

10th July 2022 – Morning Service

Go and do as He did

Margaret Bradley

Calling upon God *(You may like to light three candles as you say these words)*

Come, Parent of all people. Come, Light of our hearts. Come, Holy Spirit.

By the splendour of your creation around us, by the comfort of your forgiveness within us,

by the power of your Spirit moving within these walls, renew us, so that we come gladly to this celebration.

StF 103 – God is love

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| 1) God is Love: let heaven adore him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love. | 3) God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts each human soul,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides and keeps them whole.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign. |
| 2) God is Love: and he, enfolding
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp is holding
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God. | |

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Prayer of Adoration

Immense and amazing God, your greatness breaks the bounds of our imagination. You formed the universe and everything in it. You created the human race, in all its rich variety of colour, culture and personality, all equally cherished by you. And so, we worship and adore you.

Holy and righteous God, you inspire us to be better people. You gave us Jesus to show us your way and as an example for us to follow. In him you have given us a vision of a world of justice, of human dignity and of peace. And so, we worship and adore you.

Generous and compassionate God, your love for us fills our hearts to overflowing. You are always there for us. You support us. You are totally committed to us. Your Spirit draws us into unity with you and with each other. And so, we worship and adore you.

Collect for the day

Eternal God, giver of love and peace, you call your children to live together as one family. Give us grace to learn your ways and to do your will, that we may bring justice and peace to all people, in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

StF 252 – A new commandment

A new commandment I give unto you:
That you love one another as I have loved you,
That you love one another as I have loved you.

By this the world shall know you are my disciples
If you have love for one another.
By this the world shall know you are my disciples
If you have love for one another.

Anonymous CCL No. 515642

Reading: Psalm 82

God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the “gods”:
“How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?
Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’
But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.”
Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

Reading: Luke 10:25–37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”
He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”
The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus calls us to learn from people of other races and faith

A man was going down the hilly road from Quarry Bank to Cradley Heath, when he was set upon by people who were stronger and more powerful than he was. They attacked him, and robbed him of all his belongings, before leaving him lying in the roadside. Three possible helpers appear on the scene. The first was a minister of religion who came down the road, but she quickly hurried on her way without stopping. A local preacher then came along and saw the lifeless victim. Maybe because he feared that he might pick up an infection from the man if he touched him, or pass it on to someone else, he too passed by at a safe distance. Finally, a Muslim immigrant came by. In an area which was hostile to people like himself, he could have thought it a risk to his own safety to hang about. But he was filled with pity for the man and acted as a paramedic to one whose life hung in the balance, by carefully bandaging the wounds before taking him into hospital.

Which of these faithfully reflected God’s love and demonstrated true grace?
Does this story disturb you? Is it unfair?

Right at the start of his ministry in Nazareth Jesus' openness to people of other races and faiths had so goaded people to fury that they went to throw him over the edge of a cliff. (Luke 4: 25-30). Now he told a story about Jewish religious leaders, who were expected to be models of loving their neighbours. Yet they failed to obey the spirit of their God-inspired Scriptures, or the promptings of their internal moral conscience, by helping a vulnerable man in deep need. In contrast, a despised foreigner came to the aid of someone who was not of his own faith or race. It's not surprising that the leading members of institutionalised religion conspired to have Jesus eliminated.

Many sermons have been preached on the story of the 'Good Samaritan', which have concluded with the moral that we all have a responsibility to help each another. Who wouldn't agree with that? Yet Jesus made people angry, so it would appear that there's much more to his teaching, which they found challenging. If the main point Jesus wanted to make was that we should show care and compassion towards everyone in need, without offering what we see as legitimate excuses, he would have chosen to make the hero of his story an ordinary member of the Jewish Temple congregation. Instead, he provocatively chose to make the hero a Samaritan, a member of a shunned race, whom they considered to be pagan. By doing this Jesus risked inviting an extremely hostile reaction from his audience. And this is because he was saying something more than that we must always respond to human need.

