An Ideal World

Canonbie United & Liddesdale 23rd February 2014
Call to worship: Holy And Perfect

Hymn: CH4 201 Worship The Lord In The Beauty of Holiness

Approach: Imperfect Servants

Address: Perhaps The Day Will Come

Address: Get The Man Right

Hymn: CH4 710 I Have A Dream A Man Once Said

Reading(s):
- Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18
- Psalm 119:33-40
- Matthew 5:38-48

Hymn: CH4 263 God Of Freedom, God Of Justice

Intercession: In A Perfect World

Offering: Perfect Love

Hymn: CH4 702 Lord In Love And Perfect Wisdom

Sermon: An Ideal World

Hymn: CH4 238 Lord Bring The Day To Pass

Benediction: Building The Kingdom
Holy and perfect is the Lord
And he calls us in his way
Holy and perfect is the Lord
And he calls us here today
Holy and perfect is the Lord
Let us gather in praise
Let us offer our prayers
Let us lift up our voices
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;
Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Bring and adore Him—the Lord is His Name.

Low at His feet lay Thy burden of carefulness,
High on His heart He will bear it for thee;
Comfort thy sorrows and answer thy prayerfulness,
Guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter His courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou canst reckon as thine;
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to lay on His shrine.

These though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
He will accept for the Name that is dear,
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.
Approach

Imperfect Servants

Lord, we are fearfully and wonderfully made
We are your creation and you have made us well
You have given us strength in our bodies
You have given us love in our hearts
You have given us intelligence in our minds
You have put your Spirit in our hearts
Lord, we are fearfully and wonderfully made
We are your creation and you have made us well
We praise you and we bring ourselves before you
Aware that we have been far from perfect servants
We have turned our strength to acts of violence
We have fought and built weapons of war
We have turned our love away from others
We have hardened our hearts and become selfish
We have turned our intelligence to slyness
We have tricked others for our own gain
We have turned from your Spirit within us
And acted as if you were not there at all
We have been far from perfect servants
Forgive us Lord
Forgive us
Forgive these faults and the ones we bring before you

Fill the hearts of your imperfect servants
Help us to grow
Help our strength to grow in buiding your kingdom
Help our love to grow in caring for others
Help our intelligence to grow in meeting the needs of others
Help our souls to grow through the touch of your Spirit
This we ask through Jesus Christ
Our Lord and our saviour
Who offered hope to imperfect servants
And redemption for all who fall short
His own words of prayer we share now
It’s difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams and cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. It’s utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I’ll be able to realise them!

ANNE FRANK (1929-1945)

DIARY 15 JULY, 1944
There’s an old children’s address you may have heard. The story goes that to entertain his eight year old son while he wrote his sermon a minister cut out a map of the world from a book and cut it up to make a jigsaw. He thought, with all those countries that he didn’t know, his son would take ages to assemble the jigsaw. A few minutes later his son came into the study saying he’d done it. “That was very quick”, said his father.

“It was easy, “ said his son. “There was a picture of a man on the other side of the pieces. If I got the man right I got the world right”.
And so the minister got his sermon after all.

If it were just that simple, eh?
‘I have a dream’, a man once said,
where all is perfect peace;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
in freedom and in love
in freedom and in love.’

But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind
Christ sheds on humankind.

Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere;
God calls us now to pay the price
through struggles and through sacrifice
of standing for the right
of standing for the right.

So dream the dreams and sing the songs,
but never be content;
for thoughts and words don’t ease the pain:
unless there’s action, all is vain;
faith proves itself in deeds
faith proves itself in deeds.

Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
help us to do your will;
don’t let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace
uniting us in peace.
The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.
You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.
You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.
You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you. Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good. See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.
“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
God of freedom, God of justice,
God whose love is strong as death,
God who saw the dark of prison,
God who knew the price of faith:
touch our world of sad oppression
with your Spirit’s healing breath.

Rid the earth of torture’s terror,
God whose hands were nailed to wood;
hear the cries of pain and protest,
God who shed the tears and blood;
move in us the power of pity,
restless for the common good.

