

12th February 2023 – Morning Service

Rev Helen Croft

Call to Worship - Psalm 148:1-2

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Let the skies be filled with praise and the highest heavens with the shouts of glory! Go ahead – praise him, all you his messengers!

StF 64 – Praise is rising

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| 1) Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You,
We turn to You.
Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You,
We long for You.
'Cause when we see You,
We find strength to face the day;
In Your presence all our fears are washed away,
Washed away. | 2) Praise is rising, eyes are turning to You,
We turn to You.
Hope is stirring, hearts are yearning for You,
We long for You.
'Cause when we see You,
We find strength to face the day;
In Your presence all our fears are washed away,
Washed away. |
| Ch) <i>Hosanna, hosanna,
You are the God who saves us,
Worthy of all our praises.
Hosanna, hosanna,
Come, have Your way among us;
We welcome You here, Lord Jesus.</i> | E) Hosanna, Hosanna,
Hosanna, Hosanna. |

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Prayer of Praise¹

Father, we praise you for the way you touch and change our lives and for the way you refuse to allow us to settle for second best, either with our lives or with our worship and service. We praise you for the way you are constantly opening up new opportunities for growth and for service, new challenges to meet and new concerns to respond to. We praise you, our creator God, for the way you go on re-creating our lives in Christ; that through his life you demonstrated how you had intended us to live, and that through his death you dealt with everything that made our lives less than whole. We praise you for his mighty resurrection and for the coming of the Spirit through whom you call us and empower us for renewal. Father, we praise you for the hope, joy and faith that you have given to us and the love with which you have surrounded our lives. We praise you that your purposes for us and all your creation are certain and your love for us is free. We praise you that nothing, but nothing, will ever stop you loving us and nothing, but nothing, will ever defeat your grace. We praise you that you lift us out of our despair, and you fill us with the Holy Spirit So that our words and deeds and lives may bring you glory. In the name of him who makes all things new.

Amen

Prayer of Confession¹

Lord, we confess your right to exercise your sovereignty over the whole of your creation and over every part of our lives. But from the very beginning we have used our free will to please ourselves and not you, to live for our own ends and not for yours, and to spoil our relationship with you and with each other. We also confess that we have fallen short of living lives that bring you glory. There is no way, that in our own strength, we can put our world or our lives in order again. Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, forgive us, cleanse us and renew all things. For the glory of your name. **Amen**

StF 530 – To be in your presence

- 1) To be in Your presence,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete.
- 2) To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away,
To cherish each moment,
Here I would stay.

Ch) *This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord, this is my desire.*

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Reading: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Reflection

At the Methodist Conference in 2020, they adopted 'Our Calling' – Our calling is the Methodist Church's statement for responding to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission and it does this through four areas – worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. Over the following few months and years, resources were developed in order for us to live out 'Our calling' – it became known as the Methodist Way of Life. Within this material, I see a dual purpose – one for us to become better and deeper disciples of Jesus but also to enable us as 'local churches and the Methodist people to take bold and sometime hard decisions about their (our) future'.²

With lent approaching, many of us take stock of our lives and engage in some form of Lenten study. I wonder, if with all the discussions we have had in the past few months and in those discussions yet to come on the Circuit Way forward, now would be a good time to remind us of the Methodist Way of Life? To take stock and deepen our relationship with Christ? Living a Methodist Way of Life is not something that is to be done in isolation. It is something to be done in community and it gives the opportunity for us to be accountable to one another. John Wesley would have called it classes or bands. It was where groups of people met together to worship, learn and care, serve and do evangelism together – the same four elements of 'Our Calling' – it was a place of being accountable, living as disciples of Christ whilst offering nurture and support to go deeper. Sadly, because of the world we live in we have become more isolated, self-sufficient and self-centred, we struggle and often feel uncomfortable when we talk about being accountable to one another.

When I studied at Moorlands College in the early 2000s, we had to form accountability groups of either 3 or 4 people and each week, we would meet and become accountable to each other. It was based around 2 Peter 1:10, and we were to ask a variety of questions. There were 10 questions in total. Some of the questions were:

1. Have you spent daily time in the Scripture and in prayer?
2. Have you been completely above reproach in your financial dealings?
3. Have you spent quality relationship time with family and friends?
4. Have you told any half-truths or outright lies, putting yourself in a better light to those around you?
5. Have you shared the Gospel with anyone this week?

and the final question was always – Have you lied to us on any of your answers today?

When we started this process, I must admit it was something new and uncomfortable but the more we did it, the more we trusted one another, the more we deepened not just our friendship but our relationship with God as we were willing to allow him to prompt us. This enabled us to have frank and honest discussions and to challenge one another with our dealings whether in word or deed.

The Methodist Church in adopting 'Our calling' and the Methodist Way of Life is ready for change, although I recognise that we might not all agree with some of the decisions they make BUT they are doing something to change. My question is - are you? Is the Vale of Stour and you its people prepared to take risks and take creative actions, to re-group and resource itself and make a difference ESPECIALLY in partnership with each other? Or are you going to stand idly by and oversee a steady decline?

We are called to be agents of transformation, challenged to respond to God's love in Christ. Consequently, we must pay attention to growth and development in the life, mission and service of the Church of Jesus Christ. Our Scripture reading from Acts 2, shows how a church newly revived and at its best can be. As a result, it had a great impact upon those who were outside of their fellowship and they saw many of them coming to faith in Jesus and joining them. This should encourage us, as we have a God who is alive and wants through the power of the Holy Spirit to do the same today. This should spur us on to find purpose and direction for our mission and witness.

