

# CONNECT Wesley Church

Connecting people in faith and worship



Worship



Learning & Caring



**The Black Country Circuit**  
The **Methodist** Church



Service



Evangelism



## NEW YEAR BLESSINGS

by Gary Hopkins *Editor*

This time last year, we had no idea what was ahead of us. Summertime last year, we had no idea we'd still be facing such difficult circumstances.

I hope, however you were able to spend it, Christmas was a peaceful time. For those of you who were able to join us in the building for Christmas Day or tuned in on Zoom, it was a blessing to see you. We thought of those of you who couldn't be with us.

In this issue, you will find worship at home materials for Sunday mornings. You will also find a piece from Helen about scams. I hope it's useful to you in ensuring you keep yourself safe as unfortunately some people look for opportunities to scam others.

Remember, you belong to a community of people who care deeply about each other. We seek to bring God's love to each other in the care and support we provide for our companions in Christ. If you need anything, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your pastoral carer or our minister or me. There is always someone who can help.

Stay safe and hold onto the hope we have in Christ as we look to the future and a safer time.

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# From the Circuit



The Black Country Circuit  
The **Methodist** Church

## PASTORAL THOUGHTS FROM BCC SUPERINTENDENT

Revd Denise Williams

What a difference a year makes, to coin a phrase! Last year over the weeks of January we stood, or maybe sat, in our churches joining in the Covenant prayer. Those words, whichever version you are more at home with, on this service sheet, and on the enclosed bookmark, are challenging for us. I must admit to having sympathy with the woman who said to a minister, "I always say those words with my fingers crossed!" I don't think there has been a year more likely to have challenged our commitment to these words.

This year in the Circuit we shall all be using the Covenant prayer on the same day, whether via this written material or Zoom services at Beeches Road or Wesley (both of which warmly welcome anyone to join them). There will be a sense of being part of something bigger as we all worship together.

There is another sense of being part of something bigger with The Methodist Way of Life, the material for which is on its way to everyone.

This is an invitation to live for the God who loves us. It helps us to engage with living the more difficult aspects of Christian life, to put God in the centre, and to live out the call on our lives to worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. As a Circuit we shall be doing a lot more events related to the Methodist Way of Life over the coming months. so watch this space.

Finally, it is important to remember that God loved us before we can even begin to make a response, whether using the Covenant prayer or the Methodist Way of Life, and this love will continue no matter what.

Without this sense of God's love for us the prayer and the published material just become another list of things to do (or not).

But as a people loved by God - and certainly we are, because he has been with us through the difficult past year and will continue to be with us now, and in the future - we can use that God-inspired way of life to shape our response to everyday life, living and spreading God's love.

Remember, "Best of all is, God is with us" ... always. Every blessing, Denise





## DON'T GET SCAMMED

Helen Allen

As we enter another national lockdown, sadly, scammers are likely to once again be targeting consumers. Scammers are creative, always coming up with new ways of tricking people, and fears over coronavirus have given them a perfect opportunity. But although the scams vary, there are some things they have in common.

Here are some of the current scams and some tips on how to avoid them:

### **Pension scams**

Be wary of fraudsters who claim they can help you access your pension before 55; for the majority of people, it's not possible!

If you are tempted, the tax penalties are big - 55% of your pension pot in addition to the fees you'll have been charged by the scammers, which could be up to 30% of the value of your pot. It's really not worth it.

Be wary of any offer of a free pension review which has come out of the blue and suggests you can move your money to a safe haven, or perhaps offer you high returns. Your money is likely to be invested in high-risk and unregulated investments or will disappear altogether.

Pension cold calls are illegal so if you get one, just hang up - it's a sure sign that it's a scam. Ignore any offers you get via email, text or online adverts too.

Always check that any firm you deal with appears on the FCA's Register and then call the FCA's Consumer Helpline on 0800 111 6768 to check the firm is allowed to give pension advice. But better still, call us.

### **Advance loan fee fraud**

If you're asked for an upfront fee in order to get accepted for a loan; don't pay it, it's likely to be a scam. The fee can be between £25 and £450 and you may be asked to pay it by bank transfer, Western Union or even iTunes vouchers. No matter how much you pay, the loan never materialises.

