

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. 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.

**THEME:** Faith, hope, love. Today let`s think about and reflect on **hope**.

**CALL TO WORSHIP:**

A PERSONAL PRAYER

STILL ME

In the turmoil of this complicated life

STILL ME

Return me for a moment to the silence of my heart

Draw forth from my still pool of inner quiet

Your over flowing love.

STILL ME LORD

STILL ME

Anew

Be still and know that I am God.

For the joy of a fresh sunrise,

For the hope that each day brings,

For a love that knows no bounds,

**We praise you.**

**Bountiful God.**

**FIRST HYMN: 526 Lord, of all hopefulness**

- 1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy, whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy, be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,

your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

- 2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith, whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe, be there at our labours, and give us, we pray, your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

- 3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace, your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace, be there at our homing, and give us, we pray, your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

- 4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm, whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm, be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray, your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

**PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION:**

Gracious God, ever faithful, ever true, our words of praise are inadequate. How can we speak of your greatness?

Silence alone seems fitting to reflect the wonder and awe of your unending presence.

*Silence*

But we break the silence for we must speak. We must tell out our love for you. We must

search for words that somehow declare you are our God:

Father, Son and Spirit; words that somehow say we are your people, and we praise you.

To be surrounded by a world of beauty and wonder, to be awakened from refreshing sleep, to witness the glory of the seasons, to feel the warmth of the sun, the cooling breeze, the dampness of the rain, is to appreciate and know the love of the creator, our Father God.

God is good: **We praise him.**

To be surrounded by the affection and trust of friends, to feel the supporting love of the fellowship of the Church, to hear a reassuring word, to see an encouraging smile, is to know God's son Jesus among us, with his healing touch and renewing grace.

God is good: **We praise him.**

To be surrounded by the atmosphere of worship, to feel a sense of purpose and faith, to come with a longing to know God more clearly, to love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, is to know the Holy Spirit alive in our midst. He is here – his power is in us all.

God is good: **We praise him.**

To be surrounded by the majesty, the humanity and the daily strength of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to know ourselves richly blessed, deeply forgiven, strongly inspired and wonderfully loved each new morning. For this daily miracle we are moved to say, over and again, 'Yes!'

God is good: **We praise him.**

God of our whole lives: all we have been, all we are, all we are yet will be; we confess the sin within us. Our words and thoughts and deeds have too often bought misery; our silent inaction has too often denied joy.

In Christ you came for outcasts and for sinners. With sorrow we confess that we create outcasts by our lack of love. With shame we acknowledge our need of forgiveness. Our past weighs heavily; our present holds us captive; our future seems

unclear. Forgive us, merciful God. Free us from sin's tyranny, that our whole lives might be lived for your glory.

**FIRST READING: Psalm 71, vs 1-3 & 14-21.**

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;  
let me never be put to shame.  
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;  
incline your ear to me and save me.  
Be to me a rock of refuge,  
a strong fortress, to save me,  
for you are my rock and my fortress.

But I will hope continually,  
and will praise you yet more and more.  
My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,  
of your deeds of salvation all day long,  
though their number is past my knowledge.  
I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God,  
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.  
So even to old age and grey hairs,  
O God, do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might  
to all the generations to come.  
Your power and your righteousness, O God,  
reach the high heavens.

You who have done great things,  
O God, who is like you?  
You who have made me see many troubles  
and calamities  
will revive me again;  
from the depths of the earth  
you will bring me up again.  
You will increase my honour,  
and comfort me once again.

