

### Welcome

Welcome to worship with the Ashbourne Methodist Church and circuit. This morning we will be continuing our theme of “giving”.

Today, we’re going to focus on “Sacrificial Giving”, and our hymns, prayers and thoughts will all reflect this theme.



### Call to Worship

John 3: 16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

### Prayer of Approach

Heart-stirring God,  
You know each of us by name  
and day by day we discover your favour afresh.  
Your love is new every morning.  
Your Presence remains with us,  
whether we are called to travel or need to stay put.  
You are our rest-giver and the source of our peace.  
We marvel that you choose to be gracious to us.  
We are touched and humbled by the mercy You extend.

We ask You to stir our hearts and teach us Your ways so that we who belong to You may know more of You.

Show us Your glory. Open our eyes to it, stretching in beauty over the face of the earth, shining in the face of Christ Jesus and smiling in the faces of every life lighted by Your Spirit, so that we and all Your people may give You glory and worship You in Spirit and in Truth. Amen  
(prayer inspired by Exodus 33 vv. 12-23)

### Prayer of confession

(You can begin this prayer with your hands held shut)

Giving and forgiving God,  
You are rich in mercy and generous to all.  
Help us to see clearly the priorities, prejudices and anxieties in our lives.  
Help us to face honestly the injustice, greed and exploitation of the society in which we live.  
Forgive us when our concerns have been limited and we have behaved as if our lives and resources were ours to use as we wished.

Forgive us when we have failed to let Your big-heartedness open our hearts and hands.

(Open your hands)

Merciful God, give us the grace and courage to open our hearts and hands.

Shape our lives and use us for we belong to You.  
Amen

### Assurance of Forgiveness

Receive the riches of God’s mercy and grace.

Know beyond any doubt that You are loved and forgiven in Jesus.



### Hymn: I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
my hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people’s pain.  
I have wept for love of them.  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my words to them.  
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will send the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide  
till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them.  
Whom shall I send?

Our reading this morning is very familiar as a Christmas reading, but I’d ask you to listen to it as the story of people who invested immense

time and effort, and risked their own safety, in order to give gifts that honoured God.

### Matthew 2: 1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."



After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went

ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### Time to Reflect

Dolly Parton is one of the world's great singer songwriters- that's just a fact, and anyone who says anything different is wrong.

However, there is one song of hers that has troubled me for years. It's titled "the sacrifice", and the lyrics that bother me go like this:

*I was gonna be rich no matter how much it cost  
And I was gonna win no matter how much I lost  
All through the years I kept my eye on the prize  
You ask if it's worth the sacrifice*

And the point that troubles me is- is it, for most people, really a sacrifice if you end up rich and a winner? The answer is, well yes, if you count the things you've missed out on as having great value, but how many people listening to the song will pick up on that?

Making a sacrifice, giving sacrificially is a theme that turns up repeatedly in the bible. In my pocket concordance I quickly found 42 references to sacrifice in both old and new testament, so it's clearly an important topic. Why? And why should it matter to us today? What is sacrificial giving?

Samuel says "I will not offer to the Lord my God offerings that have cost me nothing". A sacrifice is an offering, a gift to God that costs us, it's meaningful and expensive- although not always in monetary terms.

Samuel knew this personally - he was himself, after all, a sacrifice to God. His mother Hannah had dedicated him to the service of the temple before he was born, and he knew what it cost her to give the child she loved so much to a role where she was barely involved in his life.

From the earliest development of religious laws in the bible there was a requirement for sacrificial giving- most often a sacrifice of an animal. It was set up as a way for people to ask God for forgiveness for sin.

It offered a substitute for the debt that was owed to God, to pay the penalty for individual wrong doing and through the sacrifice establish a just relationship with God. The book of Leviticus teems with laws regarding the nature of different sacrificial giving and when, and how, they should be given.

However, this is not the sacrifice that we are called to make.

When Jesus offered himself on the cross, the sacrifice of God by God, the very nature of sacrificial giving changed for all time.



We are no longer instructed to make sacrifice in order to establish a relationship with God, but, if we try to love as he first loved us, if we try to live as a follower of Christ, if we follow in his path, sacrificial giving in a new form becomes an inevitable part of that life.

