

Sunday 13th September 2020 (Ordinary 24 year A)

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use while we are unable to attend church. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you

Call to worship (from Ps 130)

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Hymn: O worship the King, all-glorious above (StF 113)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAyKmYD2Zg8>

1 O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

2 O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

3 The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
has 'stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

4 Your bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

5 Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

6 O measureless Might! Ineffable Love!
While angels delight to hymn you above,
the humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
with true adoration shall lisp to your praise.

Robert Grant (1779-1838). CCLI 052772

Reading: Romans 14: 1-12

Prayer

Holy God, you are the one we turn to in worship, you who made us, who provides all our needs, who has redeemed us in Christ. Help us to worship and recognise your presence with us wherever we are. Help us to see where we have not lived according to your holy law to love you and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Forgive us when we judge another especially as brothers and sisters in the church, which you have

created for your glory and because of your overwhelming love for the whole creation, for this earth and all that lives upon it. Forgive and we also forgive from the heart. We know ourselves to be accountable to you for all we say and do in the life you give us. Strengthen our faith in your mercy and direct our paths. In the Name of Jesus our Saviour, Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18: 21-35

Time to Reflect

Back to normal? Not really, not at all! Lots of things are easier than they were. Are we ready, though, to adapt and to change? For surely being a follower of Jesus is to be open to change.

This Sunday is Education Sunday. Barbara Easton, next year's vice president of the Methodist Conference, has prepared Education Sunday materials for schools and churches. Barbara herself is one of the leaders of Methodist Academy Schools Trust. She writes that education is all about change, something young children understand, but which older children and adults resist. But can we afford to resist change? Many lament what they are seeing their children or grandchildren go through since March this year. The children of this generation are facing changes unseen since wartime: young lives affected not only by disruption to their education, but by loss of relationships, loss of smiles through face coverings and worse. My friend said she wished her granddaughter didn't know the word "virus". The gains, for some however, have been time spent outside, in the natural world, and seeing a society quietened by lockdown and an appreciation for care and health professionals and being a good neighbour. These *changes* have been an "education" for us all. With loosening of restrictions we can easily forget this education. Us grown-ups might instead concentrate on trying to "get back to normal", whatever that means for us.

In our Gospel reading, St Matthew was speaking about Church life when he recorded St Peter's questions on how many times he should forgive a fellow believer who sinned against him. Jesus' uncompromising answer of "seventy times seven" is followed by his story about the unforgiving servant, and that story which is wider than Church. It's a lesson to all humanity. In the story, the servant of a rich man is suddenly in a lot of debt and terrifying trouble. The unimaginable sum of ten thousand talents, equivalent to the national debt of national governments today, condemns the servant and his family – the effect is traumatic. Maybe you can remember a dreadful

sinking feeling from a difficult time in your life, maybe very recently in the pandemic: Something that you wanted to run from but couldn't; something beyond you; something you cannot affect or repair. In Jesus' story, this servant is quickly on his knees begging for mercy. Maybe you have been there, maybe in prayer to God. Then rescue comes unexpectedly - the rich master is merciful, extremely merciful, and totally cancels this unpayable debt. The grateful servant and his family are free from threat, what a relief! But does the servant *learn* from this? No! And very soon he's traumatising someone else to get his own way. Jesus describes human nature at its worst.

I wonder, is God looking to see what we've learnt from generosity we've experienced or witnessed? Not quite like Jesus' story maybe, but we do well to reflect on the mercy shown to each of us in these days, and to learn from it in how we treat our fellow human beings and how we treat our precious natural world. So quickly the economy becomes the most important thing. Education is seen as a crucial part of our society's way forward through the pandemic, although this is at the cost of much on behalf of school staff, from those I have spoken to. I am no expert but I don't think all the lessons that we've learnt from lockdown are being remembered, especially not the adults. Mercy has been shown, so mercy must be practiced. St Matthew emphasised the withdrawal of mercy from the unmerciful – could this happen to us? In my view, the mercy of God and the natural world have to be treated with careful respect. The life of Jesus of Nazareth was a mercy in itself. His sacrifice for the world was the ultimate mercy. You might think about times of goodness shown to *you* in your life. All these things must teach us to also display a generous heart. Jesus taught his followers to adopt the humility of a little child. We pray for today's young generation and what they are learning through the pandemic and in their changed environment in schools. We pray for ourselves too, that we would adapt to the changes enforced upon us, but also that we'd be looking not for "back to normal", but instead for the new life God always has for us in Jesus Christ. May he enable us to learn, and grow more like him. Amen.

Prayers

Our prayers this week are using a harvest theme. We will use words from Jane Montgomery Campbell's translation of Matthias Claudius's Hymn: *We plough the fields and scatter* (StF 130). For many weeks now, a lot of industry in fields and on farms has been aiming at providing a good harvest. There have also been many unusual vehicles on the roads. We start with a prayer for farmers from the new Methodist Prayer Handbook, page 86, written by Maurice Wright, supernumerary minister: let us pray. "God of growth and Lord of fruitfulness, we pray for farmers and all who work with animals and what comes from the earth. As they toil in the muck and

mud, the slush and the snow, thankful when the sun comes at the right time and philosophic when it doesn't, may we remember all they do to put food on our plates. Amen."

Dear God, our world is being "ploughed" by Covid 19. We have felt a change in our land with so many people losing their lives. We pray for people whose lives have been badly affected, asking for them to see "seeds" of healing in compassion shown by medical teams, carers, friends, neighbours or family. We pray for people sowing these seeds in health care and care settings and we think of Methodist Homes for the Aged. Help us to sow good seed, Lord, in our prayers, actions and giving.

*We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land*

Lord we think of people whose lives have changed materially in this crisis, people whose work pattern has been interrupted. Let them receive good advice and support. We pray for foodbanks attempting to meet the increasing need. Further afield, we think of All We Can and the lasting help that they give in such a respectful way. Help us to listen to your voice prompting us to pray and to act.

*But it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;*

As we reflect on harvest, and the weather that has to aid the growth, we are reminded of climate change. We are moved to ask for forgiveness for our lack of good stewardship. We pray for those experiencing a poor harvest. Guide them God.

*He sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.*

God help us all to prepare the land of our society and to plant small seeds of your love.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heav'n above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.*

A time of silence for you and I to bring to God those people on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you (StF 611)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttW9oQ-yiuU>

Blessing (from Ps 130)

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God's steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far God removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us always. Amen.