

TORRIDGE METHODIST CIRCUIT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2020 - Issue 104

Welcome to Edition Number 104

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This is the 2nd Special Edition of the Newsletter, which we hope you will find useful during this period of uncertainty & distress in our homes, families, communities, nation & the wider world.

Any comments or items you wish to share, please contact the editor, Dave Watson by e-mail; phone 01237 451437 or to 6 Greenings Road, Buckland Brewer, Bideford, EX39 5LU.

As well as the Circuit Facebook page – **Torrige Methodist Circuit**, we have a private Facebook Group where we care share thoughts, prayers & other material on **Torrige Methodist Circuit Group**. If you wish to join please push the Join button & I can add you.

Please pray for our Ministers, Rob Blackhall, Andrew Vidamour & Lynne Burgon and all involved in the varied life of the Circuit; for those connected to the various Chapels & the communities in which they live & work.

From Rev Rob Blackhall – Superintendent Minister

John Wesley liked order. In his early days the Holy Club, of which he was so central, mapped out their days, so that they would never be idle. Hence the nickname, Methodists. As the movement grew Wesley was forever producing rules and guidance. As early as 1743 he wrote a pamphlet, "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies".

It had three rules

1. Do No Harm
2. Do Good
3. Stay in love with God

It seems to me that they are not bad guidelines for the current times in which we live.

1. **Do no harm.** Wesley continued, avoid evil, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as..(and a list follows).
One of the issues going forward in this Covid-19 crisis is how the transmission of the virus is going to be minimised. I fear that there are going to be some restrictions on us all, in a variety of forms, for some time to come. If we assume that we are carries of the virus, then we can make a judgment as to our behaviour and plans. "Do no Harm". In other words, to not spread the virus. We are going to have to alter how we live and how we do Church. Somethings which we have taken for granted and done as a matter of course are going to have to be considered carefully. It may alter what we do and how we do; but in that we shall be seeking to serve each other and keep each other safe.

The current slogan is **Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives**. What a job those in the NHS and in social care, are doing, under severe difficulties. Indeed, so many who seek to serve us, from refugee collectors to those working in our supermarkets and shops. Society will have to value the contribution of people differently when all this is over. No more can we value people by the number of 0's in their pay-packets. That will simply not do.

2. Do Good

There has been an outpouring of Good, of neighbourliness and seeking to serve the common good. I hope all that will not be lost when the current lock-down and restrictions come to an end. It matters how we look after each other, and how we seek to support the most vulnerable in our society. It matters that we support each other.

Doing good has always been part of our Christian tradition, so much so that it almost goes without saying; although the obvious does have to be said.

Wesley again:-

*“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”*

3. Stay in love with God

By this Wesley mean attending upon all the ordinances of the Church, the public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; Family and private prayer; Searching the Scriptures; Fasting or abstinence. Some of those might be easier than others.

Of course, it has been odd not going to Church, not meeting with our friends and not singing our favourite hymns. My impression is that over the last few weeks that among us there has been more Bible reading, and more praying. Long may that continue. The Church buildings have been closed, but the Church is alive and well; and as it should be, out in the community, serving the needs of others.

I do not know how long we are going to have to live with the current restrictions, nor what our pattern of Church life will look like after; although I suspect it will be different, and that might be a considerable challenge to us all.

Stay in Love with God – for without a shadow of doubt God stays in love with you.

1. Do No Harm
2. Do Good
3. Stay in love with God

May God continue to bless us and grant us his grace in living out our Christian lives.
God bless - Rob

Sabbatical

As you know I was due to have a sabbatical in May, June and July. That has now been postponed; and will be re-arranged at the appropriate time. More news as and when.

BIBLE READINGS IN MAY

For those of you who do not have a Prayer Diary (always a good publication to aid our private devotions) here are the readings for the month of May, with expanded readings for the Sundays.

Day	Reading	Psalm	Hymn (Singing the Faith)
Fri 1	John 14:1-4	139	248 I heard the voice of Jesus
Sat 2	Acts 4:23-31	39	682 God of grace and God of glory
Sun 3	John 10:1-10	23	736 In heavenly love abiding

Mon 4	Acts 4:32-35	33:1-12	686 Jesus, Lord, we look to thee
Tues 5	Acts 5:12-32	33:13-22	388 Let every Christian pray
Wed 6	Acts 7:44-50	34:1-10	53 How shall I sing that majesty
Thurs 7	Acts 7:54-60	34:11-22	683 Great is our redeeming Lord
Fri 8	Acts 8:14-17	42	383 Holy Spirit, gift bestower
Sat 9	Acts 8 :26-40	43	391 O breath of life,
Sun 10	John14:1-14	31	252 Jesus the Lord said
Mon 11	Acts 9:1-20	37:1-11	556 Just as I am
Tue 12	Acts 9:36-43	37:12-29	357 Jesus – the name high over all
Wed 13	Acts 10:34-43	37:30-40	348 He is Lord, he is Lord
Thurs 14	Acts 1:15-26	15	664 Lord, you call us to your service
Fri 15	Acts 10:44-48	38:1-8	678 Come, all who look to Christ
Sat 16	Acts 11:1-18	38:9-22	397 The Spirit lives to set us free
Sun 17	John 14:15-21	66	372 Come down, O Love divine
Mon 18	Acts13:1-12	40:1-10	397 The Spirit lives to set us free
Tues 19	Acts 13:13-41	45	463 Deep in the shadows
Wed 20	Acts 14:8-20	46	727 God in his love for us
Thurs 21	Luke 24:44-53	47	300 Hail the day that sees him rise
Fri 22	Acts 16:1-15	44:1-8	660 Called by Christ
Sat 23	Acts 16:16-34	4	94 To God be the glory
Sun 24	John 17:1-11	68:1-10, 32-35	315 We sing the praise of Jesus
Mon 25	Galatians 4:1-7	130	454 Where shall my wondering
Tues 26	Acts 17:15-34	48:1-8	111 Lord of the boundless curves
Wed 27	Acts 18:1-16	48:9-13	416 There's a wideness
Thurs 28	Acts 19:1-20	50:1-15	412 See how great a flame aspires
Fri 29	Acts 20:17-24	51	378 Father of everlasting grace
Sat 30	Acts 20:25-38	52	692 Your hand, O God, has guided
Sun 31	John 20:19-23	104	371 Breathe on me, Spirit of Jesus

