


The Methodist Church
Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist

Circuit

Worship at Home - 6 November 2022

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 prayer to prepare ourselves for worship:

Blessed are you, Sovereign God, creator of
all,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You founded the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your
hands.

In the fullness of time you made us in your
image,
and in these last days you have spoken to
us
in your Son Jesus Christ, the Word made
flesh.

As we rejoice in the gift of your presence
among us
let the light of your love always shine in
our hearts,
your Spirit ever renew our lives
and your praises ever be on our lips.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy
Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 620

Thou God of truth and love,
We seek thy perfect way,
Ready thy choice to approve,
Thy providence to obey:
Enter into thy wise design,
And sweetly lose our will in thine.

Why hast thou cast our lot
In the same age and place?

And why together brought
To see each other's face?
To join with loving sympathy,
And mix our friendly souls in thee?

Didst thou not make us one,
That we might one remain,
Together travel on,
And bear each other's pain;
Till all thy utmost goodness prove,
And rise renewed in perfect love?

Then let us ever bear
The blessed end in view,
And join, with mutual care,
To fight our passage through;
And kindly help each other on,
Till all receive the starry crown.

O may thy Spirit seal
Our souls unto that day,
With all thy fulness fill,
And then transport away!
Away to our eternal rest,
Away to our Redeemer's breast!

Prayer:

For ever and ever, Lord God.
That is Your promise to us.
A promise made before time began. A
promise kept until beyond eternity. A
promise that brings us here today.
Because forever starts today, God.
It rose with the first glimpse of dawn.
It breathed in the stirring of the morning
air.
It sang in the waking chorus of creation.
And it lives in all of us because You, in Your
goodness,
have made it so.

This moment in time, God,
is nothing in the grand scale
of Your awesome plan.
But it is our opportunity

to recognise that every second,
of every minute of every hour,
of every day is everything,
because of Your limitless love.

We praise all that You are, Creator God.
We stand amazed at all that You give and
we celebrate Your faithfulness
to us in our failure to appreciate the price
of Your promises
and the cost of Your creativity.

When You created the world, Lord,
You presented it to us as perfect.
A place of growth and fruitfulness.
but we misused it and left it broken and
disjointed.

When You breathed life into humanity
You chose and cherished us. But we broke
away from Your gentle arms
and dismissed Your love.

When You came to us, You wept with us,
You suffered for us
and You gave up Your all for us.
But we forgot the vastness of Your
sacrifice and took it for granted.
We cannot fathom the scale and the nature
of Your forgiveness
Yet still we seek it and need it.
And still You offer it.

For ever and ever, God.
That is Your promise as proclaimed in Your
Son, Jesus Christ.
So here today, we proclaim ourselves a
forgiven people,
refreshed by Your grace and ready to
serve You.
We proclaim ourselves forever people.
Committed to sharing in Your work.
We proclaim ourselves Your people, now
and always. Amen.

Reading: Job 19: 23 - 27a

²³ 'O that my words were written down.
O that they were inscribed in a book!
²⁴ O that with an iron pen and with lead,
they were engraved on a rock for ever!
²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and
that at the last he will stand upon the
earth; ²⁶ and after my skin has been thus
destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not
another.
My heart faints within me!

Hymn: Singing the Faith 303

I know that my Redeemer lives;
What joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head.

He lives to bless me with His love,
He lives to plead for me above.
He lives my hungry soul to feed,
He lives to help in time of need.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death:
He lives my future to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His Name!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same.
What joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Reading: Luke 20: 27 - 38

²⁷ Some Sadducees, those who say there
is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸ and asked
him a question, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for
us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a
wife but no children, the man shall marry
the widow and raise up children for his
brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers;
the first married, and died

childless; ³⁰then the second³¹and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³²Finally the woman also died. ³³In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.'

34 Jesus said to them, 'Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.³⁷ And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.'

Reflection:

Steve Turner was a Christian poet popular in the 1980's. In one of his books he has this poem:

"Do you need to go to the toilet when you are dead? Does God grow old? Life is full of unanswered questions when you are five years old and late for school."

Life is full of unanswered questions, and difficult ones we want an answer to. I've been bombarded with questions while I've been in hospital...

Can I take your blood pressure?
What is your name and date of birth?
(Asked before any pill is given you.)
Have you had your bowels open?
And my favourite - would you like a bottle for the night?

They were asking the man opposite me in Bolton Ward some questions the other day to test his memory. The questions were:
Do you know where you are?
Where do you live?
Can you count backwards from twenty to one?
Who is the Prime Minister?
I thought asking him that was a bit unfair as there was a different Prime Minister from when he came into hospital!

The Episcopal Church in America has this sentence as part of its *raison d'être*: "We don't have all the answers and we welcome others who love the questions." There are hard questions and then there are questioners who just want to trip you up. When I was minister in West Sussex, I did a lot of Bible studies and discussion groups and I had a man called John who didn't believe Jesus was anything other than a good man. He would come to every gathering to try and tie me up in knots. He saw it as sport and fun! His wife would shout at him "oh John, stop it!" After five years of this when I was about to leave that church, I told him he wanted to believe more and he was searching really otherwise he wouldn't have kept coming. Ministers after me told me he did the same to them!

