

Salford Methodist Circuit



Working Outside The Box - 24th January 2021

Rev kim Ratcliffe

Good Morning and welcome to worship on 24th January 2021 in the Salford Methodist Circuit.

Hymn: Be Still and know that I am God

*Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.*

*I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.*

*In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.*

Bible Reading: Psalm 27: 13 - 14

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord.*

Hymn: I will offer up my life

*I will offer up my life
in spirit and truth,
pouring out the oil of love
as my worship to you.
In surrender I must give
my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice
of a broken heart.*

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
to so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
as a praise of your name
for the things you have done?
O, my words could not tell, not even in part,
of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

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*You deserve my every breath
for you've paid the great cost;
giving up your life to death,
even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away,
there defeated my sin,
opened up the gates of heaven,
and have beckoned me in.
Jesus, what can I give...*

Let us pray:

Lord, with the developments of the past months and weeks

We cannot but help think of all the times in our lives it is now that we want to offer all of the gifts and skills that we have developed throughout the many years of our living.

Yet we can't because of all of the restrictions.

National Lockdown, friends, family, neighbours kept at a distance even when we can see them.

We may be developing new skills, new ways Lord of living and loving,

We may be being creative in how we do things Lord.

We are trying to stay safe, we are trying to stay well,

We are trying our utmost to 'be church'

and do you know something God.

With all the obstacles that have been put in our way, the ever- changing rules and regulations and advice,

we have not lost sight of you.

You Lord have remained with us.

You promise that you will never leave us.

We may have faltered and even fallen but we have picked ourselves up again and again and

we are here Lord as we are each day. In your presence.

You are our Lord and we love you Lord, we thank you for being with us this morning and every morning. We thank you for being with us even if we feel we do not have even an ounce of energy left. When we are scared, when we don't know what is going to be around the corner, you stay with us.

Just as you calm the strongest storms Lord, you stay with us when we need to summon up energy to face the day.

May the words that we speak to you and each other be filled with that emphasis of knowing your love and presence can be as wild as the flames of Pentecost and as gentle as the breeze that catches hold of a feather to bring it down safely to the ground.

We too can be wild like the flames and as gentle as the breeze,

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help us to use the different energy that we have each day to do Your will first and foremost for our families, our friends, our neighbours and let us not forget about ourselves.

In Jesu's name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: From Heaven you came

*From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.*

*This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.*

*There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.
This is our God...*

*Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God...*

*So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving
This is our God...*

Lord's Prayer

*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.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.*

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*For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Bible Reading: Mark 1: 14 - 20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Bible Reading: Jonah 3: 1 - 5, 10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Amen, Thanks be to God

Let's pray:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer

The new developments across the country and the world over the past 12 months have sent us all into chaos. From one week to the next we are 'trying' to be community. We are 'trying' to be church. We are 'trying' to be 'normal'. But each day something else develops that needs our careful thought and care to ensure that we are all looking after one another as well as ourselves.

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The word developments, means the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced.

Some developments are really welcomed and some are not.

I have been on a wee bit of a rollercoaster, to say the least, with the possibilities and the probabilities of re-opening some of the churches I am pastorally responsible for. Of course, this is not something we, as ministers, decide on our own. We are in communication with our congregations as well as our colleagues, the Circuit, the District and Connexion. Of course, sometimes there are areas that decisions in the best interest of and out of a duty of care that we do have to make that others may not understand, even after thorough explanations. We like to be in control of what happens within our lives and support our loved ones whatever we and they are living through.

Initially I think that everyone could understand that the new virus that had been discovered meant that we had no choice but to "Stay at home", "Wash your hands", "Stay at a safe distance". We needed to "Stay Alert", "Control the Virus", "Save lives", and more recently we are reminded that we need to "Stay home", "Protect the NHS", "Save lives". We are asked to continue to wash our hands, wear our face coverings and keep a distance. All very sensible things to do and to follow during a pandemic of the scale we are in just now.

Our church families have been absolutely brilliant since Day 1. Month after month have passed and still people have been very patient.

