

Sunday 21st February 2021

Deacon Sally and Revd Danny Wheadon

“Good News of God’s Faithfulness ”

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Introit Song:

There's nothing worth more

That could ever come close
Nothing can compare
You're our living hope
Your presence, Lord
I've tasted and seen
Of the sweetest of loves
Where my heart becomes free
And my shame is undone
Your presence, Lord

*Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the
atmosphere - Your glory, God, is
what our hearts long for -To be
overcome by Your presence, Lord*

There's nothing worth more
That could ever come close
Nothing can compare
You're our living hope
Your presence, Lord
I've tasted and seen
Of the sweetest of loves
Where my heart becomes free
And my shame is undone
Your presence, Lord

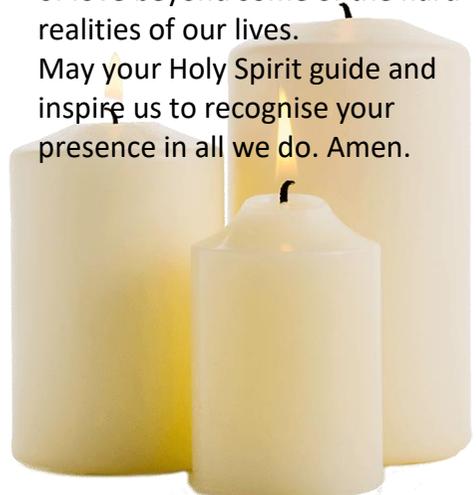
Let us become more aware of Your
presence - Let us experience the
glory of Your goodness

Call to worship

Come together to be God’s
people. - Come together and be
yourselves. - Bring to God your
joys and your struggles.
Bring to God your hopes and your
fears. - Come together to be
God’s people, - and let us worship
the living God.

A gathering prayer

Loving God, thank you for drawing
us together to be your people.
Help us, as we meet together, to
see ourselves as you see us.
Give us faith to hear your words
of love beyond some of the hard
realities of our lives.
May your Holy Spirit guide and
inspire us to recognise your
presence in all we do. Amen.





Hymn: Hymns & Psalms 264

1 Jesus, the name high over all,

in hell, or earth, or sky:
Angels and men before it fall,
and devils fear and fly.

2 Jesus, the name to sinners dear,

the name to sinners given;
it scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.

3 Jesus, the prisoner's fetter

breaks,- and bruises Satan's
head; power into strengthless
souls he speaks, -
and life into the dead.

4 Oh, that the world might taste

and see, - the riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass
me, - would all mankind embrace.

5 His only righteousness I show

his saving truth proclaim:
'Tis all my business here below,
to cry Behold the Lamb!

6 Happy, if with my latest breath

I may but gasp his name:
Preach him to all, and cry in
death -
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

A prayer of approach

To you, O Lord, we lift up our hearts,
offering worship and praise. - Show
us your path.

Teach us to follow. - Guide us in your
truth. For our hope is in you all day
long. **Amen.**

A prayer of adoration

Loving, faithful God, your love is
absolute, your promises irrevocable.
We look up after a shower of rain,
marvelling at the colourful beauty of
your rainbow – a reminder of your
promise and faithfulness to all
generations. Wherever we happen to
be – wilderness, mountain or valley
bottom – your Holy Spirit is with us.
We adore you, loving, faithful God.

A prayer of confession

Beloved Lord Jesus, you stepped
from water to wilderness, from God's
voice to the taunting voice of the
enemy. In the wilderness of today's
world, we face many enemies, many
temptations. Forgive us for
succumbing to selfishness, greed,
lust, anger, power.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Sometimes difficult times follow fast
on the heels of one another. And it's
hard to keep our focus on you.

Forgive us. Help us not to wallow in
selfish self-centredness, but to
remember your promises and
recognise you in those you bring
alongside.

Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.

Forgive us when our minds fail to focus on you and your word. Help us to remember that no matter what we're going through, you've been there before us. Whether we're swimming in the warm waters of your love, or journeying through the arid wilderness, help us not to lose sight of your hand guiding us to eternal glory at rainbow's end.

***Lord most high, forgive us, we pray.
Amen***

Assurance of forgiveness

Lord Jesus Christ, you went from water to wilderness to suffering on the cross. There you, beloved Son of God, died in your physical body for our sins. Through your blood we are washed clean of all our guilt. And we are able to enter the presence of God with whom you now sit, having been raised in the Spirit. All angels, power and authorities submit to you. Because of you, we are forgiven. Praise be to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We thank you, faithful Lord, for your patience, provision and power; for your tenderness, trust and triumph; for your security and strength; for your compassion and wisdom. We thank you, Lord, that through your grace and mercy, the blessings of faith, and your covenant love, you equip, teach and guide us as we traverse today's world, ever mindful of your steadfast love. **Amen.**

Bible Readings:

Genesis 9:8-17 NIV

“The sign of the Covenant”

Mark 1:9-15 NIV

***The Baptism and Testing of Jesus
and
Jesus Announces the Good News***



Hymn: Singing the Faith 508

1 Purify my heart, - let me be as gold - and precious silver.
Purify my heart, - let me be as gold, - pure gold.

*Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy,
set apart for You Lord.
I choose to be holy,
set apart for You my master,
ready to do Your will.*

2 Purify my heart, - cleanse me from within-and make me holy.
Purify my heart,
cleanse me from my sin,
deep within. - *Chorus*

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REFLECTION: (Deacon Sally)

In our Old Testament reading this morning we hear of the Covenant that God made with Noah and his descendants after the flood. In this Covenant God resets and renews the blessings of creation and promises to preserve all living creatures.

