

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

**1 Peter 4:1-11 (Be expectant)**

**Talk by Andrew Griffiths, Prayers by Julian Providence**

Hi, my name is Andrew and thanks for downloading the talk for St John's church for Sunday 20 June. I will be reading from 1 Peter 4:1-11, giving a short talk and then Julian will be leading our prayers, before we end.

The message of today's reading is about how living for God means living in love – it is because of the love that we show for one another, and for others, that people see what it is to be a follower of Christ. We are Christ's ambassadors in the world, and we share his message of love by what we do and what we say.

#### **Reading – 1 Peter 4:1-11**

**4** Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body has finished with sin. **2** As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. **3** For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. **4** They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. **5** But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. **6** For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

**7** The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. **8** Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. **9** Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. **11** If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

#### **Talk**

I'm sure you've all seen the tables that describe the difference between what British people say, what they mean and what non-British people hear. For example, when a British person says 'I'll bear that in mind', the rest of the world thinks they mean that they will consider the suggestion. What the British person actually means is 'there's no way I'm doing that'. Or when a Brit says 'I'm sure it's my fault', the rest of the world thinks 'they think it is their fault', when in fact the Brit means 'it's your fault.' There are loads more: with the greatest of respect, sorry, I might join you later, and my favourite 'I have only minor comments' which means 'please redo the whole thing'.

And so it is with 'love covers a multitude of sins'. It's a well-known saying – and one we often use to describe how we're actually extremely annoyed. But unfortunately, here the

British are also wrong, because it doesn't mean that we can be super annoyed, it means that underpinning all our actions and choices should be the recognition that we have been forgiven ourselves.

When we developed the church strategy, we chose 1 John 4:19 as the key verse – we love because he first loved us. Everything we do, the love that we have for each other, should be based on our knowledge that we were loved, forgiven and embraced first. This morning's passage is about how we should live, in response to God's love.

Peter reminds us that Christ died for us. Verse 1: 'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body has finished with sin.' Peter calls us to imitate the attitude that Christ had – that of utter self-giving love. This means loving others and acting for their good, even if that leads to suffering. It does not mean that our suffering has the same significance of Christ's – Christ died, once and for all, for our sins. We cannot, and need not, suffer for the sake of sin. But we should have the same 'attitude' as Christ – that we should be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ's mission and the good of others.

Paul explains it in Romans 6:8-10: <sup>8</sup> Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

It is then important to be careful in reading this verse – it does not mean that our suffering is the way to finish sin. That is not the emphasis of Peter's message. Rather, it starts from the finishing of sin – Jesus has done that – and says that those who have finished with sin have the same attitude as Christ did to suffering. That attitude is the willingness to accept suffering for the mission of God and the good of others.

Peter builds on this point: 'as a result', verse 2. Obviously, the people Peter was writing to were going through a tough time – verse 4: 'they heap abuse on you'. But Peter is clear that they should focus on the truth and the long-term. Because of the freedom that we get through Christ. The freedom to live our lives as God intended and not dominated by our earthly desires.

So many philosophies and religions, such as Yoga and Buddhism, say that we find meaning in looking outside of ourselves. That is true, but as Peter makes clear, it is not just at looking outside ourselves, but by looking at God that we find true freedom.

Peter is a little bit extreme in the examples he chooses of things to look away from: 'living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry', verse 3. Now that may be your personal challenge, but I suspect that for most of us the challenges we struggle with are about money, material possessions, being jealous of others and failing in our relationships – slightly more mundane, but nonetheless real, impactful and with the risk that it derails our lives. These are the challenges of self-absorption, of looking at ourselves and our own gratification for meaning.

Focusing on the unchanging God, who loves and cares for us, and revealed himself to us in his one and only Son – that is freeing. It frees us to avoid the peer pressure of our daily lives, verse 4. And it frees us, as Christians, to live in the knowledge of a bigger purpose, verse 5.

This does lead us to the difficult verse of today's passage, verse 6: 'For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.' The key word to understanding this verse is the word 'now' – Peter is not referring to the gospel being preached to dead people, but the gospel preached to people, who had then later died.

