

TORRIDGE METHODIST CIRCUIT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

July 2020 - Issue 106

Welcome to Edition Number 106

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This is the 4th 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.

CIRCUIT ZOOM SERVICES

There is a plan for a Circuit Service, to take place weekly on Zoom, which will use the Services that are printed in the Circuit Newsletter. The Services will start at 10.45am on Sundays – but the ‘doors will be open’ at 10.30am. The contact/entry details will be send out during the preceding week & the Service can be accessed via a computer/laptop with camera/microphone, I Pad/Phone or using a ‘normal’ phone. Even if you have a device with camera/microphone & do not wish to be seen – you can join in without the camera on.

If you do not receive an email or want further information – please contact Sarah Richards, Circuit Administrator on 01237 472649 or sarahrichards185@gmail.com

From Rev Rob Blackhall – Superintendent Minister

I write as a one-time student, admittedly a long time ago, of Physics. There are still some Physics books on my shelves, even if I am a bit rusty. I have recently enjoyed reading Jim Al-Khalili’s “The World According to Physics”. Jim hosts a fascinating programme on Radio 4 where he interviews scientists about their work. Brian Greene’s more lofty tome, “Until the end of time” remains on the shelves.

Science is very much in the news, with Scientific advice at the heart of the Covid-19 response. The Government’s claim is that they only act on and with scientific advice.

Now I am not an epidemiologist, but I do know about the scientific method. I should also add, mainly through my story and training, that the supposed divide between science and religion is not one I share.

However, the public view, wrongly in my view, is that science can or will, at sometime in the future, supply all the answers to the quandaries of life. Richard Dawkins, of “The God Delusion” infamy would say that. I believe him to be wrong.

In some cases, science is more than able to describe what happens in our God given world. So, for example if I hold a tennis ball out in front of me and let go – then I am 100% sure, that, due to the gravitational forces at work in our universe that it will fall to the ground (and that a dog might run off with it!). If we assume I am holding it at a height of 1.5 metres above the ground (perhaps I should have said 2metres in view of Social Distancing) then I can work out the time it takes to hit the ground and the speed at which it hits (0.55 second, and 5.4 metres per second, if you want to know!)

So much of science is at that level.

But that means that there is much that isn't. Within the deepest parts of the atoms that make up our universe, I cannot, nor can anyone else, accurately say what is happening. In such cases scientists deal with probability – we think such and such an event is likely to happen.

So, it is not surprising that when SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) meet that the scientists will have disagreements and will challenge each others views. That is the way that science works and moves forward.

But of course, and especially at this time we want answers, we want certainty. From a scientific point of view that is, I believe, not possible.

Truth is many faceted, and can, especially in political circles, be illusive.

The search for truth is life long, and I am convinced tied up with the God we know in Christ Jesus – a God of infinite (a word by itself that scientists and ourselves struggle with) love; a love that finds its fullest sense upon a cross.

Yes, the Covid crisis has led many to a search for meaning and for the deepest questions of purpose.

Such searching questions will go on long after the pandemic. Christianity has much to say, much to contribute.

Stay safe - Blessings to you all - Rob

BIBLE READINGS IN JUNE

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 July.

Day	Reading	Psalm	Hymn (Singing the Faith)
Wed 1	John 5:19-29	26	364 O for a thousand tongues to sing
Thurs 2	John 5:30-47	27	55 Immortal, Invisible, God only wise
Fri 3	John 20:24-29	31:1-6	316 When Easter to the dark world came
Sat 4	John 6:1-15	68:1-6, 32-35	365 Jesu, thou joy of loving hearts
Sun 5	Matt. 11:6-19, 25-30	145	322 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
Mon 6	John 6:16-29	70	303 I know that my Redeemer lives
Tue 7	John 6:30-40	71:1-16	713 Show me how to stand for justice
Wed 8	John 6:41-51	71:17-24	712 Put peace into each other's hands
Thurs 9	John 6:52-59	72	150 This is the day of rest
Fri 10	John 6:60-71	73:1-14	109 In the darkness of the still night
Sat 11	John 7:1-13	73:15-28	482 There is no moment of my life
Sun 12	Matt.13:1-9, 18-23	65	671 What shall we offer our good Lord

