

1st September 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

The Word of God is in our Scriptures. The Word of God is within us. The Word of God is among us
Thanks be to God for His Word

A Gathering Prayer

As we gather, may what we read and hear be treasured in our hearts, empower us to be transformed and inspire us to live God's Word each day that the written word might be the living word in us. **Amen.**

StF 87 – Praise to the living God

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| 1) Praise to the living God!
All praised be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be,
For e'er the same!
The one eternal God
Ere aught that now appears:
The First, the Last, beyond all thought
His timeless years! | 3) His Spirit flowing free,
High surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spoke of old,
Is speaking still.
Established is his law,
And changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart,
On sea, on land. |
| 2) Formless, all lovely forms
Declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth
Can his express.
Lo, he is Lord of all!
Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere, above, below,
His will obeys. | 4) Eternal life has he
Implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay,
While ages roll.
Praise to the living God!
All praised be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be,
For e'er the same. |

Mediaeval Jewish Doxology translated by Max Landsberg and Newton Mann

Prayer of Adoration

Holy God, we pause where we are for declare we adore you for who you are and what you have done.
You are the one who created us and created all things, seen and unseen;
You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; the source of life and the reason for life.
We rejoice that you have given to us so many good things in life.
We thank you for your wonderful gifts of grace and truth.
We rejoice that you have revealed yourself to us in different ways;
you have revealed yourself to us in your Word and in your works.
You are our Saviour in Jesus and the energy for real and true life through your Holy Spirit.
We adore you, O God, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole being. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. Forgive us, O God, for our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and renew a right spirit within us. Help us to be doers of the Word, and not just hearers. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again. **Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Loving God, we thank you for your forgiveness, enabling us to be set free from sin and guilt. Thank you that you do not remember our sins anymore, but cast them into the depths of the sea. We receive your forgiveness with gratitude and joy. **Amen.**

StF 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

- 1) From the breaking of the dawn
To the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
That will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For your covenant is sure,
And on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.
- 2) When I stumble and I sin,
Condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
You are faithful to forgive,
That in freedom I might live,
So I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
You remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.
- 3) When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
And I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
You will guide me with your hand
As I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
Every work begun in me,
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.
- 4) Hope that lifts me from despair;
Love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
For the Comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
Grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

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Reading: Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition." Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Reading: James 1:17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

StF 161 – Speak O Lord

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

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Sermon

This is the beginning of a New Methodist Church Year; Yesterday we were in the Church Year 2023/2024, today is the year 2024/2025. In many ways nothing has really changed but there is another sense where it is a new beginning. 2024/25 is the final year of the Rev Alan being superintendent minister in the Circuit before he and Michele move on to a new place of ministry; as yet undetermined by the Connexional Church. We pray it will be the year in which a new presbyter will be stationed in the Vale of Stour Circuit that the Way Forward program can be taken further; that we may be a more Fruitful People.

What are your hopes, dreams, and aims for a new church year? What will you be doing to help them come about? Are they your desires and are they in line with the desire and purpose of God?

At New Road and Gigmill a new age has dawned; as from today we become one church on two sites, sharing our resources and seeking how together we are enabled to do more than we could do separately. Synergy – We can do more together than apart.

Stourbridge Methodist Church has its beginning; Stourbridge Methodist Church (Gigmill) and Stourbridge Methodist Church (New Road). One Church, two sites. It is hoped that through sharing our resources of property and people we can explore new ways of worshipping God, new ventures in community interaction, new ways of helping us be Church, to be Christ in the community.

Both James and Jesus, in the readings we have before us today challenge the way of being and doing. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders?” James challenges people to not just read the word of God but to put it into practice. The challenge to rethink is important. Jesus began his ministry, according to Mark’s Gospel, with the command “Metanoia” “Repent, rethink for the Kingdom of God is here.”

A new congregation often challenges new church minister because they do things differently from those who have gone before them. At the same time the church one arrives at does things differently to a church previously ministered to and with, and can cause the minister to reflect on another way of being and doing. Both parties need to look at how things go forward. Sometimes the new broom finds the bit of dust that was missed. When I moved to Lancashire the Church I looked after had a wonderful set of premises and was well used throughout the week.