Daily reflections and questions to ponder may be found at
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/>

Also, you can find a pray of the day at
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/prayer-of-the-day/>

WHEN YOU HAVE READ THE PASSAGE FOR THE DAY WHY NOT SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH A FRIEND?

From Revd Andrew Vidamour

Dear Friends,

On Sunday 31st May, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, when we remember the God's gift of the Holy Spirit to a group of disheartened and fearful followers of Jesus some forty days after the Resurrection (Acts 2: 1-11). We find this described as that 'there appeared to them flames like tongues of fire distributed among them and coming to rest on each one' (Acts 2: 3).

Now this is a symbolic, poetic way of saying that the activity of God can be like fire in our lives, and there are at least two important aspects to that reality. One is that fire is destructive, as anyone will testify who has seen bushfires raging out of control in Australia, for example, even on television. Vast areas of land can be ruined by a single match or spark.

It is not surprising, then, that one of the most important safety lessons for a child is 'not to play with matches', and likewise we are extra careful to keep small children safe if they are near an open fire. From a very young age, we need to have a respect for fire and the damage it can do very quickly to people, buildings and the natural world.

So how can God's Spirit be like fire? Well, St. John tells us that the Spirit 'leads us into all truth' (John 16: 13), and this includes the truth about ourselves which, of course, is not always as we would like it to be. We all have aspects of our personalities and ways of behaviour we would perhaps rather ignore, but, through prayer, God's love can help to burn these away, to purify us just as base metal is purged of its impurities by fire.

And that process may leave another kind of fire burning more creatively in our hearts and lives, a flame which not only continues to purify us of our cruelty and greed and fear (for instance), but which also may warm our whole beings so that we can love others more fully. In that way, the fire of destruction may help to foster new energy for that creative fire of God's Spirit which may never go out as it makes us more Christ-like, as it did those friends of Jesus so long ago.

The Holy Spirit calls us to seek peace and justice, and I draw your attention to Christian Aid Week (10th-16th May). Clearly, we cannot mark this in the usual way this year, but you may want to consider supporting Christian Aid anyway at this time, and in coming days, whether it be through campaign support, financial giving or prayer, or more than one of these. Sadly, the needs Christian Aid seeks to meet continue alongside the challenges we face with the Coronavirus outbreak here, and any help we can give does make a difference.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Andrew Vidamour

From Revd Lynne Burgon

Ministerial musings....

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

The chapels may have been closed, the physical meeting together forbidden but Easter was still celebrated in our communities and around the world. Christians are responding to the challenge to BE Church despite the lockdown restrictions and I for one am proud to be part of this global movement. Christ really is visible in his people in many different ways. Thank you to those who have accepted the challenge and are working hard to ensure our communities know the love of God. I have heard of many initiatives taking place, placing palm crosses in windows, sharing ideas and testimony on social media, listening to public services on TV, radio and the internet and of course praying and reading the Bible.

I hope you have found the newsletter a useful resource too, we all have different skills and not everyone in our congregations and communities are computer literate and that is ok too! I trust that as we are sustained and suitably equipped by God's message of His faithfulness and love for us, we can equally show God's grace to others by our own acts of kindness, service and by simply loving our neighbours. Again there are many examples, from people shopping for others, phone calls to people who live alone, the sharing of scarce products with others and especially all those key workers continuing to provide their services even though it puts them at risk. I wouldn't want to single out any service as more important than the others, because each of us have a part to play – even if it is shielding ourselves from others to stop the spread of the virus. Without the majority of people agreeing to follow governmental advice the situation would be much worse.

However, I'm aware that the measures put in place are hard for us to bear. I have good days and bad days, today I am feeling quite buoyant and am able to be encouraged about the future, but other times the day drags and it is all too easy to sink into sadness and self-pity.

As Christians we turn to the Bible to help us, and the most used book of the Bible in times of trouble is the Psalter – the Psalms. I guess the psalms are so loved because they speak into the human condition in all its breadth. From sadness to joy, fear and comfort, all our feelings are in there. Last month we were urged to read Psalm 90 – often attributed to be a prayer of Moses. This psalm reminds us of God’s faithfulness to his people throughout the generations, it gives us hope that the time we are living in will not last forever, and that God’s unfailing love will see us through. I offer some pointers to where to look for some of the feelings you might be experiencing at this time;

When you are afraid.... Try Psalm 55/56

When low in mood..... Try Psalm 40

When broken-hearted... Try Psalm 137/147

When doubting..... Try Psalm 53

An aid to prayer..... Try Psalm 66

I’m sure you will have your favourites too – why not share your thoughts with others on how the psalms have helped you in the past. Many have been put to music over the years too, maybe your favourite psalm is also a hymn – share that instead! However you use the psalms, I hope they will be a blessing to you and others in these strange and unpredictable times.