Make in us a captive conscience
quick to hear, to act, to plead;
make us truly sisters, brothers,
of whatever race or creed:
teach us to be fully human,
open to each other’s need.
Intercession

In A Perfect World

Lord we pray for a better world
May we be your builders

In a perfect world, Lord, there would be no pain
There would be no injustice, there would be no hate
There would be no hunger, there would be no lies
This world is not perfect, and we bring its needs to you

Lord we pray for a better world

In a perfect world, Lord, there would be no sorrow
No loneliness loss or hurt
In this world we pray for those who are lonely
Because friends and family are gone; because they are forgotten
In this world we pray for those who suffer loss
Through bereavement, or the breaking of relationships
In this world we pray for those who are hurting
Hurts of the body through sickness, misuse or age,
Hurts of the mind through stress, or mental illness
This world is not perfect and we think on those in pain

Lord we pray for a better world

In a perfect world, Lord, there would be no injustice
No inequality, exploitation or exclusion
In this world we pray for those who are poor
Who huddle under coats at night and feed their kids from their mouths
In this world we pray for those who are exploited
Working in unsafe and unhealthy conditions for a pittance
In this world we pray for those who are oppressed
Because their words are troublesome to those in power
This world is not perfect and we think of the victims of greed

Lord we pray for a better world

In a perfect, Lord, there would be no hunger
No want for the basic needs of life
In this world we pray for those who are hungry
When there is more than enough food for all
In this world we pray for those who are homeless
When rising property prices are deemed a sign of success
In this world we pray for those driven into indignity
Begging on the street while the world hurries by
This world is not perfect and we think on those who are easily forgotten

**Lord we pray for a better world**

In a perfect world, Lord, there would be no hate
No war, bigotry or violence
In this world we pray for those caught up in war
As combatant or civilian
In this world we pray for those who are spat upon
Because of our labels of race, creed or culture
In this world we pray for those who are beaten
Sometimes by people close to them
This world is not perfect and we think on those who are victims

**Lord we pray for a better world**

In a perfect world, Lord, there would be no lies
There would be no comfortable myths - only truth
May we face down the world's lies and speak your truth
That those in pain can be healed by love
That those in need can be fed
That those who are exploited deserve justice
That this world needs peace

**Lord we pray for a better world**
Offering

Perfect Love

In perfect love you formed us
You gave us life and light
You surrounded us with wonders
You filled our world with beauty
And we thank you
In perfect love you empowered us
With though and creativity
With compassion and understanding
With language and strength
And we thank you
In perfect love you sent your Son
To teach of us your love
To die alongside each of us
To rise to new life to give hope to us
And we thank you
We thank you for the perfect love that has given us so much
In thanksgiving we bring these offerings
We ask you to bless them and to bless us
We ask you to rededicate them and to rededicate us
To working your will
To rebuilding this world
In the light of your perfect love
Lord, in love and perfect wisdom
times and seasons you arrange,
working out your changeless purpose
in a world of ceaseless change;
you have formed our ancient nation,
guiding it through all the days,
to unfold in it your purpose
to your glory and your praise.

To our shores remote, benighted,
barrier of the western waves,
tidings in your love you sent us,
tidings of the cross that saves.
Saints and heroes strove and suffered
here your gospel to proclaim;
we the heirs of their endeavour,
tell the honour of their name.

You maintain your ageless purpose
every change and chance above;
still your holy Church is bearing
witness to your changeless love.
Grant us vision, Lord, and courage
to fulfil your work begun;
in the Church and in the nation,
King of kings, your will be done.
I have a Mister Men tie at home - do you know about the Mister Men? Mine is Mister Perfect. My mum and dad gave it to me for Christmas one year and you know that when your family give you a tie that labels you as “Mister Perfect” they don’t mean it in a literal or analytical way. I have my imperfections. If you ask my wife I’m sure she could give you a list. A fairly extensive list, and it might take some time. I may be many things but I’m not perfect. But then again, nobody is. At least, I’ve met a lot of people over the years, and I’m pretty sure I’ve never met a perfect one.

So what is Jesus on about here? “Be perfect,” he says. And just in case we’re not clear about what he means by perfect, he ups the ante a little further. “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”. That is, be as perfect as God. Now that’s a big ask. You might imagine those listening to him as he taught suddenly raising their eyebrows and thinking, “What? Did he just say that? That we’re meant to be as perfect as God?”

Because nobody’s perfect. The world that we live in isn’t perfect and we are all - to one extent or another - shaped by the world into which we are born. We are shaped by the attitudes that surround us as we grow and sometimes they can involve violence and aggression. Sometimes they can involve selfishness and greed. We are shaped by the way society organises itself - by patterns of wealth and work. We live in a “competitive” economy, and sometimes that can lead to rivalries and to a “devil-take-the-hindmost” attitude infecting the way we think about those around us. The fact that we have to work to earn our wealth can lead us to want to hold onto it without regard to the needs of those around us - indeed, we can sometimes be encouraged to regard the poverty and need of others as marks of their failure - their failure to compete, or to work hard enough. And so in turn we can become violent or aggressive. We can become self-centred and greedy. Imperfect.

