

ABBHEY INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CHURCH, READING

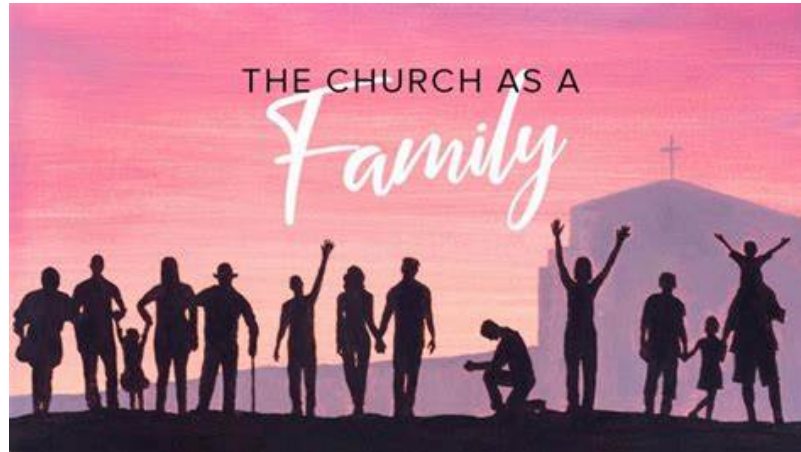
WORSHIP SERVICE WITH COMMUNION

10.30 AM 9TH FEBRUARY 2025

REV DR JULIA BINNEY LEADING & PREACHING

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

Find us on Facebook @ Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



THEME: We are Family 4... The Church (Matthew 18:15-20)

A CALL TO WORSHIP:

Come to worship, not out of habit,
not out of duty, not because your name is on a rota,
not because you will earn points in heaven.

We come to worship

because we love God,

because we love God's world,

because we love God's people.

We come to celebrate and worship the living, loving God.

SONG: https://youtu.be/aW-hvpxJELE?si=NpLNW1_mIUcbQDfi

In the darkness we were waiting
Without hope, without light
'Til from Heaven You came running
There was mercy in Your eyes.
To fulfill the law and prophets
To a virgin came the word
From a throne of endless glory
To a cradle in the dirt.

Praise the Father, praise the Son

Praise the Spirit, three in one.

God of glory, Majesty

Praise forever to the King of Kings.

To reveal the kingdom coming

And to reconcile the lost

To redeem the whole creation

You did not despise the cross.
For even in your suffering
You saw to the other side
Knowing this was our salvation
Jesus for our sake you died.

And the morning that You rose
All of Heaven held its breath
'Til that stone was moved for good
For the Lamb had conquered death.
And the dead rose from their tombs
And the angels stood in awe
For the souls of all who'd come
To the Father are restored.

And the church of Christ was born
Then the Spirit lit the flame
Now this gospel truth of old
Shall not kneel, shall not faint.
By His blood and in His name
In His freedom I am free
For the love of Jesus Christ
Who has resurrected me.

SONGWRITERS: JASON INGRAM, SCOTT LIGERTWOOD, BROOKE GABRIELLE FRASER.

A Prayer of Praise:

Almighty and Sovereign God, we join together once more around your throne to worship you.

Yours is the hand that shaped the universe.

Yours is the power that guides and controls the nations.

Yours is the love that moves and works through all things.

Yours is the purpose that has called us here.

Lord, you redeem us from our sins, you open up for us the way to life that has been most perfectly and wonderfully revealed in Christ.

We worship and praise you.

We bring to you our joyful thanksgiving.

We acknowledge you as Lord of our lives.

In the name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

Lord God, we're being honest here.

**There are people we find difficult, that we would rather not talk to,
people that we label with our fears and prejudices.**

Lord God, we're being honest here.

**There are times when we are not proud of ourselves;
times when we let you down very badly.**

There are times when we do not behave as your disciples.

Lord God, be honest with us.

Correct us and challenge us. Forgive us and heal our faults.

Help us to not hold grudges against people, to love those who have wronged us and to forgive their faults as you forgive us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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: Three's not a Crowd

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

MP 128:

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist

Without the knowledge of Your parenthood and Your loving care.

But now I am Your child, I am adopted in Your family,

And I can never be alone,

'Cause Father God, You're there beside me.

I will sing Your praises,

I will sing Your praises,

I will sing Your praises,

Forever more.

I will sing Your praises,

I will sing Your praises,

I will sing Your praises,

Forever more.

