

Sunday June 30th 2024: CIRCUIT BIG SUNDAY!



Churches throughout the Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit, and the morning online service via the Zoom platform, are using this material today. The YouTube recording of the worship sheet is also available (on the Watton Methodist website from 28th) for use by individuals and churches. The zoom service is at 10.30 am on the usual Circuit Worship link (text 07912 379101 for details of link).

Welcome from Rev Jacqui

Hello, and welcome to our eleventh Big Sunday service. It is difficult to believe that we have been worshipping in this way, as a Circuit, for over 3 years now and that the original idea (and Rev Cliff's original suggestion for the name) has been as successful as it has. As this particular Big Sunday is taking place on the day of the ordinations at the Methodist Conference in Leeds and, as Rev Jonny is being ordained this afternoon, we are taking the theme of 'The Call to Ministry'. However, this is referring to the call to ministry in general – for some people it is the call to ordained ministry in the Church, for most it is the call to ministry in the community and the world. Our four members of Staff, and our Senior Circuit Steward all talk about the theme in ways that are important to them. Rev Anne talks about her call to ordained ministry; Deacon Jen (in part of her 'sitting down' speech) talks about the one-to-one encounters that have meant a lot to her; Aileen talks about ministry in many different walks of life; I talk about my original calling as a Local Preacher; Rev Jonny talks about the call that comes to everyone that follows Jesus Christ. We begin, however, with a popular hymn about God's call to service and ministry:

Hymn StF 663 MP 857 'I, the Lord of sea and sky'

Opening Prayers (*first one is from the Methodist Worship Book 'First Service' page 27*)

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

Help us to remember that you are here with us.

May we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude,

and listen to your word with eagerness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession: Say sorry to God for the times when we have forgotten that God is with us, when we have not prayed in faith or been grateful, when we have not been eager to hear God's word.

Lord's Prayer: Say the Lord's Prayer together.

Reading: Jeremiah 1 v 4 – 10

Talk (1)

I qualified as a primary teacher in 1985 and started work. In 1987, I was sitting in Church and had a clear sense from God that I should be standing at the front, leading the service, instead of sitting in the pew. This was my call to ministry. I didn't want it. This is why I've chosen a reading from Jeremiah - he immediately made two excuses why he couldn't do what God had said. As you read through his story, he complains several times. Jeremiah didn't want the call that God gave him and it wasn't an easy call to follow.

I had spent 4 years training to be a teacher. I was just in a good school, with supportive colleagues and beginning to feel that it was the role for me. And so I was angry with God - why call me now? Why not before? Why me, anyway?

It's not an uncommon reaction to a call from God. All these years later, I still question from time to time and wonder if I'm doing the right thing! I think one of the reasons this is hard is that we don't talk about how God calls us often enough, so when we believe God is speaking to us, our first reaction is disbelief and to ignore it and hope it goes away. If we use the language of being called to do something, to take on a role or to do a certain task, we may find it easier to appreciate that God does indeed call each of us to something or other! The other reason is perhaps we cannot see someone like us in a particular role. I could never do that, we think! I could never be like that! But of course, God does not want us to be the same as anyone else. We each have to find our own way to carry out the role God calls us to, and not to try to copy how others have done it. Back in 1987, there were only male ministers in my circuit, and I wasn't even sure

if women could be ministers! (of course, as you know, we have just celebrated 50 years of women's ordinations!) but I just didn't think I would fit.

That feeling has never changed, to be honest. I have frequently felt like a proverbial square peg in a round hole. But the strength of God's calling has not changed, nor the fact that the church seemed to agree with it. I still don't feel qualified - but you'll know the saying that God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies those he calls. Just look at Jesus calling his first disciples - what a motley crew! This should give us all confidence. God sees us in a differently from how other people view us. He really knows us now and also what we can do and become as we allow the Spirit to work in us. And it will still be you and me. We don't have to become like someone else - we need to be as we are, following the call of God on our lives. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)." It's not always easy to follow where we believe God is leading us. We need the agreement and support of the Church, to test and encourage us. But most of all, we always need to rely on God. As he promised Jeremiah, he promises to us too - "I promise to be with you and keep you safe, so don't be afraid." Even when we complain or pull away from God's calling, even when we are afraid, His promise can always be relied on. **Rev Anne Richardson**

Hymn StF 513 'Take this moment, sign and space' (*chosen by Anne because of the last verse*)

Reading: John 13 v 1 – 14

Talk (2) *This was part of Jen's retirement testimony at the recent annual Diaconal Convocation. Retiring Deacons were invited to record a short video about an aspect of ministry.*