Mon 13	John 7:14-24	74:1-17	675 Because the Saviour prayed
Tues 14	John 7:25-36	74:18-23	12 Morning glory, starlit sky
Wed 15	John 7:37-52	75:1-7	248 I heard the voice of Jesus say
Thurs 16	John 7:53-8:11	76	613 God, how can we forgive
Fri 17	John 8:12-20	77	59 Shine Jesus shine
Sat 18	John 8:21-30	78:1-7	361 Man of sorrows! What a name
Sun 19	Matt,13:24-30, 36-43	86:1-13	114 Oh the life of the world
Mon 20	John 8:31-47	81	181 Of the Father's love begotten
Tues 21	John 8:48-59	84	91 The God of Abraham praise
Wed 22	Luke 8:1-3	63:1-8	471 Lord, I come to you
Thurs 23	John 9:1-12	100	582 Eat this bread and never hunger
Fri 24	John 9:13-23	87	440 Amazing grace
Sat 25	Matthew 20:20-28	126	486 Who would true valour see
Sun 26	Matt.13:31-33, 44-52	119:129-136	412 See how great a flame aspires
Mon 27	John 9:24-41	89:1-18	493 Come. Lord, to our souls
Tue 28	John 10:1-10	89:19-37	480 The Lord's my shepherd
Wed 29	John 10:11-21	90	482 There is no moment of my life
Thurs 30	John 10:22-42	91	355 Jesus, lover of my soul
Fri 31	John 11:1-16	92	305 Low in the grave he lay

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,

George Eliot is, I think, one of the greatest novelists. She writes mostly about small town and village life in the nineteenth century, and she offers much insight and compassion as she describes people's personalities and relationships, choices and hopes, sorrows and joys. One of George Eliot's novels is **Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe**, published in 1861. In this, Silas suffers several difficulties, including being robbed of his gold. Silas is saddened and embittered by all this hardship, and he largely withdraws from community life and human contact, until by chance a young girl, Eppie, walks into his house and his life after her mother dies out in the snow.

Silas grows fond of Eppie and adopts her, and gradually he finds his heart softened after all the struggles he has been through: symbolically, Eppie's blonde hair comes to replace the gold he has lost, and Silas becomes happier and more fulfilled, as he cares for Eppie.

This is, I believe, a fable not only about money and human love, and what is of true value, but also about loss and healing. In this time of grief for all who have died as a result of the coronavirus, and as we also feel the loss involved in our separation from loved ones and in the cancellation or postponement of family gatherings and Church and community events, for example, where do we find our healing and our hope?

Jesus has much to say on this, and he models his words for us as he puts his trust in and seeks to show God's mercy and compassion. '*Set your minds on God's kingdom, and the rest will be given to you as well*' (Luke 12: 31); '*Give, and gifts will be given you*' (Luke 6: 38); '*Love one another, as I have loved you*' (John 15: 12), Jesus says, and he himself finds fulfilment, peace and joy as he puts these words into practice, just as Silas Marner found in his love for Eppie.

So we pray that, at this time of change and challenge, as we adapt to new ways in our personal lives and in the Church and society, the Holy Spirit would help us, in the words of the hymn to 'keep us loving though the world is tough' (HAP 746 / STF 476).

With every blessing - Andrew Vidamour

From Revd Lynne Burgon

Dear Friends,

I've been enjoying the Bible study on Ruth that has been running online on Wednesday afternoons during June. If you have been following the Bible course on line or via the prepared booklet, I hope you are enjoying thinking more deeply about what the story of the Naomi and Ruth can teach us today. It's amazing where the discussion leads. Last week we were reflecting on God's creation, how he provides for us, when Rob challenged us with a question. Did God create Covid 19? The general thoughts seemed to be no, God wouldn't do that, he is a loving God and wouldn't deliberately set out to hurt us. I totally agree with the latter sentiment but I do think God created the virus that led to the mutation Covid 19. Let me explain why.