We are asked to be living sacrifices. To give ourselves to God's purpose, not to establish a relationship with God, or as repayment for what

we've done wrong, but as a reflection of the love we have received from God.

We can see the development of this form of sacrificial giving in the reading we heard earlier. The wise men made great personal sacrifices to deliver the gifts to the infant Jesus. It wasn't the cost of the gifts themselves, so much as the cost and danger of the journey, the political difficulties and hazards of their encounter with Herod, and, essentially, their behaviour in giving over control of their lives to the task that God set them.

So what sacrifices are we asked to make for Christ?

Our sacrifices may be about giving up something as often as giving something.

We may be prompted to sacrifice our privacy in order to speak a word of witness.

We may be asked to sacrifice a relationship that is dragging us into behaviour that is hurting ourselves or other people.

We may be asked to sacrifice an addiction, despite the pain that brings us, in order to move closer to the life that God wants for us.

We may be asked to give our time and our thoughts to God, to spend time in prayer rather than in pursuit of profit.

We may be drawn to spend time, energy and money for the service of God instead of on ourselves.

These are all examples of sacrificial giving. As the book of common prayer used to say "here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee".

We give ourselves as Christ's hands and feet on earth.

We give ourselves over to God's control, God's decisions and wants.

We give ourselves to a way of life that benefits us away from paths of self destruction that we might be set on.

We give ourselves at personal cost, to try to live the life of following Christ.

So once we give sacrificially, does it work? Do sacrifices inevitably lead to success in our endeavours?

Sometimes they do. We give our time and our energy to a project and it is a complete success. Many people are helped and there's joy.

Sometimes we may not see an immediate success, but we know, deep down, that the work we are doing will be beneficial in the long run.

Sometimes, our sacrifice comes to nothing- the project comes to an end, no-one turns up to the youth group meeting, staying off the alcohol doesn't last. We may feel we have failed.

But sacrificial giving does not fail. We honour Christ in our attempts and our love is not measured by the results we achieve.

As Dolly Parton says in a different song:

*try to be the first one up the mountain  
And try to be the first to touch the sky  
And try to be one that makes a difference  
Try to put your fear and doubt aside  
So try each day to try a little harder  
And if you fall, get up again and try*

God does not measure our love by the amount of money we raise or the number of people we had at lunch club. Our love is not defined by the statistics, but by our willingness to exert ourselves and make that sacrifice in the first place.

We are called to give of ourselves sacrificially, as we are called to follow Christ.

We are called to try to live the life that Christ has achieved for us, as St Paul tells us:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Amen.

### Prayers

Help us to remember that we can't find the words, You listen to our hearts and Your Spirit pleads for us in sighs too deep to be spoken. Lover of Justice, we hold before You the peoples of the world. Establish equity and grant wisdom. Strong God, we hold before You the church through the world and our own churches. Strengthen hearts and renew vision.



Merciful one, we hold before You those we know  
in need. Reach out with healing and restoration,  
encircle in comfort and care.

Listening God, refresh our sense of Your Presence  
and strengthen and guide us day by day, until with  
all Your beloved people we see You face to face in  
Your Kingdom. Amen

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

*Our Father .....*

**Hymn:** Dear Lord and Father of Mankind  
Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways:  
re clothe us in our rightful mind;  
in purer lives your service find,  
in deeper reverence praise,  
in deeper reverence praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
beside the Syrian sea,  
the gracious calling of the Lord  
let us, like them, obey his word:  
'Rise up and follow me,  
rise up and follow me!'

O sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
when Jesus shared on bended knee  
the silence of eternity  
interpreted by love,  
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all  
our words and works that drown  
the tender whisper of your call,  
as noiseless let your blessing fall

as fell your manna down,  
as fell your manna down.

Drop your still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of your peace,  
the beauty of your peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
your coolness and your balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,  
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,  
O still small voice of calm,  
O still small voice of calm!

### **Blessing**

Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts,  
let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;  
whatever you do, in word or deed,  
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus:  
and  
the

may



blessing of God  
the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit  
be upon you, now and always. Amen.

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