God Bless, Rev Lynne Burgon

SUNDAY 3rd MAY 2020 (FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER)

Call to Worship: ‘Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!’

Hymn: ‘All people that on earth do dwell’ (HAP 1 / STF 1)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of grace and glory, we give you thanks and praise that your love for us and for all people and for the whole of creation is like that of a good shepherd: generous, patient, kind and forgiving. You never give up on anyone, and you do not allow us to be lost to your endless mercy in time or eternity.

Holy God, we praise you that in Jesus you show us the extent of your love, and that in him we may find safety, as the gate to the sheepfold, as well as the care of a shepherd who is completely trustworthy and true.

And we bring our praise for the promise of Easter that your mercies in Jesus will always be there for us, holding us safe and helping us to grow in love.

Yet we offer too our confession, remembering before you those ways in which we have denied your love by our words or actions, or by what we have failed to say and do.....

(Time of personal confession)

And so we rest in your forgiveness, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Psalm 23 (HAP 842 / STF 805)

Hymn: ‘The King of love my shepherd is’ (HAP 69 / STF 479)

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 2: 19-25

Bible Reading: John 10: 1-10

Hymn: ‘Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Bread’’ (HAP 137 / STF 252)

Reflection:

Recently, I saw a TV programme showing a shepherd in the Lake District rounding up his flock and travelling with them to his farm for shearing. The shepherd often had to be behind his sheep, whereas in the Middle East the sheep are often behind the shepherd. In any case, the shepherd places great value on each sheep, and gives them the unique sort of care they each need.

Just so, as our Good Shepherd, Jesus not only holds us all safe as his flock generally, whatever we experience, but will make sure that each one of us is held in God's love and care in our unique journeys. For Jesus speaks of himself as the gate of the sheepfold as well. We are called to be under-shepherds in the Church of Christ: what does or may this mean for you?

Silence

Hymn: 'I will sing the wondrous story' (HAP 223 / STF 323)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

Loving God, we give thanks for all the ways we know your loving care in our lives...
(Time of personal thanksgiving)

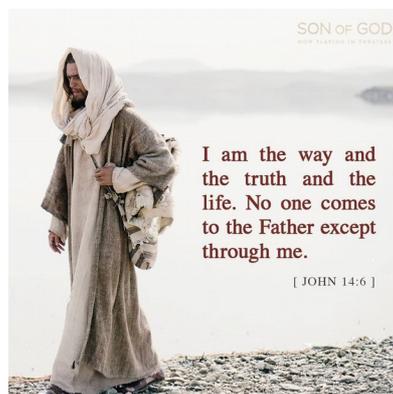
Gracious God, we pray for all who need the compassion of Jesus the Good Shepherd:
Those in pain of body, mind or spirit, including the many suffering from the coronavirus now;
Those who grieve for loved ones;
Those who are anxious for family and friends;
Those who are caring and serving sacrificially at this time;
Those fearful for the future;
Those in war-torn areas of the world;
Those known to us...
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Hymn: 'Christ is alive! Let Christians sing' (HAP 190 /STF 297)

The Blessing: 'May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make us perfect in all goodness so that we may do his will, and may he make of us what he would have us be through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest and remain with us and with all people, this Eastertide and always. Amen.'

HAP: Hymns and Psalms - STF: Singing the Faith

Sunday 10th May Easter 5



Call to Worship

Jesus said, I am the way – Come
Jesus said, I am the way and the truth – Come and receive
Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life – come, receive and respond

StF 346/HAP 455 Christ is the world's light (or MP 79 Christ whose glory fills the skies)

Prayer of Adoration

Lord, guide us that we may walk in your way, rejoice in your truth, and kept for ever in the life which you give, which is eternal; through him who lived and died and rose again for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Prayer of Confession

Forgive us, loving Lord, that we have strayed from your way.

Forgive us for the times our lives have not been shaped by your truth.

Forgive us for denying your life in us and in others, by the way we have lived.

In the name of Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray. AMEN

Acts 7:54-60 Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr.

Comment:

Stephen has just finished a controversial speech, his “defence” against the charge that he had been slandering Moses, the Law and the Temple. Here Stephen has a vision of heaven in which he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This is too much for the Sanhedrin, Jewish council, who rush at Stephen and stone him to death, presumably for blasphemy. As this is happening, Stephen prays for their forgiveness. And Saul, who became Paul, watched and approved.

**StF 248/ HAP 136/MP 275 I heard the voice of Jesus say
1 Peter 2:2-10**

Comment:

The first image in this passage concerns the new-born craving milk stressing not only the desire to be nourished by God, but also a return to a simpler life. The second image is of a cornerstone is backed up by quotes from Isaiah 8:14-15 and Psalm 118:22. They talk of a firm rock in the midst of storm and flood, and the power of God to lay the key stone even during war, and the overturning of every kind of security. Coming to Jesus, the living stone, leads to being built together into a spiritual house and that this becomes a place of worship.

We are currently living in such a storm; but God is still at work through Christ.