This is one of several Covenants that God made with his people in the Old Testament. Some generations after Noah, God made a covenant with Abraham, one of Noah's descendants. In this Covenant God promised Abraham that he would have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky and sand on the seashore and that through Abraham's offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Several generations later again, when the descendants of Abraham were enslaved in Egypt, God helped them to escape and at Mount Sinai God made a covenant with Moses and the Israelites as they had become known which renewed the one he had made with Abraham. As part of that Covenant, God gave them a set of rules by which they should live, i.e. The Ten Commandments.

The Bible tells us that this nation Israel has been entrusted with the oracles of God, that is to say that Israel was God's chosen messenger to the nations. The covenant with Israel was the means by which God

would rescue humanity after the fall and so restore the world. However, sadly, Israel had been unfaithful in its God given task.

Often you will hear Christians and also those within the Jewish faith, of course, speak of 'the righteousness of God' and the meaning of this phrase has been hotly debated over the centuries. But within the Hebrew Scriptures which Christians refer to as the Old Testament, 'the righteousness of God' is understood to be God's faithfulness to his Covenant promises. The Apostle Paul tells us the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable and even though Israel had failed to fulfil its part of the Covenant, in no way would that nullify God's faithfulness. God remains true to God's promises. All that is required is one representative Israelite who will be faithful and obedient to God's purpose, not only for Israel but through Israel for the world that the world may be blessed.

And here we pick up our New Testament reading this morning. We are told as Jesus comes up out of the water after being baptised by John, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him and a voice came from heaven saying: You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.

Here God is affirming Jesus as that representative Israelite whom God puts forward as proof of his

Covenant faithfulness. Jesus is the one who, through his faithfulness and obedience to God, to the point of death, even death on a cross, fulfils the Covenant on Israel's behalf. It is through Jesus that the promise made to Abraham is fulfilled, in that, it is through Jesus that the world is blessed.

Now Christians often refer to Jesus' death on the Cross as the 'atonement' and Jesus' 'atonement' is the means by which we are reconciled to God, hence we often say 'at-one-ment.' But Jesus' atonement is multifaceted and some Christians see it differently to others. Some place a great emphasis on Jesus' dying in our place and taking our punishment to address God's righteous anger. For myself, I prefer to focus on Jesus' obedience and faithfulness to God even if it means death, and we see that obedience in today's gospel reading.

On this first Sunday of lent, we remember again that, after his baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness for forty days where he was tempted by Satan. But whereas Adam in the Garden of Eden could not resist temptation and was disobedient, Jesus, who is sometimes referred to as the second Adam, remained obedient to God's plan, even though he knew it would lead to an agonizing death. For me, rather than thinking of God ordering Jesus'

death to pacify his own anger, I find it helpful to think of Jesus who, in his great love for God and for us, went willingly to his death no matter the cost to himself.

Our gospel reading today talks about the good news of God. So what is this good news and what does it mean for us? Well ultimately, the good news is that the grave could not hold Jesus. In remaining obedient to God rather than colluding with the powers of evil, Jesus took on the power of sin and death and defeated it. In raising Jesus to eternal life, God has shown that, in this cosmic battle that rages currently, God has already had the last word. God has shown us that there is no power like His power and there is nothing in all creation that will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And on a personal level, the good news is that we can share in Jesus' reward. People often talk about inviting Jesus into their lives but actually, it is Jesus who invites us into his life. The Apostle Paul calls this 'living life in Christ.' And when we live life in Christ, we are set free from all the powers that enslave us and seek to harm us and stop us from flourishing. We are set free to live our lives as God intended us to live them right here and now and we have the hope of eternal life in a place where there is no more death,

mourning, or crying or pain.

But let's not forget, it is by Jesus' faithfulness and obedience even to death on a cross that we are set free and our lives transformed; it has nothing to do with human endeavour, we cannot save ourselves, we can only be redeemed.

It is the grace of God and the power of the Spirit that enables us to respond to the good news of God but let us remind ourselves this morning that is not just for our own sake, when we receive God's grace we become part of God's mission to reconcile the whole of creation to Godself. I wonder, at this time when many people are losing hope and falling into despair, will you tell someone about the good news of God today? Amen.

Hymn: Mission Praise 988

1 How deep the Father's love for us,

How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen
One - Bring many sons to glory.

2 Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me
life - I know that it is finished.