However a visitor would always come to the main front door; that makes sense, but midweek activities, being in another part of the building, were entered via the back door off of the car park. All the regulars knew this and thought nothing of it. It was not very long after I arrived that a smart sign/map was placed on the front directing people to the back door! We pray that this Sunday next year we will be welcoming a new presbyter into the Circuit who will enable us to look at things afresh.

Both James and Jesus, in the readings we have before us today, challenged traditions. Do we need new and different ways of doing things, individually and corporately? Do we know why we do certain things in church? Do we ever think there could be another way?

Children can often ask questions that can be frustrating but it is through the asking of questions and exploring they learn. Popular children’s questions begin with, What, Why, Where, Who, How? For the first four, I have an answer for our Godchildren – Watt invented the steam engine, Wye is a river between Wales and England, Ware is a place in Hampshire, and Hoo is a village where I was born. How of course is the traditional Native American greeting and the title of a Children’s TV programme from the 1960s through into the ‘80s and “relaunched” in 2020.

But the question “why” is important on many occasions. “Why? – Because I said so!” can be the parental answer to such a question. Such an answer can be so easy but not particularly helpful. Often in Churches we have a way of doing things and we have stopped questioning, “why do we do it this or that way.”

Some traditions in family or community life carry on without knowing why or how they came into being, the original reason lost. For example, a woman cuts the legs off the chicken before cooking. Why? Because her mother and grandmother always did it! Then great-grandma explained that she did so because she only had a small cooking pot!

Church life can be the same. Inherited patterns and traditions are imposed on others, but we may have forgotten the real reason for them and in truth it is no longer appropriate but it still continues. In recent times more congregations have moved to gluten free bread, some have asked why? The answer is simple; there are some who cannot eat gluten.

If the bread has gluten in it they cannot share fully in a communion service. A few have graciously brought their own bread but what of “sharing in the one loaf”? A simple change to gluten free makes the service inclusive. I have not come across anybody who has an allergic reaction to gluten free bread.

As I have been preparing this service there has been much in the news about Hanna who died in February 2023 from an hypersensitive anaphylactic reaction to a hot chocolate drink.

Both James and Jesus challenge their communities about why they do certain things.

Some of you may have questions about the worship ‘traditions’ or ‘practices’ in your church. Do we need to rethink our ways for the world in which we now live? Why do we have services beginning at 10.30 or 10.45 am or 11am, except Kinver who reviewed their service time a few years ago and meet 10.00am. On the 9th August I was talking to a pastor at a relatively new Baptist church in Rhayader who have their service at 4.00pm and it works for younger families there.

As we begin this new church year it is a good time to ask the question “Why?” - Why do we do things the way we do? There is the old maxim if you keep doing the same thing you will get the same result. The results of recent times in terms of congregational numerical growth (yes there are other things that can be measured) have not been very positive. Is it time to rethink? The new venture at Stourbridge will, no doubt, have teething problems, but may we have the grace to be gentle with one another and prayerfully work through to a better tomorrow.

StF 157 – God has spoken

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|---|---|
| 1) God has spoken - by his prophets,
Spoken his unchanging word,
Each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
One firm anchor holds us fast:
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last. | 3) God is speaking - by his Spirit,
Speaking to our hearts again,
In the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then,
Through the rise and fall of nations
One sure faith yet standing fast;
God still speaks, his word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last. |
| 2) God has spoken - by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
Brightness of the Father's glory,
With the Father ever one;
Spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all. | |

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Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for the leaders in society, in the life of faith, government and business that they may lead in the ways of love and grace not profit and power. May they have the courage to rethink policy and strategy. Let us pray for those whose lives are difficult through the environment in which they are living, Lord we pray that relief may come to the needy and strength given to those taking aid. May we rethink how we live for the benefit of our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world. Let us pray for those unwell in hospital or home, remembering before God those who we know in particular needs as we name them before him. Let us pray for ourselves as individuals and congregation that we may follow the way of Kingdom and not the way of self. We bring our prayers together as we say with each other the prayer Jesus taught his disciples,

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 566 – Take my life and let it be

- 1) Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2) Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee.
- 3) Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.
- 4) Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.
- 5) Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart - it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.
- 6) Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal

Sending out Prayer

May we go from here and take up the way of a faithful people, following the way of Jesus knowing that as we do so our Triune God will bless us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we shall be a blessing to others.

Amen