**StF 677/MP 73 Christ is made the sure foundation (or HAP 75 Christ, our King before creation)
John 14:1-14**

Comment:

We know these words so well, perhaps too well. Jesus is speaking immediately before his death, and explains that he and the Father are joined in a close relationship to one another, so close that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the father. So, Jesus can assure his disciples that they will not be left abandoned and that he himself is the way which they need to travel, he is both the means and route. A fuller life awaits them. He is life itself, even in the face of his own approaching death. He is the truth, the most complete and accurate truth, truth that he promised would, by its very nature, set them free. And he is the way – the way for them to be fully united with God.

Reflection:



What do you use to help you find the way?

How does it feel that Jesus has prepared a way and a place of each of us?

When are the most difficult times to recognise Jesus as the way?

StF 519/ MP 133 Father, I place into your hands (or HAP 549 Jesus, where'er thy people meet)

Intercessions

We pray for all who walk in the way of Christ, for the Church, locally and nationally, for all who reveal Christ's truth to us

We pray for all who are in positions of authority, especially with difficult choices to make in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic

We pray for all who seek to build up communities, who seek the common good. We pray for the NHS workers, for key workers, for all those working in service for our communities.

We pray for those who need our prayers this day...

We pray for ourselves.....

The Lord's Prayer

Offertory

Statement of Faith (Based on Psalm 31)

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; you do not let me be put to shame; You come quickly to rescue me. You, Lord, are my rock, my refuge, my strong fortress; You protect me, You guide me and lead me, You help me to steer clear of traps and dangers. I trust in you, Lord. My times are in your hands. You deliver me from my enemies. Your love for me is never ending; how great is your goodness, O Lord. It is stored up for those who fear you; You give it to all who trust in you. Praise be to the Lord! Love the Lord, all his people! Be strong and take heart all you who hope in the Lord.

StF 503/HAP 267/MP 449 Love Divine, all loves excelling

May God bless you, guide you and direct you.

May God bless you, give you strength and the assurance of his love.

May God bless you and fill your life with his presence – today and always. AMEN

The Grace

Sunday 17th May 2020

Introductory sentence

After his suffering Jesus presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1.3)

Call to worship

Spirit of truth, come close to us, unite us in the body of Christ. Enable us to worship you in Spirit and in truth. Help us to support and encourage one another in these difficult times, help us to love one another as we are loved by you. Spirit of truth, abide in us. Amen

Hymn - All for Jesus (HP 251/ STF 341/) (MP 13 All hail the power of Jesus name)

Prayer of Approach

Gracious God we come before you drawn by the power of your welcoming love. We come with our sorrows and our joys. We come with our expectations and our apprehensions. We come with what we have done and what we have failed to do. We come as we are, covered by your peace and love. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Father of love we are sorry that at times our love for you falters; we have wrong priorities; we overlook your guidance.

Oh God forgive us. **Forgive us and help us.**

Lord Jesus Christ, we are sorry for our selfishness; for the times we forget to worship you; for worshipping instead our selfish ambitions.

Oh God forgive us. **Forgive us and help us.**

Spirit of truth, we are sorry that we disregard your presence; when we fail to be stirred by you; when we fail to respond to the needs others.

Oh God forgive us. **Forgive us and help us.**

Turn our failings into strength and our weaknesses into opportunities for the sake of your Kingdom on earth. May the God of forgiveness show us His mercy, forgive us our sins and bring us to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn – And can it be that I should gain (HP216/ StF 345/MP 33)

First Reading/s – Act 17:22 – 31 and 1Peter 3:13 - 22

Hymn – Head of thy church whose Spirit fills (HP316) (StF 385/MP 241 Holy Spirit, we welcome you)

Gospel Reading – John 14.15-21

Reflection

In our gospel reading Jesus says '*Before long the world will not see me anymore but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live*' (NIV John 14.19)

What do you think Jesus means by this? Jesus did appear to his disciples following his death proving that he lives on. But how are we to understand the promise that because of that, the disciples will live? (*To understand the meaning, look at the preceding verses where Jesus makes certain promises to the disciples*).

Do you think the promises of Jesus to his disciples also apply to us today?

If yes, what do you understand we have to do (if anything) in order to obtain these promises for ourselves? (*The answers are all in the gospel text*)

Hymn – There's a spirit in the air. (HP 326/StF 398) (MP 614 Spirit divine)

Prayers for others

Take some time now to sit with God and think of the needs of others. God has placed on your heart situations and people who need his healing and guidance. Lift the situation/person and ask God to help. You might like to play some music as you do this or you may prefer to sit in silence. Complete this time of prayer by saying aloud the Lord's prayer in the format you are familiar with. Listen to the words as you say each line, sometimes we are so familiar with this prayer that we can overlook its impact.

Hymn – All things bright and beautiful (HP 330/StF 100/MP 23)

A sending out prayer

May the God of love reside in our hearts and minds.

May the God of peace rule our mind and our actions.

May the God of power act in our lives so others may see and believe.

May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all, this day and always. Amen

Ascension Day Prayer Meeting Thursday May 21st



Well friends, on the evening of May 21st we should have been meeting for a regular Circuit prayer meeting. We had planned the date carefully to coincide with Ascension day – because this day starts the ten days of the wave of global prayer called 'Thy Kingdom Come.'