When God created our world he took great care and time over it and was pleased with the results, he called it good. Now bacteria and virus aren't actually named in the Bible but science has shown us how carefully the earth is balanced, each creature upon it has a part to play and bacteria and viruses have their uses as well as misuses. For example, Penicillin would never have been discovered without bacterial growth on food and our bodies need certain bacteria to function – especially our bowels! I could go on but you get the picture. Everything that is created is, in my opinion, part of God's master plan.

However, his last creation, humankind, were given something extra special, we call it free will. God created us 'in his image..... male and female, He created us' (Gen 1.27). He gave us choices, to choose to love him or reject Him, to choose goodness or reject it. Free will brought into the world the possibility of disobedience. We fall short of what God desires for us, we choose the opposite way to how God would have us act and be. The Bible calls this sin. We sin against God when we do what is alien to His nature. God sees what we do, He understands the consequences of our actions, and laments over us. I think He longs for us to steward his world with more care and attention than we are. When we are careless, the chain reaction set in place can bring disaster.

Regarding Covid 19, the scientists are still unpicking that chain reaction, trying to understand what God already knows. I guess a wrong choice or two helped set in place a deadly foe. But the virus isn't to blame, its doing what its born to do, replicate and survive. Unfortunately, we are the host it needs to survive and for some people this virus is deathly. Our main defence at the moment is to deprive this mutation of its host by staying at home as much as we can, staying vigilant regarding hygiene and keeping our distance from one another.

These are hard choices to make, especially the longer this goes on, the lonelier we become. Our Trinitarian God built us for relationship not isolation. However, we do still have each other, we can keep in touch by phone, letter, email, internet and social media to name just a few ways. If you are

feeling lonely then reach out to someone else; a note, a phone call, a text, however you can. We are all God's disciples and each of us has pastoral care of one another, don't leave it all to one person!

May God Bless you all through this time of uncertainty - Lynne.

WEEKLY SERVICES TO USE ON ITS OWN OR WITH THE ZOOM SERVICE

SUNDAY 5th JULY 2020

Call to Worship: *This day, as are all days, loving God, is the time to worship you. This time, as are all times, loving God, is the time to give you praise, as we turn to you in faith.*

Hymn: 'All my hope on God is founded' (63 HAP /455 STF/16 MP)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

Eternal and generous God, we bring you our praise as we celebrate the greatness of your love in creation and in Christ, and as we recall in our hearts the blessings we know in our lives, with thankfulness....

Merciful God, as we remember your grace and goodness, we are aware of our shortcomings and our frailties, in thought, word and action, so we confess our sins to you

God of grace, as we trust in your forgiveness through Christ Jesus, we commit ourselves once again to follow the path Jesus has shown us. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm: 145: 8-14

Hymn: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God' (138 HAP / 254 STF/ 591 MP)

Bible Reading: Romans 7: 15-25a

Bible Reading: Matthew 11: 16-19 and 25-30

Hymn: 'Break thou the bread of life' (467 HAP/ 153 STF/ 64 MP)

Reflection:

The twentieth-century poet T.S. Eliot, in his poem sequence 'Four Quartets', has these words: 'Wisdom is humility: humility is endless'. Jesus says '...wisdom is vindicated by her deeds' (Matthew 11: 19), and goes on to speak of God hiding the divine kingdom from the wise and intelligent and revealing it to infants (Matthew 11: 25).

So what is wisdom? Paul speaks of the wisdom of the cross: this is foolish in the world's eyes, but 'to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1: 18). This is about different ways of looking at reality as well as different ways of living: going back to Eliot's words, if we seek to see life humbly (literally 'from ground level'), as Jesus did, we may find God's priorities and values, and God's purposes for our lives.

This is challenging, as Paul reminds us in our Romans reading where he describes the complexities and tensions in the gap we may find between what we know we are called to do and what we actually do in practice. And yet the rewards are great, for Jesus assures us that 'my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11: 30), and in him we may find rest for our souls.

What does the kingdom of God mean to you?

How do and may we offer the life and values of God's kingdom through our our personal discipleship of Jesus and through the Church?

