

Zoomed service for The Methodist Church in Letchworth 13/09/20

Call to worship

Come to the God who knows us,
to the God who created our being,
to the God who knows our frailty,
to the God who loves and cherishes us beyond measure.
Come as you are and worship God.

Hymn 406 (STF)

We sing our first hymn *Have you heard the good news?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpcWfpwNV-U>

Have you heard?
Have you heard?

*Have you heard the good news?
Have you heard the good news?
We can live in hope
Because of what the Lord has done.
(Repeat)*

There is a way
When there seems to be no way,
There is a light in the darkness:
There is a hope,
An everlasting hope,
There is a God who can help us.

A hope for justice
And a hope for peace,
A hope for those in desperation:
We have a future,
If only we believe
He works in every situation.

*Yes, I've heard the good news?
Yes, I've heard the good news?
I can live in hope
Because of what the Lord has done.*

(Repeat)

Stuart Garrard
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Junior Church leave

Lord, we ask your blessing on Sally and our young people as they begin a new venture and may they know your presence with them. **Amen.**

Prayers of Praise, Confession & Lord's Prayer

A prayer of praise and confession

LORD, God Almighty we gather to acknowledge your power and glory; we continue to marvel at your creation, from the big to the small, from majestic mountains, to soft sandy shores, from tall trees pointing skyward to the beauty of bluebells adorning the woodland floor, for the smells and fruitfulness of autumn. We praise and thank you for your unconditional love of each one of us, a love that we don't always deserve. We are sorry for the ways we let you down, for the things we do wrong, the times we don't treat and help others as we should and we come before you to seek your forgiveness.

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

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.**

Bible Reading

Of the lectionary Bible readings today, I felt called to go with the passage from Paul's letter to the Romans. This will be read to us by _____:

Romans 14:1-12 (New International Version)

The weak and the strong

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written:

“As surely as I live,” says the Lord,
“Every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.”

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Comment

What lies behind Paul's advice here? We first come across controversy over what early Christians should eat in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter meets Cornelius. Cornelius is a Roman centurion living in Caesarea. He is sympathetic to Judaism and the local Jewish community. When he hears that Peter is staying a bit further down the coast in Tyre he sends messengers to Peter requesting that Peter come and visit him. While the messengers are en-route Peter has a vision of a sheet being lowered down containing food that Jews were forbidden to eat, and he hears the Lord saying to him, “Come, Peter, eat.” Peter replies that he has never eaten anything regarded as unclean. When the messengers arrive with their request that he visit Cornelius he realises that the meaning of the vision is that the Gospel is for the Gentiles too. Peter's actions, however, led to controversy in the early church because the first members were Jews who continued to adhere to Jewish law and

they thought that all members of the church should do likewise, whether Jew or Gentile. When Peter returned to Jerusalem the matter was discussed at a council which decided that Gentiles would be required to observe certain requirements but not all Jewish customs.

Later on in Acts of the Apostles we come to Paul's journeys. We know from the story of Pentecost that there were Jewish communities dispersed all around the eastern Mediterranean, and it was often these communities Paul searches out when he arrives in a new place. When it came to eating meat it is possible that there wasn't a Jewish butcher locally who could offer the "kosher" product. For converts from paganism the problem was different. Meat offered to pagan gods often afterwards found its way onto the open market. These converts didn't want to be reminded of their pagan past or not knowing the provenance of what they were buying feel tainted by the possibility of eating meat which might have been offered in this way.

Similarly the comments on keeping one day more sacred than another is interesting and over the years I have heard and observed what people should do and not do on Sundays and I probably do things now I would never have been allowed to do as a boy.

Hymn 615 (STF)

We sing our next hymn. Please note the words on screen will be as in StF and not what you will hear sung.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ax27fbSHj7w>

By The Redeemed Band

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go:
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,
give me your love in spite of all you know:
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, with no manipulation,

no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments,
give me your trust when all my failings show:
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Michael Forster
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Reflection

For those of you who attended last Sunday's Zoom service you may remember that Julian spoke about resolving conflict. This passage from Romans is on a similar theme. However it is not about meat and vegetarianism or what we do on Sundays.

While the passage from Romans addressed specific issues of those times, the essence is about not condemning fellow believers because their beliefs don't agree with yours and agreeing to differ. The failure of the church to heed this message has in part led to the plethora of denominations we have today.

We can differ in our views about lots of things.

It is interesting that the heading for this passage differs in the various translations. It is "The weak and the strong" in the NIV and "The Danger of Criticism" in the NLT.

