

Salford Methodist Circuit



The Peace Of Christ - 18th April 2021
Anita Shepherd

Hymn: As We Are Gathered

*As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here:
joined by the Spirit, washed in His blood,
part of the body, the Church of God.
As we are gathered, Jesus is here,
one with each other, Jesus is here.*

Good Morning and welcome to friends old and new who are joining us for today's online worship from Salford Methodist Circuit.

As we gather round our digital devices let us remember the claim of Jesus that we sang a few moments ago. We may not be able to be together physically at the moment but we can be together spiritually united in our Lord whose presence is with us wherever we are.

Hymn: Morning has Broken

*Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
fresh from the Word!*

*Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness
where his feet pass.*

*Mine is the sunlight!
Mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play!
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,*

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*God's re-creation
of the new day!*

Prayer

Sovereign God,
beginning and end of all,
ruler over time and space,
we acknowledge you as the one and only God!
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

We worship you in your majesty,
we praise you for your greatness,
we thank you for your guidance.
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

Forgive us for the way we fall into worshipping idols
rather than you –
putting you second to our other interests and concerns,
imagining we know all there is to know of you,
tying you down to our own limited understanding.
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

Forgive us for attempting to direct your will
and dictate your actions,
preferring our way to yours,
as though we know better than you.
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

Forgive us for losing sight of your love,
refusing your grace,
overlooking your blessings,
frustrating your purpose.
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

Forgive us the mistakes we make,
the sins we fall into,
the hurt we cause,
through straying from your side.
Hear us, in your mercy.

Redeem and restore us.

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Sovereign God,
teach us more, day by day, of your greatness,
of all that you are and all you have done,
and so may we give you the worship and service
that is rightly yours.
Hear us, in your mercy.
Redeem and restore us.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Bible Reading: Acts 3: 12-19

When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to

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God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshment may come from the Lord"

Bible Reading: 1 John 3: 1 - 7

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that him appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Bible Reading: Luke 24: 36 - 48

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Thanks be to God.



'Meditation of Joanna, a companion of the disciples' written by Nick Fawcett

How did we not see it before?
How could we have missed what was staring us in the face?
It's a puzzle to me,
to us all,
but that's the way it was.
When they arrested Jesus in the garden,
dragged him before Pilate;
when they nailed him to that cross
and sealed him in a tomb;
we'd believed that was it,
the dream over,
the adventure at an end.
After all, we saw he was dead with our own eyes,
watched him draw his last breath,
so there could be no denying it,
no clutching at straws.
We wanted to, heavens knows!
But what was the point of pretending there was hope,
when it was all too clear there was none.
So we'd simply given in to sorrow,
a paralysing, consuming grief,
and we'd be wrestling with that now had nothing changed.
But change it did,
wonderfully, gloriously –
death defeated,
the Lord risen!
He's been with us again today,
laughing, smiling, eating in our presence,
unmistakeably alive,
and as he opened the Scriptures to us,
just as he'd done for our friends on the Emmaus Road,
the truth suddenly became obvious,
leaping out at us from the page.
It was as he'd said:
the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead
on the third day –
the empty tomb not the undoing of some awful catastrophe
but part of God's plan,
the fulfilment of his purpose of old.
We hadn't seen it before,
and no doubt there's much we still don't see,
but we know one thing now for sure:
that he's constantly with us,
leading us to a greater understanding of truth



and richer experience of his love,
each day a new beginning through his resurrection life.

Sermon

We often describe life as like being on a rollercoaster, particularly where our emotions are concerned. I'm sure you'll all agree with me when I say life isn't always easy no matter who or where we are, it's not always plain sailing with a smooth progression from one thing to the next, even for those of us with faith in God. Things can, and do, change very quickly at times – one moment everything's going well and you're happy and content then the next minute something happens that turns your world or the world of a loved one upside down. There are numerous reason for this including serious health issues or becoming unemployed.

This is probably how we have all felt our lives to be over the last twelve or thirteen months due to the Coronavirus pandemic. As a result we've experienced anxiety, concern for ourselves and others and worry as we've navigated our way through, living in a very different way from what we were used to. There were probably times when we felt quite hopeful of a return to some sort of normal life when things seemed to be improving and restrictions were eased only to be put back in place at a later date because the situation had deteriorated again.

Perhaps this is how the disciples and their companions felt their lives were like round the time of that first Easter. Prior to Passover things were looking up, Peter had identified Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, then there was that triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, but in a matter of days things went downhill so to speak, with the arrest of Jesus, his trial and crucifixion, which was followed later, three day later, by the mystery of the empty tomb and the wonderful news of his resurrection. All of which happened in the space of a week.

