# WORSHIP October 4th 2020 – Rev Mandy Briggs

# A Manifesto for Life?

**Welcome and Call to Worship**

Summoned by the God who made us
Rich in our diversity
Gathered in the name of Jesus
Richer still in unity

**Let us bring the gifts that differ**
**And in splendid, varied ways**
**Sing a new church into being**
**One in faith and love and praise!**

STF 443 Come Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love from Cornerstone Methodist Church in Cumbria

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCSx7ZZ3-2I>

**Prayers of Adoration and Confession**

*Prayers written by Barbara Glasson, former President of Conference, from her book ‘Positive Prayers for Cities’ (Kevin Mayhew 2015)*

Thanks be to you, waiting God

Who stands at the threshold of all that is possible and holds fast in steadfast hope.

We praise you for the perseverance of your love

For the unbounded expectation of your promise

For the encompassing of your far-reaching gaze.

We thank you that you have found us amongst the odd, the troubled and the unlikely,

And that in the finding, you have embraced all that is possible within us, through us and despite us.

You are the God of all homecomings,

Who questions not where we have been, or what we have done, or why we have left,

But only why it took us so long to return.

And a prayer of confession:

I am footloose and you steadfast

I am waster and you creator

I am loser and you provider

I am feckless and you faithful,

I am restless and you tireless

I am reckless and you rooted,

I am the prodigal child of the prodigal city.

God says: I am waiting and longing,

I am generous and gentle,

I am steady and stable,

I am firm-rooted and steady

I am the Father of all that is lost.

You are ready to come home,

You are ready to be received home.

I am ready to welcome you home.

I am home. Thanks be! Amen

**Reading – Luke 4: 16-21 (NRSV) – Jesus in the Synagogue**

**16**When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17**and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

**18**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
    because he has anointed me
        to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
    and recovery of sight to the blind,
        to let the oppressed go free,
**19**to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

**20**And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21**Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**Dramatised Discussion – Jesus’ Manifesto**

*This sketch is set in a television studio as an interview between an Andrew Marr type figure and Jesus, as a seemingly naïve politician.*