**COMMENT:** Hope defined

This Psalm promises God's continuing love and care throughout our lives. Verse 14 states "But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more". We need to define what we mean by hope. At a superficial level we might hope for sunshine for our picnic

tomorrow, or if we were not Methodist's, that the horse we backed would win the Derby! It is more than optimism, which is based on men and women: whereas hope means faith in GOD's omnipotence. It is more than positive thinking or a positive outlook, good though these are, Christian hope is much deeper. The ability to hope is one of the greatest gifts that God can offer us. The absence of hope, the feeling of hopefulness was well illustrated by a famous photograph from the Nineteen Thirties which showed a man slumped against a wall, eyes on the ground: one of the many unemployed in the economic crisis, he had no hope of getting a job. In the New Testament, Luke chapter 24, opens the conversation with the unrecognised Jesus on the Emmaus Road with these words "We HAD hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel". The sense of the speaker's desolation cannot fail to arouse our sympathy. Hans Kung, the famous catholic theologian gets to the heart of Christian hope. "He is a God who does not make empty promises for the hereafter, nor trivialise the present darkness, futility and meaninglessness, but who himself in the midst of these things invites us to the venture of hope".

#### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

Lord we thank you for all the ways you are helping us. Help us to be sensitive to every sigh of your activity. Help us to use the small signs – a perfect bloom of a flower in our gardens or window boxes. Help us to see the world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of our hand and eternity in an hour. Amen.

#### **SECOND READING: Matthew Chapter 6, vs 25-34.**

'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how

they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

#### **THIRD READING: Romans Chapter 5, vs 1-11.**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**SERMON:** Matthew 5, verse 34. "Do not be anxious about tomorrow."

You may well feel that this text is uncomfortably timely. Some uncomfortably timely. Some of us are anxious about leaving our houses, others about the statistics of deaths and others about the economic damage that COVID-19 will inflict on the economy, indeed on the world's economies and so on and so forth. The possible list is very long indeed. Many years ago Leslie Weatherhead the famous psychologist and Methodist preacher at Kingsway hall which he packed for his services, wrote a book entitled "Prescription for Anxiety." I hope this service can be a prescription for us all.

Matthew's chapter 6 follows on from the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus teaching the disciples the Lord's Prayer. It describes his teaching an audience of farmers, fishermen, craftsmen and even tax collectors all of whom had real cause to be anxious. The farmers were subsistence farmers, which means that each year they produced just enough to live on plus —and very importantly- seeds to produce a crop for the following year. If on one year, the harvest failed they could just about manage: a second year of failure meant famine and death. Their harvest thanksgiving was far more intensely felt than our response to harvest festival services. This is all very well until we realise that today 50% of farmers in the third world are subsistence farmers who could suffer a similar fate to members of Jesus' audience. Only considerable international aid relief can enable them to escape their fate: wars and Government repression often stop this aid, think of the Yemen and South Sudan for example.

Some of you may have visited the rope walk in the Chatham maritime open air museum. It is in a covered pathway 135 yards in length and can produce up to 100 yards of rope. Adjacent and upstairs tiny strands are spun to start a fascinating twisting process which always draws a crowd. It still makes ropes commercially today. They can be strong enough to hold a ship against a quay. If we

transpose this to a spiritual context we could think of one strand being faith, another hope and a third love. The strands coil round each other, so faith helps hope and realised hope strengthens faith. The completed rope can represent God's unfailing love for all his creatures- an unbreakable link between earth and heaven. One might even think of Jacob's ladder being a rope one! We should certainly remind ourselves of Paul's persuasion that absolutely nothing can separate us from God's exceptional love.

How do we get hold of God' Rope? With the help of the promised Holy Spirit, our guide, comforter and friend, who will prompt our essential prayers and meditations. These are vital to bring us close to God without whom we can do nothing. Martin Luther described prayer as not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of God's willingness. As we empty ourselves of our many worries, we come to know that our mind but also without heart that we were never really alone, but that God's spirit was with us all along. We come to understand what Paul wrote to the Romans, "Suffering brings patience... *and* patience brings perseverance and perseverance brings hope". This hope is based not on happening when our sufferings are over, but on the real presence of God in the midst of those sufferings. As usual Henri Nouwen puts it very well. " The joy that Jesus offers his disciples (that's us) is his own joy which flows from his intimate communion with the One who sent him. It is a joy that does not separate happy days from sad days, successful moments from moments of failure, experiences of honour from experiences of dishonour, passion from resurrection. This joy is a divine gift that does not leave us during times of illness, poverty, repression, or persecution. It is truly ecstatic always moving us away from the house of fear to the house of love, and always proclaiming that death no longer has the final say, though its noise remains loud and its devastation visible. The joy of Jesus lifts up life to be celebrated. God does not want to keep his joy to himself. He wants everyone to share in it. It is the joy of everyone who belongs to God's kingdom."