Silence

Hymn: 'What a friend we have in Jesus' (559 HAP / 531 STF/ 746 MP)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

Loving God, on this day we are called especially to give thanks for the National Health Service in this country, for all who work for the NHS and for all other key workers who are helping to care for those in need and to maintain essential services during the coronavirus pandemic.

We give thanks, too, for the outpouring of practical compassion and community spirit as so many people have volunteered to help and support those in isolation and in other kinds of need over the past few months.

And so, gracious God, at this time of great suffering, loss, stress and change, we are thankful for the hope we may find in this bringing of people together creatively in our communities and across this country. Help us, we ask, to see this generous sharing as part of your kingdom, and as part of what you want the world to be like, as we see in Jesus.

God of compassion, we pray for all who work for the National Health Service: for doctors, nurses, surgeons, physiotherapists, administrators, catering and cleaning staff, and many others. And we pray, too, for all other key workers: supermarket staff, refuse collectors, public transport workers, teachers, and many others.

Holy God, as we are thankful for the caring, dedication, skill and public service of all these people, so we pray for continued compassion, courage and willingness to serve for each one in their various roles and responsibilities.

We pray also who suffer as a result of the coronavirus: for those with the illness, those who grieve for loved ones, those who are caring, those who are anxious, those whose livelihoods have been disrupted or lost. May each one know the peace of Christ, the loving kindness of others and practical help in their need.

And we bring our personal prayers to God...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Hymn: 'God of grace and God of glory' (712 HAP / 682 STF/ 192MP)

The Blessing:

The love of the faithful Creator, the peace of the wounded Healer, the joy of the challenging Spirit, the hope of the Three in One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, surround and encourage us now and always. Amen.

HAP: 'Hymns and Psalms' - STF: 'Singing the Faith' - MP: 'Mission Praise'

SUNDAY 12th July 2020



Act with justice and righteousness (Jeremiah 22:1-5)

Welcome

The theme of today's service is 'Choose Childhood'. Action for Children believes that every child should grow up safe and happy. To make this vision a reality, they offer practical and emotional care and support, make sure children's voices are heard, and campaign to bring lasting improvements to their lives. Doing this lays the foundations for children thrive. The work Action for Children does is only possible with our support. The Methodist Church has been by the charity's side for more than 150 years. But, tragically, there are still thousands of vulnerable children who desperately need our help. With our worship, prayers and gifts, we can make a real difference to these children. Together we can choose safe and happy childhoods for every child.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we gather today with thanksgiving and an open heart, help us to hear you. Fill our hearts with love and compassion for those you have sent us to. Stir up our hearts and strengthen our arms to act with justice and righteousness in Jesus' name. Amen.

StF 113 O Worship the King, all Glorious above (HAP 28/ MP528)

Prayer

Lord, we lift up the work of Action for Children. We think of all the families who come into contact with the charity and pray your blessing over them. We think of those struggling with their physical or mental health, and pray your peace descends on them. Lord, remove any barriers that may prevent people from reaching out. We thank you for the thousands of staff members and volunteers who serve children and families, and pray that you would sustain them. Give them the energy and enthusiasm they need to lovingly support those most in need. We thank you for the infrastructure that makes Action for Children's work possible: the buildings, the vehicles, the IT – all the variables that help them to reach and serve communities across the UK. We pray for the leadership and the trustees – may your wisdom and guidance be present as they map out the future of the charity. We pray for our wider society – we ask that your will be done; from Westminster all the way down to our communities. We ask that lives led by love – love modelled so perfectly by Christ – transform the world we live in. In the name of the King, Jesus, Amen.

Our Lord's prayer

StF 44 Come on and celebrate (MP 99) (HAP 691 Come let us sing of a wonderful Love)

Jeremiah 22:1-5 - Act with justice and righteousness

Luke 4:16-21 - Anointed and sent to those who need our support

Lyle's story

Lyle was physically and emotionally abused by his parents. They punched and kicked him, and he'd often go hungry. After turning to alcohol to numb the pain, Lyle ran away from home. Action for Children stepped in to find him a safe and stable place to live.

