



## Being with God in the Difficult Days - 24th May 2020

Ruth Dawson

### Transcript

Welcome to worship. Today for Methodists around the world is Aldersgate Sunday, the day when John Wesley in 1738 unwillingly attended worship at the Movarian meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. During this service he felt his heart strangely warmed experiencing God's love in a most personalized and life-giving way. Until this point he had known God in his mind but not in his heart. Now he understood the value of a personal experience of God and that would bring assurance to the believer. This experience transformed Wesley's belief and his preaching, leading ultimately to the Methodist Church.

Aldersgate is not about the past or even just John Wesley, it's a demonstration of the difference of knowing God for ourselves makes, when we least expect it when things pan out as planned when we feel like we've heard it all before, there can be change. Change happens when we share the story. We too can be refreshed and inspired by sharing our stories, our time together now we'll explore how and where we meet with God in these different days and how we use our experiences to meet with God.

Clare leads us in our first song as we listen, join in dance around the room as you so wish; we're here, Here I come to worship.

### Hymn: Light of the World

*Light of the world,  
you stepped down into darkness,  
opened my eyes, let me see  
beauty that made this heart adore you,  
hope of a life spent with you.*

*So here I am to worship,  
here I am to bow down,  
here I am to say that you're my God,  
and you're altogether lovely,  
altogether worthy,  
altogether wonderful to me.*

*King of all days  
oh so highly exalted,*

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*glorious in heaven above.  
Humbly you came  
to the earth you created,  
all for love's sake became poor.*

*So here I am to worship ...*

*And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.*

*So here I am to worship ...*

*Tim Hughes*

Our first prayers this morning are taken from the Methodist Church Facebook page and our first prayer is from Jude Levermore who's the head of mission in the Methodist Church in Britain, our second is then followed by the Reverend Bill Anderson who is a minister in Dudley and Netherton circuit. Let us pray:

*Lord I'm tetchy.  
I can't be the only one of your children at the moment who prays every morning in the shower "Lord make me nicer,"  
I love my family and friends. I'm grateful for them but being locked in together isn't easy. I look at the politicians on TV and sometimes I feel I could do a better job, and the children playing next door are noisy and I'm trying to read.  
I'm tetchy, Restless.  
I remember that saying that hearts are restless until they find their rest in you could you help me find my rest in you today as I find rest in you I recognize I need to change that prayer from "make me nicer" to "make me more like you Lord make me more like you", let me really be a channel of your peace, give me and my soul your rest  
Amen.*

*Great God of love in these strange days in which your whole world is wondering how to deal with a virus help us to hold on to you God who is with us help us to understand more clearly what it is to love our neighbor those who stand with us to applaud the National Health Service and carers, those we greet cheerily on our walk and in the*

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*supermarket queue, those we may never meet who live in challenging places in the world and in growing understanding help us to act justly, love generously, and walk with you following Jesus.  
Amen.*

It struck me very clearly and very early on what I would miss most. Walking down a usually bustling high street in almost silence with painted shut coffee shops. I missed those Saturday morning coffees trading thoughts developing my theology fueled on caffeine, those Sunday evening Spectrum discussions bouncing around ideas, giggles with friends over lunches, snapshots in time almost taken for granted. I realize also that there is a theme developing here, coffee at best and food always, the evenings with a close ally moaning, discussing, laughing, yes sometimes despairing of the events of the day. I miss dreadfully as many of us do my dearest and nearest to my children living elsewhere the heartache of seeing your treasured daughter through the glass unable to reach out and touch her. The WhatsApp conversations with your precious firstborn wishing desperately you could jump in the car and join him for lunch. I'm so fortunate to have my youngest here at home though at times I doubt he agrees. I'm extremely fortunate that I am classed as a key worker and as such head to work for normal each day. Here though it's a new normal, new skills, new roles, increased activities changing priorities longer hours making sure everyone is safe. As colleagues we have learned together a new way to be, the lines on the corridor floor marking out each 2 meter gap, numbers limited in training rooms, training limited to what really must be. Then we've new training developed quickly and responding to need. I am constantly amazed how people can respond and adapt to the multitude of changes we throw at them. In these times it is difficult to understand where God may be. Perhaps I have been too busy to seek Him, perhaps too weary to hear, perhaps too overwhelmed to be at peace.

In our reading which we shall hear shortly, Psalm 23, Samantha Kylie gives an honest view of how we might interpret these scriptures in today's world. I've used Samantha's video several times over the recent weeks. I've posted it on the Spectrum Facebook page and it gives me a sense of peace when my world is spinning, spinning off its axis. Samantha recorded this piece for the Austin New Church in Texas all the way over the pond in America.

