

COMMUNITY WORSHIP SERVICE, JULY 28, 2024, MIDDLEBURGH, NY

Link to the video [Community Worship Service 2024 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Introduction

The prayers & Scripture we are using come from prayers for the week of prayer for Christian Unity put together by a group of Catholics & Protestants in Burkina Faso, a country in Southwest Africa which borders Ghana, among other countries. At this time in that part of the world Christians gather the way we do today at the risk of their lives because of terrorism & racism.

The service begins with an African tradition of sharing water. This simple ritual expresses welcome, hospitality and fellowship. After the visitor has been refreshed, conversation can begin and the purpose of the gathering can unfold. We will share water from a common cup among representatives of the different faith traditions of Middleburgh as a sign of unity & a desire for peace. In Burkina Faso, they use a “calabash,” a hollowed out gourd. We will use a glass goblet used for the celebration of communion.



The “Message”

♪ Love, love, love, love; children this is your call.

Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves us all ♪.

That simple song – the Love Round - sums up the whole message of the Scripture we have just heard. I could stop here and it would be enough. But I’m not going to stop – I need to say more about the message of the Hebrew Torah and the Gospel of Jesus.

When you hear the command to Love your neighbor as yourself, what do you think of? Love your neighbor the way you love yourself?

We must love ourselves as well as our neighbor?

Both are certainly true, but I don’t think that’s enough. Many years ago, I was visiting a high school class taught by a good friend who is Jewish. One of his students asked me an impossible question, “*What do you think is the biggest problem in the world today?*” I prayed my favorite prayer in my mind, “**HELP!**” paused for the Spirit to answer and then I said, “*The biggest problem I see is that people don’t love themselves.*” Today I would add, “*That we don’t allow God to love us enough.*”

I believe the Jewish interpretation of the command to love our neighbor goes deeper. The Rabbi who is the founder of Hasidism, the Ba’al Shem Tov, translates the Hebrew: “*Love your neighbor who is exactly like yourself.*” He doesn’t mean that we are identical, but that we are members of one human race at a deeper level than all our differences.

He goes on to say “*When we love our fellow humans as ourselves, we are actually loving the Holy One, for every person is part of God.*”

But Jesus goes even further and deeper. His command, “*Love one another as I have loved you,*” means “*Love your neighbor as I love **both of you.***”

Then he tells the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. But we can miss the meaning because it’s so familiar. There are **seven** characters in the story, not counting the lawyer, each of them reflecting a part of myself, a part of each of us.

There's the person in the ditch, the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, the innkeeper, and the donkey, the Samaritan's his beast of burden,. Who are you in the parable? I've been all of them.

It's too easy to say, I want to imitate the Samaritan, who represents Christ and his Father in the parable. That is, of course, the answer Jesus gives to the lawyer when he says, *"Go and do likewise."*

It's more difficult when we hear the message as a call to love the robbers, those who beat us up and oppress those we love, or the hypocritical priest & Levite who are blind to the violence & oppression right in front of them.

It's not as easy to love our neighbor when we are called to imitate the donkey who carries the weight of human need, or the innkeeper who welcomes the stranger who is different, from a different country, with a different sexual orientation or speaks a foreign language. What is **most** difficult is to love our neighbor who makes themselves my enemy, & even to admit that I can imagine doing the things I condemn in others, even if I never actually act it out.

The message of this parable is a call to see each other, and the rest of the human family as people who are more like us than different from us. It is to resist the temptation to de-humanize those who are different, as is so often done in war and during political campaigns.

What would our families, our neighborhoods, our state, our nation or our world look like if more of us saw each other as members of one human family, as people who are exactly like us in the basic reality of their humanity? What would our world look like if we believed the last phrase of the song we began with, "God loves us all."

♪ **Love, love, love, love; children this is your call.**

Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves us all ♪.

Conclusion – before the sprinkling

As a final benediction we will be sprinkled with the water that was shared at the beginning to recall the Baptism we share as disciples of Christ.

May this water bless us with life and remind us to love one another as Christ loves us.

SONGS AND PRAYERS DURING THE SERVICE

Love is the Water

You say your heart's been turned to stone
You say you wanna be left alone
You say love only made you weep and moan
Well, let me tell you something that you know in your bones.

Love is the water that wears down the rock
Love is the water that wears down the rock.
Love is the power that won't be stopped
Love is the water that wears down the rock!

You say your soul is like a dry riverbed Stopped waiting for the water long ago, you said
You better pray all night for the rain instead Love comes like a tidal wave, over your head.

Love is the water that wears down the rock...

You say waiting for love takes too long Dulls a sharp mind, weakens the strong
Well, you may be right, but you may be wrong Cause love can make a mountain come tumbling
down.

Love is the water that wears down the rock...

The river washed over every woman and man Feet in the gravel, and mud in your hands
Nothing can stand against love's command Every boulder turns into a grain of sand.

Love is the water that wears down the rock... [© Pat Victor [Tell A Tale Music, BMI]

Link to video [Bing Videos](#)

Welcome & Sharing of Water

Call to Worship:

We are gathered as brothers & sisters to pray for the visible unity of all Christians.
At the heart of our worship is the story of the Good Samaritan where we hear the divine call to
love God & to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Praise to you Lord for you have poured out your love into our hearts so that we never lose hope.
You free our lives from fear because of your love & heal our wounded & injured hearts. Praise to
you for all the women & men who sow seeds of love & hope for their neighbors around the
world.