"Drugs were always a big problem in my family and there was a lot of violence," Lyle explains. "I wasn't fed at home and my big sister would sneak food into her room most nights. But we'd often go days without getting food."

Lyle was left to fend for himself after his parents threw his sister out. "I didn't have clean clothes. Mum and dad wouldn't let me bath or shower. I wasn't even allowed to get my hair cut," he says.

After getting bullied at school, Lyle started to isolate himself. At 14, he started drinking. "Mum and dad would offer me alcohol all the time, and eventually I said yes. I'd get home from school and they'd give me glasses of things. I'd just drink them.

I couldn't feel anything. I thought nothing bad could ever happen when I was drunk."

Lyle left school and found a job he really liked. But things at home got even worse. "I loved my job. But I was the only one putting money in the house. And if I didn't give the money to them for drugs, they'd take it out on me."

Lyle's depression and anxiety started to take their toll. "I just knew I had to get out," he says. "I left that house with nothing apart from the clothes on my back. I was in a really bad state. I came to Action for Children with nothing."

Action for Children found Lyle a safe place to live in supported accommodation. "They reminded me that I'm enough," he says. "They helped me recover from alcohol.

Without them, I don't think I'd be alive. I nearly took my own life and, if it hadn't been for my support worker coming and just talking to me, I wouldn't be here."

StF 255 The Kingdom of God is Justice and joy (HAP 139/ MP 651)

Reflection

A. Lyle's story

What touched you about Lyle's story? – What should a safe and happy childhood look like for children? – How do you think Action for Children helps young people like Lyle?

B. What can we learn from the Bible readings?

Jeremiah 22:1-5 calls us to act with justice (NRSV) or to rescue everyone who has suffered from injustice (Contemporary English Bible). Luke 4:16-21 reminds us that we're sent to people in our community who are marginalised or disadvantaged. By choosing childhood, we're choosing to act with justice on behalf of those who God has sent us to.

C. How can we act with justice in support of young people like Lyle and Choose Childhood?

Some answers include: 1. Give a regular cash donation to support Action for Children's work. 2. Leave a legacy gift in your will. 3. Sign up to Action for Children's Choose Childhood campaign and invite other people to do the same. Go to: actionforchildren.org.uk 4. Write to your MP about the state of childhood today and ask them to do something about it. 5. Find out if there are any volunteer opportunities near you. 6. Befriend a family or young person in your neighbourhood. 7. Pray for the work of Action for Children and the people they support. 8. Give to your local foodbank.



For vulnerable children in the UK, childhood hurts. In recent years, the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect, poverty and poor mental health has increased. **Every child deserves a safe and happy childhood**

StF 527 Pray for a world where every child (HAP 69 /MP 649 The King of Love my Shepherd is

Prayer

Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus, we ask that you bring healing to any child or young person who has been the victim of abuse or neglect. They are your children and have been called into your wonderful light.

Show them that you see them and know what they are going through.

Show them that you are right beside them. No matter how terrible the situation, we pray that they will know that they can lean on you.

Open our eyes, Lord, to see any potential signs of abuse and remove every form of ignorance from us.

Give these children and young people hope and provide healing in their body, soul and mind.

*Ease their suffering, Father, and cause a complete restoration in their lives. **Amen.***

Prayer of committal - The congregation says the words in bold.

In celebration of over 150 years of work and witness, we commit ourselves afresh:

Where children cry in need:

We will hear their cry.

Where children are denied the gifts of childhood:

We will provide for them to delight in good things.

Where there is exclusion or deprivation:

We will challenge injustice.

Where poverty is rife:

We will share what we have.

Where others also care:

We will work with them.

Wherever we see a need:

We will pray for means to meet it.

Let us pray:

Loving God, you have called us to be your people and to share in the ministry of your Son. Grant us, we pray, ears that are open to the cries of those in need, hearts that are eager to respond, voices that are ready to speak out for the Offering and prayers for the work of oppressed, and hands that are active in sharing your bounty.