Instead of meeting together physically we are instead going to be united spiritually as we pray in our individual homes. So I invite you to join in the service below, we normally start our prayer meetings at 7.30pm but feel free to adjust this to suit your prayer life. You may like to move to a place where you can be quiet, maybe light a candle or gaze at a picture or an object that brings you closer to God.

Call to worship...

The Father loves you, the Son loves you, the Spirit loves you. Come and show your love. Amen
'Be Still and know that I am God'

These words form part of a hymn that you may be familiar with. (StF18)

The words are based on Psalm 46 particularly verses 10-11. You may like to read those two verses slowly, as we prepare to meet with our Lord in prayer. Take time to just be still as you let the words of the hymn or the psalm sink into your mind and heart.

'The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our Fortress' (Ps46.11)

You don't need me to tell you how difficult life is for many people just now. We haven't lived through times like this before. Covid19 has brought global changes for everyone. A tiny virus has brought us to our knees. However, we are people of God – and we rejoice that God can and will bring good out of the situation we find ourselves in. But he asks each of us to play our part.

Prayer is something everyone can do. Take some time now to pray for the situations and people that you have been made aware of. Do not rush this, allow God to bring to your mind that which He wants you to pray for. It may be painful as you think and pray but be assured God will comfort you as you lay before Him the needs of others.

‘He lifted up his hands and Blessed them’

The set reading for Ascension day is Luke 24.44-53, you might like to read the verses now to familiarise yourself. The words that jumped out at me I have written above. At this auspicious time, when Jesus was going to leave them physically for the last time, he took the time to bless them first. Receiving a blessing is a very powerful thing. I have a book on my shelf here at home called ‘The Grace outpouring’ (Roy Goodwin ISBN978-1-84291-404-5). It tells the story of a retreat centre called ‘Ffald-Y-Brenin’ in Wales where amazing things happened when the community began to earnestly pray blessing on others. It’s well worth a read. So we come to a time where I encourage you to bless others.

We join together to begin the ten days of prayer called ‘Thy Kingdom Come’. The heart of this call to prayer is to bless others. We are urged to pray for five people who don’t have faith. To bless them with the knowledge of God’s love for them. To bring light into the darkness of their minds and to open their eyes to the knowledge of Jesus. And moreover to pray blessing on these five people for ten days. Take time to ask God to reveal to you these five people, let Him reveal those whose hearts he has already begun to soften. Then pray blessing upon them.

‘Shout to God with cries of joy’ (Ps47.1b)

The set psalm for Ascension day is Psalm 47 – and it is a psalm of joy and thankfulness. It acknowledges the sovereignty of our God. Amongst the pain and fear of this time, where death is placed constantly before us and we are encouraged to lock ourselves in to avoid catching the virus that causes it, there have been positive signs. Signs of God moving in His people.

Stories like Captain Tom Moore – moved to thank others by walking round his garden, or key workers continuing to work despite the threat to their lives, or the simple acts of kindness from family, neighbours and friends. The volunteering, the generosity of people, freely giving their talents, their money and their time. So much evidence of our true human nature – the urge to love others as we are loved by God.

Spend some time praising God for all the good things that have arisen for you during this time. Again, don’t rush into it, ask God to reveal to you the small things that have brought you joy and happiness. Thank God for each and every moment when He has been with you and your loved ones, especially when you needed His presence.

You may like to round off this time of prayer by singing your favourite hymn of praise, one of mine is ‘You shall go out with joy’ (StF487) but you may have your own. Then finish by saying ‘The Grace’ whilst picturing all the other members of our fellowship joining in with you.

Closing Prayer....

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you, now and forever more. Amen

(Many thanks for joining me. Rev. Lynne Burgon)

SUNDAY 24TH MAY 2020 (SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER / SUNDAY IN ASCENSIONTIDE / ALDERSGATE SUNDAY)



John and Charles Wesley

Call to Worship: 'Alleluia! The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Alleluia!'

Hymn: 'Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!' (HAP 197 / STF 300)



Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

'God of all time and space, of earth and eternity, we offer our thanks and praise for your love which has created and sustains all that has been, all that is and all that will be. Your goodness and mercy enfold your creation, and in you we live and move and have our being.

Gracious God, we praise you that in Jesus we see your compassion, and that he has plumbed the depths and scaled the heights of our humanity, and now reigns with you in glory as a reminder that our lives too are hidden with him in you.

Loving God, we praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit which you pour upon us to inspire our care and service, as you have also blessed so many in the past including John and Charles Wesley.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we bring our praises today.

Merciful God, we make our confessions to you now...

(Time of personal confession)

Forgive us, we pray, and help us to grow in the mind and the ways of Christ. Amen.'

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm: 130 (HAP 881 / STF 832)

Hymn: 'He is Lord, he is Lord' (HAP 256) / 'Christ triumphant, ever reigning' (STF 319)

Bible Reading: Acts 1: 6-14

Bible Reading: John 17: 1-11

Hymn: 'Come, divine Interpreter' (HAP 468 / STF 154)

Reflection:

The Ascension of Jesus brings to an end the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, as a cloud takes him from the sight of his friends (Acts 1: 9). This is a mysterious way of saying that Jesus was going to share in the glory of God in the life of heaven, but his followers still felt bereaved, now for a second time.

Yet in John 17, Jesus has promised the gift and protection of the Holy Spirit to his followers, and in Acts 1: 11 they are assured that Jesus will again be present with them through this same Spirit, as we will celebrate next Sunday (Pentecost).

