



The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales
Circuit

Worship at Home 6.9.2020
Graham Pentelow

Welcome

Whether you are alone, or in a small group, welcome to worship. We share together across this Circuit with a sense of belonging and community.

We begin this morning with a quiet but powerful hymn recognising our need to be still before our Holy God.

Hymn StF 20 Be Still

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of Light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

David Evans

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Opening Prayer

Based on words from James 1 v 12-18

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test,

he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him....

Heavenly Father, for some of us our trials are few, for others they are many and lifechanging. Give us courage that we might raise our heads.

“From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord”.

So often we rely on our own strength to overcome difficulties. Help us to trust you more, our rock and our salvation.

We remember those we know who are struggling at this time. Be with them heavenly Father, give them your strength, and the knowledge of your presence.

When tempted, no-one should say “God is tempting me”, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted, when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

Lord we acknowledge that we have failed you in so many ways. We have fallen short of your Glory. We are sorry for the wrong things that we have thought and said and done. We are sorry for the things that have separated us from you. We are trusting in your grace and mercy and love.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created.

Lord, we acknowledge your eternal presence and your unchanging nature. We thank you Father God for the good and perfect things of this world. We thank you for the many blessings you have showered on us.

We thank you for the gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ who came to teach us and gave himself for our sakes, a fragrant offering of sacrifice. And as we come before you, may we offer ourselves in humble worship, to live and to serve in your name. Amen

The Word.

Today's reading is from Matthew Ch18 v 15-20

¹⁵ *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'* ¹⁷ *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

¹⁸ *"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

¹⁹ *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*

Reflection

Conflict Resolution might be a modern term - there are hundreds of books, papers and qualifications around the whole topic – but here in the bible, in the words of Jesus, is Conflict Resolution in just a few sentences.

As Jesus teaches his disciples he is looking to the near future, but must surely have known that two thousand years later people will still be causing offence, hurting feelings and worse, and others will suffer as a consequence.

The solution here is simple. He tells them - Speak to the "brother" or "sister", let them know how you feel. If that fails, take another brother or sister, and if that fails take it to the church.

All very straight forward, but behind these simple instructions and in the few verses that follow, what we are actually seeing is church being church. Below the surface, what we are witnessing is Heavenly authority and Holy Spirit wisdom alongside the simple truth that God dwells

with us, and works through us. What Jesus is really advocating is a demonstration of grace, wisdom, gentleness, sensitivity, and where necessary – firm action.

This is so clearly the working of the Holy Spirit, and if we remember this, what follows becomes easier to understand, because what follows are three promises.

The Three Promises

Firstly - that whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever we loose (or free) on earth will be loosed in Heaven.

If we think about this verse in the context of what goes before, surely Jesus is saying that any upsets or misunderstandings in the church, innocent or deliberate, should be dealt with, with Holy Spirit wisdom.

So the "binding and freeing" here is not about authoritarianism or control, but rather the grace of Christ being demonstrated. What therefore is declared as being "bound" or "freed", is a declaration from heaven, made on earth, not an earthly judgement transferred to heaven.

Secondly - what-ever two agree and ask for, it will be granted by God in heaven. I once had a friend who claimed that if he prayed for a nice sports car, God would give it to him. Maybe he was thinking of this verse? I don't know whether he ever tried it (we were still at school at the time!).

Unfortunately, however, this kind of teaching is still evident in some contemporary churches with their prosperity Gospel. It is an upside down and back to front Gospel. When we put ourselves first, and our wants and desires before those of God, we grow into a very unhealthy church.

As before, our wishes should reflect the will of God. What we pray for should be under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit coming from the heart of God, not from ourselves and our earthly desires. After all, we pray for the Kingdom

of heaven on earth, not the other way round, don't we? This knowledge should inform our prayers and in fact our whole lives, as we seek to follow Jesus.

This also puts into context the third promise, the reassurance that where two or three are gathered in his name – he will be with us. Jesus is with us when we are alone of course, but when we join with even one or two others we become church.

If we read the passage carefully again we realise that what Jesus is outlining is a demonstration of a deeply loving and caring community.

Just a couple of points I want to close with, especially as we emerge from lock down and isolation:-

Firstly; that small is beautiful. Just two or three people gathered in Jesus name are blessed by his presence. At these times when attending a large gathering is not practical or even desirable, meeting in small groups, even twos and threes, is just as good if not better. It might not even be in person, but on the phone or over the internet. This should encourage us to consider meeting in small groups, and also to consider those who have no other ways of gathering.

A sense of belonging is an important aspect of church.

Secondly; that church is first and foremost a deeply caring community. We might have our programmes, our jobs and things that keep us busy, but at the heart of church are people that are (or at least should be) deeply committed to one another, looking out for one another, aware of troubles, failings and joys. We are a people who will “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice”.

When we understand that, it becomes so much easier, if we get hurt, to be honest and say how we feel.

At the start of this connexional year could we make it an aim to be more aware of

one another, pray for one another? Before we get too tied up with our jobs and routines, make it a priority to develop our relationships in a Christ centred way. Amen

Points to Ponder

Would I feel confident in approaching someone in the church who had upset me?

Are there ways that we could grow our relationships in the church?

Hymn StF 161 Speak O Lord

Normally we would sing this before the Word, but I hope that it will help us to reflect on what we have heard today.

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ
might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes, for Your glory.

Teach us Lord full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise
Cause our eyes to see,
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights
of Your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time,
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand
on Your promises;
And by faith we'll walk
as You walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Prayers

For today's prayers of intercession, I suggest we pray specifically for our local congregations. If you are by yourself, you might like to remember people in the places they usually sit, and pray for them each in turn.

If you are in a small group you might pray quietly for the person on your left and the person on your right.

In the silence ask God if there are any particular needs to pray for, or a word for that person or for the church.

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours;

Now and for ever

Amen

Hymn StF 94 To God be the Glory

To God be the glory,
great things he has done!
So loved he the world
that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life
an atonement for sin,
and opened the life gate
that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through
Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory,
great things he has done!*

O perfect redemption,
the purchase of blood!
To every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus forgiveness
receives.

Praise the Lord ...

Great things he has taught us,
great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing
through Jesus the Son;
but purer and higher and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture,
when Jesus we see.

Praise the Lord ...

Blessing

May the love of Jesus Christ
bring us wholeness.

The grace of God the Father
grant us peace.

The breath of the Holy Spirit
instil passion.

And the unity between them give us
strength for this and every day.

Amen