I would argue that it is the duty of those who are strong in faith to encourage those whose faith is weak.

So what are the issues the church faces now that we may disagree about and criticise others for their views and opinions?

One might be on whether to open church buildings for worship or keep them shut? And when buildings are opened for worship, those who go and those who continue to stay away.

Another is the *God in love unites us* report, which seems to have been put on the back burner for the moment but will surely surface again next year. While the report argues strongly for people to accept divergent opinions or views, I suspect that history suggests it will sadly cause schisms.

Another way of looking at "Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters" is that it is a sign of welcome. Welcome is key to making church work. Whatever our preferred menu (vv.2-3), we are all servants of the one master, Jesus. And though 'welcome' (v.1) is an action, 'looking down on' (v.3), as the New Living Translation

translates it, is an attitude, and one that leads to passing judgement. It is not consistent with the renewed way of thinking Paul expects. After all Jesus himself said,

Matthew 7:1-5 (New International Version)

Judging others

¹ 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³ 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

I leave the last word to Jesus.

Prayer of Response

Lord, lead us in our thinking and let us be mindful of others' views and not be quick to judge and criticise but to prayerfully think things through before arriving at any conclusion. Let us not be a stumbling block to our fellow believers but to seek to nurture those whose faith is new or not strong. We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn 675 (STF)

We sing our next hymn. There is not a version of this on YouTube. I have downloaded a sung version but the sound volume is low, so you may need to turn up your volume for this hymn.

Because the Saviour prayed that we be one
and taught his friends to say, 'Your will be done',
we sense God's call as in God's sight we dare
commit ourselves in answer to Christ's prayer.

Our narrow loyalties have had their day-
these separate ways, demeaning Christ the Way;
we own the sorry scars that paved the past,
yet gladly seek the road God made to last.

We are our Saviour's body, Christ the head,
first born of God, first risen from the dead.
Dismembered, we debase his holy will;
united, his intention we fulfil.

So guide us, Lord, and take us by the hand,
and show us how to love and understand;
reveal, within the differences we share,
the pattern of your glory, grace and care.

And when our journey here has reached its end
and strangers are the pilgrims you intend,
may we, with gratitude for all you've given,
enjoy you in the harmony of heaven.

John L Bell (born 1949)

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Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, it is our privilege to pray for your world and your people, and so we put our prayers at your disposal this day.

We pray for those who are in the news today, whether willingly or not. Especially we pray for ... (*name particular situations*) ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for our church community, our life together in Christ, and our witness to the world. Especially we pray for ... (*any issue, project, event, problem facing the church*) ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who we've met or talked to in the last day or so who have some important issues to face. Especially we pray for dilemmas faced by our own family and friends ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those coping with stress at work, at home, or in life generally — feeling the world is a dark and weary place. Especially we pray for any friend or colleague in need now ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who are waiting for something important — a birth, a job, a visit, a hospital appointment, caring for a loved one whose earthly life is nearing its end, a word of forgiveness. Especially we pray for anyone we know who's longing for love and friendship, and a way out loneliness ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for those whose lives are not content, but who have not yet found their home in you. Especially we pray for one or two people we know for whom faith would be a lovely gift ... (*pause*)

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Father every person we have mentioned in our hearts is known and loved by you more than we can ever imagine. We entrust them to you in confidence and hope, knowing that you will use our prayers for their healing and well-being, for we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who is alive forever with your and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Hymn

Our last hymn is *He's our rescuer* by Rend Collective. It is not in StF.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leh-4fCc5MI>

He's our rescuer,
He's our rescuer.
We are free from sin forever more.
Oh how sweet the sound,
Oh how grace abounds,
We will praise the Lord, our rescuer.

There is good news for the captive,
Good news for the shamed.
There is good news for the one who walked away.
There is good news for the doubter,
The one religion failed
For the good lord has come to seek and save.

He's our rescuer (hey),
He's our rescuer (hey).
We are free from sin forever more.
Oh how sweet the sound (hey),
Oh how grace abounds (hey),
We will praise the Lord, our rescuer.

He is beauty for the blind man,
Riches for the poor.
He is friendship for the one the world ignores.
He is pasture for the weary,
Rest for those who strive

For the good Lord is the way, the truth, the life.
Yes, the good Lord is the way, the...

Rend Collective

Blessing

A Celtic Blessing

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always on your back,
May the sun shine warmly upon your face,
And the rain fall softly on your fields,
And, until we meet again,
May the Lord hold you in the hollow of His hand