They would have gone from being positive and happy to the complete opposite, feeling grief and hopelessness, followed by puzzlement and uncertainty at the discovery of the empty tomb and joy when they finally realised the truth that Jesus was alive. All these emotions come across clearly in the meditation of Joanna we heard earlier.

When Jesus appears to the disciples on that first Easter evening he sees that they are troubled by all that's happened and gives them his peace before going on to explain to them the references in the Scriptures which related to himself.

Perhaps it was by receiving the peace of Christ into their hearts and minds that the minds of the disciples were finally opened to understand the relevant Scriptures regarding God's purpose for Jesus as he explored those parts of the Scriptures with them.



Three things leapt out at me as I read today's passage from Luke's Gospel, receiving Christ's peace, having our minds opened to the Gospel and the spreading of the good news of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. All of them just as important in our 21st century world as they were at the time of the early church.

I'm sure most of us will have experienced times of distress, anxiety or worry over situations at some point in our lifetimes. At these times our minds can be in turmoil and it can be difficult to sleep or concentrate on other things. I can remember an occasion when I was trying to concentrate on writing a sermon whilst in severe pain, but it got to the point where I had to give up because the severity of the pain just wouldn't let me concentrate. It's times like these when we need to accept and seek the peace of Christ, the same peace he offered the disciples on the first Easter evening and which has been available to all down the millennia since. Allowing Christ's peace to enter into our minds and hearts takes away our "strain and stress and let's our ordered lives confess the beauty of his peace" to paraphrase John Greenleaf Whittier from his hymn 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'. Christ's peace within us enables us to deal with whatever stressful situations we are faced with in a calmer, more rational way.

Earlier I referred to the possibility that receiving the peace Jesus freely offered them assisted the process of the minds of the disciples being opened to the truth about Jesus which is found in the Old Testament Scriptures. This same idea is true for us too as when we are calm, peaceful and clear-headed we are more open to what God is trying to say to us through the Scriptures and the truths that they contain. I know that this is the case where I'm concerned but am aware that it might not be so for everybody.

In his time, it was Jesus himself who opened people's minds to enable them to understand the Scriptures, for us today we have the help he promised in the shape of the Holy Spirit when we're studying the Bible as well as numerous commentaries and reference books and the opportunity to ask and discuss things with fellow Christians.

Both the receiving of Christ's peace and allowing our minds to be open to the Word of God help us to fulfil what is known as "The Great Commission." In the New Living Translation of the Bible, Luke's version of The Great Commission is this:

"With my authority, take this message of repentance to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem: "There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me." You are witnesses of all these things.

Therefore, the disciples all those years ago and ourselves today are empowered by the authority of Jesus to take the great message of Eastertide, of repentance



and forgiveness of sins for all who turn to him out into our communities. In order to do so we need to open our minds to what God is saying to us through the Scriptures and listen prayerfully to him. Are we ready and prepared to do this as we look forward to a day where once again we can continue doing God's work in our local communities bringing the Good News of the Gospel along with the peace of Christ to those who've yet to hear and experience it.

Being empowered by Christ's authority links in with today's reading from Acts. The healing of the beggar at the temple gate was performed by Peter in the name of Jesus. When explaining it to the crowd Peter takes great pains to stress that the healing is God working through Jesus, demonstrating who gave him the authority and power to heal, but all the while emphasising that it wasn't him, Peter, but God working through him who'd healed the crippled man.

In his book "Acts for Everyone" Tom Wright tells us that Peter and John weren't special, but they knew and trusted someone who had the power to make things happen. That someone being Jesus, and as a result they could tell the crowd that it was Jesus, or God at work in and through Jesus who'd healed the crippled beggar. In order to receive healing, there needs to be three things, faith in the name of Jesus, faith in the one who speaks the name and faith in the one who hears it. Jesus' name must be used in faith and we need to remember that it's Jesus himself, not merely the sound of his name, who gives our prayers their power. Believing in Jesus and the power of his name is the way to wholeness as much today, where there is much healing needed in our world, as it was in the first century AD.

When explaining to the crowd how the crippled man had been healed Peter refers to "The God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our ancestors", citing incidents and people we learn about in the books of Genesis and Exodus. In these stories we see God acting spectacularly to fulfil his promises and rescue his people. Those listening to Peter would be able to relate to the references that Peter is using to say to the crowd "look, here is the same thing is happening again, God is acting in a spectacular way but this time he's working through Jesus, the promised Messiah."