Song: Bind Us Together

Bind us together, Lord; Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord; Bind us together with love.

There is only one God, there is only one King.
There is only one body; that is why we can sing:

Bind us together, Lord ...

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

Bind us together, Lord ... [Words and music by Bob Gillman, 1977 Thankyou Music]

Link to Bind Us Together [Bing Videos](#)

Prayer of Confession

Leader: We come before you now, O God, to confess our sins:

By seeking happiness without God & ignoring the command to love, we have turned away from God & from our neighbor. Our selfishness & our desire to possess & control separate us from God. **Pause** Merciful God: **All:** forgive & heal us.

Leader: When we accept ideologies that demean the humanity of others, we build walls of division, sow the seeds of hatred & violence & abandon the Lord's command to love one another. **Pause** Merciful God: **All:** forgive & heal us.

Leader: We have hardened our hearts & deceived ourselves. In our lack of compassion, we no longer see Jesus in those who are different from ourselves.

Pause Merciful God: **All:** forgive & heal us.

Leader: We fail to open our hearts & minds to the infinite & unconditional nature of God's love for all. By being closed to this love, the world is darkened by selfishness, violence, indifference & absence of meaning. **Pause** Merciful God: **All:** forgive & heal us.

Leader: God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom you sent in the fullness of time to redeem all creation, we ask you to have mercy on us, forgive us our sins & transform us by your Holy Spirit.

Amen

Gospel Reading Luke 10:25-37 [The Good Samaritan]

Message 🎵 **Love, love, love, love; children this is your call.**

Love your neighbor as yourself, for God loves us all 🎵.

Affirmation of Love : *inspired by 1 Cor 13*

Read antiphonally men alternating with women.

Men: I may speak in the languages of people & angels, but if I lack love,
I am simply a banging gong, a loud cymbal.

Women: I may have the gift of prophecy, understanding of all mystery & all knowledge;
I may have the fullness of faith that moves mountains;
but if I lack love, I am nothing.

Men: I may distribute all my goods to hungry people,
I may even deliver my body to the flames, but if I lack love, I gain nothing.

Women: Love demands patience. Love serves. It does not walk away. It is not jealous.
It does not brag. It does not seek its own interest. It is not irritable.
It does not hold a grudge.

Men: Love does not celebrate injustice but finds its joy in the truth.
It forgives all. It believes all. It hopes for all. It endures all.

Women: Love has no end. Prophecies? They will finish. Tongues?
They will come to an end. Knowledge? It will pass.

All: Faith, hope & love continue. The greatest of these is love.

Song: They'll Know We Are Christians

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

[Refrain] *And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand.
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand.
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

[Refrain] *And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride.

[Refrain] *And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.* [Link to the song on [Bing Videos](#)]

Prayers of Intercession

Leader: We have been invited to live the divine call to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. As we renew our commitment to this call, may this love strengthen our unity as Christians.

With all our hearts, we desire to dwell in God's love and to have the grace to love our neighbors as ourselves. God of boundless love, we pray that all people may come to know your unlimited mercy and believe in your desire to fill us with your infinite love.

Response: Fill us with your love! We are one in Christ.

Leader: We join our prayers to that of Jesus, who prayed for the unity of all who follow him. God of communion, we pray that we may work together for your greater glory and spread the Good News of salvation for all. **A: Fill us with your love! We are one in Christ. ...**

Leader: Our hearts are broken because of the confusion and division in our world. God, our healer, we who are scattered like sheep without a shepherd, ask you to gather us into one fold. Enliven us by your Spirit & send us again, two by two, to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. **A: Fill us with your love.! We are one in Christ. ...**

Leader: Our world is scarred by terror and violence. Millions are forced to leave their homes in search of refuge and safety. God of welcome, grant us the grace to risk embracing the stranger, tending their wounds and standing in solidarity with them. Strengthen our resolve to be kind and merciful and to act towards our sisters and brothers at all times as you do towards us.

A: Fill us with your love! We are one in Christ.

Leader: In our weakness and fear we know that we often pass by on the other side, turning away from those who need our help. God of power, despite our lack of charity, open our hearts to experience the length, width, height and depth of your love, so that we may love you more and love our neighbors as ourselves. **A: Fill us with your love! We are one in Christ.**

All: Lord Jesus, who prayed that all might be one, we pray to you for the unity of all Christians, and of all humanity, according to your will, according to your means. May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division, to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer [In Igbo and in English]

Benediction

Wade in the water

Link to Wade in the Water, sung by Kim & Reggie Harris with Magpie [Bing Videos](#)

Ministerial Team

Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM, Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM

Bethany Ministries

Father Tom Zelker

Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church

Pastor Jeff Kelley, Paul and Anne Ferenczy

Middleburgh Reformed Church

Pastor Mary Ellen Moore

Middleburgh United Methodist Church Warnerville United Methodist Church

Gallupville United Methodist Church

Pastor David Houck, Cheryl Cater, Carolyn Tompkins

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Matthew Coltrain

Huntersland United Methodist Church

Leader of Song Reggie Harris

Guest Participants Father Anthony Chibueze Onu