

# Salford Methodist Circuit



**Challenging Assumptions – 8th August 2021**

**Ruth Dawson**

Lord God, you have the bread of life for the hungry and living water for the thirsty.

We come hungry and thirsty for your word, with a desire to know your will and to love with your unconditional love.

Help us to be fed and to learn from you. Amen

## **Hymn: Be Still for the Presence of the Lord**

*Be still,  
for the presence of the Lord,  
the Holy One, is here;  
come bow before him now  
with reverence and fear:  
in him no sin is found -  
we stand on holy ground.  
Be still,  
for the presence of the Lord,  
the Holy One, is here.*

*Be still,  
for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around;  
he burns with holy fire,  
with splendour he is crowned:  
how awesome is the sight -  
our radiant King of light!  
Be still,  
for the glory of the Lord  
is shining all around.*

*Be still,  
for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place;  
he comes to cleanse and heal,  
to minister his grace:  
no work too hard for him -  
in faith receive from him.  
Be still,  
for the power of the Lord  
is moving in this place.*

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## Prayers of thanksgiving, confession & forgiveness

We thank and praise you, Lord God,  
That despite our assumptions and judgements  
And the way we sometimes treat others,  
You never stop loving us.

Bread of life, you are always with us.  
We praise you that as we draw near to you, you quench our thirst and satisfy  
our hunger,  
So that we never need hunger or thirst again.

Thank you that you equip us and resource us with everything we need for this  
journey of life.  
We thank and praise you, Lord God. Amen

Loving Lord  
When we make wrong assumptions about other and judge the way they live:  
Forgive us Lord, for limiting people and possibilities.  
When we don't allow others to speak out and be the people you have called  
them to be:  
Forgive us, Lord, for limiting people and possibilities.  
When we cast judgements on particular communities or neighbourhoods that are  
different from ours:  
Forgive us, Lord, for limiting people and possibilities.  
Let us journey together towards wholeness and healing, knowing that only God  
can sustain us and set us free. Amen

Loving God  
Giver and sustainer of life,  
Through the power of the cross  
We are a forgiven people,  
A royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
Chosen by you  
Who has called us out of darkness into your marvellous light.  
Amen

## Lord's Prayer (Sung)

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

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*And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen. Amen.*

## **Hymn: Christ is the World's Light**

*Christ is the world's light,  
Christ and none other;  
born in our darkness,  
he became our brother.  
If we have seen him,  
we have seen the Father:  
glory to God on high.*

*Christ is the world's Peace,  
Christ and none other;  
no one can serve him  
and despise another;  
who else unites us,  
one in God the Father?  
Glory to God on high.*

*Christ is the world's Life,  
Christ and none other;  
sold once for silver,  
murdered here, our brother -  
he, who redeems us,  
reigns with God the Father:  
glory to God on high.*

*Give God the glory,  
God and none other;  
give God the glory,  
Spirit, Son, and Father;  
give God the glory,  
God with us, my brother:  
glory to God on high.*

## **Reading: John 6: 35, 41 - 51**

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*

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*At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"*

*"Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

## **Hymn: Jesus Christ is Waiting**

*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.*

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*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.*

Who has one of these? Can you remember the panic buying back in March / April last year? Empty shelves, no toilet rolls...

Maybe you saw Gregg Wallace's TV series *Inside the Factory* showing the lengthy process that produces said toilet rolls? Only a toilet paper, and yet so important to all of us.

Our scripture reading today, Jesus comes out and speaks in public as plainly as he has done in this Gospel: he is the bread of life and coming to him will ensure that no one hungers or thirsts on the journey of following him in the world. But such plain speaking can be off putting, and the crowd starts to complain. They claim to know him. He is not the bread of heaven; he is Joseph's son, the carpenter, a boy whom they have seen grow up, and whose parents they know. He can't be anyone special.

How quick we are to judge people's values by where they come from or what they do.

Imagine standing in the crowd, few rows back from Jesus, listening to both sides of this exchange. What do you make of it all? You might have eaten well on the other side of the lake, but what does it say to you about how God and the way in which God acts in the world.

If the crowd has known their history, they would have known it was full of people snatched from obscurity, from living ordinary lives and given life-changing and life-giving roles in the story of redemption – Moses, Elijah, David, Ruth and a whole host of other Old Testament stars.

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Jesus becomes mystical eschatological: people can only relate to him if God draws them to him, all of which is leading to the last day, when Jesus, and not God, will raise those who have come to him as a result of the Father's grace. The Jewish people have come to believe that they would enjoy the resurrection at the end of history, and Jesus is saying that he is the key to that.

Then Jesus says, that if they really knew their history, the history that they keep reciting at him, they would know that the prophets had predicted all this, that God spoke to his people and led them to himself (as in Isaiah 54: 13 v 45). Jesus is claiming the fulfilment of all this, that those who believe in him will enjoy the eschatological life he bestows on those drawn to him by his Father. He is the source of the life so many are searching for, and the people need to change their assumptions about God and about him.

Again, Jesus says he is the bread of life, now he adds that those who ate in the wilderness the first time, died partly because they fell under God's judgement for their lack of belief and desire to worship something more manageable, such as the golden calf. Those who came to Jesus will never die.

Well!

Could you imagine...

This boy you had seen grow up, learn to work the wood at his father's knee, claiming he was the key to eternal life. Being told to change your assumptions about God, and about Jesus. They stumble because they know him.

Perhaps we too, would have found this really difficult to get our heads around.

