

**Morning worship in the Bath Mission Area led by the Revd. Greg Haynes
10.30 am Sunday 10 January, 2021.**

Come, let us honour the powerful glory of our Creator God. Let us worship his majesty in the splendour of holiness. **Amen**

HYMN 161 "Speak, O Lord, as we come to you"

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, till your church is built
and the earth is filled with Your glory.

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God, through your might and power the world was created, and through it now the world is changed, and ever changing. We read in the Scriptures of how you changed people's lives. We hear it in the stories of saints old and new. We know it through the experience and lives of our own communities. We thank and praise you for all that you have done through the changes you have made – and are still making – in our lives. We thank and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who gives us – your people – strength, and the blessing of peace. **Amen.**

Reading: Mark 1:4-11

Finding the way

We love our stereotypes, don't we? It's so easy, for example, to describe all Germans as having no sense of humour and a propensity to keep the rules. All Italians as excitable and always ready to break the rules. All French people as passionate etc. etc.

Of course it's the clergy who are so often shown as stereotypes. The vicar in Dad's Army, played by Frank Williams, is the classic example, slightly balding, rather wet and with a reluctance to stand up for himself under the rather bullying approach of Captain Mainwaring and Air Raid Warden Hodges. On the other hand, Catholic priests are, on television, portrayed as Irish, with liking for a whisky and a flutter on the horses.

If I had a proverbial pound for every time someone assumed I was a teetotaler because I am a Methodist minister I would now be comfortably rich as opposed to the assumption I must be poor and have had to move every three years!

Clinging to stereotypes, if we think about it, is an example at its worst of lazy thinking camouflaging many hidden prejudices.

The Methodist Church has just published a programme called "A Methodist Way of Life". It begs the question is there a distinctly Methodist way of life as opposed to a stereotypical image? Should we not be talking about a Christian lifestyle which marks us out as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

We'll come back to that after we have thought a little more deeply about today's gospel reading which culminates with the baptism of Jesus.

Mark announces his Gospel as 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (v.1). He sets the scene for transformation by telling the story of John the Baptist, who fulfils Isaiah's prophecy and makes the preparations. These are impressive in themselves. Mark describes crowds of people thronging from all directions to find John in the desert and seek his baptism. But this is only the prologue. John's ministry reaches its climax with the announcement of the one who will baptize with water and the Holy Spirit – and then Jesus appears.

The whole passage centres on new beginnings. The first sentence of the Gospel spells out the way in which the world is entirely changed, now that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, is present. Mark goes on to describe the ways in which this new life is made real. People are offered the opportunity for a fresh start. The Greek word usually translated 'repentance' (v.4) carries the sense of 'a change of mind' or 'a change of heart'. It relates far more to the promise of a new future than to mulling over the sins of the past. But this is only stage one of the new life into which God invites us.

The baptism of Jesus is also a moment of new beginning. Though there is nothing for Jesus to repent of (see Matthew 3.14), this is a new stage in his life too, as he moves away from the hidden years in Nazareth and begins his active ministry. At his baptism, God does something amazing. People of Jesus' time tended to imagine a rigid, unbreakable barrier dividing earth and heaven, one that made it impossible for humanity to reach God. Now this barrier is torn apart (v.10) and God's Spirit comes powering through, like a descending dove. The world is indeed changed and those who experience Jesus' baptism in the Spirit will begin to discover what that means.

Some of you might use the Word in Time notes that the Methodist Church publish each day. Just before Christmas, the Revd. Andrew Pratt was commenting on the famous Isaiah passage chapter 2:1-5, about hammering swords into ploughshares. He told the following story:

I once knew a young man who worked in an ordnance factory, making modern weapons, and he started coming to church. I don't know what had drawn him there, perhaps he had been to a crusade – they were more common back then – or perhaps he had started reading the Bible. I don't know whether he had professed his faith in a conventional way and I'm not sure if he would describe himself as 'being born again'. But I do know that he was beginning to live his life in a new way. He came for a chat one day and said "I'm giving up my job". It transpired that he felt he could no longer make weapons and be true to his faith so he retrained as a furniture restorer.

