



The Methodist Church

Burley in Wharfedale, Menston & Otley

July 4th 2021

Welcome

It's great to be sharing with you in worship today. If you are joining us for the first time you can find out more about the Church by visiting our website at www.burleymethodist.org We have a slightly different format for our service today. I hope it will help you to meet with God and to discover more of God's love in your life. We begin as we open our hearts and minds to God in praise and song so over to the band to lead us.

Songs

Jesus, be the centre,
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.
Jesus, be the centre,
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.
*Be the fire in my heart,
Be the wind in these sails;
Be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

Be the fire in my heart...

Jesus, be my vision,
Be my path, be my guide, Jesus.
Jesus, be my vision,
Be my path, be my guide, Jesus.
Be the fire in my heart...

Jesus, be the centre,
Be my hope, be my song, Jesus.
Jesus, be the centre,
Be my hope, be my song, Jesus.

Jesus, be the centre,
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.
Jesus, be the centre,
Be my source, be my light, Jesus.ⁱ

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...ⁱⁱ

Reflection

Rev Tim Perkins

"Sounding the alarm"

The videos can be viewed at www.burleymethodist.org
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

Song

Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Forgive our foolish ways.
Reclothe us in our rightful mind
In purer lives thy service find
In deeper reverence, praise.
In deeper reverence, praise.

Interpreted by love!
Interpreted by love!

In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow thee.
Rise up and follow thee.

With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of thy call,
As noiseless let they blessing fall
As fell thy manna down.
As fell thy manna down.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,

Drop thy still dews of quietness
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.
The beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire

Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,

O still small voice of calm
O still small voice of calmⁱⁱⁱ

Prayers of Intercession & The Lord's Prayer

Lord, for this earth, we are truly grateful: the beauty of the skies and the purity of the waters, the heat of the sun and peace of the moon, all reflect you with us.

For the changing seasons, we are truly grateful: as the sun rises and sets, from winter to summer, we are assured of your presence with us.

For this body, we are truly grateful: the complexity of our minds, the delicate placing of each organ, and that you made us with your loving hands.

For this privilege, we are truly grateful: to live on earth and care for every part of it. May we show love as you do.^{iv}

Mighty Creator, you made us the pinnacle of your masterpiece to reflect your love, mercy and compassion. We bow our heads in sorrow for we have fallen far short of the potential we have as your children. We have failed to demonstrate your love in our care for each other and the world. We have not reflected your mercy and forgiveness in all our relationships. We have not always worshipped you in spirit and in truth. Thank you that you forgive us, setting us free from sorrow and guilt. Lift us up that we might reflect more clearly your character in the lives we live, for your glory.^v

Lord of the vulnerable, it seems not a week goes by without another horrifying news story about people who have been exploited or who have died in their pursuit of safety. Help us to remember that Jesus was a refugee too, having to leave his homeland and flee to Egypt with his mother, Mary, and father, Joseph.

Make us aware, Lord, of the needs of others. Help us to understand the fear and anxiety, difficulties and uncertainties, that all refugees and migrants suffer. May we never forget that we all belong to the same human family and give us compassion and courage to help in any way we can.^{vi}

Let us pray for the children of the world. We pray for those who have never known peace and live in constant fear of war and conflict; for those living in refugee camps, suffering in the heat or the cold, with not enough to eat and no clean water; for those whose lives are blighted by illness or disability; for those who are growing up in areas where natural resources are being decimated and where traditional lifestyles are being lost.

Lord, we pray for all children living in circumstances that deprive them of the right to grow up in a happy world surrounded by a loving family. May they know your love.^{vii}

Heavenly God, we bring before you the many people around the world facing extreme poverty due to the climate crisis. We pray for those now living with food shortages and uncertain crop yields, trapped in a cycle of debt in order to feed their families.

We pray for local organisations that are working to tackle these difficulties and transform the lives and communities most affected. May they be sustained and equipped to deal with the challenges they face.

We pray for ourselves, Lord, that we would be good neighbours, paying attention to the needs of those on the frontline of the climate crisis and acting accordingly.^{viii}

I am free to laugh and love, to live the life I want, to walk and talk and smile and frown or simply to sit down.

How often do I count my blessings as I walk in the sun and the wind with beauty all around me and time to whistle and sing?

How often am I selfish and thoughtless as I bustle through each day, thinking only of self-satisfaction and not a better way?

Every day on earth is a bonus, so help me remember each day: to live my life to help others and also to kneel down and pray. Amen.^{ix}

Together, we say 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.

