

Sunday January 17th 2021
Burley in Wharfedale, Menston and Otley Methodist Churches

Welcome

Welcome to worship today, Sunday 17th January 2021. We continue in our series looking at the Methodist Way of Life, in particular 'worship.'

The theme for this week's service is ' We will worship with others regularly ' – rather challenging if we take it literally at this time of pandemic. But that is what we will be exploring together today.

First, a prayer: Let us pray

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we follow you because we trust you: you are the way.

We follow you because we believe in you; you are the Truth.

We follow you because we cannot live without you; you are the Life.

We worship you because trust, belief, and the desire to live your life bring us to your feet in adoration and praise. **Amen**

Collection c Hilton 1997

Song : StF 175 Light of the world.....

Light of the world
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes, let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that You're my God

You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days
Oh so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly You came to the earth You created
All for love's sake became poor

Here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that You're my God

You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

Well, I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross

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Tim Hughes

Rules and Guidelines

Do you like playing games ? It seems a long time since some of us from Burley Methodist gathered together to play 'Beetle' doesn't it? Anyway – like lots of games, Beetle has rules doesn't it?

Can anyone tell me the number you have to throw to start? In the version I know it's 6 and you're off with the body shape. What are the other numbers? Well there's 5 for a head, 4 for a tail, 3 for six legs, 2 for antennae and 1 for an eye.

You might know different versions – but whichever numbers you choose, you all have to agree on the rules or the game won't work will it?

Now, I'm a deacon in the Methodist church, not a Rev. I won't go into all the differences of the two roles now! But one thing which makes being a Deacon a bit different is that we are not only ministers, but we belong to a religious order. A group of people who promise to act like a big family, a community. We promise to follow what we call our 'Rule of Life'.

This involves keeping in touch with one another, praying and meeting together when we can, trying to get time for ourselves and not always be working. We promise to try to read the Bible and pray every day as well. Just as rules help a game to be played smoothly – such a rule of life helps a family or group of people to live alongside each other more easily.

Have you got rules in your house, at work or at school? I remember being told not to run in the school corridors. To sign in at the office if I was late (usually because the bus was) These rules are for health and safety purposes. We are following a lot of rules or guidelines at the moment aren't we – to keep us safe from the virus and to help our hospitals from getting too full?

I wonder if you like being told what to do? I know I don't!

A Rule of life isn't a set of commands or orders. It's a list of suggestions which, if we follow helps us be better people, more considerate towards others and if it's a Christian rule of life, more aware of God in our lives.

The Methodist Way of life is like this – and we are looking at it together to make us better Christians and better people. Remember, God doesn't tell us what to do, but helps us to realise for ourselves what is the right way to live. So – understand when rules are there to help and protect us in life and be guided by God as to how to live your life.

Reading John 4 : 19 – 24

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Hymn StF 34 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for you,
comfort your sorrows and answer your
prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;

truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne

These, though we bring them in trembling and
fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811 – 1875)

Reflection We will worship with others regularly

Some of you will know Professor Peter Howdle who is a past Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and lives in Leeds. He has provided notes and thoughts for our theme today 'we will worship with others regularly.' He writes that this guideline within the 'Methodist Way of Life' brings three questions to his mind.

Firstly, 'What is worship?', secondly 'With whom do we worship?' and finally 'How often do we worship?'

So, I wonder what your response would be if I asked you what you think worship is? Maybe you think of it as an offering to God? Perhaps some kind of outpouring of praise and thanksgiving for who God is and his love and grace towards us, or a celebration of our faith? It's certainly one of the ways we express our faith isn't it?

When we worship, or 'go to worship', it is not for God's benefit. Nor do we need to ask God to be with us: God isn't there just because we have come – we have come because God is already there, Peter suggests.

In the 'Called to Love and Praise' document of 1999, the Methodist Church stated that worship has "a twofold intention: first, adoration and praise, and, second, our transformation by the grace and power of God." In *true* worship we come to God for transformation through God's grace.

I'm guessing that some members of our congregations see worship as an opportunity to learn and see the sermon as a 'teaching tool'. But this isn't where our Methodist roots lie. Midweek groups would meet to discuss

the sermon, but the function of worship itself was and is to enable those who attend to celebrate their faith together and to be transformed through their offering of praise to God.

So what about our commitment to worship God with others? With whom are we to worship?

This shared nature of worship reminds us that the followers of Jesus are called to be a community of believers, a faithful people, and to make disciples of all nations (see Matthew 28:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Personally, I think the way we use this word 'community' can be misleading. We refer to our church family as a community but also the places we live. I prefer to think of our local communities as 'neighbourhoods' as the word community means so much more than a place where we live.