On this day in 1738, John Wesley 'felt his heart strangely warmed' as he shared in a devotional meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. That is, he knew the peace and love of Christ, and this was the coming of the Holy Spirit to him in a new way which would change his life (and the lives of many) utterly.

How may we be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, in love, justice and peace, today?
What is the Spirit saying to the Churches now? Amen.

Silence

Hymn: 'God of grace and God of glory' (HAP 712 / STF 682)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

'We give thanks for all the blessings of God we know:

In our own lives...

In the lives of others...

In the life of the Church...

In the life of the world...

We pray for:

The compassion of Christ for all who suffer through illness, infirmity, grief, poverty or any other hardship...

The peace of Christ for all situations of conflict...

The healing of Christ for this ravaged planet...

The grace of Christ for the Church...

The loving-kindness of Christ for ourselves...

Almighty God, you raised up your servants John and Charles Wesley, to proclaim anew the gift of redemption and holiness. Pour out your Spirit, and revive your work among us; that inspired by the same faith, and upheld by the same grace in word and sacrament, we and all your children may be one in the unity of your Church on earth, even as in heaven we are made one in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Hymn: 'Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go' (HAP 381 / STF 550)

The Blessing: 'The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face to shine on us and be gracious to us; the Lord look on us with kindness and give us peace, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.'

HAP: 'Hymns and Psalms'- STF: 'Singing the Faith'

Sunday 31st May - PENTECOST 2020

I am very conscious that this year we had started to plan something very different for Pentecost. The plan was that we were going to meet at Sarah and Mike's for a circuit service and picnic. Perhaps next year.



Joel 2:28-29

Come Holy Spirit, fill us with your peace.
Come Holy Spirit, unite us in our worship.
Come Holy Spirit, raise us by your power.
Come Holy Spirit, come now.

StF 370/ HAP280/MP 67 Breathe on me breath of God

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit come, as the wind out of the wild places where we do not wish to go; as the breath of larger air which braces us and buffets us with all that we would rather not face about ourselves, each other and the world.

Come Holy Spirit come: as fire in the mind and joy in the heart; making us see the saint in each other, and gathering us into a hallowed unity where difference is valued, division reconciled, and love does not accept less than perfect justice, a compelling harmony.

Come Holy Spirit come: as speech which is heard and understood; as peace which does not mask the truth, as wonder which is not made small to match the littleness of our vision, but forged anew to strike a living spark in young and old; as love which will not hide.

In Jesus name. AMEN

Prayer of Confession

God, your love is unconditional;
Your gifts are offered with measureless generosity;
Your peace is all-encompassing.

We are sorry for times when we have put conditions on our willingness to care; when we have kept what we have for ourselves and refused to share with others; when we have failed to seek peace and have caused discord. Forgive us; restore us; renew us by your Holy Spirit of life AMEN.

Psalm 104:24-34

StF 394 Spirit of God, unseen as the wind /HAP 289 Holy Spirit, truth divine/MP 90 Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire

John 20:19-23

Acts 2: 1-21

StF 379/HAP 301/MP 198 Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost

Sermon:

2 accounts of the coming of God's Holy Spirit, which we remember at Pentecost, an annual Jewish festival to celebrate harvest.

3 P's

1. Peace

The Bible is full of God's promises; and God keeps his promises. So does Jesus, who promised that he would beat death and would rise again. He also promised his Peace. The disciples were behind locked doors in fear; they did not feel very peaceful at all. Then, suddenly, Jesus was with them, "Peace be with you" he proclaimed. How can we live at peace? With each other, with the environment? How can the world live at peace with each other? What can we do to bring about Peace?

2. Power

The sound of the rushing wind and what looked like tongues of flames. The Spirit blows where it wills. The disciples were confused and probably a little afraid, but they soon discovered that they had a new Power through the Holy Spirit. This meant that soon they were able to speak to the crowd that filled the city of Jerusalem. They had the power to speak of Jesus in a new and vibrant way. And they had the power to change the world as they did in the rest of their lives. The Holy Spirit can give us the power too; to speak out and share our faith with our friends and others. His power can help us pray for others.

3. Purpose

Sharing the good news of Jesus and proclaiming that Peace was part of the Purpose that the disciples were given. Jesus wanted the disciples to bring peace. Part of that peace was through forgiveness. So many people are troubled and so many people need to forgive themselves. One of the many issues with modern life is a lack of self-confidence, a lack of belief in themselves; and associated feelings of inadequacy. The Spirit lives to set us free.

StF 397/MP 664 The Spirit lives to set us free /HAP 290 Into a world of dark

Intercessions

Before praying sing **StF 395/HAP 295/MP 612 Spirit of the living God**

Holy Spirit of peace, we pray for homes and nations where there is discord and conflict. Pour out your breath of peace that people may listen to each other; may respect one another; may honour each other.

Holy Spirit, hear us COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.

Holy Spirit of Hope, we pray for those who live in despair; for those who can see no purpose in their lives; for those who cannot see a way ahead; for those who feel completely alone.

Holy Spirit, hear us COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.

Holy Spirit of unity, we pray for your Church, for its ministry to the faithful; for its mission to the world. May the Spirit of Pentecost breathe upon us, that we may witness to the world the comfort, meaning and love that you offer. Heal our differences and make us one in you.

Holy Spirit, hear us COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.