Nobody’s perfect. The world that we live in isn’t perfect and we are all - to one extent or another - shaped by the world into which we are born. We all, I
suppose, meet with aggression when we are young. We are taught - especially if you’re a boy - that you’ve got to stand up for yourself; that you have to get your own back. And sometimes that tendency to meet force with force, to get your revenge, filters its way into whole groups or gangs, and sometimes into whole nations and we find war and other armed conflicts breaking out.

So we gather, every Sunday, to bring before God a world that is far from ideal - a world where people are victims of violence and aggression, where people are ground down by poverty and exploitation, where mothers mourn their sons and daughters lost on the battlefields of countless human conflicts. We hold up this far from ideal world to God and ask him to repair it. We hold up those broken by this far from ideal world to God and ask him to heal them. Why? Do we imagine God doesn’t know? Do we imagine he hasn’t noticed how broken things and people are? No. Part of the point of offering our prayers of intercession to God is that we are offering ourselves as part of the answer, and it’s tempting to recoil from that and say, “What me? How can I play a part in God dealing with the imperfections of the world when I am. myself, so imperfect?” One can feel so inadequate - even if one has one’s Mister Perfect tie on.

But there’s something brilliant here that we so easily miss. We come to God knowing the world we live in is not ideal. That implies that we have a concept of an ideal world - that we can imagine a world that is better than this one. We can imagine a world where people don’t suffer want and hunger - where everyone gets enough to eat and where no one has to sleep out in the cold. We can imagine a world where no one lifts a hand in anger against another and where the guns fall silent forever. We can imagine a world where scores are not settled by bloodshed and anger. This is a world none of us as ever known, but I put it to you that that world can shape us too, and as surely as the one we have been born into. That is the mark of God upon us - that we have ideals.

Our ideals are important. Without that transcendent idea of what the world could be - of what the world is, somehow, meant to be - it would be all too easy to become cynical. I fear, as the idea of a transcendent God and Heaven slip from the forefront of our society’s life then we may see exactly that - a society becoming more and more cynical and simply accepting poverty, hunger and homelessness, accepting conflict and violence as simply part of the way things are.
Whatever the case, we can conceive of an ideal world. That, I say again, is God’s mark on humanity; it is part of what makes us his children, made in his image. Part of what we are here for is to be part of God’s answer to all those prayers we offer every week that reach for that ideal world - that reach for God. And this is the genius of Jesus’s teaching this morning - be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

Before he hits us with that whammy of an injunction Jesus sets out what an ideal person would be - someone who doesn’t respond with anger and violence when they are provoked; someone who gives generously to those in need - gives enough to ensure they have what they need to get by. Someone who loves those who set themselves up as his enemies and cares about them.

Is that you? Is that me? Maybe not. Nobody’s perfect. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t strive to be perfect. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t try to be more forgiving and more gentle in our dealings with others. It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try to be more generous with what we have and try to make sure that folk don’t go hungry and that people do have a roof over their heads. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t try to live in peace with those who threaten us and hurt us, that we shouldn’t love and care for those we might otherwise call our enemies. It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t reach for the ideal of humanity that Christ offers us in this teaching - be perfect, even as God is perfect.

In an ideal world there would be no hunger or homelessness. Thing is, all that’s stopping that is human imperfection - there’s more than enough food in the world and more than enough material to build homes for everyone. In an ideal world there would be no hatred and no war. Thing is, all that’s stopping that is human imperfection - our failure to see one another as brothers and sisters meant to love one another. In an ideal world there would be no slavery and there would be no oppression. Thing is that all that’s stopping that is human imperfection - our desire to have power over one another.

That’s why Jesus’s challenge is so important. We have before us an ideal, not only of what the world could be, but of what the people who might live in such an ideal world would be like. Christ enjoins us to reach for that ideal - to reach for that ideal of what we could be and maybe, through the grace of God, we could play our part in bringing the world a little closer to being ideal too.
Lord, save us from cynicism. Keep before us the goal of being all that we can be through the example of your Son, Jesus Christ. Keep before us the vision of a world transformed by your love, flowing through us.
Lord, bring the day to pass
when forest, rock and hill,
the beasts, the birds, the grass,
will know thy finished will:
when man attains his destiny
and nature its lost unity.

Forgive our careless use
of water, ore and soil
the plenty we abuse
supplied by others’ toil:
save us from making self our creed,
turn us towards each other’s need.

Give us, when we release
creation’s secret powers,
to harness them for peace,
our children’s peace and ours:
teach us the art of mastering
which makes life rich and draws death’s sting.

Creation groans, travails,
futile its present plight,
bound—till the hour it hails
God’s children born of light
who enter on their true estate.
Come, Lord: new heavens and earth create.
Fed by God’s Holy Spirit be built up by his grace
And go now to build up one another
With supporting love
With forgiving grace
With strengthening love
And build up all those around you
Play your part in the building of God’s kingdom
For you are children of God