

28th February 2021 – Morning Service

Jesus serving with gladness

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship - Psalm 22:1

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

We link those words to the lips of Christ on the cross but how much are they still the cry of people around the world.

StF 2 – Come, let us sing to the One

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| 1) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Father of life,
Whose light fills the earth like the sun;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Great is the world he has made,
Are the myst'ries untold,
Is his measureless power of old;
Come, come let us sing to our God. | 2) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Saviour of life,
Find the fullness of God in the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
Is the richness of grace,
Is the unending life we embrace;
Come, come let us sing to our God. |
| <i>Ch) To our God, who is able
To strengthen us in his grace
Beyond all we imagine,
Be all glory and praise,
Be all praise.</i> | 3) Come, let us sing to the One,
To the Spirit of life,
Leading us in the way of the Son;
Come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Strong is the Spirit within,
Is the boldness to speak,
Is the power to run when we're weak;
Come, come let us sing to our God. |

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Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Lord God, Almighty One, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Creator of all, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent what are we that you are concerned with us as species on this small planet in the vastness of the Universe, let alone as individuals? You formed humankind in your image and in that created order we are blessed by your concern and love beyond what by our behaviour we deserve.

By our lifestyle so often we reject your values and purposes yet from the beginning aware of our frailty through self-will you had a plan to restore a broken relationship with you through the provision of a Saviour, revealed to us as your Son who we call Jesus.

You call us to love you with our whole being for of that you are worthy; you call us to love our neighbour for each bears your image. Our love we offer, frail and faulted as it is in response to your love in Jesus. As we offer ourselves we confess what you already know the sins of our lives and of our being and in your grace ask for your forgiveness, a cleansing from guilt and the strength and guidance of your Holy Spirit that the sins and mistakes of the past may be more easily resisted that the glory of your love may shine through. Holy God hear our confession and speak to us those precious words we need to hear and experience; your sins are forgiven. **Amen.**

Reading: Luke 4:16-19

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

StF 404 – God's spirit is in my heart

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| 1) God's spirit is in my heart;
He has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do -
What I have to do: | 2) Just as the Father sent me,
So I'm sending you out to be
My witness throughout the world -
The whole of the world: |
| <i>Ch) He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
Tell blind people that they can see,
And set the down-trodden free,
And go tell everyone
The news that the kingdom of God has come;
And go tell everyone
The news that God's kingdom has come.</i> | 3) Don't carry a load in your pack;
You don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep -
Can earn their own keep:

4) Don't worry what you have to say;
Don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart -
Will speak in your heart: |

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Sermon

He has anointed me and sent me to proclaim release to the captives, sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Sometimes people make comments about hymnbooks and how favourite hymns have been left out. So often the new hymns have much to offer if we but give them a chance. One of the things that can be seen looking at hymnbooks is the changing emphasis over time of themes. If you look in the Singing the Faith Justice and Peace section you will find that all the authors were born in the 20th Century; what does that say? In Hymns and Psalms there were 16 hymns in the section, in Singing the faith 32 and in the Methodist Hymn book there was no such section. Hymnody and Theology have a change of emphasis over time.

When I was in University and Theological College in the late 1980's Liberation Theology was part of the Course. For those studying a generation before it would not have been on the curriculum. Liberation Theology had its origins as a new movement primarily amongst Catholic Priests in Southern America in the late 1960's. The priests perceived that the RC Church in Latin America was fundamentally different from that in Europe and that they should be actively engaged in improving the lives of the poor. They were active practically, politically, socially and in any way they could to give value and respect to the most downtrodden of society. They believed God speaks particularly through the poor and that the Bible can be understood only when perceived from the perspective of the poor. In the 1990's there was an effort to suppress this movement in South America by the Vatican as Pope John Paul II appointed conservative prelates to the region. The political activity and involvement of the Priests in social reform was seen as leftist Marxism and criticised.

I believe there is something of Liberation Theology in a wider sense, which has its roots in these words of Jesus; setting people free from captivity and oppression in all senses is Gospel, good news.

When I was working in South Wales a Presbyterian Scholar for whom I was asked to verify her identity for a CRB check, asked me about liberation theology and the Christian Church in the Eastern Valley in South Wales. I responded that from my experience amongst the church congregations the mention of liberation theology would have drawn a blank expression on most of the faces. However if you looked at how people in the churches were seeking to liberate people in a wider sense a lot was going on. God's people were expressing a new theology without it having a name for them. There had been the development of a Community Credit Union to address issues of poverty and issues around costly loans. Like many places the charity shops were well staffed by Church and Chapel folk and much else was going on.