What assumptions do we carry? If Jesus asked people of 2000 years ago to change their assumptions of God, how much more do we need to review our assumptions, how do we relate the word of God told in stories of 2000 years ago to our modern world?

John Wesley told us 'All Can Be saved'. He didn't go on to say 'all can be saved except...' Who or what would be our exceptions... the thief? Jesus forgave the thief on the cross as he himself was crucified, and gave him redemption.

Maybe our exceptions would be those not like us – and yet we are all uniquely made in God's image... Maybe the exceptions are those whom don't worship as we do...

Here's a list of biblical characters whom God called to do special things or appear in stories or parables as special people. What would be the characteristics of these people? Go on, have a think...

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*Jonah, David, Rahab, Moses, Noah, Abraham, Samson, Peter, Timothy, Martha, Zacchaeus, Lazarus*

Perhaps their characteristics as not as you might assume.

Jonah - a man who ran from God  
David - an adulterer and murderer  
Rahab - a prostitute  
Moses - a murderer and a stutterer  
Noah - a drunkard  
Abraham - an old man who doubted  
Samson - arrogant and immoral  
Peter - afraid to own up  
Timothy - too young  
Martha - worried about everything  
Zacchaeus - too small  
Lazarus - dead!

As you can see in the list a motley crew... one who ran from God, trying to escape his bidding, there's an adulterer, couple of murderers, prostitute, drunkard, some too young, too short, one even dead!

Some of these may seem unlikely to appear on God's list of heroes. Jesus didn't come for the saints.

How has your assumptions of heroes changed over the past eighteen months? Perhaps it's the bus driver who has turned in every day to ensure that you can get to work, or the shop assistant ensuring you have food available, or maybe it's a neighbour who has gone out of their way to ensure that you can stay safe, perhaps before the current pandemic, if I asked who your hero was it might have been a footballer or film star, thought that's not to say some footballers truly are heroes, ensuring children are fed.

How do we deal with the assumptions we carry about other people? We often make snap judgements about the people we see, on the bus at school, just walking down the street, perhaps dare I say the people at church. We might judge people for always being late, or not carrying their weight, perhaps children who are too noisy, someone with hair a funny colour, dress in a different way... the list could be endless.

However, while we are making assumptions or judging people we negate the opportunity to enable new ideas, we are too busy sometimes in our assumptions, that we do not see the 'real' person inside the outside shell we have just judged. New ideas, new journeys, new adventures may be missed, we might even miss the opportunity to encourage new disciples.

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How do we break free from the assumptions other people make of us? Yes whilst we are busy making assumptions on others, they are busy on us. Do we put those assumptions on ourselves? When my children were small I could often be heard saying 'I'm only a mum', and yet being a mum is the greatest gift I have been given. You may have heard people describe themselves using the 'only' word. Only a domestic, only a one person, only, only, only.

Jesus was only the son of Joseph and Mary, and the crowds expected little from him. Jesus didn't defend himself against their complaints, he turned to the problem of their spiritual receptivity – those who loved the Father and listen to Him, will believe in Jesus. The gift that brings new life is now unveiled, on the cross Jesus will offer his flesh for the life of the world.

If we go back to the list of biblical characters that God chose to do his work, God never said 'only David' or 'only Noah', God knows even the least likely candidate is able to do his work. We are given all we need for our ongoing journey. What has God equipped you to do?

You may only be a human, but you are a child of God, and what could be more amazing than that?

Amen.

## **Prayers of intercession**

Jesus, you told your followers that whoever comes to you will never be hungry, and whoever believes in you will never be thirsty. We still live among those who are hungry and thirsty for bread and water and who also seek you. In a world full of misinformation and false assumptions, help us to live in response to your promises, and to show your love more clearly, that you may be found in us.

**Amen.**

Lord God, there are so many people who need  
the difference in their lives that only you can bring.  
Lord, sometimes we feel so useless  
when we're faced with all the needs of our world.

We forget the important part we play just by opening our lives to you,  
praying to you, and being your hands and feet.

We pray today for our families, our friends, our peers, our teachers.

## **Help us to share through our prayer and through our care.**

We pray for everyone who has helped us grow closer to you;  
for our church family, and our ministers.





**Help us to share through our prayer  
and through our care**

We pray for our community, the world in which we live and work and have our being.

**Help us to share through our prayer  
and through our care**

We pray for people who feel they have nothing to share, nothing even to live for; the homeless, prisoners, people at the end of relationships, the sick and those who mourn.

**Help us to share through our prayer  
and through our care. Amen.**

Our final hymn reminds us that we only have to turn to Jesus, we are never a 'just' or an 'only', He will all our burdens share.

**Hymn: What a Friend we have in Jesus.**

*What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations,  
is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged:  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness:  
take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge -  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?*

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*Take it to the Lord in prayer;  
in his arms he'll take and shield you,  
you will find a solace there.*

## **Blessing**

As we go into our new week,  
Thank you, Lord, for believing in us,  
For seeing beyond our outside  
And knowing who we really are inside.  
Thank you for giving us all we need to do your work,  
Even when others may tell us we are 'only'.  
Thank you, Lord, for calling us to be adverts for you,  
So that others can see you also believe in them.  
Amen.

Be Still - David J. Evans Words and Music:

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Christ Is The World's Light - Fred Pratt Green

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Jesus Christ Is Waiting - John L. Bell & Graham Maule

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What A Friend We Have In Jesus - Joseph Medlicott Scriven

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