



Circuit Contact

Welcome to our Circuit Worship for
24th September 2023
prepared by Rev Julie

Worship in the following locations:

Endon Methodist Church - at 10am with Rev Eleanor Smith
Wellspring - at Wellspring Tean - at 10.30am with Rev Julie Hassall
Trinity, Leek- at 10.30am with Rev Richard Pope
Ipstones- at 10.30am with Dr Lynne Bradbury
Wetley Rocks Methodist Church - at 10.30am with
Mrs Beryl Stew (change to preaching plan)
The Gathering at St. Andrews, Cheddleton at 4pm
Waterhouses Methodist Church- at 6.30pm with Mrs Heather Hayward
Rudyard Methodist Church - at 7pm with Rev Richard Pope



Words of Strengthening...Ephesians 2 v 4-10

*⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. **

Song - [\(2\) 1087 MP Lord, I come before Your throne of grace - YouTube](#)

Prayer

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for the life changing grace you pour out on your people day by day....

We remember the stories of grace planted in the hearts of people across all time who have come to know you – those whose encounters with you are recorded in Scripture, and those we have known, who have found strength for the journey through the breath of grace.

We take a moment to recall in thanksgiving the grace you have shown us this past week – making space in your story for our story, welcoming and warming us to life.

We remember the times when we have forgotten that your grace is for all and in all – when we have been quick to judge others, decided for ourselves who is worthy and who is not, and been tempted to live closed lives which do not reflect your love and mercy.

Break open our hearts again as we come to you in prayer – speak to us of your goodness, teach us to make space for one another, to cherish community, and to live every day in the life-giving power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of Jesus...**Amen.**

[Matthew 20:1-16 NIV - The Parable of the Workers in the - Bible Gateway](#)

Song - [\(2\) Only By Grace Can We Enter \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

Reflection

I wonder if you were a 'teacher's pet' in school? I was – at least I thought I was. I would always offer to clean the chalk board, take the chairs down from the tables in the morning, put them back up at home time, pick up the rubbish. I remember speculating that some of my classmates could in fact do more and feeling a bit resentful toward them. But I consoled myself with the thought that when the Friday treat tin came out, I would be in pole position for the pick of the best sweets. I was always disappointed! Mrs Barlow's generosity was even handed, and she always made sure that everyone was treated equally. (As I look back, I suspect I was desperate to be appreciated, loved, valued – but that's a whole other story) In Chapter 19 of Matthew's gospel Peter says, rather indignantly to Jesus *'We left everything to follow you, so what's our reward?'* Jesus responds by telling them all about 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first' – it sounds a bit like *'don't expect special treatment just because you have been my closest companions'*, doesn't it?

This is then followed by today's reading of the workers in the vineyard – as if to reinforce his point. For Jesus, this story is not really about economics but about grace. In reality, the situation Jesus describes would probably never have happened.

Instead, it is a reminder to those who follow him not to think that the Kingdom belongs exclusively to them, or that they have special rights to gain early access in the way that Barry Manilow Fan Club members can get first 'dibs' on concert tickets (so I believe!!!)

God's grace is not a commodity which can be kept or stored up to the detriment of someone else. God's grace is not in short supply and is available to anyone who lays hold in it, at any time, in any place. There is no end to the grace of God.

Enid, a stalwart of my early days in the Methodist Church in Salford would say *'as soon as you try to grasp God's grace and put her in a box, she is gone'*.

I never really understood that at the time, but as I get older here is my best and current attempt at unpacking Enid's words and the story Jesus tells.

With the benefit of a few years, I sense with some sadness that the Church still in some ways believes itself to be the guardian of grace. In our structures, the way we organise ourselves, and in some of the things we say. It is as if we think we are somehow closer to God for having put the chairs out and cleaned the chalk board. We make judgments about who is 'in' and who is 'out' and we treat our own belonging as if we were making a deal with God, for an exclusive preview of the Kingdom!

Jesus tells them – in the economy of God's Kingdom the gift of grace will be available to all – no matter what we have done, where we have spent our time, or even whether we recognise God's grace in our lives at all!

For the Church to truly take the teaching of Jesus to heart would mean changing the way we speak about our communities, it would mean looking at ourselves far less as the guardians of God's grace, and far more as companions of those we live alongside in need of the grace of God.

...and what of Enid? I think what she meant was that every time we forget that grace is like the wind, blowing freely in our communities, our lives, and the lives of others – every time we make the mistake of thinking we can hold onto grace rather than sharing her, we become a little less like the source of that grace as mirrored in Jesus.

Every time grace becomes 'ours' we look a little less like the image of the living God.

My challenge to myself this week has been to welcome and celebrate grace where I have noticed her, to pray every day that God will help me to see her in others, and to rejoice in that too! How about you?

Amen.

Prayer

Spend some time today in quiet

As you do, offer to God in prayer the life of the church you have a connection with, or the life of the place where you live....

Picture in your mind's eye the grace of God blowing freely in that place, spilling out beyond walls and boundaries...

Give thanks for those unexpected people who can and will show you something of God's grace, will remind you of the humility of Christ, or the extravagance of God's love....

And then lift before the gaze of God all those people and situations where the grace of God is changing hearts and lives...and give thanks.

Pray, remembering that others pray alongside you, for communities to rejoice in the grace of God, as you pray the prayer Jesus first spoke....

Song - [\(2\) Chris Tomlin - Amazing Grace, My Chains Are Gone \[with lyrics\] - YouTube](#)

Blessing

May God give us the awareness to sense the gift of grace coursing through our lives,

May God give us the humility to recognise the gift of grace at work in others,

May God give us the confidence to make space for the grace at work in our communities,

And may God bless us richly....in Jesus' name. **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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.