This verse has a specific context in the challenges that were facing the early Christians – they had expected Jesus to return quickly, certainly within their lifetimes. When Christians started to die of old age, amongst other things, others worried that this meant that the dead would not be saved. But Peter, alongside almost all of the new Testament letter writers, addresses this by reaffirming that Christ's sacrifice overcame death. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, quoting Isaiah and Hosea: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' And Peter made it clear here – those Christians who died would be judged by the spirit. They would be judged, not by their actions, but by the actions of Christ on their behalf. This verse, then, makes it clear that when we act, we should do so in the knowledge that Christ's love for us transcends even death. This is the privilege of freedom – freedom to live as God intended.

But what does this practically mean? It means living in love.

There is an ancient story, told by Saint Jerome – who translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century. It tells of the apostle John: 'The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, "Little children, love one another." The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, "Teacher, why do you always say this?" He replied with a line worthy of John: "Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient."'

In our passage, the apostle Peter, John's old friend and fellow disciple, has the same message for us. The attitude of Christ, which Peter spoke about in verse 1, is the attitude of love. We are called to live for one another.

What are your gifts? What are you good at? How can you use these gifts for the good of others? This does not mean occasionally using them for the good of others (although that is not a bad thing). It means shaping your whole life around how you can use your gifts and talents so that other people can grow and be blessed. We could think that we are called to the occasional good action, but can otherwise live our lives unaffected by the gospel. Yet, whilst using our talents for others is always a good thing, we are called to think about how *everything* we do can be a blessing for others. We are Christ's ambassadors to the world – not offering Ferrero Roche, but a life of love and service.

It is through living lives of love that people see who Christ is – we have the amazing privilege of showing others what God is like. Not with the occasional action, but by who we are.

But of course, are any of us truly living our lives with this attitude? Are any of us really making our life decisions based on what is good for others, and not ourselves? If you know of anyone who is, please let me know, because I know that I don't.

This is a profoundly difficult thing, but this is why Peter calls us to be alert and sober minded – we have to question ourselves and our motivations, as much as anything. Because, as Peter says in verse 11: ‘If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.’

But do not fear, none of us are perfect – we do not all live as we should. This brings us back to verse 8 – ‘love covers a multitude of sins’. Whose love? The love of Jesus shown on the cross and in the resurrection – it is this love that gives us forgiveness, this love that frees us, and this love that allows us to keep on going whenever we fail. Focus on this love, the love of God, and we will be able to live lives of better service to others. The more we know of Christ’s love, the more we can show it to others – focus on Christ, not on ourselves. To end, I want to look at a part of the sentence in verse 11: that ‘in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ’. Why does God need to be praised – do you ever wonder that? Is God a huge narcissist, or does he have low self-esteem or something? Why does he constantly need to be told how great he is? Well, the answer, of course, is that God does not need anything. He does not need our praise to know that he is God. He does not need self-affirming or recognition. No, God does not need praise.

But we *do* need to praise God – we need it. Because through praise, we come to know who we are, we come to know that we are loved by the author of creation. Praising God puts into context who it was that sacrificed everything for us. By praising God, God does not learn anything new about himself, but we learn about our value and worth. God is praised through Christ Jesus, because it is through Christ Jesus that the character and nature of God is really known – a loving, self-giving and caring God, who wants you to live to your fullest potential; a life of love.

I will, then, finish with the words of the apostle John: ‘Little children, love one another, because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.’

Amen

And now Julian will lead us in prayer.

### **Prayers**

Lord this Fathers Day we remember you as our perfect, loving and faithful heavenly Father. Thank you Jesus that you brought us to know him - that as your word says we all have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph 2:18)

Lord you know each and every one of us down to the smallest details of our lives and you know the experiences we have had with our fathers and the imprint they have left upon our lives.

For some our fathers were inspirational, men we looked up to and who gave us an example to live by so that we were able to see the love of you, our Heavenly Father in them. For others our fathers may have been selfish or thoughtless and maybe even for a while blocked our way to you.

For some our fathers were loving and kind and joyful and brought happiness and laughter into our lives. For others they were maybe distant, unkind or hurtful and let us down.

For some our fathers were present with warmth and care, their eyes and ears attentive to us. For others our fathers might have been absent, avoidant and disinterested.

