



### Readings for this week:

Monday	Reading Matt 20:17–21:11 Pray for Huw Jones
Tuesday	Reading Matt 21:12–32 Pray for Vivienne Kenyon
Wednesday	Reading Matt 21:33–22:14 Pray for Beverley Mitchell & family
Thursday	Reading Matt 22:15–33 Pray for Kingdom, Debi, David, Sarah & Faith Matsetlo; Debi is due soon in maternity
Friday	Reading Matt 22:34–23:12 Pray for Dr. Herbert McGonigle & family
Saturday	Reading: Catch up Pray for Sigrid Nwator & family
Sunday	Reading Matt 23:13–39 Pray for Myra O'Hara and family

### Other Prayers:

- Our weekly prayers recall to our thoughts those in need; after '*seeking the face of the Lord*' in quietness; our first prayer should be the one who readily comes upon our hearts...
- *Thank God* for past events, even hard ones, and commit to trusting Him for the future no matter what it holds.
- Pray for *our fellowship* and specific people who are ill and need encouragement
- We pray for John B who had a full scan this week, and for Ann and their family
- We pray for Kingdom & Debi and the expected arrival of her child this week
- Pray for Sylvia's friend, *Jean Graham*; one brother has passed away and the other is very ill in hospital (Jean has attended our church quite a few times).

It is always good to come to the House of the Lord, even in this strange 'remotely gathered' way these past ten or so months. '*Let us go to the House of the Lord*' (Psalm 122: 1). We gather as a '*testimony*', to '*pray for peace*', and to seek '*good*' things for others'. (The word used in the psalm is translated as '*prosperity*', but it can so easily be misunderstood. It means seeking the very '*best*' for others.)

We have been looking forward to hearing *Huw Jones* preaching today, and we continue to pray for the successful completion of his college degree - and his future ministry which we feel God has in mind. It is a privilege to play our part in offering him this ministry opportunity. In case you did not know, a few of us always aim to give constructive feedback to Huw, after listening carefully to both what and how he preaches. It is an important part of the learning curve in preparation for ministry, God willing.

*The funeral* of the late Wendy Baily will be held on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February at 10.30am, at Manchester Crematorium near Southern Cemetery. Our prayers are for her son David and other recently bereaved families.

Next Sunday Karl will be preaching his final message as our pastor. Following this, we look forward to welcoming *Rev Mick Kane alongside his wife, Debbie & son Mikey* in becoming the ninth pastor of our church. The Sunday services *will continue* as usual in a similar format, helped and assisted by our good and reliable team of technicians. The weekly *Update* sheet will *also continue* to be produced, printed, and delivered by hand as required as is our practice. We will also continue to provide a weekly email which includes the *Update* and important items of news about people, and items for prayer.

Karl and Mick will have met on three specific occasions to discuss vital matters concerning the handover, and to take a tour of the church premises and community. Important board documents have been gathered and stored safely for future reference when needed. The most important aspect of this continued ministry is, of course, *you*, and *all the other members and friends of our church*! I know that as a chaplain and now pastor, this is where Mick's heart lies. He has a heart for people and that is where his passion lies. The church is people!

These are exciting days; days when we can expect God to do a '*new thing*'. Our faith is in the Lord, our worship is heaven-ward, and it is together we look forward to the



decades that lies before us – for His glory, Amen.

**Blessings to all our readers. Grace and peace!**

**Message:** Practice Makes Perfect [Preacher: Huw Jones]

**Readings:** OT: Deuteronomy 6: 4-12; NT: 1 John 3: 16-24

Have any of you ever learned to play a musical instrument? Either the Piano, or violin, or guitar? Perhaps *singing* is your instrument, and you use your voice to make beautiful music.

When I was younger, I played a very big instrument. The biggest instrument in the brass section actually: the Tuba. Now for those of you who don't know, the Tuba is the one that goes like [make tuba noise]. But you see, I never felt I could make beautiful music with my instrument. I always seemed to miss the timing, make mistakes, or play the wrong note.

But then I had a friend, my best friend from when we were just three-years-old, called Elin. And Elin played perhaps one of the most elegant instruments of all, a very Welsh instrument: the Harp. Now Elin played the harp so well that she was asked to play in every School Christmas Concert, and even competed in National Competitions. And those who heard her were so captured by her music that people even began to hire her to play at weddings. But most important of all, playing her harp brought her *own* heart joy. It blessed her soul and expressed an inner beauty.

Why was Elin able to play so beautifully and bless others with her gift, when I always seemed to come out flat? It's got nothing to do with our instruments. I know plenty of Tuba players who play wonderfully. It was because I didn't practice, *but Elin did*. She got up at 6am every morning, if not earlier sometimes, so she could spend an hour practicing on her harp every day; learning the music and training her fingers to flow over the strings with immaculate coordination. The music industry and many other industries, actually (such as dance, medicine and perhaps even ministry in the church) have a very famous saying about practicing. Anyone know what it is? Yes, that's right; 'practice makes perfect'.