Luke Chapter 20 opens with Jesus in the Temple. It is the start of the final week of his earthly life and takes place after his 'cleansing' of the Temple from the misuse it had fallen into.

Loved by his crowd of listeners, Jesus has also made many enemies amongst the various religious leaders, and in this chapter, each group attempts to question his authority, to catch him out or trick him into a falsehood or blasphemy which will give them the opportunity to arrest him. Jesus answers them all faithfully.

When the Sadducees, a sect that didn't believe in resurrection, made their challenge, it was in the form of a hypothetical situation fantastical, almost ridiculous. Yet Jesus doesn't dismiss them, and listens to their question with patience, without laughing, and answers seriously. Evidence of the truth of resurrection will not be found in a reproduction of the structures and confines of earthly society, but in the Sadducees' own Jewish history, where God is the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are alive with Him as demonstrated to Moses in the burning bush. To question this would be to deny their own beliefs; the Sadducees are silenced, and even the scribes admit "Teacher you have answered well."

To hear that marriage as we understand it is not recognised in heaven, where each individual is a child of God and like the angels, may be a disappointment to many people, whether Christian or not, who fondly imagine loved ones reunited after death. After the death of our late Queen, there were some lovely cartoons of her and Prince Philip together; in one cartoon Her Majesty is walking hand in hand with Paddington Bear, and the speech bubble says "Paddington, I have worked hard and I'm very tired, please let me go to be with my husband." It is a consoling picture, and let us hope that they are reunited, even if not in marriage, nor as monarch and consort, but as angels and children of our heavenly Father.

Let us hope that all people who have died in faith have risen again in that place where "there is one equal light, one equal music" as John Donne wrote in his prayer:

"Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of

heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity: in the habitations of thy majesty and glory, world without end. Amen."

There is a lot we don't know, but as Christians there are things that we do know. How confident would you be if you had a John or a Sadducee challenge you? Would you be able to give an answer or would you freeze? We know despite much uncertainty, of new life, a heaven, victory over death, that how it is today is not how it will always be. We don't have all the answers about it but we know it is true. Job even knew it in the midst of undeserved and unbelievable suffering: "For I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God."

While Jesus' answer to the Sadducees' question silenced his critics, it still leaves all of us mystified as to what form that kingdom of God will take. Will it be the 'heavenly city' of the Book of Revelation, or will we be made to 'lie down in green pastures' as in Psalm 23? Will there indeed be a heavenly banquet? Or are all these things just an extension of what we have wished for in our earthly lives, and the reality something yet more wonderful? I remember a vicar coming to our youth group to talk on "what is heaven like?" He stood up and said "I don't know, I've not got there yet."

Life is full of unanswered questions. That's okay. But we do need to be more certain in what we do know in our hearts, as it said on

the front wall of the chapel at Kirkby Malzeard, "great is our God, Jesus Christ is Lord."

Part of my trouble in recent weeks has been a corneal abrasion on my right eye, got in my first stay of my two in hospital. That has meant I haven't been able to read very clearly. While off sick, I've attended some Evensongs in the cathedral. I have found I know the words of the creed by heart. These words are, in the midst of all the questioners and doubts we face, what we treasure and what we proclaim as the Church:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

There's the right answer! Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

On this the third Sunday before Advent, we pray for the Church throughout the world as it remembers those who have gone before us; all whom we love but see no longer. We pray for the Church. May your Church be Jesus' body on earth, as we all

face harder financial times and so many problems as a result of the war in Ukraine, reaching out to help all in need with prayers and words of comfort.

We hold before you the young people of this day and age: the young Russian men sent out to fight for a cause that they do not believe in; the young Iranian women standing up with great courage against an oppressive regime seeking to deny them their freedom;

the young people of all nations trying to get their governments to see climate change rather than economics as the most important issue facing our world. Bless all our world leaders, monarchs, and politicians, with the wisdom and the conscience to listen to the voices of the young, and to join together to make a better future for those who will follow them.

Loving Lord, be present in our communities. We pray for all who are sick and those who care for them. We pray that you will bless our hardworking and overstretched National Health Service as winter approaches and even busier workloads become inevitable and ask that this congregation may be ready to respond to all in the community who are cold, hungry, or lonely in the months ahead.

We continue to remember with gratitude the years of service of our late Queen Elizabeth, and her Christian example. Grant that with her, the dead whom we mourn will have discovered the truth of the Resurrection and will be reunited in that kingdom where all are as angels and as children of God. May the faithful departed rest in peace and rise in glory.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 185

Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain,
Life and salvation his empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.

Refrain:

Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King;
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.

All shall be well in his Kingdom of peace,
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom
increase,
Foe shall be friend when his triumph we
sing,
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.

Souls shall be saved from the burden of
sin,
Doubt shall not darken his witness within,
Hell hath no terrors, and death hath no
sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King.

Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.

Benediction:

To him who loves us and has freed us from
our sins by his blood and made us a
kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to
him be glory and dominion forever and
ever. Amen.