



The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit - Worship at Home –
15 October 2023

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome. As we worship, let us delight in the works of the Lord and sing and shout our praises for all the things God has done for us, because God is gracious and merciful and keeps His promises for ever and ever.

Hymn:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Most Gracious God,
open us up to a sense of Your presence with us now,
for we believe that You are always here,
always present,
that there is no place where You are not.

And yet so often we go through life unaware of You;
so help us now to become aware of Your presence with us,
and within us,
and in the space between.

Help us to realise that there are no unsacred spaces,
only sacred places and desecrated places,
and that by our attention to You,
we make this a sacred space.

For we come to meet with You,
trusting that knowing You will bring us all that we need
to face what life has in store for us.
We long for the day when things will be done Your way
on earth as they are in heaven,
so hear us as we pray together, saying

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Reading: Exodus 32: 1 – 14

32 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' ³So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould,* and cast an image of a calf; and they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' ⁵When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.' ⁶They rose early the next day, and offered burnt-offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

7 The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"' ⁹The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.'

11 But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever."'¹⁴And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Reading: Philippians 4: 1 – 9

⁴Therefore, my brothers and sisters,* whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,* help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice* in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved,* whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about* these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Hymn:

Give praise and thanks unto the Lord,
for bountiful is he;
his tender mercy doth endure
unto eternity.

God's mighty works who can express?
or show forth all his praise?
Blessèd are they that judgment keep,
and justly do always.

Remember me, Lord, with that love
which thou to thine dost bear;
with thy salvation, O my God,
to visit me draw near:

That I thy chosen's good may see,
and in their joy rejoice;
and may with thine inheritance
triumph with cheerful voice.

Blest be Jehovah, Israel's God,
to all eternity: let all the people say, Amen.
Praise to the Lord give ye.

Reflection

Are you patient and can wait or are impatient wanting instant results? Do you sit in traffic and think I can use this time to think and be calm or do you fret you will be late and get stressed as the green traffic light only lets three cars through at a time and there are still at least thirty ahead of you? Are you someone who like the Psalmist can rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him or do you pray the prayer “Lord give me patience, but please hurry up about it”?

Our readings for this week are about waiting and show us two ways to wait. We have two contexts; both are hard but the attitude of those who wait is different in each place.

First, we go into the desert and join the ancient people of God on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The lectionary has had Exodus in it for the past few weeks. We forget how long the journey was, the people struggle with it. We need to understand where this episode takes place in the story of Israel – it is after the tribes of Israel have escaped from slavery in Egypt and are still in the early days of their freedom. Although early on in their journey they have nevertheless begun their moaning and doubting, saying they had better food and conditions in slavery in Egypt. They are still getting used to God and Moses. Now they have arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, and Moses has gone up the mountain amidst cloud and thunder and lightning to meet with God while the people wait below. Moses will be gone 40 days and 40 nights, which is long enough that the people decide he has disappeared forever and is not coming back – so they decide to make their own god – the golden calf.

What strikes you about this? From our vantage point it is easy to judge the Israelites harshly for so quickly losing interest in the God who has just sent ten plagues, opened a path through the red sea, drowned Pharaoh's army, fed the people manna from heaven and opened springs of water in the desert. But try and stand in their shoes. Forty days is a long time for Moses to have disappeared up the mountain. They have had generations of being among the gods of Egypt, so while the idea of making a golden calf as a god to us sounds crazy, it is in keeping with all that they have grown up with. I understand their wanting a God that they don't need to wait to see. Remember God was mystery, remote and you weren't to see his face. We can worship a golden calf!

When we are left waiting for someone how do we feel? Forty days is a long time to wait. Imagine waiting for the bus to come until towards the end of November.

Imagine waiting forty days for an answer to your question you need answering today. I had an office manager in my church in West Sussex. She used to fire off e mails to me mostly complaining. Then ten minutes later she'd send another asking why I hadn't replied! Have you noticed those on hold messages when you ring up places: "your call is important to us. You are number thirty three in the queue." One organisation could make you listen to the whole of Vivaldi's Four Seasons before they answered!

I have sympathy for the Israelite people. In frustration they look for an accessible, approachable God. Waiting is hard. Note how God loses it, hot wrath and threats he will consume them, poor Moses exhausted from mountaineering and presumably writing every commandment in the Torah on stone tablets and bringing them down the mountain, says "please don't do that!" And luckily God relents.

We can be like the impatient child who cannot wait for Christmas.

We can be like my father who would never sit in a traffic jam on a motorway and turn off at the next junction because it would be quicker. It never was.

We can reject God whose time isn't like ours and turn to other gods who make us feel better.

But there is another way to wait. The context is maybe as hard as the desert, it is prison. Paul wrote Philippians in jail, and yet it is the most optimistic and joyful of his letters. He wasn't about to be released and yet his attitude isn't that of moaning or turning aside from God. Instead, despite of his circumstances he sees God's love in Jesus bigger than his troubles. Stand firm in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always! I always smile when I read that verse. Rejoice in the Lord always was our school motto. It was on a wooden plaque at the front of the school hall. We did our exams facing it. Eugene Peterson says of Paul's letter to the Philippians: 'This is Paul's happiest letter. And the happiness is infectious.' Isn't it often people with indescribable problems who show us a different way?

I remember a man called Cliff Holliday, my steward at The Valley church at Coundon Grange near Bishop Auckland. He was one of the most optimistic and content people I've ever met.

His chapel served amazing deprivation and poverty and it often got broken into, but he kept smiling and oozed Christlike optimism. People there often laughed how bad life was and held on to the simple things of life.

Joy in waiting, for Paul, is not a feeling that is dependent upon circumstances. Or else how could we at school rejoice in the Lord in a maths exam? It is a theological act. It is choosing to reflect on God's actions to redeem the world even when all the present circumstances might indicate that some other power has won. Joy in waiting stems from his vision of God's super-exaltation of Christ after his super-humiliation with death on a treasonous cross. Remember the hymn in chapter two about Jesus. Joy in waiting stems from the vision that all the world will recognise the sovereignty of Jesus when he returns. "The Lord is near," Paul reminds his readers. And reminds us. Waiting hopefully.

How then do you wait? Even if it is forty days? Are you confident God will come to you or will you give up?

Maria Boulding in her classic book "The Coming of God" talks of the consecration of waiting.

"Some things cannot be skimped or hurried. . . . Faith can demand long, patient waiting, when nothing seems to be happening."

Remind me of that when they yet again put three way traffic lights by the clock tower by where we live and I turn into an impatient, grumpy Israelite!

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for those who wait this week.

For those in Gaza and Israel waiting for peace.

For those in Afghanistan waiting for help.

For those who wait to be fed, or find refuge and safety.

For those who wait for hospital treatment or test results.
For those who wait for things to sort.
For an impatient world looking for quick fixes and better gods.
For the church which needs to wait on God and fret less.
Lord in your mercy, God of infinite patience, hear our prayers.

Hymn:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore;
Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing waters flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.
Strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, I will ever give to Thee;
Songs of praises, I will ever give to Thee.

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.