## **Psalm 23.**

### **Song : My Lighthouse**

*In my wrestling and in my doubts  
In my failures You won't walk out  
Your great love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea*

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*You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*In the silence, You won't let go  
In the questions, Your truth will hold  
Your great love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea  
You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*My lighthouse, my lighthouse  
Shining in the darkness. I will follow You  
My lighthouse, my lighthouse  
I will trust the promise  
You will carry me safe to shore  
Safe to shore  
Safe to shore  
Safe to shore*

*I won't fear what tomorrow brings  
With each morning I'll rise and sing  
My God's love will lead me through  
You are the peace in my troubled sea  
You are the peace in my troubled sea*

*My lighthouse, my lighthouse...*

*Fire before us, You're the brightest  
You will lead us through the storms  
[repeats 4 times]*

*My lighthouse, my lighthouse...  
Rend Collective*

Thank you to Hannah for that beautiful rendition of My Lighthouse. My Lighthouse is one of my favorite tunes, it's played regularly in my car, you can see me waving my arms at the traffic lights; safely of course. It's a tune that reminds me how much I need my God and how often he's there even when I do not look. Sometimes in my car I can feel it so closely that it's almost as if I looked at my mirror that I'd see Jesus looking back at me. So in these different times where do we seek our God? I'll be very honest, I found the last several weeks really difficult, working long hours, traveling along silent motorways and sometimes even what we wish, for less traffic, has an unsettling uncertainty Unable to offloads friends face to face although we message and we work virtually, it is so different to sitting next to somebody, looking at their gestures, working out their moods. And I admit to finding it really difficult to come to prayer, but then it's the little things sometimes that

# Salford Methodist Circuit



catch us out; the postcard that arrived in the post with no name, a postcard for me to colour send from someone who knew me really well and arrived on my birthday, the box of chocolates which quite literally had my name on it again anonymously arrived because of a comment I made on Twitter where I'd cried because I couldn't get into the petrol station for chocolate - both leaky eye moments.

Then there are the times people pop up on Messenger just when needed, right at the right time. These are the times when God has spoken to me and made me realize that, you know, he is still there and always will be. He was there in the smile of the kindly strangers who very friendly back away so I can pass, he's there in the fearful eyes above the masks of those who though faithful still arrived shift after shift. He's there in the thousands of key workers who have moved out with their homes to protect their families so they can continue to work. He was definitely there in the service station lady who seeing my uniform and gave me cheap coffee and a free Creme Egg, making a particularly difficult day so worthwhile. Babies are still being born safely, reminding of life goes on and on. The Lord is there too in all who work so that all of us can be safe; in the teachers, the health care workers, the lorry drivers, the refuse collectors, shop workers, couriers, transport workers, people we may never think of day by day. And each day as we mourn for those who've died we think of those bereaved and of the sick, sick in a way we have never experienced, those struggling so hard to make sense. It is here, right here, we need to make more time to sit with God, to listen to his whispers, making time to be at peace. As the nurse he removes her gloves to hold the hand of the dying one last time, so the Lord holds us. He will comfort us, he will help us to provide the new normal.

We come to prayer once more as we listen to Keith Waddell who is a mission partner with the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church based in Zambia where the Covid virus is currently on the rise. Let us pray:

*Lord we come to you  
as a friend of the hungry and thirsty,  
the lonely and defeated,  
the stigmatised and marginalised,  
the infected and quarantined,  
The suffering and dying.  
Be especially close to those  
enduring the misery of loneliness  
separated from loved ones,  
confined in a familiar yet strange environment,  
to those who are seriously ill and fighting for their lives  
to all who work in hospitals, care homes, shops and transport  
to all who are busier than usual caring for, and looking after, others.  
Touch us all with your hand of healing we pray,*

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*through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen*

So this morning we started our time together talking of John's Wesley's experience on that first Aldersgate Sunday, we shall understand together with the hymn inspired with Wesley's final words on his dying day on March 2nd in 1791 it is said that he lay raised his arms to the air and with his remaining strength cry twice "And the best of all is God is with us."

Andrew Pratt's hymn is simple in reminding us that where faith is frail it becomes deepened, where God's love renews, doesn't forget us, best of all becomes the anchor to cling to when the going gets tough as well as the shout for joy when faith runs smooth. As a memory of Aldersgate, where the hymn alludes to hearts are challenged and strangely warmed this rebooted Wesley's ministry and Wesley's ministry went on to offer practical love in the form of Social Care, he argued against slavery and responded to the inequalities of the day, all of which we can relate to here in the 21st century. Wesley's words and Pratt's hymn insist of God's presence beyond surrounding and sometimes in spite of our experience. So let's join Clare for our final hymn singing, Best of all is God is with us join in as you're able, listen, dance meditate, whatever suits your needs, Best of all this God is with us.

## **Hymn: Best of all God is with us**

*Best of all is God is with us,  
God will hold and never fail.  
Keep that truth when storms are  
God remains though faith is frail.*

*Best of all is God is with us,  
life goes on and needs are met,  
God is strongest in our weakness.  
Love renews, will not forget.*

*Best of all is God is with us,  
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,  
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,  
grace received and hope reformed.*

*Best of all is God is with us,  
in our joy and through our pain,  
till that final acclamation:  
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'*

*Best of all is God is with us*

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*as we scale eternal heights,  
love grows stronger, undiminished;  
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.*

*Andrew Pratt*

So thank you to Clare and to Hannah for providing the music for today because I am really clear that you would not want to hear my voice but as our session ends we pray:

Go in peace,  
know that you are loved,  
seek the Lord wherever you may be  
and know he is right there beside you.  
Amen

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Light of the World - Tim Hughes

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My Lighthouse - Rend Collective

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Best of all is God is with us - Andrew Pratt (b. 1948)

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