*In the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen.***



StF 663 I, the Lord of sea and sky (HAP 770/ MP 178 Go forth and tell)

Blessing

Further details can be found at <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/12961/1301-worship-outline-online.pdf>

Sunday 19th July 2020

Call to worship

God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God and God in him. Amen

Hymn - The King of Love my shepherd is. (StF479/HS69)

Prayer of Approach

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Penitence

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1John.8-9)

Most merciful God, we confess to you, before the whole company of heaven and one another, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed and what we have failed to do. Forgive us our sins, heal us by your spirit and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen

We thank you for your unfailing love and generosity, take from our hearts and minds our misdeeds and restore us to peace, the peace that only you can bring. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn – Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the King of creation (StF88/MP564)

Psalm 86 – A Psalm of petition and praise

Hymn – I need thee every hour (StF 467/MP288)

Reading – Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43

Reflection

Today we find ourselves sitting on the shore of a Lake with Jesus speaking from a boat moored there. He is speaking of God's Kingdom, using parables to illustrate his point. A parable is an illustration or comparison, a story that paints a vivid picture. The picture we are concerned with today is a field of wheat, dancing in the breeze. On the surface all seems well, good seed has been used to plant the crop. Alas though, amongst the fine wheat are hidden weeds. These weeds look like the real thing and they are hard to tell apart. In addition, they now form part of the whole root system. To destroy the weed, you risk destroying the wheat. What is to be done? Jesus urges caution. Don't be too quick to uproot, leave both until the harvest and then the good can be separated from the bad. Let the reaper judge by the fruit of the crop. Now, instead of a wheat field picture the earth, see the people that populate the earth. All interwoven with one another, going back generations and forward into the future. How do we tell the good from the bad? Well, we don't. We are called to live our life, and to choose for our life the ways of the kingdom, ready at the harvest to show forth good fruit. God alone is the harvester. He will sort the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad. Don't be too quick to judge others, lest you spoil the potential of the growing goodness.....

Hymn – Will you come and follow me (StF 673)

A Prayer for World Peace

*Lord, we pray for the power to be gentle;
the strength to be forgiving;
the patience to be understanding;
and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding on to what we believe to be right.
May we put our trust in the power of good to overcome evil
and the power of love to overcome hatred.
We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe
in a world emancipated from violence,
a new world where fear shall no longer lead us to commit injustice,
nor selfishness make them bring suffering to others.
Help us to devote our whole life and thought and energy to the task of making peace,
praying always for the inspiration and the power
to fulfil the destiny for which we all were created.*

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.

Hymn – Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty (HP7/StF 11)

A sending out prayer

*O God of our pilgrimage, who has led us to your living water; refresh and sustain us as we go forward on our journey. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen***

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

SUNDAY 26th JULY 2020

Call to Worship: *O come let us sing out to the Lord, let us shout in triumph to the rock of our salvation, for he is the Lord our God: we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*

Hymn: ‘God is love: let heaven adore him’ (36 HAP / 103 STF / MP 187)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

God of love, we offer our praise and worship as we celebrate your grace and mercy as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Father, your love amazes us and fills us with wonder as we see the beauty of your world around us and as we know your care for all people and the whole of creation.

Jesus, your love humbles us as we remember the way you washed the feet of your friends on the night before your death, and so many other examples of your compassion and service in healing and sharing, teaching and friendship.

Spirit, your love inspires us as we know the love of family and friends, as we grow through art and music, Bible study and prayer, science and literature and in many other ways – and as we see you active in the world, revealing wrong and helping to set it right.

Merciful God, we ask your forgiveness for the ways we have denied your rule of love, for our unkind thoughts, hurtful words and thoughtless actions, and for the good we have failed to do. We confess our sins to you now...

*Gracious God, forgive us we pray, and renew us for your service through your Holy Spirit, as we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.***

The Lord’s Prayer

Psalm: 119: 129-136

Hymn: ‘The kingdom of God is justice and joy’ (139 HAP / 255 STF /MP 651)

Bible Reading: Romans 8: 26-39

Bible Reading: Matthew 13: 31-33 and 44-52

Hymn: ‘Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire’ (469 HAP / 155 STF /MP 90)

Reflection:

Our Gospel reading includes some of Jesus’ ‘parables of the Kingdom’, where he uses simple pictures drawn from everyday life to help illustrate some of the ways God works in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the Church and in the wider world.