Looking back over my 19 years in diaconal ministry I have come to realise that what I will remember most strongly will be some very significant one to one encounters. Through these I have witnessed and shared the immense range of human emotions and endurance. I would like to share four stories with you. Abigail struggled all her life with an eating disorder and then in her fifties was admitted to a secure hospital for many months. I was one of the few people permitted to visit her and to journey with her. The **courage** she showed to overcome these difficulties was inspiring. Alice was a young mother, who at the age of 22 had already had one child taken away from her into care. I met her through the food bank and through the trust we built up together over many months and years she became **determined** to turn her life around and become the person she was meant to be. Adam came into the Multifaith centre at the University and said 'I tried to kill myself this morning I think I need help'. Sharing that day with him whilst all the necessary support was put in place was such a privilege. By Adam being willing to share his **vulnerability** his life was transformed. Anna, an elderly lady, had a major stroke. There were many hours sitting with her daughter as the decision to switch the life support machine off had to be made. The act of **love** when this was done was so moving. So, through these people I witnessed courage, determination, vulnerability and love. Knowing that God was leading and guiding me in each situation enabled me, and gave me the words to say. It has been such a huge privilege to be a Deacon, for which I will always be thankful. **Deacon Jen Woodfin**

Talk (3)

I was waiting to move house, I had left work and all my activities, then the house sale fell through. I saw details of the Worship and Preaching course in a catalogue and it was like being punched as I felt a real pull inside me for doing this. Settling in Fakenham later, I was job hunting and becoming involved at Fakenham Methodist. Our minister sent out a questionnaire and one of the questions was "Have you ever considered becoming a local preacher?" I felt a real sense of being prompted but I was still not yet ready to commit, and wrote 'not sure yet'. A conversation followed with my minister and I was encouraged to take my time. Some weeks passed and the sermon was on the call of Isaiah, my Bible Reading Notes also featured Isaiah. I went to my Minister and said 'yes I do feel called to explore Local Preaching'. I finished my studies and exams just inside the 5 years and thought that was it. I was working as a Health Information Service Manager, meeting people newly diagnosed with conditions and people desperate for help. There were times when I could only silently pray for them amidst their difficulties. I felt this was also serving God. Redundancy followed but eventually p/t work as an administrator in a Day care centre where several visitors recognised me from their churches. I tried to be a good listener and support everyone. I also

started Foundation Training with East Anglia Ministerial Training course (EAMTC) alongside ordinands from different denominations; with tutorials, assignments, residentials and placements to do including for me a time exploring prison Chaplaincy.

During my year at EAMTC I candidated for the Methodist ministry as a part-time Minister in Local Appointment but was not accepted for further training. I was however successful in becoming the Methodist Connexional Secretary with the Wesley Guild. This involved supporting Guilds in the UK and taking Guild weekends in many churches, preaching, running training weekends, and encouraging members as well as all the admin. Redundancy followed as the Guild became a separate organisation. Working with homeless people was next followed by more redundancy. Finally, after several years of waiting (and feeling called) an opportunity arose in prison Chaplaincy, first as a volunteer, then as a sessional Chaplain and finally as Free Church Chaplain. I didn't become an ordained minister, but I have had the most amazing and humbling time to show, in practical ways, God's love for everyone. I realise ordained ministry wasn't what God wanted for me, I have no regrets. There are so many ways we can serve God and I am truly thankful that there have been so many different openings for me. **Aileen Fox**

Hymn StF 611 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'

Talk (4)

I originally slipped into a preaching ministry when I was in my teens. As part of an active Methodist youth group (led by local teacher Liz Jolly – yes, that Liz Jolly!) in a Suffolk town, I helped lead services, do talks and, on more than one occasion, wrote multi-voice scripts as an alternative approach to the sermon slot. All this led to me going 'on note' when I was 17. I accompanied Liz to services and progressed, I think, to leading much of the service. However, my 'A' levels and my Grandpa's death got in the way and I didn't continue. However, I took up LP training again in the Cambridge Circuit – aged 21, graduated, married and working for the Law Society in a Legal Aid Office. Becoming accredited in 1982, for 42 years I have had an in-built divinely-inspired desire, and capacity, to lead worship and preach God's word. At least, that's what it feels like – I could do no other. The way I prepare and deliver sermons has changed over the years but one thing has not changed. I cannot do it in my own strength and I almost always end up relying on the Holy Spirit to guide me and speak through me when I cannot quite get the ideas or the structure. Why am I talking about the preaching part of my ministry? Because this is how I feel guided on this particular occasion but also, because, I have always felt that my main identity in church ministry has been as a preacher. Becoming a minister (called by God as I walked along a road when I was in my late 30's) and then a Super (just having the sense that God was asking me to do this for the last 5 years) have felt in many ways like added roles; underneath I am first and foremost a lay person called to be a local preacher (if that makes any sense!) Hence, when people say to me, "You shouldn't be doing the washing-up!" I reply, "But I am just an ordinary person!" Of course, everyone is 'just an ordinary person' but everyone can become extra-ordinary as they follow God's unique call, God's ministry unique to them in a paid job, in volunteering, in the community or in the church.