He wasn't even saying that we shouldn't set any limits on our obligations of neighbourliness; that they must extend not only to people who are like ourselves, but towards those we've been fired up to look down upon and avoid. In that case he would have made the victim a Samaritan and the person who helped him a Jew. No. Jesus clearly says that it was the outsider who was showing them how to behave in God's way. His point was that we need to be open to learn from people of other races and faith, who have important things to offer us, to teach us about God and the right way to live. This wasn't a nice cosy story. This was red hot stuff that made people's hackles rise because it challenged their prejudices as Jesus tried to get his people to move on from a narrow, exclusive, tribal nationalism that saw their own race and faith as being superior to all others.

We believe that the diversity of the human race was God's deliberate creation of variety, and that God wants us to take delight in it. As followers of Jesus, we will humbly ask for God's help to overcome our own prejudices and fears and we will be open to learning from those of other races and cultures and faiths. We will be open to appreciating how they can enrich our lives.

StF 403 – God is love: his the care

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| <p>1) God is love: his the care,
Tending each, everywhere.
God is love - all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
That we all might know him:</p> | <p>2) None can see God above;
Neighbours here we can love;
Thus may we Godward move,
Finding him in others,
Sisters all, and brothers:</p> | <p>4) To our Lord praise we sing -
Light and life, friend and king,
Coming down love to bring,
Pattern for our duty,
Showing God in beauty:</p> |
| <p>Ch) <i>Sing aloud, loud, loud!</i>
<i>Sing aloud, loud, loud!</i>
<i>God is good! God is truth!</i>
<i>God is beauty! Praise him!</i></p> | <p>3) Jesus came, lived and died
For our sake, crucified,
Rose again, glorified;
He was born to save us
By the truth he gave us:</p> | |

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Jesus urges us to demonstrate extravagant love towards the vulnerable

The story of the 'Good Samaritan' challenged people to be more open to those of other races and faith and to see that true religion consists in demonstrating extravagant, caring, saving love for those who are vulnerable. To Jesus, religion isn't a set of restrictive regulations, but a boundless series of opportunities.

After the Samaritan had cleaned and bound up the hurt man's wounds, he put the man on his own animal, took him to an inn, where he paid the cost of board and lodging, and then offered to pay for any further care that might be required. The Samaritan demonstrated real, generous love, with no restraint. He saw a fellow human being in need and this was more important than the possibility that his generosity might be abused and taken advantage of. It didn't matter. He gave. He gave freely and without calculation. This presents us with another challenge. Sometimes our giving is based upon the least we think we can get away with, rather than offering to God as much as we can, in thankfulness for all the blessings we've received. We are called to give generously, so that all those who are vulnerable, at risk, isolated and hopeless might be enabled to know life in all its fullness, which Jesus came to offer everyone.

The second Sunday of July has traditionally been set aside by the Methodist Church to remember the work of its children's charity Action for Children. This was started by Rev Thomas Bowman Stephenson on 9 July 1869, in response to the plea of a boy living under the arches of Waterloo Station, 'Do what you can for us, sir.' Sadly, there are still babies and young people, in our country and abroad, who suffer neglect and abuse. Frontline staff tells us that child poverty levels in the UK are at the worst they can remember. Consequently, they are currently supporting thousands of families desperate to keep their children warm, clothed and well-fed. Many are also in need of mental health support. Nelson Mandela said that there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than in the way that it treats its children. Don't pass by on the other side, closing your eyes to this need. By supporting this arm of Methodist work, YOU can be a lifeline to the thousands of children, young people and families who come through the doors of AFC projects every day.

Some people have noted the similarity between Jesus himself and the Good Samaritan, in the way that he comes to our rescue, offering to heal our wounds, bringing life and hope into situations which seem lost and hopeless, through his own generous self-giving love. I'm not sure that it was in Jesus' own mind when he told the story, but I do believe that the concern shown here is the pattern of God's love for the world, which was revealed to us in Jesus. I do believe that every single person is of worth to God. I know that for us to get involved in following Jesus' way IS demanding and risky. It IS costly, in terms of our money, our time and also in putting others before ourselves. But when we live in union with God, obedient to the way of Jesus, God's love flows through us, so that we love others as God does. It's a love that bridges divisions of race and culture. It's a love which reaches out in kindness to all individuals, especially those who are most vulnerable. It's a love which is extravagant in giving.

Jesus said, 'Which was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?'
'The one who showed him kindness.' 'Go – and do as he did.'