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION. It's time to reaffirm 'Our calling' and as part of our discipleship the Methodist Way of Life³. As far as we are able, with God's help:

Worship: We will pray daily
We will worship with others regularly.
We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.

Learning and Caring: We will care for ourselves and those around us.
We will learn more about our faith.
We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Service: We will help people in our communities and beyond.
We will care for creation and all God's gifts.
We will challenge injustice.

Evangelism: We will speak of the love of God.
We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus.
We will share our faith with others.

May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church, for the transformation of the world.

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

A Methodist Way of Life encourages us to grow together.

Make time to discuss these questions regularly with others.

Worship: What is the pattern of your prayer life?
How easy or hard do you find it to pray?
What has spoken to you recently in worship or in the Bible?
When, lately, have you felt close to God or distant from God?

Learning and Caring: How have you practised generosity since we last met?
How have you shown hospitality to others recently?
How are you caring for yourself?
How and what are you learning now?

Service: How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond?
What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?
How are you caring for God's creation?
How are you using God's gifts (including your financial resources)?
What issues of injustice are you currently concerned about?
What are you doing in response?

Evangelism: When was the last time you were able to talk about God?
What opportunities to share your faith have there been since we last met?
How have you responded to opportunities to share your faith?
Is there anyone you might invite to consider Christian faith?

How can we support each other in our Way of Life commitments?

While the future is in God's hands the church can discern what God would like it to focus on.
In all this God will be with the church always.

Heavenly One, you are beyond all knowledge and yet known to us. You are outside of our experience and yet deep within us. We commit ourselves anew to follow your will and to work towards your purposes that all the world might be transformed for the benefit of all creation. Fill us with hope, we pray in Jesus name. **Amen**⁴

StF 608 – All praise to our redeeming Lord

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| 1) All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by his grace,
And bids us, each to each restored,
Together seek his face. | 4) Ev'n now we think and speak the same,
And cordially agree;
Concentred all, through Jesu's name,
In perfect harmony. |
| 2) He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling's glorious hope
We hand in hand go on. | 5) We all partake the joy of one,
The common peace we feel,
A peace to sensual minds unknown,
A joy unspeakable. |
| 3) The gift which he on one bestows,
We all delight to prove;
The grace through every vessel flows,
In purest streams of love. | 6) And if our fellowship below
In Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we know
When round his throne we meet! |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession¹

Let us pray for those who build their lives on the things they can see, hear, touch or prove; for those who demand proof before they will believe and for those who because of their insecurity are full of doubt and despair; for those who have been deceived into thinking that only science can give us the answers and solutions that are important and real; for those who fail to comprehend that though love, compassion and forgiveness, like God's presence, cannot be proved, it is the evidence of them that really matters.

May the holy God hold them, love them, guide them still.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for those who because of their treatment by others find it hard to trust anyone ever again; for those who are broken and damaged by the spiteful words and deeds of others and for those who have spent their days not knowing who they are or if they really matter; for those who even in the midst of a crowd can feel desperately alone and vulnerable and for those who have been let down so often that they shut themselves off and lock themselves in; for those who are afraid to acknowledge their hurts even to themselves and for those ashamed of themselves and fearful of what others would say.

May the holy God touch them, hold them and listen to them still.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for those whose lives have been thrown into turmoil by the loss that they have experienced and for those whose hopes have been dashed and those who can find no way to put their lives back together again; for those for whom the bottom has dropped out of their world and for those who have received news that has shaken their lives to the core; for those who have slipped and are falling because they have built on the wrong foundations, and for those who are filled with 'might have beens' and 'if onlys'. May the holy God walk with them, hold them and heal them still.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for those who build their lives on the passing pleasure of the moment and for those whose lives are founded on chance; for those overwhelmed by superstition and insecurity and becoming more empty still; for those who place their hopes in their possessions and power and for those who seek to further their own lives by dominating the lives of others.

May the holy God challenge and change them and hold them still

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for those whose lives are ruined by civil war and for those who, through no fault of their own, are forced to rely on aid. Let us pray for the work of peacemakers and for those seeking to end the fighting; for Christian Aid, Tear Fund, All We Can, Action for Children, and all agencies seeking to reach the starving and to help the hungry to feed themselves.

May the holy God shake the world community to love and to care.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for any we know to be in special need; for any who feel unloved, unwanted, unnecessary or not valued; for any with few opportunities for joy and laughter, and for those who ache for a human touch; for anyone facing serious illness and for any who are troubled for themselves or for those they love.

May the holy God comfort, encourage, bless and hold them still.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray for ourselves and for all we must face and all we must do this week. Let us ask that the God whose holiness shook the mountains will hold us when the foundations of our lives are shaken and hurting. May the holy God heal us, strengthen us and hold us still.

L: The Lord hears our prayer **R: Thanks be to God.**

In Christ's name. **Amen**

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 407 – Hear the call of the kingdom

- 1) Hear the call of the kingdom,
Lift your eyes to the King;
Let his song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy,
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in his unfailing grace.
- 2) Hear the call of the kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven,
The humility of Christ;
Walking justly before him,
Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.
- Ch) *King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion,
Filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*
- 3) Hear the call of the kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness,
And a hope yet to come:
Let the nations put their trust in him.

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Closing Prayer¹

Go into the world in the name of Christ, with the love of God and in the power of the Spirit. We go, but we do not go alone. We go together and Christ goes with us. **Amen**

¹ 500 Prayers for All Occasions – David Clowes Kingsway Communications: Eastbourne, 2003)

² Reaffirming Our calling: the future call of the Methodist Church report

³ © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2020 Registered charity no. 1132208, MWL00120

⁴ Immerse Community, Kidsgrove; A Brief Guide to a Methodist Way of Life, Pg13