**Interviewer** Welcome back after the break. Today we are delighted to have Jesus of Nazareth with us here in the studio. Now you've probably not heard of him yet … but he's going to be the one to watch in the next couple of years. He hails from Galilee, works as a carpenter in the family business and following, what he describes as a life-changing experience when he got himself baptised by his cousin (who we know as John the Baptist), he has gone around the region of Nazareth preaching his message. By all accounts, he is starting to attract quite a following. So it's a great pleasure to welcome you this morning.
**Jesus** Thank you.
**Interviewer** I'd like to begin with what has been described as your manifesto: the statement you made in the synagogue in Nazareth.
**Jesus** Sure.
**Interviewer** For the benefit of our viewers who weren't there to hear you in person, you said – in essence – that you wanted to bring good news to the poor.
**Jesus** Yes, that's right.
**Interviewer** Doesn't every politician want to do that?
**Jesus** Do they indeed?!
**Interviewer** OK, I'll re-phrase that. Doesn't every politician say that they are for the poor and disadvantaged?
**Jesus** I'm sure they do say that, but that's not the same as bringing about actual good news to the poor and disadvantaged, is it?
**Interviewer** Well, let's look at what you mean when you say you want to bring
good news to the poor. Number one: you are going to release the captives. Number two: you are going to give sight to the blind. And number three: you are going to set the oppressed free.
**Jesus** And four: proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.
**Interviewer** Let's leave that one to the side for the moment. Number two – bringing sight to the blind – is laudable but how on earth are you going to achieve this, when medical science as it now stands can't do this?
**Jesus** Simple! I see it as my mission to open people's eyes to the truth of what is going on around them. I'll give you an example, we live by greed: it's all about what we can get not what we can give, even if it means that others suffer. We want to get away with what we can, rather than be honest with ourselves and those around us. Where is our integrity? We too easily turn a blind eye to protect our own interests, rather than get involved. Not least the most religious amongst us, who would rather remain ritually pure than stoop to help someone in need. I want to change all that.
**Interviewer** Hmmm! Point number three: letting the oppressed go free. Again laudable, but how are you going to do that? Bear in mind that we are a people living under occupation.
**Jesus** Self-rule may not come in our life-time, but we do not have to give in to our oppression. We are a people of faith – a faith stretching back centuries and a people who have always known suffering. We should live not as people under occupation, but as people living in the kingdom of God.
**Interviewer** And what is this kingdom of God?
**Jesus** It is a place and a time where the poor receive good news.
**Interviewer** Let me just try and get a handle on what you are saying: what is that good news?
**Jesus** Let me ask you a question. What is good news to the homeless? What is good news to the sick and infirm? What is good news to the hungry? What is good news to the refugee and the asylum seeker? What is good news to the poor? What do you think?
**Interviewer** I think that's several questions … but it's my job to ask the questions, not answer them. And so I bring you back to number one: are you really going to let all the prisoners go free? Are you advocating mass lawlessness? Isn't this taking forgiveness too far?
**Jesus** My friend, we are all prisoners of our fears. And the biggest fear is believing that we can do nothing, that change cannot come, that we are completely powerless. God made us, God created us with a voice to speak out, God empowers us to act, God calls us to make a difference to this world, not to sit back and let it happen all around us.
**Interviewer** Can I just point out that what you said in that synagogue in Nazareth, and has come to be known as your manifesto, was actually said many centuries ago by the prophet Isaiah. Now that's many centuries which have gone by without it being implemented. Aren't you just building up people's hopes by regurgitating Isaiah's words, knowing that they are never going to come to pass? What makes you think that you are the one who can do it?
**Jesus** Because the spirit of the Lord is upon me. I am the one God has chosen to bring that good news to the poor.
**Interviewer** Is that what you mean by this being the year of the Lord's favour?
**Jesus** Yes.
**Interviewer** I wish you well … but sadly we are out of time.
**Jesus** No … there is still time. **(from**[**rootsontheweb.com**](http://rootsontheweb.com)**)**

STF 672 Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our master? (From the Isle of Man Methodist Church) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOamiaW0b6E>

**Reflection**

Often when politicians and political parties want to inspire us to vote for them, they publish what is known as a manifesto.

A manifesto is formally described as "*a public declaration of intentions, opinions, objectives or motives, as one issued by a government, sovereign or organisation.*"

Or, in more simple terms: “*This is what I stand for and this is why I would like you to vote for me.”*

This morning, I thought I would share with you a different kind of manifesto. This collection of words is called “The Holstee Manifesto’. Holstee is an art company based in New York which aims to "inspire reflection and encourage action."

Their ‘Manifesto For Life’ reads like this:

*“This is your life. Do what you love and do it often. If you don’t like something, change it. If you don’t like your job, quit. If you don’t have enough time, stop watching TV. If you are looking for the love of your life, stop; they will be waiting for you when you start doing the things you love.*

*“Stop overanalysing. Life is simple. All emotions are beautiful. When you eat, appreciate every last bite.  Open your mind, arms and heart to new things and people, we are united in our differences. Ask the next person you see what their passion is, and share your inspiring dream with them.*

*Travel often. Getting lost will help you find yourself. Some opportunities only come once, seize them. Life is about the people you meet and the things you create with them. So go out and start creating. Life is short. Live your dream and wear your passion.”*

There is a lot of good advice here. But did you notice that it is also a little bit inward looking? This is **your**life. Do what **you**love. The word you or your appears 18 times in one short passage. Is this manifesto just all about me, me, me? To be fair it does mention other people in several places. But the main emphasis is still about the individual. You could call it a Me Manifesto because it is all about the self.

