



'BEING CHURCH' in BOSTON SPA

Sunday 10th January 2021

First Sunday of Epiphany



A personal prayer in a time of pandemic

[This prayer was written last year by Romaine Barrett, who is 17 years old and lives in East London and has close links with High Cross URC, Tottenham]

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all you have done for us and given to us, even when we do not deserve it. Thank you for protecting the ones we love and care dearly about; and thank you for giving me the strength to write this prayer. When our loved ones are taken away please help us to cope and surround us with your care. Please protect us through these tough times, and give us a fighting chance against such evil. I hope you hear this prayer, dear Father God. Amen

This week's lectionary Bible readings: Genesis 1. 4—11; Psalm 29; Acts 19. 1—7; Mark 1. 4—11

God of all hope we call on you today.

We pray for those who are living in fear:

Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.

May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.

For those people who are worried about attending worship.

For those needing to make decisions in order to care for other

For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.

Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that

Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.

Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.

Church family news

We wish Judith England well for her move South this week to live near her sister. Good luck!

We are pleased that Joan Dyer is back home after a spell in hospital and we continue to keep her and other members in our prayers at this difficult and challenging time for us all.

Any family news you wish included in 'Being Church' can be emailed to Jim Murison [james.murison@outlook.com].



Thanks to Donald Milne for this lovely picture of the church taken on New Year's Eve

The Covenant Service

Last Sunday the short act of worship included with the Circuit Newsletter focussed on the annual Covenant Service normally held on the first Sunday of the year. Steve Jakeman has kindly sent me background notes to the Methodist Covenant Service and I thought it might be useful to remind ourselves of how it developed. As a relatively new member I admit to little understanding of Methodism, having spent the nearly 40 years following the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church!

Jim Murison



Origins of the Covenant Service

This idea of Covenant was basic to John Wesley's understanding of Christian discipleship. He saw the relationship with God in Covenant as being like a marriage between human beings (both as a community and as individuals) on the one side and God in Christ on the other (cf. Ephesians 5.21-33).

In 1755 Wesley followed a Puritan tradition of pastoral and spiritual guidance and therefore insisted that the Covenant Service be located in a framework of pastoral care, preaching and guidance.

The Covenant Service itself would be held in the context of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Wesley thought that this Sacrament brought into the realm of experience and made real all that was said in the Covenant. He therefore urged Methodists to pay it the highest regard, to put it at the centre of their spiritual life and to share in it frequently.

The process did not end with the Covenant Service. People were encouraged to continue to work out the implications for their lives of the fact that their relationship with God had been renewed in and through Christ. It was accepted that people might find this difficult to do without help, and might "backslide". There would therefore be further pastoral guidance offered to both groups and individuals in the weeks that followed the service.

At the start of the new year Methodists make a distinctive resolution

The **Covenant Service**, often celebrated on the first Sunday of the year, is at the heart of Methodists' devotion and discipleship, and their dedication in working for social justice. In the service the Church joyfully celebrates God's gracious offer to Israel that "I will be their God and they shall be my people".

This offer is then extended beyond Israel to all women and men in Jesus Christ, who also provides the supreme example of what it is to live in such a relationship with God.

That relationship primarily involves the corporate life of the community of God's people (i.e. Israel; the Body of Christ). It is concerned with individuals within that group.

What God offers is a loving relationship. The Covenant is not a contract in which God and human beings agree to provide particular goods and services for each other! It is not something that we have to do to create a relationship with God. God has freely and graciously already made it possible.

Rather, the Covenant is the means of grace by which we accept the relationship and then seek to sustain it. It is therefore not so much about getting in to a relationship with God as it is about staying in it. It is not about acquiring a relationship with God, but living within the loving relationship that God has already offered us.

God's gracious offer to us is therefore simultaneously a challenge. If God is committed to us, are we prepared to accept that as reality and commit ourselves in return to God? Even if we do choose to accept it, how can we manage to live out our commitment adequately, frail and human as we are?

The New Testament suggests that as we join the group of those seeking to follow the way of Jesus, we respond to God's challenge with him and begin to share his relationship with God as Father. Within the group of disciples, this leads to his Spirit bubbling up in us as individuals, encouraging and enabling us to live out our side of the relationship (i.e. "writing God's ways on our hearts" as Jeremiah 31 describes the Covenant).