Warning signs to look for include being contacted by text or email out of the blue, or being put under pressure to pay the fee quickly.

**Good cause scams**

It's heart-breaking that some criminals target people by asking for donations to good causes. Examples have been an email pretending to be from the government asking for money for the NHS, or appearing to come from an organisation that claims donations will go towards the production of hand sanitiser or protective equipment for the NHS.

Never download attachments or click on links in emails unless you're sure who sent them. Even if the email is from an organisation you know, if the email itself is unexpected or asks you to click on a link, it could be a scam.

And of course, never give personal or financial information. Not even your bank will ask you for personal information in an email. Only donate to legitimate charities which you can search for on the Gov.uk website charity register.

**NHS Test and Trace scams**

If you've been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus and you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace service, you do not have to pay for a coronavirus test.

If you receive a call where they ask for payment, you can report it to Action Fraud by calling 0300 123 2040 or by visiting its website.

Also be careful of any links in messages you receive to the contact tracing service website. Action Fraud advises you to type the web address (<http://contact-tracing.phe.gov.uk>) directly into your browser rather than clicking on any link provided in the message.

**Universal Credit scams**

Fraudsters have been targeting people who receive Universal Credit by claiming to offer government loans and grants linked to the benefit. Remember that the government will never ask for personal or bank details over text or email so if you receive something like this, the best advice is to ignore it.

**Number spoofing and clone firm scams**

Numberspoofing is where a scammer sends a text message that looks like it's come from a genuine organisation, such as the government, HM Revenue and Customs or your bank.

Fraudsters also set up websites that use names similar to those of legitimate firms, and typically cold-call you to promote worthless or non-existent shares, property or investment opportunities.

These scams are very hard to spot especially as the messages will sometimes appear in a chain of otherwise genuine text messages. The best advice is not to click on any link in a text that appears to come from a legitimate source. HMRC doesn't issue tax rebates by text, and banks don't ask for personal information this way.

## Cold call and doorstep scams

Not all scams are online or over the phone. There have been reports of scammers going door-to-door offering 'coronavirus tests' with some posing as NHS contact tracers. To avoid being scammed, ask to see the identity badge of anyone who comes to your door and claims to be from a company or organisation.

If you're not 100% comfortable, don't let them in, and don't give away financial information (such as your bank account details) either.

There are also fraudsters who claim to be able to give you a list of people affected by coronavirus in your area. To access the information, you have to click on a link (which will then steal your personal details) or provide an upfront payment. There have also been examples of fraudsters writing articles about coronavirus with links to a fake company website where you're encouraged to subscribe to daily updates.

And last of all, your internet provider will not phone you to tell you there's a problem with your broadband and that to resolve it you need to make a payment.

The simple message from me is don't click on any link in an email you're not sure where it came from and never give out personal or bank details.

# Dates for your diary

## JANUARY

### 17th

11.00 am Worship at Home

6.15 pm **Zoom Worship** (*Covenant: Thomas*)

### 18th

7.30 pm **Lent Planning Meeting** (*Zoom*)

### 24th

11.00 am Worship at Home

6.15 pm **Zoom Worship** (*Clifford*)

### 31st

11.00 am Worship at Home

6.15 pm **Zoom Worship** (*Hopkins*)

# Messages

If you are an early riser or are enjoying a cup of tea in bed on a Sunday morning Radio 4m broadcast a service at 8am lasting half an hour. It is led by different people every week and there have been some lovely ones. On Sunday the 3rd of January it was led by the chaplain of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club and some of the players who are committed Christians. It was very heartwarming and well worth a listen if you can get it on catch up on BBC sounds.

God Bless  
Linda

# WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 17TH JANUARY

Circuit Covenant Service (with materials by Roger Walton)

## Call to worship

*(Jeremiah 31, but also Hebrews 8)*

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

## Hymn - Come let us use the grace divine (StF 549)

Come, let us use the grace divine,  
and all, with one accord,  
in a perpetual covenant join  
ourselves to Christ the Lord:

Give up ourselves, through Jesu's power,  
his name to glorify;  
and promise, in this sacred hour,  
for God to live and die.