Contrast this with the passage in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus visits his home synagogue in Nazareth. He gets up to read from a scroll featuring the words of the prophet Isaiah. When Jesus reads the excerpt we heard earlier, it is like he is setting out his stall; telling people what his agenda is going to be as he begins his public ministry.

But Jesus wasn’t looking for votes. He was making a statement about how he saw his calling and mission. As he reads the scroll, it is clear that he is being very intentional about his priorities.

You could argue that this is also another manifesto that is "all about me". At the beginning, Jesus reads from the scroll as if he is talking about himself. But then he changes tack very dramatically and stops talking about himself. He starts talking about helping other people - the poor, giving freedom to prisoners, helping the blind and setting the oppressed free". His agenda is not just about himself but other people as well.

His agenda looks at the world around him and the needs that he sees in it. This is a message not just for one person but for lots of people. It involves helping people who are often seen as 'the lowest as the low' in society.

Now zip forward over 1,000 years. Here is another manifesto, based on the writings of someone else. What do you think of these points?

1.      Reduce the gap between rich and poor

2.      Seek to ensure full employment

3.      Introduce measures to help the poorest, including a living wage

4.      Offer the best possible education

5.      Empower individuals to feel they can make a difference

6.      Promote tolerance

7.      Promote equal treatment for men and women

8.      Create a society based on values and not on profits and consumerism

9.      End all forms of enslavement

10.  Avoid engaging in wars

11.  Avoid narrow self-interest

12.  Care for the environment

This ‘manifesto’ is based on the writings of John Wesley and it sets out some of the things that he cared about and wrote about in his journal and his letters. He didn't write out this actual list but he wrote about all these things separately and cared about them deeply.

At the New Room, we’ve joined them together into what we call “John Wesley’s Manifesto for Today” because it helps people to understand what was important to Wesley and why his views are still relevant today. It also acts as a point of discussion. Did Wesley REALLY say that? Where? There is a link to the manifesto and to supporting quotes on the New Room website - <https://www.newroombristol.org.uk/john-wesleys-principles/>

As a team at the New Room, we like this manifesto and we want to continue to be a place where the Gospel of Jesus is shared, but also where these points are upheld and encouraged. Wesley cared about telling people about the Christian faith but he also believed in practical action too.

The famous quote attributed to him is : “*Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”*

That sounds easy but actually it's quite a challenge. A related question might be  - when the term ‘do gooder’ is seen as an insult – what’s actually wrong with doing some good?

So – a question. What would be included in your own personal manifesto? If you were to make a list of qualities and beliefs that mattered to you, what would you include on it? Would it be like the Holstee Manifesto? Would it be like the words of Jesus in the synagogue? Would it echo John Wesley? Or would it be completely unique to you?

If you have a minute today, or over the weekend, maybe have a go at writing one. Take some time to think: "What actually matters to me? What matters to me so much that it is part of my manifesto? How do I want the world to change? And what am I going to do about it?”

And then extend it. What matters to the church that I go to? What’s OUR manifesto? Where do we want to see change? What are we going to do about it?

A manifesto is not a be-all-and-end-all on how to live life well. But it’s a good place to start to explore what matters to us – and what we are going to do about it.

Amen

**Prayers of Intercession (by Barbara Glasson, from the same book)**

Loving God, who is not only distant but also earthed,

We pray that those with power in our city will also keep their feet on the ground.

Loving God, who is not only creator but also embodied,

We pray that those with gifts in our city will remember the dispossessed.

Loving God, who is not only crucified but also raised,

We pray that those who suffer neglect in our city will also experience new possibility.

Loving God, who is not only all compassionate but also wounded,

We pray that those who suffer violence in our city will also hear the news of peace.

**Lord’s Prayer (trad)**

**Hymn – STF 673 Will You Come and Follow Me?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnXOEUS7BBM>

**Blessing**

Loving God, as we seek to follow you this week

May our words and actions reflect your love and your yearning for justice

And may your blessing be upon us, and all those who long for a better world

Now and forever. Amen

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