The Son of God who loved us  
And gave us life.  
We'll shout Your praise, O King,  
You give us joy nothing else can bring;  
We'll give to You our offering  
In celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate,  
Celebrate, celebrate and sing,  
Celebrate and sing to the King.  
Come on and celebrate,  
Celebrate, celebrate and sing,  
Celebrate and sing to the King!

PATRICIA MORGAN & DAVE BANKHEAD © 1984 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

**BIBLE READING 1** Acts 2:37-47

**BIBLE READING 2:** 1 John 1:1-4

**BP&W 20:**

The King is among us,  
His Spirit is here!  
Let's draw near and worship,  
Let songs fill the air.

He looks down upon us,  
Delight in His face,  
Enjoying His children's love,  
Enthralled by our praise.

For each child is special,  
Accepted and loved,  
A love gift from Jesus  
To His Father above.

And now He is giving  
His gifts to us all,  
For no one is worthless  
And each one is called.

The Spirit's anointing  
On all flesh comes down,  
And we shall be channels

For works like His own.

We come now believing  
Your promise of power,  
For we are Your people  
And this is Your hour.

The King is among us,  
His Spirit is here,  
Let's draw near and worship,  
Let songs fill the air.

GRAHAM KENDRICK GRAHAM KENDRICK © 1981 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

## **SERMON: We are Family 1... Fellowship (Acts 2:41-47)**

Look around. How many of these people did you know 3 years ago? How do you feel about them? What has happened? Surely, God has made us a family. It is not man-made. We are more than a club with a mutual interest, e.g. coming together for a walk or to play Mahjong! We have relationship with God, which means we have relationship with each other.

So I do not have to exhort you to create fellowship – it is something that has already happened. But like many things in the Christian life, we need to work at it and live out what God has done: for example, we are given a new nature, but we must work at showing it in our lives! This morning I want us to celebrate and enjoy what God has done, but realise God has a purpose in bringing us together. It has implications and responsibilities.

Over the coming weeks will explore more about what it means to be family together. Some of the pictures of church are: people of God, body, bride, building, family, flock. This morning, I will talk about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The word in the bible for 'fellowship' has a much richer meaning than our English word. *Koinonia* in Greek means *sharing together in something*. It refers to the deep and intimate relationships we have with each other and God and being a community - giving and receiving.

John describes this in our reading (1 Jn 1:1-4). They have fellowship (*koinonia*) with the Father and the Son. So John wrote his letter so they will have fellowship (*koinonia*) with him, which will make his joy complete. Also, when we take communion, we share or participate together (*koinonia*) in Jesus' body and blood (1 Cor 10:16).

What makes this fellowship so special is that it flows from God's nature. We always close our service saying the grace prayer together (2 Cor 13:14). There is already fellowship and love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then, because God loves us, through Jesus' grace we are brought into right relationship with God, and then the Holy Spirit gives us fellowship with God. And this creates our fellowship with each other.

We can think of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit like the glue between us. This glue is love, which binds us together. As John wrote (1 Jn 4:19-21), we love because he first loved us, and whoever loves God must love their brother and sister. Love for each other is a result of being loved by God. It is not an instant attraction we have for each other – we all have our faults! But as we share in knowing God, the Spirit changes us to be more like Jesus, and produces his fruit of love (Gal 5:22) that draws us to each other. Ephesians (4:16) describes us as a body, joined together by ligaments and building itself up in love.

Our fellowship is something we can enjoy and celebrate, but it is not an end in itself. Notice that the grace prayer was Paul's prayer for the Corinthian church and it is for them in the plural – a group, not individuals. It is God's delight and master plan to work through a loving community – we call this the church. As we rub up against each other, with all our faults, we are refined and made like Jesus. And his mission in the world uses us as a group; he does not use super-heroes, but he chooses to use frail and imperfect disciples to achieve his ends. Our individual



weaknesses are compensated for by other members of the family. And our unity speaks to the world. John says, by our love everyone will know we are Jesus' disciples (Jn 13:35).

I see the purposes God has in mind for us in the example of the early church in Acts (2:42-47).

The context is important here. Notice it follows the Holy Spirit being poured out at Pentecost on disciples who had been praying. The Holy Spirit enabled them to praise in languages the crowd could understand, and then Peter preached to explain what was happening. They became aware of their sin, repented, were baptised, and then received the Holy Spirit. Notice the four elements of becoming a Christian we have preached about before. 3,000 were added that day. So they were now fully Christians. Then what happened? We read about their life together – they become a church! The fifth element of becoming a Christian is to be part of the church.

These verses are not necessarily a model for church for all time - the New Testament gives more detail. Church will vary according to context, but they contain the key marks of a Spirit filled church. One commentary said a church lacking these features is in danger of spiritual decay. How do we measure up to these?

1. They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching**. For us, this is contained in the bible and is surely the foundation of the church. By regular Sunday preaching and in study and discipleship groups we are doing this.
2. **Fellowship (koininia)**. This too is foundational to all they do together. In the next verses we see this expressed in generosity and sharing of what they have, and this is a challenge to our individualist lifestyles.
3. **Breaking of bread**. They quickly followed the instructions Jesus gave at the last supper to do this in remembrance of me (Lk 22:19). Yes, we still do this.
4. **Prayer**. Fervent prayer occurs throughout Acts, and must be one explanation for the dramatic growth in numbers and miracles we read about. It is good we have a number of prayer meetings in our programme, but few attend – could you be encouraged to join in?
5. **Miracles and signs**. Jesus' ministry was not just teaching, but included healing and signs, which were the basis for faith. The apostles followed this and later we read it was not only the apostles who performed signs and wonders, leading to growth of the church. We should expect to use gifts of the Spirit in our evangelism.
6. **Meeting together for worship**. Notice they met in the temple and homes. Church is not a building, nor is it just gathering on a Sunday, but it includes fellowship worked out in smaller groups. This is why, in a church of this size, where it is not possible to know everyone, we encourage meeting in Connect Groups.
7. **Evangelism**. Their fellowship (church) was not a closed club, but was reaching out and expanding. This is surely the aim of what God is doing in creating fellowship. We can share in his joy by being part of extending his Kingdom. If we hold on to 'fellowship,' and think it is something for our benefit, or if we neglect to reach out and draw others in, our fellowship will quickly become dry.