Holy Spirit we pray for those who need our prayers this day.....

Holy Spirit, hear us COME HOLY SPIRIT COME.

After praying sing **StF 395/HAP 295/MP 612 Spirit of the living God**

The Lord's Prayer Offertory

StF 379/HAP 281/MP 89 Come down O Love divine

May the power of the Spirit challenge you.

May the peace of the Spirit comfort you.

May the presence of the Spirit enable you to live in love and service in the name of Christ.

The Grace.

A Pentecost sermon

And afterwards, I will pour out my spirit and all people (Joel 2:28)

God the Father we can manage. We are on the whole happy with the image of God as a loving Father. Indeed, some add God as mother to supplement the picture.

God the Son we can cope with. We see Jesus, his life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection and ascension; and are happy to call him the Son of God.

But Pentecost causes us problems...

God the Father,

God the Son...Yes

But God the Holy Spirit?

Why has the Holy Spirit been neglected?

Maybe because the Holy Spirit is difficult to understand.

Perhaps it is because the images associated with the Holy Spirit don't do the jobs that they were meant to do. Consider the words Luke uses in Acts 2:2 – a sound *like* the blowing of a violent wind.

Acts 2:3 and there appeared to them flames *like* tongues of fire.

Like – in other words difficult to describe.

The Holy Spirit is clearly unseen, but nevertheless a reality, a reality of feeling. Feelings are difficult to describe be they feelings of ecstasy, "I felt great scoring the winning goal in the Cup Final"; the widow who says, "I felt as if he was in the room with me". We know that her departed husband wasn't, but we also know what she means. "I am in pain...". It is very difficult to argue against that.

The same with the Holy Spirit. It is an experience of feeling, not one measured by our 5 senses. The Christian Church has turned the images of wind and fire into something they are not. They are there to describe feelings.

We cannot see the Holy Spirit because he is near. Recall the saying, "You cannot see the wood for the trees". Try drawing a book towards you, you loose sight of the words, although you know they are still there.

The Holy Spirit is God with us, comforting, leading, prompting, guiding. He is God on the ground floor. The Holy Spirit is LIKE (that word again) the air that we breathe, and we don't pay any attention to the air we believe.

So let us look back to the experience of the first disciples and to Pentecost, noting that what happened with in fulfilment of what Jesus has promised, or what was promised throughout the Old Testament, "I will pour out my spirit upon all people" prophesies Joel, and then lists 6 different people and the differing effects the Spirit has upon them: - sons and daughters who shall prophesy, old men who will dream dreams, young men who will see visions, even slaves and slave-girls, although the effect on them is not specified.

Notice the all-encompassing nature of the Spirit "on all people". Notice too that it would be a mistake to tie down the effect of the Holy Spirit to one thing. That clearly cannot be done.

I wish we wouldn't try to limit God.

So, the disciples are together, a wide variety of people. Jews, who believed in God the creator, and the God of history. Jesus had come into their lives and they had started to think of God in a different way. They hadn't always understood him, but they walked with him. Then Jesus was gone. But the experience of him remained. They found it hard to believe that he was still alive.

At Pentecost their experiences made sense. They felt that God's power was still with them; this hit them *like* a rushing wind. They were overjoyed, this warmed them *like* burning flames. And they were transformed from a frightened group meeting behind closed doors, into bold, fearless men, prepared to risk their lives to tell others about Jesus.

They were transformed from being a group of friends following a carpenter and preacher from Nazareth, into people with a message for the world.

They were transformed from being a few into a growing Church.

The story of the Acts of the Apostles which follows is a story of the Holy Spirit.

But so often the vision fades.

Maybe this is how we should live, but we don't live like this. Should we live like those in the Acts? It's an impossible question to answer – times are a changing.

But consider the Pentecost hymns we sing:

Come down, O Love divine

Come, Holy Ghost, all-quickening fire.

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire.

Come, thou Holy Spirit, come.

COME, COME.

This suggests that the broad Church recognises that we don't live like the men and women of Acts. Maybe we should. But we have already said that the Holy Spirit is God with us, God on the ground floor, like the air around us. God the Holy Spirit is here, unseen I grant you. But God is here, how can he come. Maybe it is us who fail to see him? Maybe like the air we take him for granted? Maybe like the words he is *too* close? Maybe it is we who fail to welcome him?

George Herbert, the early 17th century poet, was from a noble family. He was a brilliant academic; and a career in University or politics was probable. He chose to become a country clergyman, serving for 7 years in Bremton near Salisbury, before his early death at the age of 40. But not before he had penned some of the most impressive religious poetry in the English language. His most famous makes the point I have just made, that it is we who fail to see God the Holy Spirit with us.

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.*

In the hymn "Teach me, my God and King" (StF 668, HAP 803) Herbert wrote

*For those who look on glass
On it may stay the eye;
Or if it pleases, through it pass,
And then to heaven espy.*

Too often our eyes focus on the glass, the earthy work; but seldom do we look through the glass to what lies beyond, the heavenly reality, the reality of God.

Look at the glass by all means, but occasional like Alice look beyond it, look through it.

The Holy Spirit is like that Glass, we should through it, not at it. Through the Holy Spirit to God. The Holy Spirit, a window to God.

And in looking the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience....

