



Feb 14th 2021

Welcome

Welcome to our service today. Wherever, you are watching from, or reading through, it is good to know you are sharing in worship with us. I am delighted that we have Rev Keith Reed sharing with us in our series looking at a Methodist Way of Life. He will be focussing on the commitment to practise hospitality and generosity. We will hear from Keith a little later.

About 5 or 6 years ago we used some resources produced by the Church of England, titled, "Love Life Live Lent." Each person in our Church community received a little booklet that had a simple action to take each day throughout Lent to make our lives and communities better. Actions like, "Give a lollipop to your Lollipop person," or "Do something nice for someone without telling them." We shall be doing something similar again this year throughout Lent so now is a good time to think about why?

Why might we practise random acts of kindness or pass forward acts of love and grace? I think there are 3 particularly good reasons. And the first two flow from the third. First, doing something nice, being kind, showing love to someone else takes our focus off ourselves. The more we do it, the less selfish we become, or to put that in a positive way, the more generous we become! It is good to recognise that there is a big world out there and that we are not the centre of it. The world does not revolve around you or me.

Second, that big world out there needs our help. However small or insignificant we may feel, particularly at a time when many of us are stuck at home, we have something to give to make it better. Our gifts and skills, our time and effort, our prayers, and actions. That big world is suffering in so many ways – pollution, poverty, pandemic, power struggles, war, refugee crises. However bad our own situation may feel, we are extremely fortunate compared to many people in this world. And each little action that we can take to make life better for others, will also, in some small way, make life better for ourselves too.

But both reasons stem from something deeper – from our understanding of the God we believe in. The Bible tells us that "we love because God first loved us!" We hear that phrase every time we share in a Baptism. The way we live out our lives should reflect all that we know of God and all that we have received from God – most importantly God's love for us shown through Jesus.

Why don't you spend a few moments as we continue through our service thinking about a few small actions you can take that will make life better for someone else? As we think about that we are going to sing together a hymn which reminds us of God's great love for us and for the world: "Come, let us sing of a wonderful love, tender and true; out of the heart of the Father above, streaming to me and to you."

Hymn

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
Streaming to me and to you;
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
Why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
Joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost,
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
Come and abide,
Lifting my life, till it rises above
Envy and falsehood and pride;
Seeking to be
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Text

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20: 35

We share together in some words from Psalm 103:

Bless the Lord, O my soul
And all that is within me bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul

And forget not all his benefits;
Who forgives all your sins
And heals all your infirmities;

Psalm 103: 1 – 12

Who redeems your life from the pit
And crowns you with faithful love and compassion;
Who satisfies you with good things
So that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
The Lord executes righteousness
And judgement for all who are oppressed.
He made his way known to Moses
And his works to the children of Israel.
The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,

Slow to anger and of great kindness.
He will not always accuse us,
Neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is his mercy upon those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has he set our sins from us.

Prayer of Confession

O generous and Loving God,
We who have too much and have shared too little, ask your forgiveness.
We who have too much and have shared too little, ask for a new heart within us.
We who have too much and have shared too little, need a new vision for our world.

We ask that we may see each child as our child, each woman as our sister, each man as our brother, each older person as our parent and know the love of caring for our own.

We who have too much and have shared too little, stunt our own soul's growth.
We who have too much and have shared too little, are beginning to realise that it is not only helping others, but also saving ourselves.
As Jesus taught us – what does it profit to gain the whole world and lose our soul.

Hear our cry in Jesus' name. Amen

Reading

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25: 34 – 40)

Reflection 1

Rev Keith Reed: "Practising Hospitality and Generosity"
The videos can be viewed at www.burleymethodist.org
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

Hymn

Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger:
*All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,

Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.

Reading

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 2: 40 – 47 & 4: 33 – 35)

Reflection 2

Prayers

For our prayers of intercession, I'm going to use the words of a song by John Bell and Graham Maule to help us reflect upon all that God offers to us in our times of deepest need. Each verse will be followed by a prayer and a response for you to join in with. Let us pray:

"The love of God comes close where stands an open door to let the stranger in, to mingle rich and poor."

God of Love, where our hearts are cold and hard to the needs of others, warm them by your love, that we might be increasingly receptive to all who need our hospitality and generosity.

The love of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk his way.

"The peace of God comes close to those caught in the storm, foregoing lives of ease to ease the lives forlorn."

God of Peace, we pray for all who feel like they are living through a storm and especially for those who have had to flee, poverty, war or persecution in search of a new life. Fill us with peace to replace our fear that we may offer hospitality and generosity to those in need.

The peace of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk his way.

"The joy of God comes close where faith encounters fears, where heights and depths of life are found through smiles and tears."

God of Joy, strengthen us by your joy that we may live freely to sit alongside those who live with fear. Help us to be companions and comforters to those who are walking through dark valleys. May our hospitality and generosity bring joy to their lives.

The joy of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk his way.

"The grace of God comes close to those whose grace is spent, whose hearts are tired or sore and hope is bruised or bent."

God of Grace, we pray for those whose lives have been scarred by their experience, who carry pain like a millstone around their neck. May we extend grace wherever it has been previously with-held. May your grace bring healing to our own pain, and wherever possible, may your grace lead to healing, reconciliation, hospitality, and generosity.

The grace of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk his way.

"The Son of God comes close where people praise his name, where bread and wine are blest and shared as when he came."

Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, our example, in giving of yourself you have demonstrated God's generosity and welcomed us into your Kingdom. As we praise you for your goodness and mercy may we be willing to be broken and shared for the healing and salvation of this world. Help us to embrace your way, whatever the cost, and walk it with us Lord.

The Son of God is here to stay, embracing those who walk his way.

And so, we share together in the words Jesus taught his followers to pray, saying:

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.

Hymn

Lord, you call us to your service,
Each in our own way.
Some to caring, loving, healing;
Some to preach, or pray;
Some to work with quiet learning,
Truth discerning,
Day by day.

Seeing life from your perspective
Makes your challenge plain,
As your heart is grieving over
Those who live in pain.
Teach us how, by our compassion,
You may fashion
Hope again.

Life for us is always changing
In the work we share.
Christian love adds new dimensions
To the way we care.
For we know that you could lead us,
As you need us,
Anywhere.

Lord, we set our human limits
On the work we do.
Send us your directing Spirit,
Pour your power through,
That we may be free in living
And in giving
All for you.

Blessing

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

May grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and always. Amen.

Reflection: "Caring for ourselves and others"

Rev Keith Reed

Part 1

I remember a former Vice-President of the Conference telling a story about the hospitality she had received during an official visit in Africa. She had been taken to a remote village and she led a service there. She was made very welcome and although it was clear that this was an ordinary village and the people had a basic standard of living – there was a feast of food laid on after the service. A collection was taken during the service and to her surprise that money was given to her as she was leaving. She felt that their need was greater than hers and tried to refuse the gift. But it was made clear to her that African hospitality meant welcoming everyone and also ensuring that when they left they had enough for the next part of their journey.

Hospitality and generosity was what she experienced. I am sure we can all remember occasions when we have received generous welcomes and help. We can think of all the charities we support - as individuals and as churches. National Charities like Christian Aid and CAP and local ones like the Burley-Tereli Friendship Trust.

Our theme today reminds us of how hospitality and generosity are an essential part of our Christian living – our Methodist Way of Life. I left college in 1963 and went to my first circuit – 58 years ago; now I have been a Church treasurer for over six years – so one way or another I have some experience of how hospitable and generous the Methodist people are!

Part 2

One of the ways in which this last twelve months has been strange is that we have not been able to offer hospitality in the usual manner. Our homes have been closed to visitors – even family! When our children and grandchildren

have been able to come into the garden there have been no hugs and they have not been allowed inside the house!

Most Methodist Churches have a kitchen – they all have a kettle! But the kitchens have been closed! No cups of tea and coffee after a service; no coffee mornings for a chat or to support a charity! No handshakes and no hugs – just smiles from behind a mask and a weird range of improvised signals to greet each other.

Charity shops are a very British way of expressing generosity and supporting good causes. But they have often been closed and charities are desperate for that missing income. But people have found other ways to be generous and sometimes the efforts of the very young and the very old and the disabled have reached the newspapers and the TV news. They have been an inspiration and a sign of hope and brought to our attention various needs. We have admired the determination and the energy of all who have found new ways to express their concern for people in need and raise money to support them.

Food banks which were there before the pandemic have been expanded because of the great need and many people have made special efforts to support them. There has been much concern for the children whose education has been interrupted and the appeal for laptops for those who haven't got them has brought generous responses from individuals and companies – and help from the government. Special efforts have been made to help the homeless during this winter – hospitality for those who have been sleeping rough – shelter and food to ensure that they are safe and warm and fed.

In all this – people of faith have been very active. Muslims and Sikhs as well as Christians have been in the news because of their kindness and their charitable work. For Christians the imperative to be hospitable and generous is written plainly in the Scriptures. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The parable of the sheep and goats which was read earlier in this service states "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

And our second lesson from Acts Ch 2 and 4 described the early church realising that they must care for those in need. When I was a lad a communion service was an extra – added on after the main service had finished. And as we left there was a second collection – for the Poor Fund. It was a recognition that we who had received so much from God should in our turn help others. The Poor Fund became the Benevolence Fund. And I have answered a recent request for help from Guiseley's Benevolence Fund. We were able to help and that is when I learnt about the charity Acts435.org.uk.

Acts 4.35 says' "They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need". The charity Acts435.org.uk is only 5 years old. It was started by the then Archbishop of York John Sentamu and it helps people in need. Sam our Circuit CAP Debt manager told me about it when she was seeking help for someone. People can ask for help up to the total of £150 and describe what they need; individuals can look at the website and if they want to help someone, then they can make a donation towards these requests. All the money given goes to the person in need. If the donation is gift aided, the gift aid covers the administration of the charity.

Of course, the best-known story of Jesus about hospitality and generosity came when a rich person asked Jesus 'Who is my neighbour?' and Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan. Who is our neighbour? Well in this world where news travels everywhere very quickly, we feel as though we have lots of neighbours and we feel overwhelmed with the need. The Good Samaritan didn't watch BBC news – but he did come across one person who needed help. Our acts of kindness begin with the people we meet, the community of which we are a part. Sometimes our generosity can be offered further afield – to charities that do good work near and far.

We are blessed by knowing the love of God for us; we are blessed by having received so much from the kindness of others. The selflessness of others in our Christian journey has been instrumental in making us the kind of Christians we are. So it is part of the Methodist way of life that we are generous and hospitable.

"Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"