But... when some of the restrictions were gradually released, we could feel that sense of relief. We were able to meet in our gardens, on the doorsteps, in outdoor spaces. Soon we were able to go out to a café or a restaurant, keeping a distance of course!

We even began to make moves towards making some of our churches, "Covid Secure". Some church buildings had necessary repairs done, roofs, boilers, toilets needed essential work to be done, all of those were done in a safe environment.

All the time we have been waiting to hear the "Good News", different good news that we expect to hear under the normal church conditions. Now we are looking for the good news that the virus is finally under control. We do get asked, "when will we be able to re-open our church buildings?" Some people are ready to return, whilst others are a little bit tentative and others are simply not ready at all to reopen and to re-attend.

The development of the vaccine has been a positive thing for us all. It has and will continue to give us the hope that we need.

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I have had a stubborn flu virus that began on the 16th of December and then disappeared only to return again on the 1st of January. I contribute to the Covid-19 App each day and had to report my symptoms and was asked to have the Covid test twice which I did, one at a drive-in centre and one in a walk-in centre. Both tests came back negative I am glad to say and relieved to say. The waiting was horrible. I was thinking through who I had been in contact with, during the time I thought I was over the flu I had taken a funeral, following all of the safety rules and guidelines, of course. We didn't see anyone on Christmas Day but on Christmas Eve instead we saw two of our sons and their families. So I was preparing to have to tell people if I had 'the virus' for them to isolate. I had been shopping again taking all the precautions, of course. I felt guilty even although I hadn't done anything wrong and stayed within the guidelines.

We can't control how other people behave though and often whilst shopping I have walked past someone on more than one occasion who didn't have a mask on and coughed as they passed me, not covering their mouth or their noses, just coughing quite naturally as if, you know, it didn't matter. It is now the third week after the new year and I am getting to a place of feeling quite normal again, with some day not feeling not quite normal, but these will pass, these days will pass. We all want 'normal' again don't we? We don't want any more new developments. We want to just get on with things like they used to be.

We are no different to the people of Jesus' day. In the Gospel of Mark, Mark presents Jesus' preaching and the manifestation of the kingdom of God as a decisive new development in the history of Israel. But I must emphasise that Jesus wasn't promoting the people a new religion. He was taking the people into a decisive new development that would enable the people to progress their lives as well as bring them to the point of recognising the kingdom of God. Bringing them to the point where they could see God ruling over all people. Of course, we then need to think about being in God's kingdom and what is right for God's kingdom and what is wrong for God's kingdom. We want God's kingdom to be a good place for us all to live in. This, I am sure, is what the people of Jesus' day would have wanted just as we today want too. We need to be able to be given guidance on how to make better people of ourselves if we are to live together in God's kingdom.

For it to work for the best for all human kind, we cannot do this alone, we need to make it work together. We need to work with God. If we do not then we cannot help but go off at different tangents from everyone else. We may even believe that we can save the world and make that an individual self-destructive mission as well as bringing others down with us. When we are all scattered all over the place then there are bound to be differences, we live in a world of different cultures – so did Jesus. We live in a world of different communities – so did Jesus. It is natural for us to become part of a community where we are but this doesn't mean that we can't work with different communities and be in relationship with each other for the bettering of the world we live in. We say

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that we want a better world but who do we want a better world for? We say that we would like to open our church buildings again, I agree with this, but I also think about the dilemmas that we will face by doing this. I'm not speaking about the practicalities of making it a 'safe space' to invite our church families back in to – I believe that we will have to look at the risk assessments again with help we will be able to do this, it shouldn't be a problem. The thing that I am concerned about is that we will simply go back and 'pick up where we left off'. God sent Jesus into the world to make a difference to a world that had gone wrong. Jesus came as God had planned not to introduce a new religion but to develop the already existing religion into something that would change people's attitudes to not only the way they worshipped which had gone array, he would give people the opportunity to come and follow him and be prepared to make changes that were for the good of not only themselves and their families but for everyone.