IAN SMALE © 1984 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Psalm 133

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE READING: Matthew 18:15-20

BP&W 293:

O breath of love, come breathe within us,

Renewing thought and will and heart;

Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,

Revive your Church in every part!

O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,

Till humbly we confess our need;

Then, in your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore - for this we plead.

O breath of life, come sweeping through us
Revive your church with life and power;
O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit your Church to meet this hour.

ELIZABETH A. P. HEAD (1850-1936) ALTD.

SERMON: We are Family 4 – The Church (Matthew 18:15-20)

This is our fourth study on the theme of the Church as family. As with any family, what is of utmost importance are the loving relationships at the core of family life. It has been rightly said that Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship. The heart of our faith is not a set of teachings and beliefs about God. It is not a set of rules to follow to please God. It is a *relationship* with God. A relationship that is made possible by the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ; and a relationship that is made alive in our lives by the Holy Spirit through faith. It is the most important relationship we will ever have, our relationship with God. We were created *by* God, and created to be in relationship *with* God. As Augustine once put it, 'our souls find no rest until they find their rest *in* God.'

But a close second is our relationship with each other as church. The Church is the unique creation of the Holy Spirit. We are bound together as God's people in *Koinonia* fellowship, welded together by God's love. Together we are the body of Christ, the living stones that God is using to build into a spiritual house, his holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. The greatest commandment Jesus gave us is to love the Lord our God with all we have and are, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Also with the ten commandments, the first table is all about our relationship with God. The second table is all about our relationship with each other. Both relationships are important.

Jesus went to the cross to restore our relationship with God the Father. In so doing our relationship with one another is also restored. As followers of Jesus, we are to gather together, to be in community, to be church, to be a loving faith family. God has not designed us to be on our own. It is very important to Jesus that his followers stay connected, that they are a true community of believers; a community that cares for one another, and prays for one another, and shares our gifts with one another, and with the world around us, and grows in our faith and discipleship with one another. As an Ethiopian proverb puts it, 'alone a thread of spider web can catch a fly. Reinforced by thousands of others, it becomes strong enough to tame a wild beast. When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.' So do not give up meeting together and worshipping together but keep encouraging one another, spurring one another on (Hebrews 10:25).

Churches are gathering together for worship all across the globe. But they are also doing something else. As I read recently, 'they are arguing and disagreeing with each other, not getting along with each other, even hurting each other through their words and actions.' This happens everywhere in life, such as in schools or workplaces, but it is particularly painful when it happens in church, the last place where we would expect it. But we are sinful human beings. Jesus knows this. It is no surprise that relationships can be strained at times. This brings us to the passage in Matthew 18:15-20. This is only one of two places in the Gospels that refer to 'church' meaning the local congregation. One is in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus speaks of building *his* church. The other is in this passage that contains Jesus' advice for when relationships in church are difficult. This passage presents us with an



action plan for mending broken relationships within the Christian fellowship.

1. Simple Instructions – vs.15-17

The Message Bible interprets these verses as, 'If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell them—work it out between the two of you. If they listen, you've made a friend. If they won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If they still won't listen, tell the church. If they won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront them with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love.' As simple as that. Keep things out in the open, don't let things fester – resentments, jealousy, criticism, complaints etc. Be honest, kind, patient and forgiving in your relations with each other. Let the Fruit of the Spirit be the guide to your behaviour: 'Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22). If you have a problem with someone, try and sort it out personally and don't let things escalate. If that doesn't work, take someone with you who is wise and kind and will help. If that doesn't work take it to the church. This is not a legalistic, rules based thing. It is in an atmosphere of prayer, love and fellowship that relationships can be righted. If the person is not prepared to listen to the church, Jesus is not suggesting that they are just abandoned or that forgiveness has limits. Jesus is presenting a challenge to not give up on anybody; no-one is outside God's all encompassing love even 'pagans and tax collectors' (v.17). No-one is without hope and anyone can be won with the love of God that can touch even the hardest of hearts.

2. Binding and Loosing v.18

What does this mean? This is not about spiritual warfare in this context. Nor does it mean is that we, as church, can forgive sins or settle someone's destiny in time or eternity. A Roman Catholic interpretation would say these words mean, 'whomever you exclude from communion will be excluded from communion with God. Reconciliation with the church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.' In a Baptist understanding of church, we do not have this kind of authority. Only Jesus does. The church is, however, to call out sin and wrongdoing and take it seriously. Binding and loosing is more to do with the pronouncement of what is and what is not sin, rather than any condemnation of the sinner. As the Apostle Paul wrote, 'For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1) and as Jesus said, 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him' (John 3:17). Even as the Church reflects God's authority and judgement to the world, we do so always with humility, care and compassion.