Song

Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies.

Come, Lord Jesus,

*Come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit we pray.
Come, Lord Jesus,
Come, Lord Jesus,
Pour out your Spirit on us today.*

May now your Church rise with power and love,

This glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in your name.
Help us bring light to the world
That we might speed your return.
Come, Lord Jesus...

Great celebrations on that final day
When out of the heavens you come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
And rulers will bow at your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet.
Come, Lord Jesus...^x

Closing Prayer

Give to us, O Lord God, a heart that is teachable, that we may know what is pleasing in your sight; a life attuned to your Spirit that we may be guided in your ways and a mind ever watchful that we may rejoice in the coming of your kingdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.^{xi}

Reflection

Rev Tim Perkins, "Sounding the alarm"

On Monday morning I did something I don't often get to do. I ignored the phone, the computer, the emails, and I took my Bible, a cup of coffee, a piece of caramel cake, a notebook and pen and I went and sat in the garden to start to prepare for this service. It was the perfect opportunity for some fresh air and quiet reflection.

I wonder when you last spent time meditating on the Word of God reflected through the Bible or the world around you? We all need to create space to do that. Perhaps it is one thing you could think about this week – how to build into your daily routine opportunities to focus on God and how God calls you to live in the world. I wonder what that might look like for you?

As I looked at the readings in the lectionary and spent time reflecting upon them and other passages that came to mind, I tried to hear what it was I felt God wanted me to say this week. If you want to look at the readings later, they are Ezekiel 2: 1 – 5 & Mark 6: 1 – 13. They underpin what I have to say today but there are other Bible passages I will use within my reflections, so there are no separate readings as part of our service.

Whilst reading and thinking in the garden, I also stopped to listen to the birds. We have two families of sparrows who have made our garden their home. One in a large laurel bush, the other in a large pyracantha. They are shrubs which provide great cover for small birds. We also have bird feeders which I had only filled up on Sunday afternoon. It was a joy to watch them flying back and forth between the shrubs and the feeders. It made me smile to listen to them merrily chirping away to each other.

Then, suddenly, there was a much louder, sharper, shrill, call that came from a single sparrow sitting atop the pyracantha. Immediately all the sparrows disappeared into their hiding places. As I was sitting on the patio, I could not see what had caused this single bird to tweet out a warning but from its watchtower high up in the pyracantha it had a much better view, a different perspective! Whether it was the stalking presence of a cat or the silent gliding overhead of a bird of prey, I do not know, but it struck me that for this little community of sparrows to stay well, healthy and nourished, at least one of their number had to be constantly on the lookout for imminent danger.

This became for me something of a parable for our own human communities. The thought began to rattle around in my mind that not only do the passages from Mark and Ezekiel give a sense of speaking out a warning but there are many others in the Bible where someone is called to act as a lookout (or a 'watchman' as the Bible often terms it) and to speak out from God's perspective to warn the family of God about the dangers that lie in front of them or the consequences of the way they lead their lives.

I wonder what lessons you might learn from the birds or the world around you if you stop long enough to listen and notice?

Here is the question I was left with: "Should the church, or each one of us as individual Christians, lookout for, or speak out about, dangers which might cause harm to God's family?" And when I speak of God's family, I mean all people, because we are all made in God's image and are called to participate in the life of God.

The Church has often been criticised for meddling in politics or trying to be the conscience of the nation. Should that put us off? Throughout history, at its worst, the Church has collaborated with systems and ideologies of evil to oppress those it sees as enemies of the truth (whatever their version of the truth might be!). At its best, the Church has spoken out against any form of abuse or oppression and worked to bring about the transformation of society and to rid it of systems and structures which exclude. Just some of the many passages of the Bible which offer a foundation on which to build a theology of justice for all are: the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew's Gospel and the Benedictus, or Song of Zechariah, from Luke's Gospel.

I wonder what other words from the Bible might inspire in you a concern for justice for all? Perhaps you could make a note of them to read later.

We are called as God's children to challenge the powers that be in this world about how power is used or abused. We Methodists have a long-standing history on this ranging from the abolition of slavery to the activism that brought about prison reform and education for the poor, and which worked to tackle the rampant abuse of alcohol and develop the rights of women in wider society, these to name but a few!

The Bible reminds us that when we speak out God's truth of love and justice, it will not be universally welcomed, even by those within the Christian community! But God has placed a call of obedience on those who would follow Christ, to live his way, and speak his words, and show his love, no matter what the opposition, because for some it *will* result in transformation, freedom from oppression, and new life.