The covenant we this moment make  
be ever kept in mind:  
we will no more our God forsake,  
or cast his words behind.

We never will throw off his fear  
who hears our solemn vow;  
and if thou art well pleased to hear,  
come down, and meet us now.

To each the covenant blood apply,  
which takes our sins away;  
and register our names on high,  
and keep us to that day.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

## Let us pray together

Gracious God,  
on this day, I and many others, seek to renew  
our covenant with you.  
Your love is strong and faithful.  
You never stop loving us.

Our love for you is weak and fickle and we  
often fall short of what we have  
committed ourselves to be and do.

Forgive us for our reluctance to follow Christ,  
our half-hearted worship, our failures

in caring, service and witness, and our  
unwillingness to challenge injustice.

Have mercy on us, O God, and renew in us  
both the desire and the ability to be people  
of love.

Thank you for your gracious words:  
'Your sins are forgiven'. Amen.

## Readings:

Jeremiah 31.33-34  
John 15.1-9



*Hymns reproduced using CCL 637415*

**Reflection**

The image of the vine is an organic picture. The branches are growing in the vine. They are connected to every other branch through the vine and fruit grows naturally on the branches. The branches have no choice. They are part of the Vine. But Jesus' use of this image to speak of our relationship with him offers choice and invites our participation. We are asked to abide in the vine and so grow and be fruitful. Today, we choose again to trust God, to walk with Jesus and to live in the ways of the kingdom.

Take the Methodist Way of Life Card. Before you say the covenant prayer, read through the commitments on the card and reflect on which of these you want to grow in during the coming year.

As far as we are able, with God's help:

**Worship**

We will pray daily.  
We will worship with others regularly.  
We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.

**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.

**Service**

We will help people in our communities and beyond.  
We will care for creation and all God's gifts.  
We will challenge injustice.

**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 time of prayer**

Take time to sit quietly. Then say the Covenant Prayer aloud:

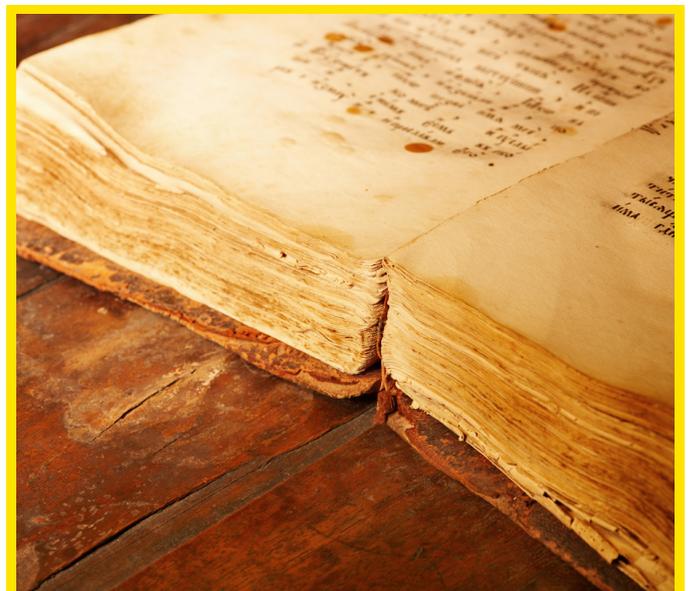
*Covenant prayer version A*

I am no longer my own but yours.  
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,  
wherever you may place me,  
in all that I do and in all that I may endure;  
when there is work for me  
and when there is none;  
when I am troubled  
and when I am at peace.

Your will be done  
when I am valued  
and when I am disregarded;  
when I find fulfilment  
and when it is lacking;  
when I have all things,  
and when I have nothing

I willingly offer  
all I have and am to serve you,  
as and where you choose.

Glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours.  
May it be so for ever.  
Let this covenant now made on earth  
be fulfilled in heaven.  
Amen



*Covenant prayer version B*

I am no longer my own but yours.  
 Put me to what you will,  
 rank me with whom you will;  
 Put me to doing,  
 put me to suffering;  
 let me be employed for you,  
 or laid aside for you  
 exalted for you,  
 or brought low for you;  
 let me be full,  
 let me be empty,  
 let me have all things,  
 let me have nothing;  
 I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to  
 your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
 you are mine and I am yours.  
 So be it.  
 And the covenant now made on earth,  
 let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

**A time of prayer**

We pray for our own church ...  
 that it may be a faithful witness to God's love.  
 We pray for the church worldwide ...  
 that in word and action it may help  
 people to see God's glory  
 We pray for the leaders of nations...  
 that they act justly and guide wisely.  
 We pray for those pushed to the margins  
 of society ...  
 that they and their gifts may be  
 made welcome.  
 We pray for those in need...  
 especially people we know... Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer****Hymn:** All I once held dear (StF 489)

All I once held dear,  
 built my life upon,  
 all this world reveres,  
 and wars to own,  
 all I once thought gain  
 I have counted loss;  
 spent and worthless now,  
 compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus,  
 knowing you,  
 there is no greater thing.  
 You're my all, you're the best,  
 you're my joy, my righteousness,  
 and I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire  
 is to know you more,  
 to be found in you  
 and known as yours.  
 To possess by faith  
 what I could not earn,  
 all-surpassing gift  
 of righteousness.

Oh, to know the power  
 of your risen life,  
 and to know you in  
 your sufferings.  
 To become like you  
 in your death, my Lord,  
 so with you to live  
 and never die

*Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)*

**Blessing**

May the God of heaven and earth bless us and  
 keep us; may his face shine upon us that we  
 might know God's peace and live in ways that  
 reflect his love, now and always. Amen

*Hymns reproduced using CCL 637415*



# WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 24TH JANUARY

by Helen Allen

## Call to worship

Here I am Lord, taking time from my busy week to spend time stepping aside from the world 'out there' to meet as your church. Here I am Lord, seeking an encounter with you again, a fresh taste of grace. Here I am Lord, I have come. Come by your Spirit. Amen.

## Hymn: Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

*StF 250*

Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult  
of our life's wild restless sea,  
day by day his voice is sounding,  
saying: 'Christian, follow me.'

As of old apostles heard it  
by the Galilean lake,  
turned from home and toil and kindred,  
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship  
of the vain world's golden store,  
from each idol that would keep us,  
saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

In our joys and in our sorrows,  
days of toil and hours of ease,  
still he calls, in cares and pleasures:  
'Christian, love me more than these.'

Jesus calls us! By your mercies,  
Saviour, may we hear your call,  
give our hearts to your obedience,  
serve and love you best of all.

*Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895)*

## Opening Prayers

Loving God, as I/we come to worship you this day, fill all of my/our being with a longing to come close to you.

Loving God, I/we may have kept silent but now is the time to give voice to praise.

I/we come today because being part of this worshipping community gives rhythm to my/our week.

We come because you call us to be a faithful people, in times of sorrow and in times of joy. We come to encourage and affirm each other.

So therefore, let all of your people who try to be faithful disciples of Jesus offer prayer and praise to you. Amen.

## The Lord's Prayer

**Readings:** Jonah 3:1-5,10; Mark 1:14-20

## Reflections on the readings

The Jonah reading takes me back to Summer 2018 when Linda, Steve and I studied the book of Jonah during The Methodist Church Bible Month; a story of Jonah being called by God, yet taking great efforts to run away, getting caught in a storm and being swallowed by a fish before finally "giving in" and accepting the call and proclaiming God's message to the people of Ninevah.

In Mark's gospel today, we are then given a few lines about the disciples where they are called by Jesus to 'follow me; the gospel writer tells us that they responded 'immediately', even to the extent of leaving a Father with only the hired hands for the family business.

Both passages tell us of a short time scale and a call to people to change. Both are set with lots of references to the natural world, the water, the boats and of course, the fish and both contain some kind of call from God, a proclamation to share, and change to make.