A *true* community gathers together, has a central purpose, maybe a rule of life. Not all members in a community may share the same views, but a common belief draws them together.

How we think of such a community, however, can be problematic, as we so often picture a gathering of people like ourselves. People whom God calls to worship may not be like us in a number of ways, perhaps in terms of culture, race, social class, income, sexual orientation, age, disability, even understanding of the nature of Christianity – but all are welcome.

One of our roles as a Christian community is to demonstrate this equality both within and outside our church buildings

Now, I know what you are thinking ! We may not have met as congregations since last March due to Covid 19! But that doesn't mean that we aren't worshipping together. Some of you will be reading this service and some may be watching it on YouTube. Even if we aren't doing that at the same time – we are still part of the community of people watching. And not just locally.

Perhaps one of the things actually worshipping with others should remind us about is the global church to which we all belong.

One of the things I particularly appreciate about the (Women's) World Day of Prayer services is that we can imagine that service is being conducted right across the world on the same day. We experience the solidarity with others as we worship, even if we aren't physically alongside one another.

And finally, we ask, 'how regularly should we worship together?'

Worship was at the centre of the practice of the Early Church. Luke tells us in Acts: "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" (Acts 2:46 NRSV).

Many mothers and fathers of the Church over the centuries have stressed the value of regular praise, prayer, thanksgiving – in a word, worship.

As a deacon, I am encouraged to pray and worship every day. In some ways during the pandemic, worshipping together has become especially important. The Order to which I belong has daily prayers on zoom where we can meet together on screen. Some are finding the online services a real lifeline and also very accessible. Some services are attracting people who don't normally attend church at all.

And of course, one could argue that the whole of our lives should be an offering of worship to God. The song which follows this reflection says 'I will offer up my life in spirit and truth, pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you ...'

Let us all do the same, whatever our circumstances and may we keep trusting that one day we will once again be able to meet for worship together regularly. In the meantime, may we keep offering who and all we are to God and continue to allow his grace to transform us as we worship within our own homes. AMEN

Song StF 446 I will offer up my life in spirit and truth

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have

done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful
heart

You deserve my every breath, for You've paid the
great cost
Giving up your life to death, even death on the
cross

You took all my shame away, there defeated my
sin
Open up the gates of heaven and have beckoned
me in

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring.....

Matt Redman (b 1974)

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray
Loving Lord help us to discern the right way to worship in spirit and truth.
We look out to the world as it tries to cope with the pandemic.
We see the weariness and resentment from restrictions rather than the need to keep each other safe. We see
the struggle where fake news confuses us hiding the truth
We see the pursuit of power causing chaos and anger whilst trying to crush reason and democratic process.
We see discord when we need peace.
Lord, In all these things, let your spirit guide us all to seek the truth.

We look around us in our community
We pray that our leaders at every level of government are mindful of the needs of the population they serve
and act as responsible stewards.
We pray for all those who have no choice but to work outside of the home, that they are kept safe from infection,
and accorded respect from those they meet.
We pray for all those in frontline care situations, for safety, strength and the ability to find rest and peace to
restore their spirit.
Whilst sitting at home, we can lock ourselves into a cosy bubble, but there are many who struggle with access
to shelter, food and warmth. People who have lost jobs and health.
We see self-interest making things harder for those in poverty.
Lord, Open our hearts and guide us with your spirit to reach and help others.

We know that many are frustrated about not being able to worship and pray together, to share communion and
peace. We miss our friends, laughter, smiles, shared concern, handshakes and hugs
We give thanks for all those who work hard to help us share in the on-line service,
to those who deliver the service sheets when the internet cannot be accessed.
We are social animals and struggle with seclusion, Lord help us to keep community alive
We remember those who are struggling through this time, with illness, isolation, loneliness or bereavement.
Lord lift their spirits.
Let your Spirit guide us as we reach out to friends and neighbours, May we realise just how much we can gain
as we give, how we can grow as we share

As we look inside us, Let your spirit be our guide to look for those things which need to change.
The weaknesses we confess...
The wrongs we have done...
Lord help us to focus on your truth and grant us peace.

Let us say the Lord's Prayer together

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who is in heaven. Holy is your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin
against us. Do not bring us to the time of trial but save us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power and
the glory, now and forever, Amen

Hymn StF 548 Blessed assurance

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song, Praising my
Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love

Refrain
Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Refrain

Frances Jane van Alstyne (1820 – 1915)

Blessing

May all creation lift up it's heart in gladness around us, the children of God emerge as a community of grace in the light of our God, the God of risen life **AMEN**

c Dorothy MacRae-McMahon 2004