So, back to my sparrows for a moment. What are the imminent dangers to our society that we might be called to sound warning notes about? And what does our faith in Christ have to say to them?

I wonder what issues of justice are close to your heart and how you might seek to address them in the love of Christ? They might be climate change, global poverty, the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers, issues of inclusion and justice, or concerns about mental health provision.

Allow me a moment to focus on two stories that have been in the news this week as examples of a wider illness at work in our world. Traditionally, the Church has referred to this illness as "sin," "the weakness of the flesh," "fallen human nature," or even, "total depravity," a phrase John Wesley used. Sounds dreadful, doesn't it? We don't like such language. But there is a reality to human life which I want to refer to as the life we easily fall into when we live outside the life that Jesus offers, when we are detached from the Vine, to use Jesus' own image from John 15.

You may not be aware of the first example as it has largely only been covered online. I'm sure you will be aware of the second.

Winston Marshall was, until recently, the lead guitarist in the globally renowned folk-rock band Mumford and Sons. The lyrics of their songs often focus on themes of love and hope. During lockdown, Marshall spent much time reading books and posting reviews online. Most of those reviews went unnoticed. But one, and the response to it, has led to his decision to leave the band he has grown up with. Here's part of the story in his own words: "At the beginning of March, I tweeted to American journalist Andy Ngo, author of the New York Times bestseller, 'Unmasked,' 'Congratulations. Finally had the time to read your important book. You're a brave man.'

I believed this tweet to be as innocuous as the others. How wrong I turned out to be. Over 24 hours it was trending with tens of thousands of angry retweets and comments. I failed to foresee that my commenting on a book critical of the far-Left could be interpreted as approval of the equally abhorrent far-Right. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Thirteen members of my family were murdered in the concentration camps of the Holocaust. My Grandma, unlike her cousins, aunts and uncles, survived. She and I were close. My family knows the evils of fascism painfully well. To call me 'fascist' was ludicrous beyond belief.

I've had plenty of abuse over the years. But owing to our association, my friends, my bandmates, were getting it, too... Despite being four individuals we were, in the eyes of the public, a unit. Furthermore, it's our singer's name on the tin. That name was being dragged through some pretty ugly accusations, as a result of my tweet.

Despite pressure to drop me they invited me to stay with the band. That took courage, particularly in the age of so-called 'cancel culture'. I made an apology and agreed to take a temporary step back.

Predictably another viral mob came after me, this time for the sin of apologising. Then followed libellous articles calling me 'right-wing' and such. Though there's nothing wrong with being conservative, when forced to label myself I flutter between 'centrist', 'liberal' or the more honest 'bit this, bit that'. Being labelled erroneously just goes to show how binary political discourse has become. I had criticised the 'Left', so I must be the 'Right', or so their logic goes.

Why did I apologise? 'Rub your eyes and purify your heart — and prize above all else in the world those who love you and who wish you well.' — Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once wrote. In the mania of the moment, I was desperate to protect my bandmates. The hornets' nest that I had unwittingly hit had unleashed a black-hearted swarm on them and their families. I didn't want them to suffer for my actions.

Secondly, I was sincerely open to the fact that maybe I did not know something about the author or his work. 'Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak,' Churchill once said, 'courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.' And so, I listened. The truth is that my commenting on a book that documents the extreme far-Left and their activities is in no way an endorsement of the equally repugnant far-Right, and that reporting on extremism at the great risk of endangering oneself is unquestionably brave. I also feel that my previous apology in a small way participates in the lie that such extremism does not exist, or worse, is a force for good.

So why leave the band? On the eve of his leaving to the West, Solzhenitsyn published an essay titled 'Live Not By Lies.' It stirs me profoundly. He wrote: 'And he who is not sufficiently courageous to defend his soul — don't let him be proud of his 'progressive' views, and don't let him boast that he is an academician or a people's artist, a distinguished figure or a general. 'Let him say to himself: I am a part of the herd and a coward. It's all the same to me as long as I'm fed and kept warm.'

For me to speak about what such controversial issues will inevitably bring my bandmates more trouble. My love, loyalty and accountability to them cannot permit that. I could stay and continue to self-censor but it will erode my sense of integrity. Gnaw my conscience. I've already felt that beginning. The only way forward is to leave the band. I hope in distancing myself from them I am able to speak my mind without them suffering the consequences. I leave with love in my heart and I wish those three boys nothing but the best. I have no doubt their stars will shine long into the future."

