

Order of Service
Sunday May 2nd @ 10.30

Welcome

Opening words: For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3 v 16

Hymn StF 363

My Jesus, my saviour,
Lord there is none like you, All of my days I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love, My comfort, my shelter,
Tower of refuge and strength Let every breath,
all that I am Never cease to worship you.

Shout to the Lord all the earth let us sing, Power and majesty, praise to our king,
Mountains bow down, And the seas will roar
At the sound of your name.

I sing for joy at the work of your hands, Forever I`ll love you, forever I`ll stand.
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.

Darlene Zschech (b: 1965)

After the vim and vigour of our opening hymn, let us quieten ourselves.

Let us concentrate on worshipping God, by stilling ourselves, so we may feel His very presence.

Like Isaiah in his great vision of being in the temple at Jerusalem, in the very presence of the Glory of God, let us be amazed at the wonder of God.

(SILENCE)

Loving heavenly Father, we open up our hearts so that you may enter our very being, to fill up with your presence.

Let us feel your love, radiating throughout our bodies, helping us to be more Christ like, so that all that we do may bring your blessing to the people that we meet in our daily lives, that they, too, may know you as their risen Lord.....

(SILENCE)

Prayer: - The Collects set for this Sunday in the Methodist Worship book are as follows:

Eternal God, Whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life: Grant us to walk in his way, To rejoice in his truth, and to share in his risen life; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Loving and eternal God, through the Resurrection of your Son, help us to face the future with courage and assurance, knowing that nothing in life or death, can ever part us from your love for us, in Jesus Christ our saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 22 v 25 - 31 (Singing the Faith 804)

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; I will perform my vows in the presence of those that fear you. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord shall praise him; their hearts shall live for ever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall bow before him. For the kingdom is the Lord`s and he rules over the nations. How can those who sleep in the earth bow down in worship, or those who go down to the dust kneel before him? He has saved my life for himself; my descendants shall serve him; this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.

They shall come and make known his salvation, to a people yet unborn, declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

Hymn StF 436

What shall I do, my God to love,
My loving God to praise!
The length, and breadth, and height to prove
And depth of sovereign grace?

Thy sovereign grace to all extends,
Immense and unconfined;
From age to age it never ends,
It reaches all mankind.

Throughout the world its breadth is known,
Wide as infinity,
So wide it never passed by one;
Or it had passed by me.

My trespass was grown up to Heaven;
But far above the skies,
In Christ abundantly forgiven,
I see Thy mercies rise!

The depth of all-redeeming love,
What angel-tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove
The gift unspeakable!

Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take
Possession of Thine own;
My longing heart vouchsafe to make
Thine everlasting throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayers: Let us pray.
We teach religion all day long.
We teach it in arithmetic, by accuracy.
We teach it in language, by learning to say what we mean - yea, yea, or
nay, nay.
We teach it in history, by humanity.
We teach it in geography, by breadth of mind.
We teach it in handicraft, by thoroughness.
We teach it in astronomy, by reverence.
We teach it by good manners to one another, and by truthfulness in all
things.
We teach students to build the Church of Christ out of the actual
relationships in which they stand to their teachers and to their school
fellows.

The six most important words in the world:

I ADMIT I MADE A MISTAKE

The five most important words in the world:

YOU DID A GOOD JOB.

The four most important words in the world:

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION?

The three most important words in the world:

IF YOU PLEASE.

The two most important words in the world:

THANK YOU.

The most important word in the world:

WE.

The least important word in the world:

Amen.

New Testament Lesson: Acts 8 v 26 - 40 Philip and the Ethiopian

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road- the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So, he started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to

Jerusalem to worship, and on his way, home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot, and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "Unless someone explains it to me?" So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Sermon "Told him the Good News about Jesus" Acts 8 v 35

When I went to Wilshere Dacre Junior School from 1958 to 1962 (and at that, I can see you all feverishly counting on your fingers so that you now know my exact age), it held 500 seven- to eleven-year-olds and was the biggest and most popular Junior School in North Hertfordshire. It was there that I met - and made friends with - my first people with black skins. I am not sure where the family of Raphael Faron came from and did not know him terribly well because he lived on the West Mill estate.

We must have been in the same class at Strathmore infant school, but I have no recollection of him there. At that age, there is no difference between children. You just get on with people, sharing learning experiences, sitting cross legged at the feet of your class teacher. Ajab Singh, or Jabber as we all knew him, came to Britain in our first year at Junior school. He was a tall, incredibly handsome Sikh, who lived just round the corner from me, and I got to know him very well. He came to my house to play in our long garden, and we got on famously.

These were the first people from a different culture who I got to know. I suppose these two boys stuck out like sore thumbs from their 498 white fellow pupils, but no one minded, and as far as I am aware, no one treated them any differently. They were given the same opportunities and the same learning experiences. When I went back to visit Wilshere Dacre three years ago, it only held 320 pupils, of which about 50% were originally from immigrant families.