3 I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart -
His wounds have paid my ransom.

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Jean Treleven reads Anna Carrington's (*Ministerial Candidate*) Prose in response to the question

'How does the modern
Methodist church move from
disorientation to reorientation?
What Kingdom values can inspire the
church after a pandemic?'

2020 - a year that we will never forget.
Separated from friends, family, and the
ones that we hold dear. Watching the
briefings, the numbers spiralling out of
control Just like the first disciples, shut
away in our homes experiencing fear.

Our churches were closed, no coming
together Instead we worshipped at
home via YouTube and Zoom Technology
enabling God's people to be connected
Hearts worshipping as one, despite not
being in the same room.

This period of waiting, reminds us of
Mary, expecting her child. Clinging to
God's promises and waiting for His
arrival with anticipation. Born a baby and
yet a King, a paradox and a mystery
Those affected by the virus crying out to
God looking for an explanation.

Amidst the storm, our hope comes from

a faithful God, who is our one and only constant Jesus walked our path, shared our humanity and weeps when we weep The cross looked like the end, like failure, game over. But through His death and resurrection the victory is sweet.

The vaccine brings us hope, of restoration and normality, There is light at the end of the tunnel, but from this journey we must learn. We cannot go back to the way we were before We need to be changed, transformed, to be Christ-like we must yearn.

We clapped the NHS, painted rainbows and placed them in windows The pandemic has taught us that our priorities must shift The key workers, the food banks, who work so hard for little thanks. A reminder that the poor and the meek we must uplift.

As we have been forced to live differently, the planet is healing Emissions are down, the air is cleaner, could this be a reprieve? A reminder that we are stewards of God's creation Lasting consequences, impacting the air our grand-children will breathe.

Dying is living, the least is the greatest, these values go against what society tells us We need to see the world through new eyes, to see with clarity To walk the walk, not just talk the talk To live resurrection lives and follow Christ with sincerity.

Some people find themselves exploring faith for the very first time, Those who will never enter a church building, but feel comfortable online. The pandemic brings about new opportunities The hope of the resurrection to a world on its knees.

Although many people are mourning, a new day is dawning. The body of Christ, must bring the hope this world desperately needs. To be transformed and recreated through the power of the Holy Spirit To think outside of the box and be creative in the way it leads.

It's important to remember our heritage and to be faithful to our calling To show that no-one is beyond the reach of God's love and grace The pandemic has magnified divisions and injustices, and we must lead by example So that through the Church the World will see His love demonstrated, and clearly see His face.

The storm feels insurmountable, but we know that this will surely pass. We don't know what the future will look like, only time will tell. But one thing we can be sure of, God is and always has been with us. The reason for our Hope – Immanuel.

Intercessions:

God of our salvation

We trust in your promise.

God of grace, your Kingdom draws near to us in your Son. Increase in your Church trust in the fulfilment of your promises . . .

Fill our hearts with the joy of your good news announced to us.

God of grace, prophetic witness led to John being arrested.

Be with all who courageously make a stand for justice and liberty . . . Give us faith to trust in the victory of right.

God of grace, you set the world in a universe of awesome wonder.
Awaken all peoples to the urgent need for ecological balance . . .
In your mercy bring humanity back from the brink of self-destruction.

God of grace, in the wilderness your Son had to face the limits of humanity. Hold in your tender care all who suffer . . . We put our trust in you, O Lord.

God of grace, in baptism we are united with Christ's death and resurrection. In this hope we commend to you all who have died . . .
May we too come to enjoy the benefits of your beloved.

Intercessions written **by Ian Black**

Hymn: Singing the Faith 331

King of kings, majesty,-

God of heaven living in me,- gentle Saviour, closest friend, - strong deliverer, beginning and end – all within me falls at your throne.

*Your majesty, I can but bow,
I lay my all before you now.
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve your majesty,
I live to serve your majesty.*

Earth and heaven worship you, love eternal, faithful and true, - who bought the nations, ransomed souls, brought this sinner near to your throne; - all within me cries out in praise.

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A sending out prayer

Creator God, you made us in your image to be your people, wherever we go. This coming week, whatever we experience, wherever we find ourselves, help us to know that you are with us – guiding, revealing and sustaining – always. Amen.

Song: – Songs of Fellowship 3075

There's a place where mercy

reigns - and never dies; there's a place where streams of grace - flow deep and wide; where all the love I've ever found - comes like a flood, comes flowing down.

*At the cross, at the cross
I surrender my life, I'm in awe of you,
I'm in awe of you. Where your love
ran red and my sin washed white.-
I owe all to you, I owe all to you,
Jesus.*

There's a place where sin and shame - are powerless: where my heart has peace with God - and forgiveness; where all the love I've ever found - comes like a flood, comes flowing down. - *Chorus*

Here my hope is found, here on holy ground; - here I bow down, here I bow down. Here arms open wide, here you save my life; here I bow down, here I bow. - *Chorus*

Chris Tomlin (born 1972),

Ed Cash, Jonas Myrin,

Matt Armstrong and Matt Redman

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