



# The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist  
Circuit: Worship at Home  
5 December 2021

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.

A Call to Worship: the beginning of  
Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless  
us and make his face to shine upon us,  
that your way may be known upon  
earth, your saving power among all  
nations.

## Hymn:

Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour  
comes,  
the Saviour promised long;  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release,  
in Satan's bondage held;  
the gates of brass before him burst,  
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,  
the bleeding soul to cure,  
and with the treasures of his grace  
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,  
thy welcome shall proclaim,  
and Heaven's eternal arches ring  
with thy beloved Name.

Loving God, we thank You for Your  
constant guidance in our lives  
and for all the ways You encourage,  
challenge, strengthen and renew us.  
We thank You that we still hear Your  
quiet words whispering to us in the

silence of our own hearts.

We thank You that through song,  
prayer, preaching, worship mission and  
service, we are still able to hear Your  
voice.

Through fellowship and community, we  
can feel Your presence in what we do  
and say.

We thank You that when we see the  
fields of corn and hear the birds  
singing,  
we are hearing You and when the wind  
blows,  
we feel You.

We thank You that through Christ's life,  
work, teaching, death and resurrection  
You speak to us and that Your Holy  
Spirit inspires, comforts and empowers  
us each day.

We thank You for the times we have  
felt lost and have felt Your hand take  
hold of us  
and lead us forward – through  
difficulties, life problems and illnesses.  
We thank You for Your healing touch.  
Be with us now, directing our ways  
so that we may glorify You in all that  
we do and say.

**Amen**

**Reading:** Luke 3: 1 - 6

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In the fifteenth year of the reign of  
Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius  
Pilate was governor of Judea,  
Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother  
Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis,  
and Lysanias tetrarch of  
Abilene— during the high-priesthood  
of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of  
God came to John son of Zechariah in  
the wilderness. He went into all the  
country around the Jordan, preaching  
a baptism of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.  
Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
And all people will see God’s salvation.”

### Hymn:

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh.  
Awake and harken, for he brings  
glad tidings of the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin:  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail you as our Saviour, Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.

Stretch forth your hand, our health  
restore,  
and make us rise to fall no more.  
O let your face upon us shine  
and fill the world with love divine.

### Reflection

Repent. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Valleys shall be filled. Mountains and hills shall be made low. The crooked shall be made

straight. The rough ways shall be made smooth.

By themselves those words have no meaning. They need context. That’s true for any word. We might be able to define a word but it really has no meaning until we understand the context in which it is spoken. I think that’s why St. Luke is so specific in today’s gospel. He sets the coming of God’s word in a specific context; naming a time, people, and places. It was the fifteenth year of Tiberius’ reign as emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was ruler of Galilee. Philip was ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis. Lysanias was ruler of Abilene. It was during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. That’s when and where God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. That’s the context for John going into the region around the Jordan and speaking God’s word.

The echoes of John’s voice can still be heard. They are everywhere. That word he spoke at the Jordan River continues to be spoken in all times and all places. We have our own context.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel explained it well when we wrote:

*“The prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible.”*

All. You and me included. We are responsible to God, to each other, to the world. We have been given a sacred trust and we have a responsibility. To deny our responsibility is to refuse to repent. There can be no repentance without taking responsibility.

John's voice will not be silenced. God's word remains. Repent. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Valleys shall be filled. Mountains and hills shall be made low. The crooked shall be made straight. The rough ways shall be made smooth.

So what do you think? Can we do it differently this Advent hearing the challenge of John again? I think we can. Christ has shown us a different way, a different life. I believe we have been given what it takes. Isn't that the hope of Advent and the promise of Christmas? Isn't that really what the Advent-Christmas cycle is about? Preparing for the birth and the coming again of Christ. That's repentance. That's taking responsibility. Yes, by God's grace, we can do life differently.

But will we? Will we do anything differently this Advent? That's a different question. That's the harder question. Whether we change is a question only you and I can answer and each one of us answers that question every day of our life. So, what's your answer?

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Almighty and everlasting God, You are strength to those who suffer and comfort to those who grieve. Let the prayers of your children who are in trouble rise to you.  
Hear our prayer.

We claim your promises of wholeness as we pray for those who are ill or are suffering loss and long for your healing touch.  
Hear our prayer.

Make the weak strong, the sick healthy, the broken whole, and confirm those who serve them as agents of your love.  
Hear our prayer.

To everyone in distress, grant mercy, grant relief, grant refreshment.  
Hear our prayer.

We commend our neighbourhoods to your care. Give us strength of purpose and concern for others, that we may create a community where your will may be done.  
Hear our prayer.

God of compassion, you watch our ways, and weave out of terrible happenings wonders of goodness and grace.  
Hear our prayer.

Surround those who have been shaken by tragedy with a sense of your present love, and hold them in faith. Though they are lost in grief, may they find you and be comforted;  
Through Jesus Christ who was dead, but lives and rules this world with you.  
Amen

### **Hymn:**

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne,  
while heaven's eternal anthem drowns  
all music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died to be  
your saviour and your matchless king  
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life  
triumphant from the grave,  
who rose victorious from the strife  
for those he came to save:  
his glories now we sing  
who died and reigns on high;  
he died eternal life to bring  
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of love,  
who shows his hands and side  
those wounds yet visible above  
in beauty glorified.  
No angel in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends his burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of peace  
his kingdom is at hand;  
from pole to pole let warfare cease

and Christ rule every land!  
A city stands on high,  
his glory it displays,  
and there the nations 'Holy' cry  
in joyful hymns of praise.

Crown him the Lord of years,  
the potentate of time,  
creator of the rolling spheres  
in majesty sublime:  
all hail, Redeemer, hail,  
for you have died for me;  
your praise shall never, never fail  
through all eternity!

May the peace of God which passes all  
understanding keep our hearts and  
minds in the knowledge of Christ our  
Lord, and the blessing of God, Father,  
Son and Holy Spirit be with us all,  
evermore. Amen.