

Service at Home for Sunday 18th July 2021

Prepared by Christina Pritchard

Call to worship

Holy God of Israel,
 ever present and moving among your people, draw us near to you,
 that in place of hostility there may be peace;
 in place of loneliness, compassion;
 in place of aimlessness, direction;
 and in place of sickness, healing;
 through Christ Jesus, in whom you draw near to us. Amen.

Singing the Faith 481 (Psalm 23)

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
 he makes me lie in pastures green,
 he leads me by the still, still waters,
 his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
 and I will trust in you alone,
 for your endless mercy follows me,
 your goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,
 and he anoints my head with oil;
 and my cup – it overflows with joy,
 I feast on his pure delights.

3 And though I walk the darkest path –
 I will not fear the evil one,
 for you are with me, and your rod and staff
 are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend
 (1963-)

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Prayer of adoration (Singing the Faith 66)

This, this is the God we adore,
 our faithful, unchangeable friend,
 whose love is as great as his power,
 and neither knows measure nor end:

Tis Jesus the first and the last,
 whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
 we'll praise him for all that is past,
 and trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart

Prayer of confession (CtRCLv3)

Lord Jesus, you lived a life in harmony; rest and work, time for others and time for yourself, activity and prayer, were in perfect balance.

We often get it wrong.

When we work so hard that there is no time for those we love – Lord, forgive us.

When we view our work purely in terms of what we have achieved – Lord, forgive us.

When we linger too long by still waters, knowing you've called us into the dark valley – Lord, forgive us.

When we forget in our work and play that you are with us – Lord, forgive us.

Thank you, Lord for your patience and encouragement with us in all that we do: Thank you for leading us in your way. Amen.

Ephesians 2:11-22

2:11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" - a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands - 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Singing the Faith 685

1 In Christ there is no east or west
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

2 In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

3 Join hands then all the human race,
whate'er your nation be;
all children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

4 In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north;
all Christ-like souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

John Oxenham, pseud.

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Message

Over the last few weeks, there has been much disturbance within as well as outside the Methodist Church. We have seen:

the outstanding performance from a sports team belittled, and their failure to win used as excuse to beat people up, spread racist messages, fear and prejudice;

differences of opinion over vaccinating or not, easing restrictions or not is causing breakdown of groups and relationships;

political pressures over BREXIT and what it will or won't mean for various elements of the UK is creating an unstable future for many sectors of business and the people working in them.

After the announcement from Conference of the acceptance of the "God In Love Unites Us" report, we have seen division, name calling and prejudice throughout the Methodist Church.

Throughout biblical and church history we have seen the understanding of God's message to love our neighbour change. Christianity has been used to justify slavery; prejudice against those of different race or colour; sexism, denouncing female ministers; punishing left-handedness; homophobia; refusing remarriage

to divorcees; war, crusades, genocide, the holocaust; apartheid; prejudice against those who do not conform to heterosexual stereotypes; and probably others which I have not included.

Whatever situation we find ourselves in and whichever side of any argument we agree with, all of these situations involved real people with sincerely held beliefs.

I would hope that all of us were disgusted by the behaviour of some so-called fans after the final. This is not how we expect reasonable people to behave.

I would hope that whatever our ideas about vaccination, restrictions, BREXIT, etc. that we would still be able to discuss rationally with those who hold opposing ideas.

Nowadays in Methodism we would not expect to support slavery, racism, sexism, an all-male clergy, apartheid, etc. Now we are being asked to recognise that relationships between single gender couples can be true expressions of God's love and may be celebrated by marriage in our churches. For some, this change will be difficult and go against long-held traditional beliefs. For others it will be a welcome liberation, accepting those who have previously been unable to be fully part of congregational life. Conference has asked us to hold these differences in teaching in tension, in the same way that, as Methodists, we accept the marriage of divorcees as valid, although some would still argue against such practice.

As we continue into this new understanding of Methodist life, may we each remember that we are called to love our neighbour, without exception. We are not called to agree with or judge our neighbour!

Jesus came to free us from the law and commandments and to take down the divisions between people (Eph 2:15 above). As this division starts to come down throughout Methodism, may we react with love, discussion, openness and a willingness to learn from each other, so that our congregations may be truly inclusive and places where anyone can feel welcome and loved. In all of our dealings, may we remember that everyone we meet is a dearly loved child of God. Amen.

Intercessions (Based on CtRCLv1)

When we are hungry, for food, for love, or because we have not fed on you in our hearts:

Loving Shepherd of your sheep: feed us.

We pray for those who hunger for food in a world where there is enough to feed everyone;

for those who experience hatred, prejudice, oppression, physical and mental abuse, for whom love is only a word rather than a lived experience;

for those whose love has been degraded, dismissed and led to exclusion because it differs from heterosexual love.

When we are ill or injured, in body, mind or spirit:

Loving Shepherd of your sheep: heal us.

We pray for those known to each one of us, and those unknown to us, for whom life is full of pain without relief;

When we are sorrowful, bereft of someone we love:

Loving Shepherd of your sheep: comfort us.

We pray for those who are in need of your comfort and for those have no-one to comfort them;

When we are afraid, our lives darkened by thoughts of what we have to do or endure:

Loving Shepherd of your sheep: encourage us.

We pray for those who live in fear of what the next minute, hour, or day will bring;

for those living in places torn apart by conflict; those trying to find a place to call home, even if it is an over-crowded refugee camp; for those who risk everything to try to get to somewhere where they think that they will find safety in an inhospitable world; for those who fear whatever the future might bring.

Loving Shepherd of your sheep, who will leave the ninety nine safe ones, to gather the one in danger, show each of us how we can follow your example. Once we have accepted your guidance, feeding, healing, comfort and encouragement, show us how to take those gifts out to those in the world around us, so that we might seek them and minister to them in your name. Amen

Singing the Faith 416

1 There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

3 There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

5 But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

2 There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the
members in the sorrows of the Head

4 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

6 If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Frederick William Faber

Blessing (Singing the Faith 414)

Shalom chaverim,
shalom chaverim,
shalom, shalom.
Lehitraot, lehitraot,
shalom, shalom.

Shalom, my friends,
shalom, my friends,
shalom, shalom.
Until we meet, until we meet,
shalom, shalom.

Hebrew blessing translated by S. T. Kimbrough, Jr
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Using the hymns as prayers is something that I often do. I make no excuse for this but encourage you to do likewise, especially when you find yourself without the words to pray. Christina