Sometimes the word perfect seems scary because we can never reach 'perfect'. But for today, I want us to re-think our idea of 'perfect'. Instead of

thinking of 'perfect' as getting a 100% on a math's test, or sticking to a time schedule precisely to the last second, what if we look at the *world*? The mountains and lakes. Have you ever looked at a landscape and thought to yourself: wow, this is just perfect. Or a patch of grass and thought: this is the perfect picnic spot. Have you ever listened to a song or piece of music that has resonated with your heart so much that you can't describe it as anything but perfect? Sometimes perfect is just what your heart tells you when you feel complete.

But the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was perfect in every single way. He never did anything wrong. And this is why we can have faith in him - and need to have faith in him, in order to be saved from our imperfect lives. But did you know that in James chapter 2, the Bible also says that we need to practice our faith, just like I should have practiced my Tuba. But how do we practice our faith? And, can it ever be perfect?

These past two weeks, I've been doing a little experiment with myself to see if practicing faith makes a difference. Before coming back to college I was given this little cross by a dear friend of mine from my home Church - Stella, a woman who evidently practices her faith. And as I'm holding this cross, God reminds me of those precious words he tells the Israelites to recite in our first reading today: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6: 4-5); and I add on Jesus' amplification too: "and love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:39) These words were given to the Israelites to remind themselves of their commitment to God, every morning when they get up, every night before going to sleep. When they leave the house and when they return. These words are to be bound to their foreheads and hands; in thought and deed. In the routine of speaking these words over and over again, God is slowly transforming their – and our – hearts to be more like his own. The Deuteronomy passage goes on to remind the people of God that everything we have is given to us by him. All good things are given by God, and this obviously should lead us to a place of gratitude. But if we have been practicing our faith in devotion such as reciting these words, our prayers won't only consist of thanksgiving, but also asking God for the wisdom of what to do with all the things he has given us. Healthy faith will ask God to teach us how to be responsible with everything we own - food, money, talents, faith, joy, love; *the whole lot*! God wants us to use them to help



other people. For how does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

The First Letter of John tells us that we will receive from God whatever we ask, if we obey his commandments. But I think this has been misunderstood by many people, this isn't us earning anything from God. It's not saying that if we pray hard enough God will give us a bigger house or a better car. It's saying that if *we practice our faith and our love for God and other people*, then we'll start to ask God for the right things, things he cannot refuse to give. The more closely we journey with God and strengthen and practice our faith in Jesus Christ, the more we'll get to know his heart; and the more our hearts will come to look a little more like his, a little more like 'perfect'.

Now, if you're not aware, we are in the Church of the Nazarene; and if we travel back in time to some key events and figures in our denomination's history, we come across a man in the eighteenth-century called John Wesley. John Wesley saw that many people of the time were lukewarm Christians – people who just went to Church on a Sunday and forgot about God the rest of the week. But for John Wesley, this didn't make sense because the Bible tells us to have faith, yes, in Jesus Christ, but also to love one another, even to be willing to die for one another. With this passion he began a movement of prayer, preaching and serving the poor during the week as well as on Sunday, which demonstrated the practicing of his faith. But this week I heard what may be an apocryphal story about John Wesley...

He was seemingly very fond of artwork and liked to buy some pieces from time to time. But one day, as Wesley was walking along the street, he saw a woman, sitting, clearly in need of new clothes to keep her warm in the winter months. But Wesley had just spent his last pounds of the week on a piece of art, that very morning. Of course, he wasn't to blame, for how could he have known his path would cross with this woman. Yet the situation deeply affects him. He speaks so heavily of situations of need like this. In his New Testament translation and *Notes on 1 John*: 3: 17, Wesley writes, that: "The very sight of want knocks at the door of the spectator's heart." How he feels the compassion as a "holy discomfort in his bowels", not as guilt or pity; but *perfect love*.

Jesus Christ was perfect in every sense of the word. Whenever Jesus came across people who were in need, people who were suffering, whether they were diseased, possessed by demons or even dead, he was able to help every time, able to heal and redeem. But, there's something else that makes Jesus even more wonderful. In Luke Chapter 5, a man suffering with leprosy begs Jesus to heal him: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." (Luke 5:12). And Jesus replies: "I am willing." "This willingness and this want to help others is what Wesley recognised as 'perfect love'".

John Wesley might not have been able to help all those who needed it, but because he practiced his faith, his heart was definitely "at one with Jesus". My friend Elin might not have played every note on her harp to the correct millisecond each time, she might have held a rest too long once or twice, but because she practiced, she was able to share the glorious bliss and wonder of her music with other people. Stella from my home church might not be able to take all my burdens, or heal all my anxieties; but because she practiced her faith, she was able to encourage and share that with me, now giving me the joy of practicing my faith. Today's passage commands us to "love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (1 John 3:18). The reality is that we cannot act perfectly or help perfectly, but if we practice our faith and seek to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might; if we abide in Christ by the Spirit of God and seek his heart always; we will become willing to act in love towards everyone around us.

It starts with God giving us faith. The Holy Spirit then helps us to practice that faith in our lives. The Spirit of Christ grows us and stretches us and shapes us through our spending time with God. And the result of this practicing faith is always Jesus Christ working through us, in perfect love.