What can we learn about being called?

The call from Jesus to 'follow' comes to the disciples in the midst of what looks like a normal workday, fishing and fixing nets. A call that seems to come through a normal looking Jewish teacher, in a very simple way and yet they respond. Compare this with the response of Jonah, which was to hear God and turn and go the other way.

Who do you relate to?

Last week at Wesley and in the Black Country Circuit, we shared Covenant Sunday, and we reflected on the promises we are each making to God, and the promises the whole church can make to God.

Each of us is different, and God is calling us to 'be ourselves' and to be the very best version of ourselves that we can be.

What does that look like for you?

As I mentioned in my dialogue with Ian Belcher at our recent circuit service, none of us could have imagined 12 months ago, how we would be called to "willingly offer all that I have, and am, to serve you as and where you choose" through 2020.

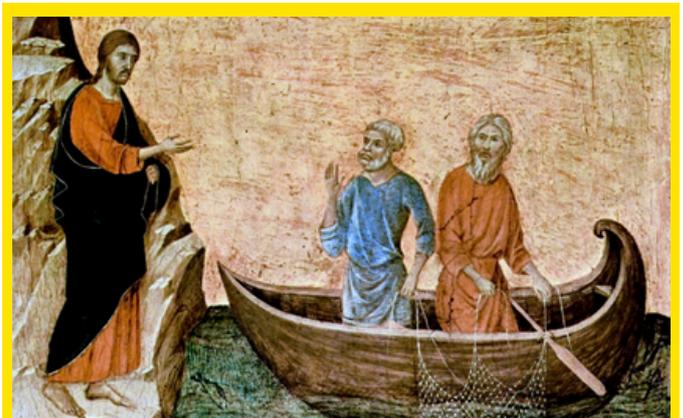
Who would imagine that my call would be to use my IT skills to enable some of us to worship together on a Sunday evening, or that Gary would be using his skills to produce weekly service material and Connect magazine that has helped us to stay connected through a challenging year, or Steve's insurance knowledge used to produce risk assessments so that we could return to worship in church for a period. Many of you have responded to your calling over the last 12-months and used the greatest form of social media, the telephone, to keep in touch with our Wesley family with regular phone calls.



Maybe many of us will relate more closely to the response of Jonah than to that response of the disciples as described by the writer of Marks gospel. Yet we also know that despite the passage perhaps giving us the impression that the disciples were the perfect crowd, responding immediate to the call, that no doubt like Jonah, each had been on a journey with God up to that point and a journey of doubt and faith, failure and hope, that was to continue as they walked with Jesus.

God's call to Jonah was persistent, coming back to him even in his greatest turmoil and depths. God's call is not to perfect people, it's not to know all the details, but it is a call to follow and it may take some time to get there.

What is God calling you to? What is that persistent nudge? That message that you need to share? Perhaps you're ready to respond? Perhaps you need to dwell in the depths with God some more? What will that call mean leaving behind? How would other people perceive that? What proclamation is there for us to share?



Duccio, di Buoninsegna, d. 1319. Christ Calling the Apostles Peter and Andrew, from Art in the Christian Tradition, <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=49261>

# WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY

## 31ST JANUARY

by Neil Manthorpe

### Opening Sentence

Our God set his people free and made an eternal covenant with them. Holy and mighty is our God! (Psalm 111 v.9)

### Hymn: 'From the highest of heights to the depth of the sea' StF 48

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea,  
creation's revealing your majesty.  
From the colours of fall to the fragrance of spring,  
every creature unique in the song that it sings,  
all exclaiming:

*Indescribable, uncontainable,  
you placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name.  
You are amazing, God,  
all powerful, untameable.  
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly  
proclaim, you are amazing, God.*

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go  
or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow?  
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light  
yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night?  
None can fathom.