God's promise; for us to claim - AMEN

A Hymn From Nancy Hall-Tomkin

God's peace and love be your joy and strength as you face today..... I have been struggling with just thanking the NHS folk without acknowledging God, so have put some words to the hymn tune, To God be the glory.....thinking that it can be sung as we clap !!!!!!!

“O Father, we thank you for all those who care ,
the doctors and nurses and ALL THOSE who share
In loving and serving at measureless cost,
that in the struggle with covid, all may not be lost.

Chorus

Thank you Lord, thank you Lord for the work that they do,
Praise you Lord, Praise you, Lord as they glorify you,
with tremendous compassion they all play their part
In reflecting your mercy and passionate heart.”

.....”that in “has to be sung quickly
God bless and love ,Nancy and Brian.

From Julia Spencer at Northam

This was sent to me by Serena and Neil from Northam Methodist Church and I want to share it.

Healing to the world by Irene Vella translated by Kitty O'Meara

And the people stayed home and read books, and listened,
and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games,
and learned new ways of being, and were still.

And listened more deeply.
Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.
Some met their shadows.

And people began to think differently.
And people healed.

And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous,
mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.
And when the danger passed, and people joined together again,
they grieved their losses, and made new choices,
And dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,
as they had been healed.

Christian Aid

In the light of Covid19, events for Christian Aid week (10-16 May) cannot go ahead as originally anticipated. If people would like to support the work of Christian Aid, it is easily possible to donate money via the CA website – christianaid.org.uk There are also interesting articles, prayers and quizzes there. We will be organising fundraising events again, as soon as it is possible.

Some people may have Smartie tubes which they are filling with 20ps for Christian Aid. Please could people hang on to them until it is safe to collect them?

Thank you for your continuing support and prayers - Lindsey Brading

From Rev Graham Thompson – Chair of the Plymouth & Exeter Methodist District

Hope in Uncertain Times



The journey of Jesus towards the Cross will have been filled with uncertainty - even anguish. What would await Him on the other side? Before there can be a resurrection, there has to be a death and we - so often - want to cling to life because of the uncertainty we bear.

We are living through uncertain times as the Coronavirus shutdown continues and each of us hopes for a better tomorrow. But what must we endure before a bright tomorrow emerges? There is no choice - we have to face whatever lies ahead and do so safely and carefully.

But we can choose hope. We can choose to be hope-filled. Hope that comes from our faith in Jesus who died that we might live. For, we are people of the resurrection - Easter people. Whatever the future holds, there we will also find God who - like a candle in the darkness - offers light and hope for the world.

Where is the church? Where is Christ? by Sally Coleman.

So, we have made it past the celebration of Easter Sunday and are making our cautious journey into this vastly different Easter Season. We did not gather as we normally would, did not break bread together, share breakfasts, or family celebrations in a gathered way. Instead from behind locked doors our cries of Alleluia may have been heard. I know one or two took to the streets to do so, but whatever we did this Easter Sunday just past was completely different to what we may have been preparing for.

Some say that our experience was perhaps more authentic to that first Easter morning, reflecting that the first disciples were gathered behind locked doors for fear of the authorities who had crucified the one they called Lord and who called them friends. Those who did venture out came away scratching their heads in disbelief, and doubt and questions were voiced. 'Alleluia! Christ has risen!' was not proclaimed on that first Easter Day.

Even Mary, who encountered the risen Christ was confused at first; she did not recognise him until he spoke her name, and when she went to hold onto him was told not to. He needed to ascend, to complete his work of transformation. Instead she was told to go and tell the disciples that Jesus would go ahead of them.

I wonder then what that means for us today, we have a sign on our building at Wesley Hall, Sheffield that says the building is closed, but the church is still alive and well – at home, worshiping, caring and praying. We are scattered yet connected, and in some ways have become more outward looking. We have been sent from the buildings to different corners of our

communities. I wonder if we are beginning to encounter the Christ who has gone ahead of us into our homes and neighbourhoods?

One thing that we have done is to invite community members to join us in lighting a candle at 7pm every evening and placing it in an outward facing window. Interestingly this practice is growing as people share with their families and neighbours what they are doing and why. The church is lit up with prayer every evening, if only through the simple act of lighting a flame.

We have also been forced to slow down. Queues at Supermarkets offer unexpected opportunities for conversations, and people seem more ready to talk (from a safe distance). Has Christ gone ahead of us here? My suspicion is yes, and while I acknowledge that being able to go out wearing a collar has always opened a number of opportunities for people to converse with me, if you'd asked me earlier this year if I thought I would find myself praying, not once but a number of times with people in queues and car parks, I would probably have laughed.

What it has shown me is that people are asking questions of eternity and do want spiritual assurance of hope. These people may never have entered our churches on Easter Sunday, and our practices may have seemed strange to them, but here and now in the simple art of conversation, and in the lighting of a candle in prayer, the church is alive and well. Perhaps we need to hear Jesus' words: do not cling to what was, for I have gone ahead of you.

Rev Sally Colman is a Methodist Minister in Sheffield & this article is from 'Theology Today' which is a website that gives space weekly for various articles on various subject by mostly Methodists.

From Rose Peard – Senior Circuit Steward

Rose would like to thank all who have contributed to this Newsletter & the previous one in the midst of this difficult time – that all can feel that they are part of the wider Circuit & that ALL are remembered in our thoughts & prayers.

Rose would like to thank especially Sarah Richards & family (especially her able assistants Bella & Henry), who enabled the Newsletter to be sent out by post or electronically.