For all of us our fathers were all of these things at different times in our lives. Like us they were and are fallen people in need of your forgiveness and grace. We pray for those of us who have lost our fathers - please Lord touch us in those places where there may be sorrows they have left behind or grief from them no longer being with us. Help us to forgive their failings and remember the good things they have brought into our lives and that even through the hardship we are now secure in our eternal relationship with you. We thank you so much for fathers who have come to know this forgiveness and grace for themselves. We lift up those of our fathers who have yet to come to know you, that you would soften their hearts and open their eyes to the love you have for them.

Our heavenly father, we remember you our perfect father - "ABBA Father":  
Our daddy who puts his arms around us and pulls us close.  
Our loving provider as the Father who knows what we need even before we ask you.  
Our faithful Father who watches over our coming and going both now and forevermore.

Help us as men in the church, whether fathers or not, whether younger or older, to be the kind of men the Father is seeking - the courage to be reliant on you, to be filled with your Spirit, who are faithful and willing to serve and to lay down our lives for you and your church and for one another as you laid down your life for us.

We pray for our family in need. We lift up Will and Kath and Sam - please Lord we ask for your healing touch for Will and for your presence to remain with Kath and Sam; for Keith and Barbara - please will you watch over and look after them; for Val's mobility, for continued healing for Andy and Geresse and for all of us in need. Thank you Lord that you always hear us, for as you promise:

" The eyes of Lord are on the righteous and his ears attentive to their cry" (Psalm 34:15).

We remember CAP, Amaze Penge and Foodbank thanking you for your love and compassion on those in need. Will you keep blessing their work and make them fruitful.

We thank you so much that St John's is starting to feel like the family home it once was. Thank you for the safe return of people we have not seen in person in so many months and for bringing us all through the past year and few months. We still lift to you those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. Be their strength and their comfort Lord. We pray also for those who have yet to return to us - please prompt them to come back to St John's and help them again to find their place back here among us.

We thank you that you have sent people to be interviewed to become our new church leader. Lord we thank you that you have heard our faithful prayers for the right person to come. Yet we continue to choose to trust you for this Lord. It is our hope that you have chosen someone from the candidates who visited the parish last Friday but we pray Lord your will be done knowing that you will continue your faithfulness to us whatever the outcome.

Holy Spirit we pray especially for all the members of the interview panel from St John's and Holy Trinity. We pray you would set their hearts and minds at rest. Let them not be anxious but know that you are with them and that your Spirit goes ahead of them to lead them to the right decision. May they have the unity of your Spirit as they pray, think and discuss who will lead St John's and Holy Trinity to fulfil the purposes you have for your church at Penge.

We pray your blessing over Penge. Holy Spirit, cause our streets to be safe, make this a place of peace and community. We pray over shops and businesses that you would prosper them, over families that you would support and strengthen them, over people who are isolated or struggling that you would bring them the help they need. We pray that your goodness will flow through Penge and that this place will become a community that values the good things you give to us.

Lord it is sad to see increasing numbers of knife attacks returning to London with dozens of stabbings and 20 killed so far this year. We pray again Lord for you to find a way out of this darkness. Thank you for how you have been the answer for so many who have been in gangs and we pray in communities around London your church will offer a way out for so many young lives caught in this cycle of destruction. Give wisdom and inspiration to our government, the mayor, police and community groups to find a solution.

We remember so much of the world is still in the grip of the pandemic. Thank you Lord for the agreement among the G7 countries to make 1 billion vaccines available to poorer countries. We pray for a commitment from them that they would keep their promises. It is estimated 11 billion are needed and so in your mercy Lord we ask we will do more and do it more quickly.

We pray for countries where people are oppressed like North Korea, Eritrea and Saudi Arabia and places of the world in conflict like Yemen, Syria and Ethiopia. Lord as we meet in freedom and safety this morning help us not to take our freedom for granted. Please Lord help us to value the freedom, the peace and safety and the time and opportunity you have given us, to know you better and love you more. Give us a heart and a hunger and your love for people to help them to know your salvation for themselves.

A Prayer of David:

"Praise be to you Lord, the God of our father Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Yours Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour. For everything in heaven on earth is yours. Yours Lord is the kingdom you are exalted as head overall. Wealth and honour come from you. You are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now our God we give you thanks and praise your glorious name." (1 Chronicles 29: 10 - 13)

**Amen**

Thank you for listening, and God Bless.