I am deeply grateful for the privilege I have had of serving God as a Local Preacher, as a Lay Worker (in Bar Hill outside Cambridge in the 1990's), as a minister and, most recently, as a Superintendent. I look forward to the next stage of life and ministry which I fully expect will involve new 'calls', new areas of ministry, and new opportunities to be part of the Body of Christ. **Rev Jacqui Horton**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12 v 12 – 20, v 27

Talk (5)

One of the things that I often think about concerning the word 'ministry' is not something that is about being ordained but something that each and every person is called to. We frequently mean something to do ordained ministry when we use 'ministry' or 'minister', but it is more than this. In the gospel stories, Jesus calls people to do many different things, from meeting other people in various places to healing to giving away material possessions to 'sinning no more'. Each time he calls someone, he calls them to something that is particular to them and their context. He doesn't call a person begging on the street to give away all their material possessions. Instead, he calls the extremely wealthy man to do so. Each person

called by Jesus in the gospel stories is met at the place they are in and is asked to act in a way that is appropriate to what they can do. However, sometimes Jesus calls us to do things we are unwilling to do, as with the wealthy man.

Jesus Christ continues to call each of us today, to a variety of tasks that are suited to our abilities. For instance, I may not have a science background, be physically fit, or have perfect health, so I'm unlikely to be called to be an astronaut anytime soon! I might also be called to ordained ministry, but my response to that call will differ from my colleagues. The gifts, interests, and talents that I possess are unique to me. The key point about each person's calling, whether it's for ordained ministry or not, is that our response to it will be unique, and this is what we refer to as our ministry. I would argue that how we respond to what we are called to and what we make of it is what defines our ministry. You may be the person who helps with the tea and coffee after the service, but how you do it will be different from how another person does it. You may call people up to see how they are, but how you talk with others and receive them is unique to you. Your prayer life is also a part of your ministry: some may pray over the paper and what issues are mentioned in it; others may pray in silence and encounter God in the stillness; others may pray as they walk. Who you are matters to how your ministry is expressed, how God is at work in you, and how God is expressed in your response to Jesus Christ's call. So, we are all called by Jesus Christ to ministry, and this call will be appropriate to what we can offer. And, what we offer (in who we are, our interests, our gifts, our abilities, etc.) will affect how we respond to that call. We may not always be willing to respond to that call, but it is offered to us nonetheless. To finish on this note, I believe it is a part of how God works in the world through our response to God's call. In this response, we create what are each of our ministries. It is a beautiful thought that God's goodness and working in the world transform through us, giving unique expressions of God's love through us all, each as a minister of God. **Rev Jonny Bell**

Hymn StF 664 'Lord, you call us to your service' (*tune of 'Angel voices, ever singing'*)

Pray for Rev Jonny and all those being 'Received into Full Connexion' as ministers (this morning) and ordained into the world-wide church (this afternoon).

Prayer for those being ordained today

Gracious God,
as you call and ordain these your servants to this ministry,
we ask you to fulfil in them the work you have begun.
Grant them unfailing love for those people among whom you appoint them as pastors and teachers.
May they boldly proclaim your truth and faithfully celebrate your sacraments.
Give them wisdom and patience in their witness and service.
Sustain and strengthen them at all times,
giving faith and perseverance to all who believe in you through their word.
May they be counted worthy at the last to enter into the joy of their Lord.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Methodist Worship Book 'Ordination of Presbyters' ©Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 1999

Pray for all ministers, evangelists, mission partners, and for all who serve God in the Church, in the community and in the world.

Pray for ourselves, and for each person seeking new opportunities for service.

Dedication of Offertory

Hymn StF 546 H&P 788 'Behold the servant of the Lord'

May the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, and all those we love, this day and always, Amen.

Circuit News:

The next Big Sunday will be in the Autumn as we introduce our new Superintendent, Rev Derek Grimshaw, to this 4th or 5th Sunday Service when we all worship together.