StF 257 – Would you walk by on the other side

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| 1) Would you walk by on the other side,
When someone called for aid?
Would you walk by on the other side,
And would you be afraid? | 2) Would you walk by on the other side,
When you saw a loved one stray?
Would you walk by on the other side,
Or would you watch and pray? |
| Ch) <i>Cross over the road, my friend,
Ask the Lord his strength to lend,
His compassion has no end,
Cross over the road.</i> | 3) Would you walk by on the other side,
When starving children cried?
Would you walk by on the other side,
And would you not provide? |

Prayers of Confession, Thanksgiving and Concern

Merciful God, we come before you, acknowledging the narrowness of our own vision. Where you embrace the world, we are preoccupied with our own concerns and feelings. Where Jesus broke boundaries, we have built up walls of discrimination and prejudice and put limits on your love and care. Although we try hard to live according to his values, we sometimes fail and we thank you for Christ's generous, self-giving, saving, love that raises us up when we fall short.

We bring our thanks, too, for all the many different ways in which you bless us day by day. Thank you for the diversity of your creation, for the contrasts among us, for our different gifts and personalities, for the rich variety of cultures in our society and for all that we can learn from one another. We thank you that Jesus reached out across the ethnic boundaries between Samaritan, Roman, Syro-Phoenician and Jew, offering life to all. We give thanks for men and women of vision, like Rev Thomas Bowman Stephenson, who began enterprises of care for those who are most in need. And we thank you for the spreading of your kingdom throughout the world through your Holy Spirit.

God of hope, we pray for the life of the world. For children and young people in every nation, growing up in a dangerous world. We continue to pray for peace and stability in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, where conflict has led to many families and unaccompanied children fleeing to seek sanctuary in safe countries. We share your longing for the time when all will live together in harmony, safe and secure from violence, persecution and poverty, and that in all places there might be government in accordance with your will.

God of love, we pray for people of other races and ethnic groups and faiths who have made their homes here. And we pray for those who are frightened of anyone who is 'different', who fear that their culture will be threatened, rather than enriched, by accepting foreign immigrants. May we gladly welcome the stranger into our midst and build your new community. We pray for parents who are exhausted and isolated and wondering where to turn. For children who are at risk and afraid. We pray for AFCs many family projects, for its work with victims of abuse, for its youth support and advocacy work for children's rights. We pray for those in AFC schools, residential care, respite care, foster care and adoption schemes. And we ask you to bless this of Methodism's work and those members of staff, volunteers, supporters who enable it to continue. May we all be good neighbours to everyone.

God of unity, we pray for the life of your church throughout the world, remembering especially today AFC international work in 23 countries beyond the UK. In our own land we pray for those who have the responsibility of implementing policies made at the Methodist Conference at Telford. We pray for our new President Rev Graham Thompson and Vice President Arthur Boetang as they begin their year of office, and the Youth President Daud Irfan. We commit to you the activities of all churches in our Circuit in the coming week. May every congregation be a community of love which witnesses to your grace.

God of compassion, we pray for those known to us who are ill, anxious, in pain, lonely, feeling the pain of bereavement. For those who bear the stress of caring for elderly or sick relatives. We ask that you will uphold them, strengthen them in their weakness, bring healing and peace.

Finally, we pray for ourselves. May our love bear all things, hope

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 249 – Jesu, Jesu

*Ch) Jesu, Jesu, Fill us with your love,
Show us how to serve
The neighbours we have from you.*

1) Kneels at the feet of his friends,
Silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.

2) Neighbours are rich folk and poor,
Neighbours are black folk and white,
Neighbours are nearby and far away.

3) These are the ones we should serve,
These are the ones we should love.
All these are neighbours to us and you.

4) Kneel at the feet of our friends,
Silently washing their feet,
This is the way we should live with you.

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Dedication of Offering

Generous God, you shower us with blessings day after day and so we would not bring offerings that cost us nothing, but real tokens of our gratitude to you and all that you mean to us. Take them, and take all that we are, as we renew our commitment to making sure that your gospel is spread in word and in action.

Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold fast to what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honour all men and women. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, be with each one of us, this day and always. **Amen.**