This must be our cue to use our hands to pick up the telephone, to spread God's joy to the isolated and lonely, to use our feet to deliver things they need. To be able to do these things we must love God to the uttermost to draw his grace to help us. Some will not physically be able to respond, but all can pray. May God bless each and every one of us. Amen

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:** I am sending the choice of for what or for whom you pray, to you, the readers, it will give you the opportunity to contribute to the service. A general prayer from me to open.

Lord, give us the courage to follow your way of handling things. We know your thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Help us to trust you so that we may service our neighbours

#### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

#### **THIRD HYMN: 476 One more step along the world I go**

- 1 One more step along the world I go,  
one more step along the world I go;  
from the old things to the new  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*
- 2 Round the corners of the world I turn,  
more and more about the world I learn;  
all the new things that I see  
you'll be looking at along with me:  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*
- 3 As I travel through the bad and good,  
keep me travelling the way I should;  
where I see no way to go  
you'll be telling me the way; I know:  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*
- 4 Give me courage when the world is rough,  
keep me loving though the world is tough;  
leap and sing in all I do,

keep me travelling along with you:  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

- 5 You are older than the world can be,  
you are younger than the life in me;  
ever old and ever new,  
keep me travelling along with you:  
*and it's from the old I travel to the new;  
keep me travelling along with you.*

*Sydney Carter (1915-2004)*

#### **CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING:**

Please say very slowly the words of **hymn 636** so that they can enter your heart and soul.

- 1 O love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee:  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
that in thine ocean depths its flow  
may richer, fuller be.
- 2 O light that followest all my way,  
I yield my flickering torch to thee;  
my heart restores its borrowed ray,  
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
may brighter, fairer be.
- 3 O joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee:  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
and feel the promise is not vain,  
that morn shall tearless be.
- 4 O cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee:  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
and from the ground there blossoms red  
life that shall endless be.

*George Matheson (1842-1906)*

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be ours today and for evermore. Amen

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I wish to thank Joanne Cummins for her invaluable assistance in preparing this service. I am producing a number of ideas on hope for your further reflection.

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## HOPE

Anything that is found to stimulate hope should be seized upon and made to serve. This applies to a book, a film, a broadcast, or a conversation with someone who can impart it.

Hubert van Zeller, *Considerations*

Christian Hope is the consecration of desire, and desire is the hardest thing of all to consecrate. That will only happen as you begin to think how lovely the life according to Christ is.

William Temple, *Christian Faith and Life*

'Hope', says St Thomas Aquinas, 'is a divinely infused quality of the soul, whereby with certain trust we expect those good things of the life eternal which are to be attained by the Grace of God'.

W.R. Inge, *Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion*

He is a God who does not make empty promises for the hereafter nor trivialise the present darkness, futility and meaningless, but who himself in the midst of darkness, futility and meaningless invites us to the venture of hope.

Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*

Oh, how good a thing it is that the great God who has placed us in this world – where amid so much that is beautiful, there still exists vast bestowal among men of grief, disappointment, and agony – has planted in our bosoms the great sheet-anchor, Hope.

Walt Whitman, *The Early Poems and the Fiction*

Hope to the last... Always hope;... Never leave off hoping:... Don't leave a stone unturned. It's always something to know you've done the most you could. But don't leave off hoping, or it's no use to doing anything. Hope, hope, to the last!

Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*

Hope is a completely confident expectation; that sureness and certitude with which the awakened soul aims at God and rests in God. It is the source of that living peace, that zest and alertness, that power of carrying on, which gives its special colour to the genuine Christian life.

Evelyn Underhill, in John Stobart, *The Wisdom of Evelyn Underhill*

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