So again, we celebrate and enjoy being God's family, but we do not see fellowship as an end in itself. We seek to develop all the marks of a Spirit filled church, and be sure we are an open and welcoming church.

There are some challenges for us. To experience fellowship with God and fellowship with each other in the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to be born again – like those first believers in Acts. Then we need to be daily receiving God's love poured out by the Spirit.

As I said at the beginning, it is God who creates fellowship, but we still must work at it. As Paul wrote in Ephesians (4:3) 'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' The unity is already there, because the Spirit has made it, but we need to keep it. None of us are perfect: fellowship requires us to develop the fruit of the Spirit and love one another.

#### **BP&W 471:**

*Bind us together, Lord,*

*Bind us together*

*With cords that cannot be broken.*

*Bind us together, Lord,*

*Bind us together,*

*Bind us together with love.*

There is only one God,  
There is only one King;  
There is only one Body,  
That is why we sing:

Made for the glory of God,  
Purchased by His precious Son;  
Born with the right to be clean,  
For Jesus the victory has won.

You are the family of God,  
You are the promise divine;  
You are God's chosen desire,  
You are the glorious new wine.

BOB GILLMAN © 1977 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC

### **PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:** – Polly Jung and Thomas Ng

Abba father, we are your children. Thank you for your love. Jesus Christ is the first born of God's family. Because of salvation, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us love one another because you love us.

#### **Lord, help us be one in Christ.**

Christ Jesus, you know there will be many challenges in the coming year. The Bible teaches us to pray for our city. We pray for peace in Reading. We pray for less crime. We pray for the homeless. We pray for the asylum seekers and all the newcomers in Reading. You know that Reading is multicultural; help us to embrace the differences. Let us show your love to our neighbours. You are our refuge and our protector. You are the one we are longing for.

#### **Lord, teach us how to pray for Reading.**

Our Lord, many people are struggling in their lives all around the world. Some elderly pensioners don't have enough money to cover heating expenses. They fall ill easily, and some hospitals are overwhelmed with patients, which is undesirable. Also, the winter flu is widespread. We pray for the patients in the hospitals and ask that your healing hands be with them. We pray for the NHS staff as well. Please give them strength and wisdom to cope with this difficult situation.

Lord, we face flooding and bad weather in the UK, earthquakes in Tibet and severe wildfires in California. Life is unpredictable. Please be our comfort and hope. We pray for the leaders of the UK, United States, Canada, Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Gaza, Syria, Iran, and China, and all other nations. Please guide us and comfort us in these uncertain times. Please dry our tears and give us hope. Help us be wounded healers, following your footsteps. May the church be your witness in this sinful world.

#### **Lord, may our church be your light in the darkness.**

Holy Spirit, open our eyes and see your wondrous works. You build up your church according to your will. We pray for the spiritual growth in our church. Thank you for your spiritual gifts, which help us understand your Word and serve you. We are different parts of the body of Christ. Please humble our hearts and teach us to respect one another as we respect you, our Lord.

Bless our church and show us your vision. We thank you for the faithful service of Julia and Jim among us. We pray for our new pastor, whom you have called to lead the church.

**Lord, you are the head of our church.**

We praise you in the name of Jesus Christ, **Amen.**

**BP&W 486:**

Lord of the church, we pray for our renewing:  
Christ over all, our undivided aim.  
Fire of the Spirit, burn for our enduing,  
wind of the Spirit, fan the living flame!  
We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing,  
the will that lacks the courage to be free,  
the weary labours, all but unavailing,  
to bring us nearer what a church should be.

Lord of the church, we seek a Father's blessing,  
a true repentance and a faith restored,  
a swift obedience and a new possessing,  
filled with the Holy Spirit of the Lord!  
We turn to Christ from all our restless striving,  
unnumbered voices with a single prayer:  
the living water for our souls' reviving,  
in Christ to live, and love and serve and care.

Lord of the church, we long for our uniting,  
true to one calling, by one vision stirred;  
one cross proclaiming and one creed reciting,  
one in the truth of Jesus and his word;  
So lead us on; till toil and trouble ended,  
one church triumphant one new song shall sing,  
to praise his glory, risen and ascended,  
Christ over all, the everlasting King!

TIMOTHY DUDLEY-SMITH © 1984 OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

**THE BLESSING:**

God has a purpose for you.  
You have a part to play in God's family of faith.  
Go then in love, peace and hope, and serve God with joy;  
and may the blessing of the living God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, give you  
confidence and strength to live the life of the Gospel today and every day. Amen.

**THE GRACE:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

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**Church Information:**

TODAY

After the service: fair trade stall  
CHURCH MEETING

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**The Leadership Course Session 5:**

- Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 – 2.30 pm in person in the Brookside room.
- Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – 7.30 pm on Zoom (ID: 828 1505 7805 Passcode: 461165).

**Baptismal Service:** A baptismal service is being planned for 19<sup>th</sup> January and another one on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to the Minister or one of the Deacons.

If you would like to contribute financially to Abbey International Baptist Church electronically, please use the card reader at the back of the church or scan the following QR code below to pay.

**QR Code for Offering:**