While I was at Wilshere Dacre, the headmaster was called Bernard Moles, a stalwart of the local Anglican parish church. Most days of the week he - or one of the other members of staff - would tell the whole school a story in morning assembly, and we would sing a hymn or a song. I think I must have been 9 or 10 when he read the story of the crucifixion in such a meaningful way, that the tears were running down my face. But in the succeeding days, the story of the resurrection - and how it affected people's lives, inspiring them to make the world a better place to live in, was shared with us.

Both Raphael - and Jabber - stayed in assembly, despite their legal right to withdraw, and shared in

the same experiences as the rest of us. When I taught at Rushcliffe in Nottinghamshire, in my first "O" level exam group, I had a Sikh girl, Rajwant Hanspal, who had opted to study R.E. as one of her exam subjects, and at the first parents evening, I asked her father if he minded the fact that we were studying Christian based Biblical texts, and he turned from his daughter who was sat next to him and said, "What is good for Christians is also good for Sikhs." I thought him a very wise man. I think that Jabber`s family probably had the same outlook on life.

Both that young lady - and two years later her younger sister - were therefore told about the Good News of Jesus, and understood it, even if at a later date they reverted back to Sikhism.

It was not until I was teaching in Eastbourne, from 1991 to 2003, that I actually met and got to know anyone from Ethiopia. They were two brothers, who came to teach Maths in the middle of my stay there. They each had a degree in Maths, and spoke perfect English, and although they worked in England, they went back to Ethiopia each summer, taking with them enough money to support their families for another year.

The only thing that I disliked about them, was that the oldest brother, while we chatted one lunchtime, insisted that East Enders was the best programme on television, and when I challenged him to tell me why he thought that he told me that "It reflected real life!" I had to gently let him know, that it did not reflect my real life!

So, these two young men, despite the fact that they grew up in a village in rural Ethiopia, spoke Amharic fluently (which is the most widely spoken of the six main languages in that country), Arabic and English, as well as having gained a degree in Maths and a teaching qualification from a top English university. There was no way that they could be called backwards, and I suspect that they were the modern-day equivalents of the Ethiopian Eunuch which we read about in Acts 8.

This week, there have been the competitions in this country to find out who was to be judged as the best Town Crier, you know, those people who wear clothes that were popular two or three hundred years ago, who go out into the middle of towns, ring a bell to draw attention to themselves that they have important news to share with the crowds, and then, in a loud voice, make a proclamation. Elizabeth my wife, commented that as I have a loud voice, I would be good at that job! In those days, when there were no televisions or radios, no text messages or telephones, it was difficult to pass on information and news to the general population.

Sometimes songs were made up, and the results of battles fought overseas, or the loss of important ships for examples, would have been sung to the people, and the important news spread in that way. As Christians, we use exactly the same techniques to spread our basic beliefs, through the hymns and carols that we sing. I remember listening to an edition of Desert Island Discs many years ago on the radio, where a prominent Christian, at the end of the programme, was asked to choose what book he wanted to have with him, as well as the Bible and a copy of Shakespeare, and he replied that he wanted to have a copy of the Methodist hymn book, and when asked why, he replied that the hymns contained all that was important to him in terms of his beliefs. It was the Good News set to music.

As a person who enjoys performing on stage - and let`s face it, leading a service and giving a sermon comes in the same category as performing on stage - on the occasions when I was given a lead role in any of the musicals which I so enjoyed performing in, whereas I rarely had trouble remembering the words to songs, learning the dialogue from the libretti was, for me, a much bigger and more difficult task.

I came to the conclusion many years ago, that musical tunes stuck in my memory far better than mere words. While teaching I was amazed at how many teenagers - girls especially - knew the words to hundreds of pop songs. I often thought how good it would be if I could turn the words of the subjects,

they were supposed to be learning for their GCSEs into lyrics attached to a popular tune, as they might get better results than because they could memorize what they needed to learn!

As a great Youth Hosteller, I enjoyed taking groups of pupils away for weekends or whole weeks to stay at hostels while exploring different parts of the country. On one occasion we were staying at Maeshafn, which, at the time, was the highest hostel in North Wales. We had spent much of the day walking through the mountains, climbing and descending, and getting thoroughly worn out. Most of the youngsters were happy to go to bed, and the warden, once all of his hostellers that he was expecting had turned up and signed in, offered to take any of the adults who wanted to go, down to the local pub in his Land Rover. The point was, that he knew the way, and in a spread-out village with no streetlights, he wanted to ensure that we all got back safely!

There were enough adults left behind to keep an eye on the youngsters and they had the pub phone number should anything go wrong, and we had to be quickly recalled. While relaxing over our half pint and a packet of crisps, something rather wonderful happened. Out of nowhere, a group of the locals started singing, and soon, nearly everyone was taking part. They were not folk songs, or pop songs, but hymns! We enjoyed half an hour's impromptu hymn singing, with no books or hymn sheets. Those well-worn words had been committed to memory over many years, and were shared and spread amongst all who were in the pub. The Good News - set to music - was as naturally broadcast there as in any church or chapel, and I suspect that a goodly number of people who only went to church or chapel for births, deaths and marriages, knew the basics of the Good News as well as any who did go weekly.