In referring to God's promises in the Old Testament, Peter is echoing what Jesus himself did on the first Easter evening when he explained the relevant passages of Scripture which foretold his destiny, and which was part of God's plan for his people and his world.

God is still at work in his world today, through us as his hands and feet, and as our communities and society begin to open up again in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic there will be a variety of things and ways in which God can work through us. Whenever God is at work people marvel at the personal or social changes that he brings about and this is just as true in our 21st century world as it was at the time when Peter healed the crippled beggar.

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Through the healing of the crippled beggar Peter showed what could happen through faith in Jesus' name and urged those listening to repent of their sins and turn to God so that they could receive his forgiveness and have a fresh start.

The passage we heard from the first letter of John reminds us of how much God loves us and that through the death and resurrection of Jesus we are now God's children. The knowledge that we are children of God now, and not just at some future time should encourage us to live as Jesus did. Our lives as Christians are a work in progress, a continual process where we become more Christ-like in our thoughts, attitudes and actions. This process won't be complete until we see Christ face-to-face at which point we will be like him. Knowing that this is our ultimate destiny as believers should give us the motivation to keep on the straight and narrow as it were, keeping ourselves free from sin and corruption and what my Life Application Bible describes as "morally fit."

We became children of God through the grace of God and in this passage we find reassurance of who we are and our ultimate destiny, a thought which brings both comfort and the encouragement to keep growing more Christ-like in anticipation of meeting him face-to-face.

Receiving the peace of Christ and opening our minds to God's Word in the Bible equip us to go out into our communities spreading the message of God's salvation for all as we go. We can do this confidently due to the reassuring knowledge of our position as God's children through what Christ did for us by his dying and rising again, and the fact that we know he is with us wherever we are or go – "to the very end of the age."

I hope and pray that we are all prepared to open our minds to God and wherever he may lead us to as a result and that we may all know the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ in our minds and hearts now and always.

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,*

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*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;*

Prayers for others.

All knowing God,
we find it hard to understand what happens around us;
like the disciples who found it hard to understand
that it was the risen Christ on the lakeside;

or like the people who found it hard to understand
that it was their long-expected Messiah upon the cross.
It is hard for us to understand what happens around us
but we pray for enlightenment,
asking that you will explain to us, your children,
the things that we should believe, and do, and be.

We pray for the leaders of the world:
that they may be given a deeper understanding
of complex issues and situations
and how they should act to serve their people.

We pray for all governments around the world as they continue to deal with the
Covid-19 pandemic and it's aftermath,
those countries that are suffering from internal conflict and political issues.

This is our prayer: **help us to know and do your will.**

We pray for the church;

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that we may be given a deeper understanding
of what it means to follow Christ in the world
and how we should live.

We pray for all churches in Salford but especially for the members of the Salford Methodist Circuit as we work out a way forward following the pandemic and look to the future.

This is our prayer: **help us to know and do your will.**

We pray for humankind;
that we may be given a deeper understanding
of the worth and needs of every individual
and how we may show respect and concern for them.

We pray for all who have suffered as a result of the events of the past year,
whether through ill-health, loss of employment, gaps in their education.
We pray too for all those known or unknown who are grieving the loss of loved ones.

This is our prayer: **help us to know and do your will.**

We pray for ourselves;
that we may be given a deeper understanding
of how you, loving God, are present in our lives
and how we can show our love for you.

[Silence]

This is our prayer: **help us to know and do your will.**

In the name of Christ, God's Word for us. **Amen.**

Our final hymn reminds that whatever we do in our lives we need God's strength and vision with us at all times. Let's sing or listen to "Be Thou My Vision" which will be followed by "The peace of the earth be with you" as a musical blessing.

Hymn: Be Thou My Vision

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;*

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*be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.*

*Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.*

*Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.*

Sung Blessing

*The peace of the earth be with you,
the peace of the heavens too;
the peace of the rivers be with you,
the peace of the oceans too.
Deep peace falling over you.
God's peace, God's peace growing in you.*

As We Are Gathered - John Daniels

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info@songsolutions.org

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Be Still - David J. Evans

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Be Thou My Vision - Irish Traditional

Words: Translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrn Music: Irish Traditional Melody, Harmonised by Erik Routley (1917-1982) adapted by Martin V. Clarke Adaptation © 2011, Oxford University Press

The Peace Of The Earth Be With You - Guatemalan text translated by Christine Carson

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