

2nd July 2023 – Morning Service

Welcome and hospitality

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

The God who welcomes all, welcomes you into worship. God receives you with joy today.
Our Generous God invites you to receive from him all that you need.

StF 35 – The trumpets sound the angels sing

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| 1) The trumpets sound, the angels sing,
The feast is ready to begin;
The gates of heaven are open wide,
And Jesus welcomes you inside. | Ch) Sing with thankfulness songs of pure delight,
Come and revel in heaven's love and light;
Take your place at the table of the King,
The feast is ready to begin,
The feast is ready to begin. |
| 2) Tables are laden with good things,
O taste the peace and joy He brings;
He'll fill you up with love divine,
He'll turn your water into wine. | 3) The hungry heart He satisfies,
Offers the poor His paradise;
Now hear all heaven and earth applaud
The amazing goodness of the Lord. |

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Prayer of Adoration, Praise and Confession

Almighty God, Lord of all, we pause in this moment to look upon your being and to offer our worship, adoration and praise. You are a God of love, grace and mercy. You are a God of creativity, diversity and welcome. You are the God of paradigm, transcendent yet present, mighty yet gentle, eternal yet involved in time. We rejoice that in Jesus you entered into your creation that we might know love in reality, grace in action and mercy overwhelming. We praise you that Jesus is the very focal point for each part of our living. In his life on earth, his death and resurrection he completed all that you had promised through your words to your people. We praise you that in Jesus we find the assurance of your presence to master the trials and temptations of daily living. Yet, even as we think and hear such a phrase, we become aware of our failing to trust in your strength each moment of our lives.

We seek to do things our way and in our strength and so fail to love at all times and in places. We walk away from the needy and so people around us miss encounters with grace and love. Forgive us our wrongdoings and by the power of your Holy Spirit, continue to work in us that which is needed that we may be more the image of Christ each day. **Amen.**

StF 363 – My Jesus, my Saviour

My Jesus, my Saviour Lord there is none like You All of my days, I want to praise The wonders of Your mighty love My comfort, my shelter Tower of refuge and strength Let every breath, all that I am Never cease to worship You.	Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing Power and majesty, praise to the King Mountains bow down and the seas will roar At the sound of Your name I sing for joy at the work of Your hands Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.
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Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-16

One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'" She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

"What can be done for her?" Elisha asked. Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old." Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

Reading: Matthew 10:40-42

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

StF 157 – God has spoken by his prophets

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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Sermon

Over the years the hospitality industry has changed. During Covid we heard a great deal about how the hospitality industry was struggling, as people were not eating out, not going out for drinks, as they had previously or staying away from home. Initially places were not open, then venues had limited seating and people were concerned about mixing too much. Now things are just about as they were except the prices have gone up. Hardly an Ad break comes on TV, at certain times of the year, without an ad for a holiday or hotel or a travel App. All round the world there are chains of hotels offering varying qualities of accommodation to travellers - if you have the money accommodation is available just about anywhere. "Airbnb" is now a big thing.

Back in 2020 Anita and I managed to get away from home for a couple of weeks with friends from South Wales. We went to stay in Scotland on the Outer Hebrides. On the journey we stayed in a couple of Premier Inns and had the benefit of “Dine out to Help out”; this helped the budget. It was “fun” to try and find a time when the rules for Wales, England and Scotland, during the Covid times, allowed us to achieve the planned break fulfilling the rules and regulations for each area.

Commercial hospitality is something we tend to take for granted nowadays. It was not always so. If we go back to the time of the prophets in the Old Testament and to the time of Jesus things were very different. Hotel chains did not exist and travellers had to seek the hospitality of strangers when they travelled beyond their own tribe and family. “Airbnb” was the natural order of the day without the need for pre-booking and without charge, you stayed in the homes of others.

Elisha had no planned place to rest as he travelled. But he found a woman, in Shunem, a woman of some means, who invites him to break his journey and eat at her house. This became a regular pattern as Elisha travelled the route on future occasions. The woman recognised Elisha as a holy man and suggests to her husband that an extension is built on the house to provide Elisha with a regular resting place, a space of his own. If we read on we find that her generous hospitality to the man of God resulted in her having a son, a family and so some security in her future. Her hospitality brought her a reward from caring for the prophet.