The kingdom of God was being introduced to the people in a new way and a lot of people would have dug their heels in, and a lot of people wouldn't have wanted to change, a lot of people would do their utmost to persuade others that this new way of thinking and doing just hasn't got any chance of 'succeeding'. But others did take that chance, they took the chance. Others came on board with Jonah and with Jesus. Where do we as the church begin to prepare ourselves for the natural changes that will have happened since we last met. I don't think that we can 'pick up where we left off'. We need to be prepared for the changes and the new developments that have happened and need to happen when we are able to re-open. Not only to the physicalities of our buildings but to us as individuals and as church. We can't go back into our church buildings and have a quick catch up with the last 12 months. Too much has happened. Our Spiritual lives may have become stronger over the past year but for some the experiences of the past year has taken the toll with what we have experienced and are experiencing today. Because we are church, doesn't separate us from the rest of the community. If we think that it the church is separate from the community, then we are in serious trouble. People outside of our church families, as well as members of our church families in the area of Salford have been being creative and thinking 'outside of the box' so to speak. Now is the time for us to take hold of the opportunities that have opened and are opening up to us to think 'outside of the box' or should I say 'outside of our buildings' and get our heads together as a Circuit to bring anything at all, no matter how 'out of the norm' you may feel it is, I'm telling you it may seem a crazy idea but God came up with the crazy idea to send Jesus to us so that we could make a difference in the kingdom of God. Jonah took the risk to obey God and do as He asked of him, the people heard and changed their ways. Jesus knew what He had to do to make a difference. He called the disciples one by one, and one by one they took that step out of their box, the lives that they had known forever had changed. They didn't know why they had to but they took that risk. I don't believe that God wants for us to enter into and stay behind the four walls of the church building. Now is the time to take hold of not a new religion but to take the opportunity to develop our church in new ways, to take that step out of the

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four walls that will eventually allow God to stand back and say "It is good" once more.

In the meantime, as you take your daily walk, staying at a safe distance, with your masks on whilst shopping, washing and sanitising your hands, stay safe, stay well and Stay Alert and obedient and even be surprised at what God is saying to you. But don't just sit on it, have conversation, pray about it, tell me, tell Clare or Matt.

We can make a difference, but we need to take that step out of the four walls of our church buildings and be within the community and invite the community to be with us too.

Until we meet again. God bless you and yours. Amen.

Our prayers come from page 68 of Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary, Volume 1 Intercessions, by Christine Odell.

Let us pray

Jesus calls us to repentance:

To leave behind

Old ways of seeing;

Old ways of thinking;

Old ways of living;

And follow him along the new way of Love.

Re-creating God, we pray that the world may be led into

New ways of seeing and perceiving human life:

We ask that humankind we may not gaze in awe

At the trappings of wealth and power;

But look in compassion

At the suffering of the poor and powerless.

In your love and in your mercy:

Hear our prayer

Re-creating God, we pray that humankind may be given

New ways of thinking about what is right:

We ask that we may not thoughtlessly accept the opinions

Of those around us;

But voyage to discover your word of truth

For Christian living today.

In your love and mercy:

Hear our prayer

Re-creating God, we pray that your church may be given

New ways of living, in discipleship with Christ;

We ask that your people may not cling to the old ways

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Of selfishness and fear;
But walk boldly with the Lord of Life
Along the way of self-giving love.
In your love and mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Jesus calls us all to repentance.
Loving God, with the help of your Holy Spirit,
We will leave behind the old ways
And follow you along the new. **Amen.**

Hymn: We have a gospel to proclaim.

*We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.*

*Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.*

*Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.*

*Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.*

*Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.*

*Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.*

May the Lord bless us and keep us safe
Until we meet again.
Amen, thanks be to God.

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CCL: 30925

Be Still And Know That I Am God - Anonymous

I Will Offer Up My Life - Matt Redman

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Performed by Jason McMahon

From Heaven You Came - Graham Kendrick

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administered by Kingswaysongs. a division of David C Cook tym@kingsway.co.uk

Performed by Chapter and Verse, 1990.

We Have A Gospel To Proclaim - Edward Joseph Burns

Words: © Canon Edward J. Burns

Performed by Preston Methodist Voices