*Indescribable, uncontainable,  
you placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name.  
You are amazing, God,  
incomparable, unchangeable.  
You see the depths of my heart and you love me the same;  
you are amazing, God.*

Laura Story and Jesse Reeves

### Let us pray together

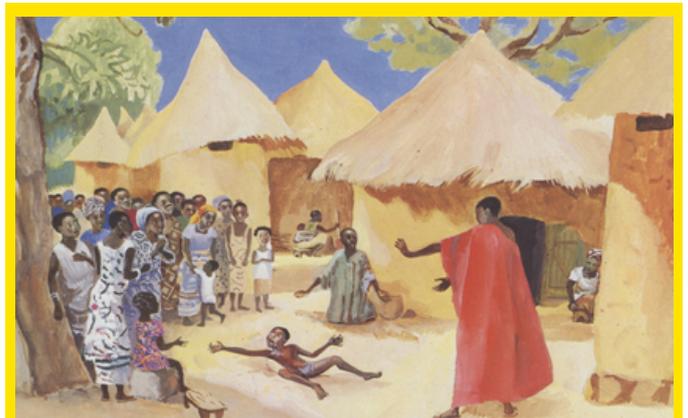
Generous God we praise you, for the beauty and diversity of your creation – each of us placed here with a purpose – each of us called to love and care – each of us welcomed to share in your bountiful goodness. We thank you for each new day and the opportunities we have to worship, to learn and care, to serve and to witness – help us to know how to share the good news of Jesus with our families, our friends and our neighbours.

We confess that there have been times in the past week when we have not lived up to the challenge of being a disciple – may the assurance of your forgiveness give us the wisdom and strength to know the right words and actions to use to reflect your love out into the world for everyone to see. Amen.

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 18:15-20, Mark 1:21-28

### Time to Reflect

A response of 'sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me' isn't true, is it? Words can hurt – and can be used with the intention of hurting – and the healing can be as hard as if we had been pelted with sticks and stones. Words are powerful – for bad and for good – and we see this in our Gospel reading today. In Mark we aren't told what Jesus said in the synagogue, but we read that people were amazed at the way he taught and that he spoke with authority – his words are powerful.



**JESUS MAFA. The Possessed, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.**  
<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48382>

Hymns reproduced using CCL 637415

But the power of words can diminish if they are not matched by actions. Jesus acted to heal the man with an evil spirit. His words and actions were gentle but carried authority which the people around him recognised, and again they were amazed. This was not the power of kings and occupying forces that oppressed. It was a power that responded in word and action to each encounter to bring wholeness.

We are all called to speak and act when we find a neighbour in need – a gentle word or an act of kindness can bring wholeness. We are not alone – the Gospel story teaches us how, and our faith communities and others of goodwill share the task.

None of us is too small for our words and actions not to make a difference. So speak and act with gentleness and with power to bring wholeness to your neighbourhood and to the world.

*Take a time to sit quietly*

### **A time of prayer**

We pray for the world and ask that we can better care for and share its riches so that all people and nature can flourish. We pray for all health workers, carers and everyone providing vital goods and services we depend upon. We pray for our leaders to have care for lives and livelihoods so that everyone is valued for who they are. I especially want to pray for...

We pray for the Church to have the boldness to speak and act for peace and justice. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour and our Friend. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting'**

*StF 251*

Jesus Christ is waiting,  
waiting in the streets;  
no one is his neighbour,  
all alone he eats.

'Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I am lonely too:  
make me, friend or stranger,  
fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging,  
raging in the streets,  
where injustice spirals  
and real hope retreats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I am angry too:  
in the Kingdom's causes  
let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,  
healing in the streets,  
curing those who suffer,  
touching those he greets.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I have pity too:  
let my care be active,  
healing, just  
like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,  
dancing in the streets,  
where each sign of hatred  
he, with love, defeats.  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
I should triumph too:  
where good conquers evil  
let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,  
calling in the streets,  
'Who will join my journey?  
I will guide their feet.'  
Listen, Lord Jesus,  
let my fears be few:  
walk one step before me;  
I will follow you.

*John L. Bell (b. 1949) and  
Graham Maule (b. 1958)*

### **A prayer of blessing**

May Jesus Christ, who by his birth brought together heaven and earth, fill our lives with light and joy and peace. Amen