"Swords into ploughshares"? Not exactly. But the intent is exactly the same. That was the story of one person.

How we live matters. "You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?"(Matthew 7:16)

It matters much more that you live out your faith as a Christian and much less the manner in which you became a Christian however important that was at the time. Our way of life as Christians and as Methodists should be authentic and show the fruits of our faith and belief. The resource, a Methodist Way of Life, is designed to encourage that lifestyle and our growth as followers of Jesus Christ.

What does it involve?

Our calling: The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. As far as we are able, with God's help:

1. **Worship:** We will pray daily. We will worship with others regularly. We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.
2. **Learning and Caring:** We will care for ourselves and those around us. We will learn more about our faith. We will practise hospitality and generosity.
3. **Service:** We will help people in our communities and beyond. We will care for creation and all God's gifts. We will challenge injustice.
4. **Evangelism:** We will speak of the love of God. We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus. We will share our faith with others.

A Methodist Way of Life sets out what it means to be a Methodist. It puts into words how we try to live our lives in response to God's love made known to us in Jesus, how we live out our calling.

A Methodist Way of Life is both new and old. It is new, in that it was first discussed by the Methodist Conference in 2018 and was shared more widely in 2020. But it is based on what Methodists agreed was their calling in the year 2000 and that, in turn, was built on what Methodists have always done, since the days of John Wesley, as they tried to follow Jesus and live out the Christian faith. It is a way of living.

How can a Methodist Way of Life help?

1. It **focuses and strengthens** Christian living by reminding us of the core practices of the faith.
2. It provides a **sense of being part of something bigger.**
3. It **challenges us to tackle the things we find hard.**
4. It helps us to **reflect** on our Christian life and seek help and support when needed.

When people find themselves caught up in a terrorist atrocity they panic, look for a way to escape and run away to find safety. On the other hand, those who have had military training often do quite the opposite even if they are retired and no longer in uniform. They look around and they assess the situation and very often run towards the danger in order to nullify it even if it means putting their own life at risk. "You can take the man or woman out of the uniform but you cannot take the uniform out of the man or woman"; it is part of their very being, their way of life, it is part of their DNA.

It is the same for the disciple of Jesus. Her, his way of life is built in, it informs every part of their being and therefore of their way of life, every action, every decision every relationship.

May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church, for the transformation of the world, as we live out our faith in words and in actions.

HYMN 341 "All for Jesus-all for Jesus"

All for Jesus--all for Jesus,
this our song shall ever be;
for we have no hope, nor Saviour,
if we have not hope in thee.

All for Jesus--thou wilt give us
strength to serve thee, hour by hour,
none can move us from thy presence,
while we trust thy love and power.

All for Jesus--thou hast loved us;
all for Jesus--thou hast died;
all for Jesus--thou art with us;
all for Jesus crucified.

All for Jesus--all for Jesus--
this the Church's song must be;
till, at last, we all are gathered
one in love and one in thee.

A time of prayer: Father God, we come to you with open hearts and minds to pray for our world;

For all who are working to help others.

For all who are unwell in body, mind or soul.

For all who fear violence, in their streets or their own homes.

For church, family, friends and neighbours.

For ourselves, right here and now, all we are and think and feel.

Father, we place into your hands our world, in all things and in all places may your will be done. **Amen**
The Lord's Prayer

HYMN 504 "May the mind of Christ my Saviour"

1 May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power inspiring
all I do and say.

2 May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

3 May the peace of God, my Father,
rule my life in everything
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

4 May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self-forgetting:
this is victory.

5 May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Let us pray: Gracious God, thank you for your extraordinary love shown to us in Jesus.
Help us to live each moment of each day in gratitude, loving those around us and witnessing to the ways of
your kingdom. Refresh us continually in the power of the Holy Spirit to be people of the Way. **Amen.**