What is being said in these verses is that we have to take our relationships and our relational health in the body of Christ seriously for the sake of the health of the whole body. How we behave with each other matters. How we conduct ourselves as church has eternal consequences.

3. The Promise of His Presence vs.19-20

The unity of the church affects the spiritual effectiveness of the church and the power of prayer. Agreement, or at least a place to agree to stand together in love and fellowship even in our diversity, affects how our prayers are heard and answered : 'A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is a no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action' (The Message). Effective prayer must be the prayer of agreement which means a total lack of a selfish focus and where self serving and personal ambition is entirely absent. As the Apostle James put it, 'the prayers of a righteous person (a person living rightly with God) are powerful and effective' (James 5:16).

As well as Jesus teaching us how to deal with conflict, he offers us his wonderful promise: 'For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them' (v.20). This is his promise to be present in the assembled company of God's people. We know that Jesus is always with us as individuals. He is 'the friend that sticks closer than a brother' (Proverbs 18:24). Jesus promised, 'Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:20) and 'I will

never leave you or forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5). But here in verse 20 we have the promise of his presence in a special as we gather as church – to worship, to witness and to pray. This is why Christianity is a communal thing.

There is a bond that unites believers. We may be a varied bunch of people and we may gather with just a few of us or with thousands in the congregation, but we all bear the same name, 'that worthy name by which we are called' (James 2:7), the name of Jesus. And when we gather in his name, it is the Lord's delight to be 'there... in the midst.' This is also why corporate prayer is so important. Jim referred to the church Prayer Meeting last week as 'the Cinderella of the Church' when it should be the power house. Never underestimate the power of corporate prayer.

A united church is a blessed church (see Psalm133). Where the people of God are serious about behaving in a godly manner and working at preserving good relationships, God is powerfully active. Praying in the company of others no matter what the language, agreeing together in prayer by the sharing of 'amens' after each other's prayers means the presence of Jesus in a special way.

*Jesus stand among us in your risen power; let this time of worship be a hallowed hour.
Breathe the Holy Spirit into every heart; bid the fears and sorrows from each soul depart.
Then with eager footsteps we'll pursue our way, watching for the dawning of eternal day.*
William Pennefather (1816-73)

MP 388:

Jesus, we enthrone you,
We proclaim You our King.
Standing here in the midst of us
We raise You up with our praise,
And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne,
And as we worship, build a throne:
Come, Lord Jesus, and take Your place.

PAUL KYLE © 1980 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

COMMUNION

WORDS OF INVITATION:

Come to this table, not because you must but because you may,
not because you are strong, but because you are weak.
Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come,
but because you need mercy and help.
Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more.
Come, because he loved you and gave himself for you.
Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

INSTITUTION:

'The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,
"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way after supper he took the cup saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

(take a piece of bread and eat as it is served to you)

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

(we drink together once all have been served)

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us

with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: – Maureen Dickens

Lord, you have said that when two or three are gathered in your name you are there with us. We bring before you, now, our concerns for your world.

Where there is strife we ask for wisdom, tolerance to understand and courage to work together towards peaceful solutions. Where there is discord, we ask for patience to listen and to know when to speak to bring about harmony and stability, bringing an end to poverty and the upheaval of much of humanity.

We bring our own country before you and that our government will listen to the country’s concerns bringing fairness and equality to all.

We lift to you, Father God, Jim and Julia, asking that you bless them as they embark on a new chapter in their lives, moving on in retirement to pastures new, may they continue to seek you in all that they do and achieve in the coming years.

Abba Father, please be with us as a church as we go forward towards a new ministry and may we be open to your word and follow you. **Amen.**

PRESENTATION: To Julia and Jim by John Chilvers

BP&W 566:

To God be the glory! Great things He has done!
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

*O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
And give Him the glory! Great things He has done!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
For every offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son:
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see!

FRANCES VAN ALSTYNE (1820-1915)

THE BLESSING:

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace.
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. 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.**

Church Information:

After the service: Fair Trade Stall

Baptismal Service: Another baptismal service is being planned for March. If you would like to be baptised and/or become a Church Member please speak to one of the Pastoral Team, namely Simon Bird, Jill Bird or Celia Chan.

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:

