

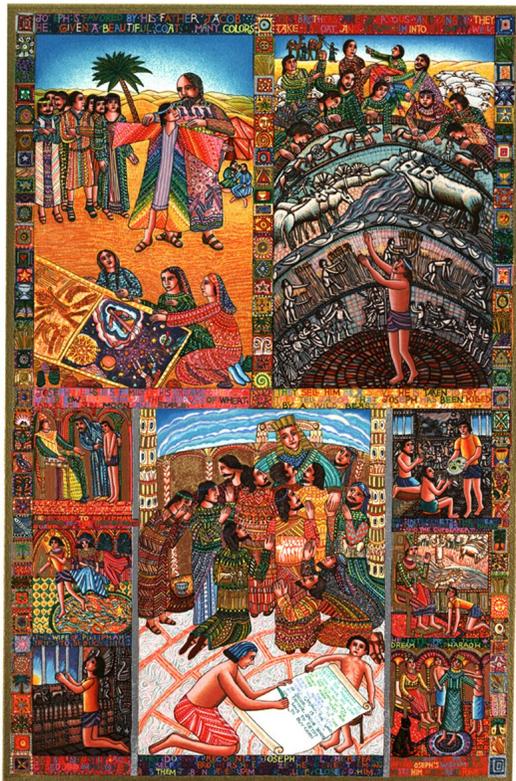
# Connect

*Connecting members and friends*

Wesley Methodist Church

August 2020

Issue 9



The **Methodist Church** 

## From the editor...

Hello and welcome to the ninth issue of *Connect*. This issue covers most of August. In this issue you'll find a short act

of worship for each Sunday, which is taken from the Methodist website and written by various people across the church. I've then also written some prayers and reflections based on the lectionary, which are there for you to use through the week as you wish. They are intended to continue to support worship at home and provide insight into the week's readings alongside prayers for use at home. We continue, as a team, to develop the worship life of Wesley as we find ourselves in a very different context—but also in a time of great opportunity. Our evening online worship service continues to thrive with over 30 people joining us each week, which is planned to continue for as long as it serves a need. And, all being well, we hope to open the building for a short act of worship each Sunday morning. This has been no easy task: there has been a team of people work tirelessly to ensure it is safe to do so. Particular thanks must go to Revd Phil for his leadership in navigating this task; to Steve and Helen for their hard work in planning the reopening through action plans and risk assessments (many hours of work); to Linda and Jasmine who were part of the team who deep cleaned the church and to Justin for purchasing equipment needed to ensure we are able to open and minimise risk as much as possible. A group of interested parties and the Church Council have met on two different occasions over the past few weeks to ensure we have oversight of plans. What I must reiterate is that this reopening is for those who wish to attend—there is absolutely no expectation for people to be there (a number of our members fall into vulnerable categories and will prefer to stay at home). We will continue to offer written materials through *Connect* and online worship through *Zoom* for as long as necessary so that people feel part of our community however they engage. Blessings, Gary.



To include a message or to contribute to the next edition, contact me. I'd love to hear from you!

**XXXXX XXXXXX** (Phone, Text, WhatsApp)

**info@wesleywestbrom.co.uk** (Email)

**Every Sunday at 6.15pm**

Join us via the internet or on an ordinary telephone.

**Weekly Worship with Wesley Church**

## Join using the internet

Join online using a smartphone, tablet or computer, at the following address: **zoom.us/join**



Meeting ID: **XXX XXXX XXXX** and Password: **XXXXXX**

## Join by ordinary telephone



### 1. Dial the number to connect to Zoom

You can use a landline telephone or a mobile phone.

Dial: **0131 460 1196**

### 2. Enter the Meeting ID

When you are prompted, enter the following Meeting ID followed by #.

Enter: **XXX XXXX XXXX #**

### 3. Participant ID

It will ask you for a Participant ID. You don't need one.

Press: **#**

### 4. Enter the Password

When you are prompted, enter the following Password followed by #.

Enter: **XXXXXX #**

### 5. Welcome in!

Wait a short time and the host will let you in. You'll then hear talking.

We recognise this way of accessing worship is new to us all, so please, if you need any help, get in touch. It will get easier the more we get used to it.

**Hymns:** For those accessing via the internet, we will be displaying the words of hymns on everybody's screen. However, if you are accessing by telephone, or would prefer a copy of the hymn book, we are happy to lend you a copy of *Singing the Faith* and will drop one to your door. Please contact me for one.

**zoom**

## Change has become a constant

*Derek Percival*

I recently watched a programme of the “Queen in her own words”. In it she spoke about change, she said:

“Change has become a constant  
Managing it is an expanding discipline  
How we embrace it defines our future”

I believe this to be both profound and very appropriate in these unusually demanding circumstances we find ourselves in.

If we are not prepared to accept the necessary changes which we are now facing on so many fronts of our lives we will suffer in so many ways, financially, physically and mentally; the one good thing we Christians have in our favour is our Spiritual base; BUT we cannot hold on to the past, we must move forward. We are the living CHURCH!

I am a great believer in “everything happens for a purpose” we don’t always understand the reason at the time but given time, when looking back, there was logic or gratitude for how things turned out.

This pandemic is forcing us to change our way of living in so many ways. Who has not felt that this is happening for a reason? I have. Yes, many people have lost their lives and I am sure that not all of those were inevitable. Yes, there has been much pain and suffering; BUT (and I know as a man I don’t know the pain involved, but I was there for both of my children’s births and witnessed the suffering and shared the joy of that miracle moment) out of suffering of child birth comes new life. New parents have to change the way they live.

This is just such a moment for us all, we must embrace it and move forward with the guidance of the spirit.

It will take time to get used to working through the aftermath of this pandemic and the losing of loved ones, coming to terms with not being able to

say good bye to them as we would have wanted to.

Change is inevitable and I am hopeful that we, the people of God, can work with Him to embrace what lies ahead, with the enthusiasm of the early “church”, to lead the way forward, by showing by example of how we live our lives, getting involved with the community around us, and spreading God’s WORD.

God Be With You All,

In Christian Love,

Derek

## A Poem

*From Robert White*

When he got home the night before

It went straight to his head

And when he woke next morning

He felt that he was dead

His mother said ‘you must get up’

You have to go to school

But the teachers didn’t like him

And the kids were pretty cruel

‘So give me two good reasons

Why I should get out of bed’

‘Well firstly son, you’re 46

And the second, you’re the Head’

## New Hymns

*The global pandemic of COVID-19 has seen some hymnwriters respond with new hymns. Here are a few of them*

When we face an unknown future that we can't imagine yet,  
when the closeness we have treasured turns from blessing into threat —  
As we miss our friends and loved ones, as we crave community,  
may we look, God, in this season, for a whole new way to be.

Jesus faced the lonely desert as a time to look within.  
There he met such trial and conflict; there he knew you were with him.  
In this time of separation when we miss the life we've known,  
may we hear your voice proclaiming: "I am here! You're not alone."

May we cherish those around us as we never have before.  
May we think much less of profit; may we learn what matters more.  
May we hear our neighbors' suffering; may we see our neighbors' pain.  
May we learn new ways of offering life and health and hope again.

God, when illness comes to threaten, and when so much here goes wrong,  
may we know this thing for certain — that your love is sure and strong.  
You're beside us in our suffering — and when times are surely tough,  
we may face an unknown future, but it's filled, Lord, with your love.

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Lord God, creator, life of all we do:  
friends, neighbours, family are our gift from you.  
Now, in these days when we are kept apart,  
may they be sure you hold them in your heart.

Lord, for the ill, and those approaching death:  
give them your solace, through each laboured breath.  
For those who serve with courage, skill and care  
we ask your strength. You know the loads they bear.

Lord, in this time when much is set aside  
show us the truths which busyness can hide.  
Where wealth misguides us: Lord of life, forgive;  
give grace to shape anew the way we live.

Lord, in adversity we learn again  
there is no place where your love cannot reign!  
Hear now our prayer, from fear our minds release;  
grant both to us and to your world your peace.

*Words © 2020 Tony Law.*

When life is shaken to its core,  
when clouds and storms arrive,  
we find it difficult to know  
God present in our lives.  
Yet there's no misery or grief,  
pain, doubt, or emptiness,  
that is not known by the divine  
and filled with tenderness.

When we are tempted to give up,  
and purpose drains away,  
where is the God of hope and joy?  
Can peace replace dismay?  
God, in the centre of our pain,  
makes of our dark a tent,  
a holy place of tearfulness  
as life splits and fragments.

We need to learn to trust and know  
God in our lives, God here  
hidden within the clouds and storms,  
one with our doubts and fears.  
This is our peace: that in the depths  
of our adversities  
we find a God who shares our pain  
and life's cruel miseries.

*Words: © Andrew Brown (November 2019, rev. March 2020)*

# Sunday 2nd August

*9th Sunday after Pentecost*

## **Prayer**

God of our going out and our coming home, I worship you today.

For the times and places that have filled me with joy, I praise you.

Where I have chosen the wrong path and caused pain to myself, to you and to others, I ask your forgiveness.

For the assurance that you will walk beside me to forgive me and restore me, I thank you.

## **Reading**

Genesis 32:22-31

## **Time to Reflect**

An enduring cliché from the world of movies is the portrayal of the happy ending in spaghetti-western movies, with the hero walking off into the sunset satisfied that order has been restored and everyone can now live in peace and harmony.

This was brilliantly parodied by John Sullivan in the Only Fools and Horses Christmas Special (1996) when the Trotters finally become millionaires: the episode ends with Del-Boy, Rodney and Uncle Albert walking off into the horizon as the sun sets. At the time, it was thought that this would be the final episode of the long-running and popular comedy, but as

it turned out, the show not only returned, but so did the characters' troubles. Their moment in the sun had turned out to be temporary and Sullivan captured the experience of many of us, that there are rarely easy answers to life's struggles.

Today's Old Testament reading ends, not with Jacob walking towards the sunset but towards the rising sun. It is not the story of a hard day's work successfully completed, but of a night-time of wrestling that resolves some questions but leaves others still open. His opponent refuses to offer him easy answers so whilst there is blessing for Jacob, things are not neatly tied up.

Jacob, plans to spend the night alone preparing for his uncomfortable reunion with his brother, Esau. Given their history, we might expect that he was always going to have a disturbed night. Choices from long ago are still having an impact on his life and his family's. After years of ducking and diving, Jacob seems to have come close to the end of his own resourcefulness but there is still something that wants to turn events to his advantage.

Into this scene walks the unexpected stranger. Later Jacob understands that he had been joined by God as he struggled with his past. What follows

shows us that Jacob is not entirely ready to give up the fight and his mysterious opponent, seeing that Jacob is willing to fight to the end, delivers a decisive blow. It is at this point of vulnerability that Jacob opens up to a moment of unvarnished self-awareness and unexpected God-awareness.

Jacob demands a neat and tidy resolution which his companion refuses to give to him. Instead, from the struggle, Jacob is offered the opportunity of a new beginning. A new name, a new blessing (a blessing of his own and not one stolen from Esau) and a new insight to God's presence and God's nature of love.

So, for Jacob, there, with the rising sun, comes hope to follow a night of uncertain and painful struggle. But there is challenge too: he has to reconcile himself to the fact that some of the scars and wounds of a lifetime of wrestling will travel with him into the new day.

God has confronted him with his past and offered him a better future but his history will not be rewritten. He is offered a future shaped by God's faithful provision (rather than his own manipulative gains) and reconciliation (rather than the uncertainty of unresolved conflict). He will limp towards the future less certain of his

own strength and more aware of God's presence.

The fantasy of walking off into the sunset is appealing because we would all like neat endings. Sometimes though, God challenges us to embrace new beginnings whilst carrying the memory of our tangled past. Facing up to our past in order to be ready for God's future may involve some painful wrestling with uncomfortable truths, but in the struggle we can find God's presence and God's blessing. Our story, God's story has not ended yet. May you see God's face and live.

*Take a time to sit quietly*

### **A time of prayer**

Ever-present God, I join my prayer with all those who pray in the name of Jesus today:

We pray for your church that you grant us patience as we continue to the work we need to do to prepare for future gatherings together.

For those who are anxious about the future and those who see only threat in the days to come.

For those who are estranged from loved ones and feel they are unable to do anything to bring about reconciliation.

For those who wrestle in the night

with trouble and distress of body,  
mind and soul.

I pray especially for ...

Holy God,  
help us to show others that you are  
present in the midst of their strug-  
gles, that together we might demon-  
strate your great love and concern for  
your world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **A prayer of blessing**

Power of God, be our protection;  
wisdom of God, be our guide;  
word of God, be our inspiration;  
shield of God, be our defence;  
hosts of God, be our deliverance;  
Son of God be our salvation;  
now and always. Amen

*Original materials by Revd Dalwyn R Attwell*



Delacroix, Eugène, 1798-1863. Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, detail, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48071> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: [www.yorckproject.de](http://www.yorckproject.de).

**Prayer of adoration**

God of reality,

We praise you for your care of all people:

your care of the physical needs of each person,

your care of the spiritual needs of each person,

your care of the whole creation.

You are the God who meets our every need, in this life and beyond. Amen.

**Prayer of confession**

Gracious God,

Forgive us when we neglect to see who we really are before you.

Forgive us when we neglect to recognise who you really are.

Forgive us when we don't take time to understand and seek your wisdom.

In our confession and our seeking, we find renewal and wholeness. Amen.

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

Thank you, O God, for your care of our every need:

for feeding us both physically and spiritually.

Thank you, O God, for the wisdom to understand:

for showing us who we are and who you are.

Thank you, O God, for meeting us day by day:

for being present personally to us as we journey in life. Amen.

**Prayer of intercession**

God, who holds the world in your hands,

embrace those people we know of who need your care,

embrace those who are ill or in need of comfort,

embrace those who seek but struggle to find,

embrace those who are alone and feel isolated,

embrace your Church and bring renewal,

embrace our local communities and the people around us in need,

embrace our local church that it may be a light to the world,

embrace each of us as we utter the words of this prayer.

Amen.

## Read

Matthew 14:13-21

## Meditate

*And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. (Matthew 14:20)*

## Reflect

In my previous school, we had a child who had travelled from a war-torn Syria across Europe to England. Part of his travel meant he didn't have any food for nearly a month. He had incredible anxiety around food and any hunger pains would trigger deep psychological reactions. Some would argue about his right to be in England, but anyone with compassion would simply say, he needs to be fed. Jesus, in feeding the five thousand, doesn't ask where all the people are from and whether they have a right to be there. He cures, he feeds without reservation. We're told that he has compassion—compassion for people whoever they are and wherever they've come from.

That compassion was rubbing off on the early disciples. They knew the people needed feeding. Their solution was to send them to the neighbouring villages to buy food—any capitalist would be rejoicing at that decision: imagine five thousand people turning up to buy food. But Jesus, says wait, we will do it, we'll feed them as part of God's reign.

Sometimes, as the Church, we're good at feeding people spiritually; we're good at prayers, bible study, hymn-singing, preaching. However, we can sometimes neglect people's physical needs. For just as Jesus had compassion for the whole of every individual, so we must do the same. We're not called to solve all the problems of the world, but we're called to take the few things we have and help those around us, trusting that God will take the little we offer and transform many lives, both physically and spiritually.

## Ponder

Who are you called to help? What can you do to help them?

## Pray

Compassionate God, show me how I can help those around me.

## Respond

Do something to help someone else with a real physical need.

## Read

Genesis 32:22-31

## Meditate

*So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30)*

## Reflect

When I began preaching, some seventeen years ago, I was mentored by an experienced local preacher. She was incredibly encouraging, but was honest with feedback she gave me. I remember being told, 'Learn what to do with your hands.' I'd a nervous habit that she'd picked up on, but I'd no idea that I did it. Not long after beginning teaching, someone I was dating said, 'You don't have to speak to me like a teacher, you know!' When I first started leading in schools, my line-manager said, 'You're really good at understanding people.' It's with our encounters with others, we learn about ourselves: both the good and the bad. We learn that we have something to offer, but we also have a long way to go in becoming the people God wants us to be.

Jacob has a similar experience. Through his wrestling, he learns about the qualities that perhaps he needs to work on. We've seen his trickery and whilst he may have been avoiding Esau for valid reasons, we can't help but conclude it's his own fault. Yet, he meets God and in that encounter realises God is greater and becomes aware of his own weaknesses and sinfulness. But greater still, even though he is yet to be what God wants him to be, God accepts him and remains faithful to God's promises. We have our gifts, but we have many weaknesses, yet God accepts us and journeys with us, encouraging us to see God for who God is and ourselves for who we really are, ready to be our best selves by the grace of God

## Ponder

What gifts do you have? What experiences could you learn from?

## Pray

God, help me to accept myself, to nurture my gifts and to learn from my mistakes.

## Respond

Ask someone you trust to tell you about what they think you're good at and what you could be better at.

# Sunday 9th August

*10th Sunday after Pentecost*

## Opening Prayer

I come this day to worship You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Open my heart, to receive Your love, my soul to receive Your Spirit and my mind to know to Your truth. For Your glory. Amen.

## Hymn

*Great is thy faithfulness  
(StF 51)*

## Prayer

God of grace, I praise You. I praise You for who You are: creator, faithful, rescuer, and holy. I praise that You even though I cannot be with others to worship You, I can feel that You are here in my heart.

I praise You, for all the blessings You have given me. For family, for friends, for a relationship with You. Help me not to take You for granted.

God of grace, as I worship You this morning, help me to be transformed by Your love, and in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Reading

Matthew 14:22-33

## Time to Reflect

I am sure we can all relate to Peter. Throughout the gospels we get a picture of someone who does not al-

ways think before he speaks, if we take Peter's confession in Matthew 16:13-20 and think – did he rush his confession of faith or not? Only a few verses later Jesus rebukes him.

And it is the same in this reading. Peter is singled out while the others stay in the boat.

Jesus says to his disciples 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid' when he walks on the water to the disciples in the boat. Should this have been enough for Peter as it was for the others? No, Peter being Peter, wants to try and walk on the water.

Perhaps, the message today, for us, is one of trust as we journey as disciples through these difficult times? Jesus says to us, as he said to Peter, "Take heart, it is I: do not be afraid".

*Take a time to sit quietly*

## A time of prayer

Almighty God, I come now to pray for Your world. Your world which is full of brokenness, injustice, and inequality. I bring before You the rulers of the world, local or national, and pray that they would remember that all power comes from You.

Almighty God, I pray for your church. I pray that during these times we would unite in worship and service. I pray for my local church, and its ministers/pastors, that they would be

strengthened by Your Spirit.

Almighty God, I pray for those known to me and name them before You. And, I pray for myself, that I would be transformed by Your Spirit, and live in the love which You have given me through Jesus.

In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

### Hymn

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
whose arm doth bind the restless  
wave,  
who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep  
its own appointed limits keep:  
*O hear us when we cry to thee  
for those in peril on the sea.*

O Saviour, whose almighty word  
the winds and waves submissive  
heard,  
who walked upon the foaming deep,  
and calm amid its rage didst sleep:

O sacred Spirit, who didst brood  
upon the chaos dark and rude,  
who made its angry tumult cease,  
and gavest light and life and peace:

O Trinity of love and power,  
shield all who sail in danger's hour;  
from rock and tempest, fire and foe,  
protect them wheresoe'er they go:  
*and ever let there rise to thee  
glad hymns of praise from land and  
sea.*

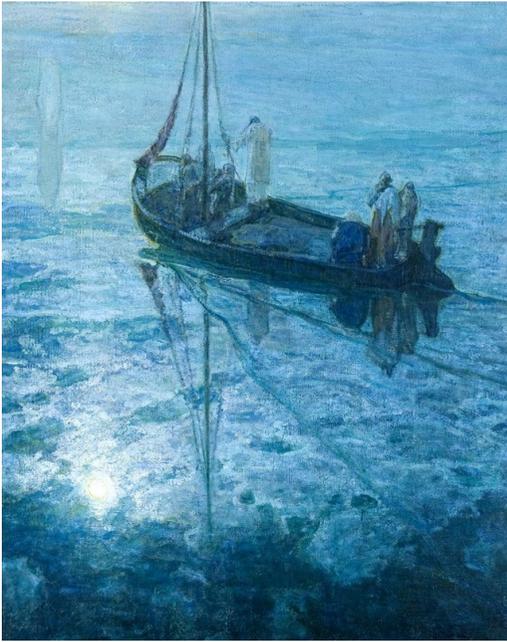
*William Whiting (1825-1878)*  
*(StF 517)*

### A prayer of blessing

As this time of worship ends,  
and I enter into the storms of life,  
and the uncertainties which may  
come, may I take heart that Jesus is  
present, and ever live for His holy  
name.

And may the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with me, and those whom I cher-  
ish in my heart, now and always.

Amen.



Top: Tanner, Henry Ossawa, 1859-1937. Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://digilib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-image/RC=55904> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry\\_Ossawa\\_Tanner,\\_The\\_Disciples\\_See\\_Christ\\_Walking\\_on\\_the\\_Water,\\_c.\\_1907.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry_Ossawa_Tanner,_The_Disciples_See_Christ_Walking_on_the_Water,_c._1907.jpg).

Bottom: Joseph at the Well, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://digilib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-image/RC=57437> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ugardener/3344020114/>.

**Prayer of adoration**

Saving God,  
You lift us up when we are at risk of sinking,  
you help us when we face challenges that we think we can't overcome,  
you save us in ways we may never know.  
We give you praise for your presence in our lives,  
for your salvation, your liberation, your love and care.  
Praise to you, O God, for your faithfulness to us. Amen.

**Prayer of confession**

Forgiving God,  
Sometimes we think we are able to get through challenges on our own,  
forgive us when we forget our dependence on you.  
Sometimes we are afraid of stepping out into new territory,  
forgive us when we put our fear before your grace.  
Sometimes we lose faith in your faithfulness to us,  
forgive us when we forget that you are always there to protect us.  
God's faithfulness grants us forgiveness. Amen.

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

All-knowing God,  
We give thanks that while we are often ignorant to it,  
you are always present in our lives,  
working things out for the good of many.  
For your encircling love and guidance, we give thanks. Amen.

**Prayer of intercession**

God of hope,  
We pray for a broken world,  
tossed and turned in a sea of destruction and stormy weather,  
battered and bruised by waves of harm and hurt,  
fearful and panicked by darkness and strong winds.  
May your protection come to those who need it  
and your salvation touch the entire world so the waters may be calmed,  
and the full redemption of all creation realised. Amen.

## **Read**

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

## **Meditate**

*But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us not take his life.'* (Genesis 37:21)

## **Reflect**

When something terrible happens, it's hard to see where God is in that moment. We can often despair at the situation and wonder what God is up to. Many of us felt that way at the beginning of lockdown. Many still feel that way, recalling the terrible loss of life and the impact the virus is having around the world. Some have started to see God at work in new ways as the Church responds, attempting to be God's people on earth, sensing the movement of the Holy Spirit. There are no easy answers when it comes to the question, 'Why?' before God.

In our reading, God is not mentioned. We're left to wonder whether God is there and if so, is God doing anything? What we do know, however, is that Joseph survives and later in our story is elevated to a high position in Egypt. Joseph's wisdom later in the story leads to the salvation of his brothers and family. In the midst of the story we struggle to see God at work, but later on, we can see how God, without restricting the freewill of individuals, turns it round for good and the salvation of many people. Perhaps Reuben heard God's voice within which led him to challenge his brothers. In life, who knows which small nudge here and there is the result of God at work. What we do know is that things are not simple, that terrible things happen, but we also know that God is present in the world and when we look back we can often piece together how the puzzle is being put together by God.

## **Ponder**

Think of a time when God was present, but you were not aware of it at the time.

## **Pray**

Loving God, we thank you for your presence in our world.

## **Respond**

Note down some situations where you are struggling to see the presence of God. Look at them at a later date and see if you can recognise God in them.

## **Read**

Matthew 14:22-33

## **Meditate**

*But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'* (Matthew 14:27)

## **Reflect**

Stepping out into new territory is not easy. I remember the first time I played the organ for church, my hands shaking as attempted to do something I'd not done before, but encouraged by others who thought I could do it. I remember the first time I stood in front of a class of children, petrified, but not able to show it, knowing that it was the start of a career. I remember the time I moved from primary to secondary education and I was stood looking at students who were taller than me, but having been told it was possible to move from one setting to the other. It's not easy stepping into new territory, but we do it with the belief that it's right the thing to do. We might be nervous, or down right afraid, we might not really know what we're doing, but we do it knowing we'll learn. I've been impressed at how many people have embraced trying out new technology to join with others in worship—how many of us had used Zoom before the beginning of this year?

Peter isn't a doubter. He steps out because he believes. He believes Jesus can help him across the water. He steps out in faith. But, like with many things we do, he experiences difficulties. The wind pushing against him and he wonders whether he's doing the right thing, he becomes overwhelmed, challenged. He believes, but he struggles. So it is often the same for us. Stepping out into new territory is not easy, there will be difficulties, there will be challenges, but we will never sink. Our obedience to the word, 'Come,' takes us to new places, but God will always save us when we need it.

## **Ponder**

Is God calling you to step out into new territory?

## **Pray**

Equipping God, give me the courage to step out in faith.

## **Respond**

Do something new for the reign of God in your community.

# Sunday 16th August

*11th Sunday after Pentecost*

## Opening Prayer

“Be Still and Know that I am God.”

Sit back. Breathe deeply. Quieten yourself and listen to the noises around you; birds outside, the fridge humming, cars passing by, the neighbour working outside. Offer these things to God in thanks.

Father, I thank you for all there is in our world, natural and man made. As I come into your presence, I celebrate them and praise you for them. Speak to me through all those things and through your Word today. Amen.

## Hymn

And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above --  
so free, so infinite his grace --  
emptied himself of all but love,

and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray --  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ,  
my own.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)  
(StF 345)*

## Prayer

Lord, I come before you and  
acknowledge that you are King of  
Kings and Lord of Lords.

I bow before you and recognise you  
as the one who is able to do great  
things.

Help me to trust you and listen to  
your reply as I call out to you.

## Reading

Matthew 15: 21-28

## Time to Reflect

The Gospel reading raises a multitude of questions and this reflection is not necessarily able to answer them. Why did Jesus seem to reject the woman – surely his message is for all the world? Why were his disciples apparently so heartless? Why did Jesus heal some people and not others? We say that God always answers our prayers but why are some prayers for healing answered with a ‘no’? That last one is surely more pertinent now than ever.

I admit that I don’t know the answer to those. However, the reaction of the woman shows us ways that we can respond when faced with hard questions and difficult situations.

Firstly, in the midst of her trouble and desperation, she recognised who Jesus was and that she should turn to him. She recognised him as someone special, as the one with the power to help her.

Secondly, she reacted with boldness. She was not put off by approaching a stranger, by approaching a man or by approaching a foreigner – none of which would have been easy for a woman of her time to do. Her boldness continued as she pressed the matter and argued her case. She was not put off by Jesus’s silence or the disciples’ irritation.

Finally, she approached with faith – and that is her claim to fame. She argued her case. Her boldness and her faith go hand-in-hand. Her request was not a “well, Lord, if you might, possibly ...” She trusted that Jesus was the one to help her and wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Are we like that woman? When we approach Jesus, do we truly recognise who he is – the Lord of Lords but the Saviour who can meet our deepest needs?

Do we approach with faith, clearly asking, or do we provide God with get-out clauses: “Please heal my friend – or at least make him not quite as bad?”

Do we approach with boldness?

And, when we don’t get the answer we want, does our faith allow us to answer back? God’s back is strong enough to take it if we shout and rail back at him – as long as our faith then allows us to respond to his answer.

## A time of prayer

Re-read the last verse of the hymn. Take a time to sit quietly

“Bold I approach the eternal throne ...”

I approach your throne for the people I know personally that need a

special touch from you. I picture them as I place them into your loving hands.

I approach your throne for the people who are shouting out with questions and despair and don't know where to turn. Be their comfort Lord.

I approach your throne for those far from me and give to you their needs, knowing that I can trust you to respond.

### A prayer of blessing

In the joys, may I celebrate with you Lord.

In the troubles, may I shout out to you with boldness and listen to you in faith.

And in the everyday, may I journey on with you.



Watanabe, Sadao, 1913-1996. Woman of Canaan, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57538> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/woman-canaan-26809>.

**Prayer of adoration**

Guiding God,  
Though we're not always aware of your presence, we know you are there,  
guiding your people to bless the world,  
granting wisdom to those who seek so they can work for your good.  
Just as you transformed Joseph's situation  
so he could become salvation for your people,  
you transform us so we may glimpse your light in the world. Amen.

**Prayer of confession**

Gracious God,  
When we let our ego guide our thoughts and actions, forgive us,  
when we put our fears before love of others, forgive us,  
when we act in ways that harm others, forgive us.  
Just as Joseph forgave his brothers by your grace, so you forgive us. Amen.

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

God of all people,  
We give you thanks that no one is excluded from your grace,  
that through your Son, Jesus Christ, all may find a place in your reign.  
We give you thanks that when we call upon you, you respond in love,  
regardless of who we are and what we have done. Amen.

**Prayer of intercession**

Listening God,  
As you listened and responded to the Canaanite woman, hear our prayers.  
We pray for the world and its needs...  
We pray for our communities and their needs...  
We pray for the Church...  
We pray for our local church...  
We pray for those we know in need...  
We pray for ourselves...  
As you listened and responded to the Canaanite woman, hear our prayers.  
Amen.

## Read

Genesis 45:1-15

## Meditate

*And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. (Genesis 45:5)*

## Reflect

“You can choose your friends but you sho' can't choose your family, an' they're still kin to you no matter whether you acknowledge 'em or not, and it makes you look right silly when you don't.” The words of Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's right though isn't it? We don't get to choose our family. Love them, struggle with them, they're ours. I'm sure many of us have experienced parts of our families that have stopped talking or don't get on. Joseph's family was no different. The brothers just did not like him and a younger Joseph didn't help matters with his arrogance about himself. So Joseph was sold—just about managing to escape death.

Years later the brothers arrive. How many of us would want to seek revenge? Rub it in their faces of how successful we are without them; send them packing to face the famine alone and inevitable death. But Joseph has journeyed with God. He's taken a step back from the human situation to discover the wisdom of God's involvement. He recognises that in being sent away by his brothers, God used him to bring salvation to others. He doesn't respond to them with another human response founded in his own ego, just as the brothers had been led by their ego. Instead he responds with a similar grace that God bestows to all. He opens his arms and welcomes them with love, echoing God's love for all. Just as we can't choose our family, we also can't choose our church family, but we're always called to put ego aside and allow God's grace to allow us to embrace each other in love, whatever mistakes we make.

## Ponder

Are there people you have fallen out with where it's time to make amends?

## Pray

Gracious God, give me the strength to love others even when it's difficult.

## Respond

Make amends with someone who you have a difficult relationship with.

## **Read**

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

## **Meditate**

*Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:28)*

## **Reflect**

The word 'data' fills me with dread. I've spent many years collecting, processing, analysing data in my role as a leader in schools. It isn't the data in itself that fills me with dread. It's the questions that can be asked from it and the way it's used to say, "Well, there's an issue here, why is that?" Each year, the same would happen: we'd take the previous data and work hard to focus on the areas that needed improving, but in doing that, we'd neglect something else. Where there's limited resources, there's only so much you can do—you have to prioritise.

Jesus' mission was prioritised. Matthew's gospel makes no secret of the gospel being first to Israel, to the people of God. They had always had a special calling and in that calling they were to be a blessing to all nations. It wasn't that those outside this weren't important, it was that Jesus needed to remind the people of Israel of their place, their responsibility, of their calling, so that salvation could be opened wide to all people. But along comes a Canaanite woman, persistent, but also full of faith that Jesus could do something—and Jesus is reminded that there are groups beyond his initial mission waiting for God's grace and in need of his ministry.

Sometimes, as a Church, we get focussed on certain mission and ministry and neglect particular groups of people. When they come knocking, we should recognise their faith and respond with compassion, just as Jesus did.

## **Ponder**

Are there groups of people you think the Church has neglected?

## **Pray**

Compassionate God, show us the people we need to serve.

## **Respond**

Talk to your church community about groups of people who might be neglected in your local community. What can you do to help them?

# Sunday 23rd August

*12th Sunday after Pentecost*

## Opening Prayer

When we see only trouble Jesus, be our vision

When we feel only uncertainty Jesus, be our rock

When we hear only bad news Jesus, be our hope

In all the circumstances of our lives Jesus, our Companion, be a light to our path

## Hymn

One more step along the world I go  
(StF 476)

## Prayer

Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, mindful, compassionate, constant, thank you for loving us through every season of our lives. May we believe that you call us into a new day, that you call each of us by our name, that we belong to you. And gathered or scattered, you hold us together in love.

Generous and merciful God, the only way to come to you each day is in truth, for you know us completely and love us as we are. Shine your gentle light on us so that we can know ourselves to be real, honest and forgiven. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

## Readings

Isaiah 51 1-3

John 4 1-14

## Time to Reflect

In November, we moved house. It set me thinking how old and new need to exist together. A different house, same old furniture; meeting new people, keeping old friends. Old and new together enrich our lives. And it happens all around us in different ways.

Grandparents and grandchildren bridge the generation gap. In nature in autumn and winter, already buds are on the seemingly bare branches, nurturing life for another spring. In our north east culture, ancient Celtic sites co-exist with new developments. St Peter's Church by the River Wear bears witness to many centuries of Christian life, now surrounded by a modern university. But I suspect the Venerable Bede would have welcomed new ways of learning, exploring, discovering.

What does Jesus say about this? Many are tempted to think Jesus discarded all that was old giving us licence to do the same. Yes, we have his words about new wine and old wineskins that destroy one another when they are put together. But in the wilderness, whenever Jesus was tempted away from love and vulnerability, he found his resistance in words from the scriptures with their

timeless wisdom and relevance.

Jesus held within himself the wisdom of the ages, God the Ancient of Days, 'the rock from which we were hewn' with the effortless ease he had of living with his contemporaries in fresh and creatively new ways.

During lockdown, we have learned of necessity to hold familiar songs and prayers with new ways of experiencing and expressing them. To be able to hold old and new is something we need to take into an uncertain future, as we abide in the timelessness of God, 'ever old and ever new' but allowing Jesus continuously to bring new life to birth in us, bubbling up with laughter, love and possibility.

*Take a time to sit quietly*

### **A time of prayer**

Holy and gracious God, we pray for others, prayers that bring to mind the world's realities. Please teach us not to be afraid, because it is here we find you, sharing this deeply troubled world with us.

Please bless all who are continuing to make a difference: scientists working faster than ever before to find cure or vaccine for covid-19; chefs, volunteers, entertainers, neighbours and countless more. May they know your laughter and love.

We ask you to bless all who are there

to care for those who are at their lowest, especially in health and care services. May they know your persevering strength.

We pray for the hundreds of thousands who are grieving here and across the world: for the loss of loved ones, loss of livelihood, loss of confidence and hope, loss of any sense of wellbeing. May they know your comfort, strong and everlasting.

We pray for people who need the world to be a more just and equal place, and for those who have power to make changes. May it happen quickly and peacefully. May they know your righteousness.

We pray for all who need the world to remember them: refugees and asylum seekers, all living in poverty and suffering from climate change. May we remember; may they know your provision through us.

Thank you for all, profoundly known and loved, who enrich our lives every day.

### **A prayer of blessing**

Generous God, please fill your holy gift of life with grace; please bless your fragile gift of life with joy; please help us always to cherish your precious gift of life. Amen.

*Original materials by Jean Hudson*



Top: Unidentified. Peter with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55930> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tzf093/5037793055>.

Bottom: Loemans, Alexander Francois. The Finding of Moses, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=50256> [retrieved July 27, 2020]. Original source: <http://www.mfa.org/>.

**Prayer of adoration**

Eternal God,  
The world's salvation and liberation  
have always been at the heart of your relationship with creation:  
in Abraham, you established your covenant to be a blessing to all nations;  
in Moses, you took the initiative to save your people from slavery;  
in Jesus, you took on flesh to offer salvation and freedom to all people.  
Your compassion and love for the world never ends.  
Glory to you, O God. Amen.

**Prayer of confession**

God of love,  
forgive us when our actions and words  
close the door to other people knowing more of your love;  
forgive us when we bind so that others are excluded from your reign. Amen.

**Prayer of thanksgiving**

God of freedom,  
We thank you that the reign of God has been loosed enough  
so that we were able to become part of it.  
We thank you that your reign is one of inclusion  
and that your love is broad and welcoming. Amen.

**Prayer of intercession**

God of healing,  
We pray for those who feel excluded from your reign and your church:  
may they know your love and welcome.  
We pray for those who through their own fears exclude others:  
may they see the error of their ways and be transformed.  
We pray for the Church as it seeks to represent heaven on earth:  
may it be wise to binding and loosing.  
We pray for ourselves and the ways in which we struggle to welcome:  
may we truly reflect your love in the world.  
Amen.

## **Read**

Exodus 1:8-2:10

## **Meditate**

*When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, 'because', she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'* (Exodus 2:10)

## **Reflect**

What does a room of thirteen people, eating bread and drinking wine, and the birth of Moses have to do with each other? This reading from the beginning of Exodus is the start of one of God's greatest acts of liberation. The birth of Moses is the start of God's plan to save the oppressed Israelites in Egypt—leading eventually to the parting of the Red Sea and the escape of the people to safety. It became one of the most significant stories for the Jewish people, where each year at Passover they remembered how God had saved their people.

It was exactly this remembering that Jesus and his disciples were undertaking at the last supper: they had gathered for Passover. In this context of remembering what God had done through Moses for the people of Israel, Jesus symbolised his death in bread and wine and signalled the start of the new covenant of salvation and liberation. From Moses for the people of Israel, to Jesus for all the world.

In both cases, this was not people calling upon God to do something, this was God's initiative to rescue the people from all that enslaved them—and all that enslaves us. Our God is a God of liberation and salvation, and as God's people we are called to be part of God's work to liberate others. It is in helping to liberate others, we become preachers of the good news.

## **Ponder**

Where might we be called to go to help liberate others?

## **Pray**

Liberating God, guide us so we may join in your mission in the world.

## **Respond**

Talk to others about people who are enslaved today. How might you respond? What is the good news for them?

## **Read**

Matthew 16:13-20

## **Meditate**

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ (Matthew 16:19)*

## **Reflect**

The other day my sister came round and as she walked through the kitchen, she shouted, ‘There they are. I’ve been looking for those for ages!’ She’d found her lost keys. One of us had put them on the key hook—obvious place really—but you wouldn’t expect your own keys to be one someone else’s. Turns out she’d been missing them for a few months. We’d no idea she’d been having to arrange with her partner when he was in or out so that she could get in. She’d lost her freedom to come and go when she wanted. The power to get in her own house was lost.

Peter gets the keys to the reign of God representing the keys being given to the members of Christ’s Church: an immense power—and responsibility! This is no small act. This is a welcome into partnership with Christ in being the church on earth. We have the power to bind and loose; the power to include and exclude. Unfortunately, too many times the earthly church has been guilty of exclusion, where God’s love calls us to inclusion. Do we find ourselves with this responsibility because of what we have done? Absolutely not! Peter gets given the keys because the gift of faith has shown him who Jesus is: Messiah, son of the living God. When we accept the gift of faith we are welcomed into God’s reign and handed the keys. Our task is simple: open the door for others and welcome them in.

## **Ponder**

Who is God calling you to open the door for?

## **Pray**

God of heaven and earth, grant us the wisdom to bind and loose so that others may recognise your glory and love.

## **Respond**

Make a list of the things you think the church should bind and loose. Share them with someone else.