C.H. Dodd, in his book 'The Parables of the Kingdom', refers to 'Parables of Crisis' and 'Parables of Growth', and we find examples of both in this passage. The picture of the mustard seed (Matthew 13: 31-32) is a growth story, reminding us that the ways in which God works are not always obvious: that which seems to be small and insignificant may prove very fruitful and valuable. So a kind action, an encouraging word, a prayer, a donation to a food bank, support for a charity – all these are examples of how an apparently little offering to others may have a great impact, not only as they are added together but also in themselves, for they may bring new hope and courage, for example.

And this fruitfulness is true on a wider scale as well, as the crisis parables illustrate. One of these is that of the dragnet (Matthew 13: 47-50), which may be read as not only a story about judgement but also about the ways in which our personal choices work out in the wider moral and spiritual scheme of things: ultimately, the story may be saying, in God's economy, only the good done to others will last. Or, as the poet Philip Larkin put it: 'All that will remain of us is love'.

Can you think of any parables from your own experience which help to show what God is like? What helps you to grow in faith, hope and love?

What wrongs can the Church help to right, and how?

Silence

Hymn: 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun' (239 HAP / 328 STF /MP 379)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Generous God, we give thanks for all the blessings we know in our lives, as we remember and name them before you now...

Holy God, we pray for all peoples according to their need:

We pray for the peace of the world and the healing of the nations...

We pray for all who suffer in body, mind and spirit, that all may know the peace, hope and courage of Christ....

We pray for all who are trying to rebuild their lives and livelihoods in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic....

We pray for the Church here and across the world, as we seek to worship and witness in the name of Christ in changed and challenging circumstances...

We pray for those especially on our hearts at this time...

We pray for ourselves...

*Loving God, may your Kingdom come and your will be done, and may we be part of the answer to our prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.***

Hymn: 'May the mind of Christ my Saviour' (739 HAP / 504 STF / MP 463)

The Blessing: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always. **Amen.***

HAP: 'Hymns and Psalms' - STF: 'Singing the Faith' - MP: "Mission Praise"

THE METHODIST CONFERENCE WILL MEET ONLINE THIS YEAR

The Conference Business Committee has agreed that the Conference will meet between June 25 – July 2 2020 in order to conduct its essential business. The committee recognised that the restrictions that are likely still to be in place at the end of June mean that an online meeting is necessary. The committee was encouraged by the experience of the Council when it met online.

The Conference will open with the Induction of the President and Vice-President and the rest of the timetable can be viewed here. Reception into Full Connexion will take place on Saturday 27 but ordinations will be delayed to a later date.

Not everything in the original agendas will take place this year. The restriction on groups meeting has meant that some Synods have not been able to meet and give full consideration to God in Love Unites Us, and the Council agreed that the debate and voting on the provisional resolutions will be deferred until the 2021 Conference. This also means that any other business (eg memorials) relating to those resolutions will not be considered this year.

We are particularly mindful of those for whom this is a significant Conference personally (eg ordinands and those designated for office) and hope that the Methodist people will keep them and all the representatives in their prayers.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK

A big thank you to all those who supported my cake deliveries during Christian Aid Week. I raised £300. This will be supporting Christian Aid's work fighting Covid-19 by providing soap, clean water and medical supplies in countries like Kenya.- Lindsey Brading

REPENTANCE by Tom Stuckey.

When Covid-19 is over will Methodism revert to business as usual? Over the past ten years I have been arguing that if Methodism in Britain is to thrive, a complete sea change is required. I have used the word 'repentance' to describe the radical nature of this shift. I mentioned it first in my Presidential Address of 2005, repeated it in 2006, spoke of it in study days across the connexion, alluded to it in Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land (2017), addressed it directly in Methodism Unfinished (2019) and reflected on it in a series of short articles in the Methodist Recorder throughout the months of March, April and May 2020.

One of the motivations for this decade of repetition has been my growing awareness of a 'paradigm shift' taking place. Back in 1962 the American philosopher Thomas Kuhn first propounded this concept. It describes how a dominant framework under which normal science operates is rendered incompatible with new phenomena. This necessitates the adoption of a new interpretive framework to make understanding possible. My former theological teacher, Prof. Thomas Torrance, introduced me to this idea in a theological way by using the word metanoia – 'repentance'. Since then I have come to believe that a universal kairos event would occur making it clear that our usual ways of thinking and doing have come to an end. Only repentance will enable us to cross over from the old to the new. I suggest that Covid-19 is that liminal event.

I have been taken to task, sometimes quite severely, for saying that Methodism must repent. My suggestion of a paradigm shift has similarly been dismissed. These negative reactions have puzzled me. I now see that Methodists interpret the word 'repentance' in a personal way. As followers of Wesley we readily appreciate his words 'he has saved me from my sins, even mine'. Is this preventing us from thinking about what repentance might mean for an institution? Ecclesiastical institutions obviously sin. We have examples of this in the recent revelations of clergy abuse, the Church's anti-Semitism and its discrimination against sections of society: women, black people or those with different sexual orientations. In such cases these ethical sins can be named and addressed but what of the more subtle spiritual and theological sins?

The author of the book of Revelation diagnoses the failure of six of the seven churches. Each must repent of their particular spiritual/theological sin. Paul in Colossians, writing to the churches of the Lycus Valley, does not hesitate in naming their corporate theological sin. These Churches have absorbed into their life features of the prevailing culture which are having a toxic effect upon their witness. Sin in these cases is corporate and institutional. When Churches become national establishments or are linked in some way through an Episcopal or Connexional system does not

sin, whether ethical, spiritual or theological, affect the ecclesiastical culture and distort their structural processes?

While governments in a 'post-truth' culture often resort to denial or self-justification, the Church does attempt, sometimes reluctantly, to address the sin within. One solution is to list the 'sins' (failures?) on the agenda to be dealt with through the usual channels. 'Lament', which is a fundamental feature of repentance, is largely avoided. Another approach is to initiate a review, identify mistakes and learn from them. 'Lament' may figure in this but still lacks the radical renewing power which Walter Brueggemann alludes to in his expositions of the Psalms. 'Lament' as he describes it, drives us to our knees in desperate petitionary prayers which seek to motivate God into action!

Why do institutions find it so hard to repent? According to Michael Polanyi the interpretive framework or paradigm which enables us to hear and understand is buried deep within our minds and subject to our passions. Institutions are reluctant to admit that they may be getting things wrong because this raises questions about trust, integrity and power. In order to comprehend 'the new' the current way of thinking and doing may have to be abandoned. Polanyi describes this move into a new understanding as a 'heuristic' act of non-rational discovery. In Christian terms he is describing renunciation and faith which takes us back to the Gospel imperative 'repent and believe'. If we are indeed where I think we are in the history of the Church, we cannot revert to business as usual. The old is passing away and the new is coming.

The full script plus references can be found on www.tomstuckey.me.uk

Rev Tom Stuckey is a former President of the Conference and was Chair of the Southampton Methodist District. He has ministered for 50 years in a variety of appointments and being involved in ministerial formation. He is the author of several books, is visiting scholar at Sarum College, Salisbury and continues to write, preach and teach. He does theology through his own web site (Google: Tom Stuckey – home). He is married to Christine who is the MWiB President for the Southampton District. They have three grown up children and four grandchildren.

THEOLOGY EVERYWHERE

Every Monday, a short article is posted which brings some theology to bear on an issue or topic. This offers some theological reflection people can read quickly to start their week, ponder on and contribute to as the week goes on. It is a way of flexing and using our theological muscles to keep them fit, as well as an opportunity for those contributing to offer new ways of thinking about a topic or looking at an issue theologically perhaps for the first time.

The Theology Everywhere website is made available by the Methodist Church as one of the actions being taken to create a learning church. Contributors are from varied backgrounds; many but not all are Methodist. The views expressed are the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the position of the Methodist Church.

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