In the tradition of nomadic tribes, moving from place to place finding, pasture for their herds and flocks, hospitality was of importance, it was a matter of life and death. In the sacred tradition of Israel hospitality was regarded as one of the chief responsibilities of a caring people. The stranger living in the land was given a special place of protection in the community (Lev 19:33-34). The modern equivalent might be the migrant workers who leave home to travel to different areas of the country or different countries to find work and life.

As the life of the people changed from being a travelling people to a settled people things changed; people became owners of property and then protectors of their property. Moving from a nomadic to a settled people changed the peoples’ attitudes and values. How much further that has gone in modern times.

Jesus was born into a community that did not accept him, he had no security and so his parents went into Egypt for shelter and safety. Jesus became a receiver of hospitality from an early age. As Jesus began his ministry he had to find support away from the family. He becomes one of an itinerant band supported by others. On leaving Galilee, their home region, they needed the hospitality of others; others who would receive his message and in that message they found reward. The poor and needy find acceptance and healing; the sinners find forgiveness from God as they offer acceptance and welcome to the holy one who came amongst them. The people who open their heart, and not just their homes, to the messenger find life transformed. Their lives, touched by his life, are transformed and they become the messenger and the message as his values rub off on them. The reward of the holy one is theirs. In the words of the Gospel passage *“Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous.”*

As we open our lives ever more to the Gospel message, God’s promise stands good for us today. To receive his word brings reward in life. To receive God’s word is to find forgiveness, acceptance and transformation. It is to find reward and the opportunity to become the “prophet”, the message proclaimer, to offer the same to others. Those who accept the message bearer’s message receives the reward on offer. As Methodist ministers, Rev Alan, Rev Helen and myself are blessed by the hospitality of congregations. Rev Chris, through her offer of ministry in a slightly different form, is blessed by the generosity of congregations.

The message of the Gospel is to support the ministry of the prophet amongst you. One of the great characteristics of the Church is the generosity of the people towards ministers and the pastoral needs around us. Jesus promises that responding to this brings with it reward. Those who give generously to the things of God will not lose out. As we look to be God's people in this age and place we need to be prepared to be "offerers" of generous hospitality as we share the message of grace. In times of economic pressures there is a challenge to the Church to be the givers of hospitality, for "*whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.*" As Jesus said, Matthew 25:40 '*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*' In our hospitality "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*" Ultimately it is God we are welcoming, he is our guest and he blesses those who welcome with reward.

Moving slightly away from the theme just looked at, outside of the Church the welcome of the stranger is equally important for it can have tragic effects on society when not offered. As I write this there is the marking of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of Empire Windrush. The Richard Dimpleby lecture this year was given by David Harewood and broadcast on Tuesday 20th June. If you have not watched/listened to it, it is available on BBCiplayer, I would commend you to do so. As Jesus said "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me*" so let us be prepared to offer hospitality to, and to receive hospitality from, those inside and outside the kingdom, as needed, that all may find the reward of God.

StF 611 – Brother, sister let me serve you

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| <p>1) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.</p> | <p>4) I will weep when you are weeping,
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.</p> |
| <p>2) We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.</p> | <p>5) When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.</p> |
| <p>3) I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.</p> | <p>6) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.</p> |

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Prayers of Intercession

We pray for those who are travelling. Those who are travelling to escape persecution and warfare. Those travelling to find a better life for themselves and their families. Those travelling for pleasure in this summer season of holidays and relaxation. May all find a welcome when they arrive and treated with respect and know they are welcome in your kingdom. **May they know the welcome of your love.**

We pray for those who find themselves on the edge of society; for those who feel rejected and overlooked. We pray for those who are lonely. May they find people who are caring and accepting and know they are welcome in your kingdom. **May they know the welcome of your love.**

We pray for those who are hungry and thirsty. Those in prison and those who are homeless. Those in hospital and those ill at home. May they find the help and care they need and know they are welcome in your kingdom. **May they know the welcome of your love.**

Loving God, as you welcome us, may we welcome others with warmth and steadfast love. **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 550 – Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go

- 1) Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only thee, resolved to know
In all I think, or speak, or do.
- 2) The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
In all my works thy presence find,
And prove thy good and perfect will.
- 3) Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labour on at thy command,
And offer all my works to thee.
- 4) Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
And every moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to thy glorious day;
- 5) For thee delightfully employ
Whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
And run my course with even joy,
And closely walk with thee to heaven.

Charles Wesley

Blessing

As we go from this place of worship may we welcome others as God has welcomed us. May we offer to others the blessings we have received and may the continued blessing of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us to enrich the lives of all. **Amen**