I wonder, what strikes you about that story? For me, it is Marshall's bravery and integrity in the face of what has become something toxic in our culture – the use of social media to express vitriol, polemic thought, and abuse, often anonymously, towards anyone with whom you disagree. *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths (or keyboard!), but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen,"* wrote St Paul in Galatians 4.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be different, to stand up for truth, beauty, and goodness, to pray for those who would persecute us. With this example, that might mean making sure that anything we post online is only positive. It might also mean being brave enough to call out those who would seek to bully or abuse others in the online world. *"Rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."* More words from Paul's pen, this time from Colossians 3.

We need to find appropriate ways of challenging our culture to encourage and build others up, rather than tearing them down with vile words and threats.

There is something rotten at the heart of society when someone like Winston Marshall has to give up the career and bandmates he loves in order to protect them from the abuse they have received simply because he expressed a balanced opinion!

I wonder what you make of that? I wonder how you might change the way you express your opinions or challenge those of others as a result?

There is also something rotten at the heart of society when a Prime Minister will not dismiss his Health Secretary when he has blatantly broken the rules that he himself put in place to protect people from the dreadful virus that has taken so many lives far too soon. The story of Matt Hancock's week is the second example I want to offer to you.

Now, before you accuse me of political bias just wait a moment lest I be tarred with the same brush as Winston Marshall. Like him, I sit somewhere in the middle of the political landscape. The example of Matt Hancock and Boris Johnson's response is not me being anti-Conservative. I know some fine, upstanding, conscientious Conservatives, both MP's and voters! The warning cry I want to sound applies across the political spectrum. At a different time, with a different Government, I have no doubt that the same issue would need to be addressed. And it is the single issue which stands at the heart of all human dilemmas and is particularly important for those in positions of leadership. It is the issue of integrity.

For a society to be healthy and concerned for all its citizens it requires leaders who are people noted for their integrity – be it in the political arena, the business world, the Church, or any other aspect of society. Where personal integrity is absent in leadership then the most powerful voice becomes that of the lobbyist. And the most powerful of the lobbyists are the ones who can shout loudest or exert a level of influence above that of others simply because of their wealth, their status, their connections. Personal integrity is the bulwark in any democracy which refuses to give an inch, or a contract, to those who would exert undue pressure for their own ends or those of their clients.

Our society is, I think, in desperate need of leaders in every sphere of life who are first and foremost people of integrity, people of character, people who will not give in to the power of wealth or media, or the temptations that are placed before them to put their own interests above those of the people they serve. When society ceases to care about the character and integrity of its leaders it gets what it deserves! It is why so much of Paul's writings deal with the difference that faith in Jesus makes to our personal relationships and to leadership roles within the Christian community. I am not judging Matt Hancock or Boris Johnson or any other individual. I am judging our society against the teachings and life of Jesus to which we Christians strive.

We are called to be different, to bring transformation into the world so that it may become different too. In Matthew 5 Jesus says: *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live lives of integrity and character. That is what the fruit of the Spirit is all about. It is what Jesus' Golden Rule is all about. It is what his summary of the Commandments is all about. It is what Paul's writing about the difference between life lived in the flesh and life lived in the Spirit is all about. It is what the Kingdom of God is all about – the decision to allow the life of Jesus to so transform our own souls, into the glorious children of God whose lives are marked by love and grace, compassion and kindness, truth and justice.

Perhaps the passage from the Bible that best sums up all that I have been reflecting upon today is these words from Philippians 2: *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others."*

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father...'

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fear in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life."

How our society needs us to shine like stars reflecting the love, humility, compassion, kindness, grace, and wisdom of God. We look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, to help us shine brightly, to help us make a positive impact for the good of the world, to help us transform the kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of our Lord and God.

I wonder what Jesus might be calling you to be or do to shine more brightly and reveal more fully God's love for this broken world? Amen.

ⁱ Words & Music by M Frye, 1999, Vineyard Songs UK. StF 447.

ⁱⁱ Words & Musci by M Redman, 1994, Thankyou Music. StF 446.

ⁱⁱⁱ Words by JG Whittier, Music by CHH Parry. StF 495.

^{iv} Thelma Comey, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^v Rosemarie Clarke, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^{vi} Samantha Taylor, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^{vii} Tina Hackett, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^{viii} All We Can, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^{ix} Hilda Owens, "The Earth is the Lord's," 2020, TMCP.

^x Words & Music by G Coates & N Richards, 1992, Thankyou Music. StF 405.

^{xi} Elizabeth I, "The Earth is the Lord's, 2020, TMCP.