At the heart of the call of Jesus given in these verses from Luke's Gospel as declared by the prophet Isaiah are the key themes of liberating the oppressed and setting the captives free which Jesus took into his public ministry. This was the role, the service, he felt called to. This is the hallmark of discipleship he calls his disciples to; service. A Hallmark tells of place of origin, quality, age and designer – there is probably a sermon in that line as well.

Liberation was part of the calling of Jesus, whenever we set people free we are seeing the work of Jesus being expressed. Charity work in its broadest range is an expression of the liberating love of God. Within the Methodist Church Family, AFC, Methodist Homes, All we Can are but a part of what is being done and supported by people like you and I. Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, Compassion... the list is endless of agencies seeking liberty for others. Amnesty International seeks to get freedom from captivity in its more traditional meaning. In my previous Circuit a group would get together once a year, in one of the Churches, and spend the morning writing letters in support of Amnesty International's work to both governments and the prisoners.

Such liberation and service also functions on a grassroots level within local communities, Credit Unions, Food Banks, Debt Advisory Services are such activities. What about Mums and toddlers, Youth Clubs, serving behind the counter in a charity shop? How do you see them? Whenever we are doing something that liberates another person we are part of the serving church of Christ. The Special Spirits Group, within the Circuit, the use of Chilly Kiddies for worship are both about offering freedom and liberty even if for a short time so that longer term life can be better. Shopping for neighbours, Medication delivery, Hospital Transport, the list of serving can go on and much has been happening in our communities over the last 11 months in volume as it did not before.

How do you serve? How have you served? Did you realise you did it for the Kingdom?

Let us rejoice in all that has gone on and is going on; may that spur to find further ways of service. In the name of Jesus. During the last few months many of us have had to lay some things aside for many a reason. In this Lenten Season, as we reflect upon Holy Habits, may we ask again of Jesus "for what have I been anointed and prepared?"

How does God call you to serve in our future communities as we move into a post-Covid age, call you?

StF 693 – Beauty for brokenness

- 1) Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset Your kingdom increase.
 - 2) Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't
speak
 - 3) Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to
green,
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain.
 - 4) Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
Plundered and poisoned, our future, our
dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need.
 - 5) Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until Your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of Your ways,
Seek Your salvation and bring You their praise.
- Ch) God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray,
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.*

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Prayers of Intercession

Friends in Christ in the presence of the living God let us ask for his help and guidance within the church and the world in which we are placed

We join in prayer with Christians around the world that we may have increasing love and respect between individuals, groups, congregations and denominations that with increasing open-heartedness we may reach out in Christ's name to love and to serve.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

We pray for the breaking down of barriers of suspicion, double standards and hypocrisy in our world. We pray that nations may work together to conquer the problems of hunger, poverty and health through a fairer sharing of resources.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

We pray for the communities in which we dwell that where there is need it would be brought to our mind that we may use the resources available to us to show care and support.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

We pray for homes and families we represented here with their variety of joys and sorrows, needs and resources, that our lives may be practical witnesses of our faith.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

We pray for those involved in medical research and all who suffer from diseases, which are as yet incurable. We give thanks for the development of vaccines to bring hope and release in our current situation. We pray for a fair distribution of these vaccines around the world amongst rich and poor alike. We pray for those who are too weak to pray for themselves and have lost hope.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

We pray for all who have died in recent times and those who continue to mourn and grieve.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

Father we thank you for your immense compassion shown to us throughout our lives, may we share that compassion with others around us.

L: Unchanging God **R: We commit ourselves to your service**

Loving, Heavenly Father, we know that you hear our prayers may we hear your response when we are those called to serve and love in response.

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 411 – May the God of hope go with us every day

- 1) May the God of hope go with us every day,
Filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
Bringing light and hope to every land and race.
- 2) God will be our Shepherd as we go our way
And will not forsake us when we go astray.
Even though the load of life is hard to bear,
We must not forget that God is always there.

*Ch) Praying, let us work for peace;
Singing, share our joy with all;
Working for a world that's new,
Faithful when we hear Christ's call.*

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Prayer of dismissal and Blessing

Lord, send us out in your name to serve the world and to love our neighbour as ourselves.
Send us out in faith and hope, that we may be channels of your grace to all. **Amen**

Now may the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, empower us to be people of faith and service.
Amen