Finding the right medium to share the Good News has always been a challenge. Getting people hooked and curious, wanting to know what a piece was referring to, what it meant, has always been an important way to interest people, as Philip discovered on that desert road. While teaching at County Upper School in Bury St Edmunds, I had a visit one day from one of the Chaps who taught A Level French. They had one of the stories from Flaubert which they had to study as one of the set texts, and he came to quiz me about the background to the story of John the Baptist, and his relationship with the Life of Christ.

Gradually I went through it with him, making sure that he understood what I understood. He then went off to teach the same to his French "A" level students. Here was another way in which part of the Good News was shared and explained. Little did those sixth formers expect to have an R E Lesson while doing French, but that was how it turned out.

At a similar time, one of my colleagues who taught in a very rough school in Haverhill, which was populated with displaced London overspill families, was having a dreadful time trying to teach R.E. there. However, a solution was found. Art was the love of his life, and he had a large collection of pictures. Many of these were of religious subjects, and he found that the same pupils who would not listen to him if he tried to teach a straightforward R.E. lesson, were fascinated by these pictures, which they were happy to discuss, and soon, he discovered that the pupils wanted to know what story the artist had painted, and he was able to deliver some very deep religious lessons, using the great - and not so great - pictures of the world. So, they heard the Good News, although it was delivered in a rather round about way!

For the people who lived at the time of Jesus, there was, of course, no New Testament. They were looking forward to the time when God would, as they understood it, fulfil the next part of his plan for mankind. As they understood it, God would intervene into the lives of humanity, to justify those who were good, those who tried to fulfil his teachings and expectations. The language of the Psalms, for instance, was couched in almost battle terms, because, of course, this is what they understood, this is what they had experienced up to now.

Nowhere was there a complete usage of spiritual terms to portray God. Only in the prophesy of Isaiah, in a few selected verses from chapters 42 to 53 do we find references to a suffering servant, who would not be a mighty warrior king as many of the Jewish people had expected and were looking forward to, but would be one who came, not to lord it over people, but to serve them, who would not come shrouded in glory, but would come prepared to suffer for his people, who would take on the punishment that the people deserved.

This concept was already familiar to the Jewish people. On the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year, the High Priest, in a long ceremony, would ritually transfer the sins of the nation into a goat by laying on his hands on the animal's head, and the animal would be taken out into the desert, and left to die. This is where we get our term "scapegoat" from, one who takes the blame for other people. But there was no official understanding that a human being would take on this role.

No wonder that the Ethiopian eunuch, educated though he undoubtedly was, did not understand that the passage he was reading in scripture had been fulfilled by Jesus. No wonder that Philip was needed to explain to him that God had forgiven his sins, that God loved him so much that he sent Jesus to die at the crucifixion in his place. No wonder that when the scales fell off his eyes, and he understood what he had been reading, that he wanted to be baptised to show that he believed and accepted Jesus, not sometime in the future, but right now, as soon as possible.

The psalmist talked about the poor eating and being satisfied. Whereas the poor always need physical food - and thank God for food banks and the work that the Trussell Trust and others do in Britain at present, and that Christian Aid and Oxfam do in other parts of the world at present - but I think that the psalmist also had a spiritual understanding, which only God could satisfy.

Each and every human being has a spiritual side to them. That is what distinguishes a human being from all the other members of the animal kingdom. Humans have a spiritual craving which not everyone recognises or accepts, yet deep down, it is there. It is part of what makes us, us. The Ethiopian knew that he had a spiritual hunger which needed satisfying, but which he could not do on his own. He was almost there. He was on the brink, ready to plunge headlong into a depth of being, surrounded by God, feeling God's love washing over him, supporting him, strengthening him. And Philip was the catalyst to enable that to happen.

I have already said that we all have this spiritual side which needs developing, yet there are so many, who, unlike the Ethiopian, are not searching, are not ready to receive God, who only understand this spiritual need as a itch in life which they cannot be bothered to explore. And our role in life, as I understand it, is to be there, ready to be another Philip when the need arises in others. We are called to tell him - or her - the Good News about Jesus. Amen

Prayers of Intercession and Lord's Prayer

Hymn Tell me the Stories of Jesus by William H Parker

Tell me the stories of Jesus, I love to hear,
Things I would ask him to tell me if he were
here.

Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea.
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

First let me hear how the children, stood round
his knee,
And I shall fancy his blessing, falling on me.

Words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
All in the lovelight of Jesus' face

Tell me in accents of wonder, how rolled the
sea,

Tossing the boat in a tempest, on
And how the Maker, ready and kind,
Chided the billows, and hushed the wind

The Grace