

# Salford Methodist Circuit



**All About Power! - 27th June 2021**

**Rev Clare Stainsby**

Hello and welcome to our service today.

I'd like to begin the service with some words from the book of Isaiah, from Isaiah chapter 6:

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:*

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

Those words have a particular importance to me, and probably to every Methodist minister, for they are read at every ordination service. And today - the day this service goes out - is in fact the 17th anniversary of my ordination; I chose to wear my ordination shirt today.

The reading goes on to describe further Isaiah's vision of God in the temple. Having seen God in all his glory, even if it is just in a dream, Isaiah is terrified because no one is permitted to look at God. But one of the seraphim flies to Isaiah and touches him with a live coal from the fire, a symbol of burning away all his impurities, and making him clean. Then the voice of God says, "whom shall I send, who will go for us?" And Isaiah says, "here I am Lord, send me."

I guess every minister that ever was, had some kind of sense of God calling them to something, and all of us at some point said, "send me - I will do this." Isaiah's vision was particularly dramatic. It begins, not with a call to go and do something, but with a sense of the awesome power and majesty, the glory of God, which drew praise from the angels - the seraphim.

## **Hymn: Now Thank We All Our God**

*Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;  
who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way  
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;  
and keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.*

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*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,  
the Son, and him who reigns with them in highest heaven,  
the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.*

## Prayers

Lord we come to worship you and to praise you, to bow down before you, and proclaim your glory. We come to acknowledge your power and majesty; we come to marvel at all you have done and all you continue to do in this world. We come to marvel at your love for us. We confess that we don't always remember you at the heart of everything - that we are neglectful in our worship, weak in our trust, and selfish in our thoughts and actions. But we recognise that in your unfailing love, you forgive us, and constantly draw us back to yourself.

We accept your love for us once again in this moment, and offer this time of worship to you.

Open our ears to your word and our hearts to your love. Speak to us, and teach us, and lead us on. We bring our prayers in the name of our Saviour Jesus, and we share in the prayer he taught us.

## Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
Now and forever. Amen.*

I guess there are some bits of the Bible that we read or hear, and it strikes us that we've never heard that bit before, or never noticed that bit before. And there are other bits that we've heard so many times before, that we begin to switch off when we hear them again - what can that possibly have to tell me that I haven't heard before. And I guess for those of us that have been in the church a long time, perhaps since childhood, then the Gospel stories are the ones in particular that we've heard so many times.

I used to do scripture exams when I was a child - I expect others of you did too. We'd spend a few weeks talking with our Sunday School teachers about particular set passages for the exams, and then on a certain day - I think we used to go to church after school, and we'd have an exam paper put in front of us, and we'd answer the questions on the things we'd studied. No one needs



extra exams these days - schools pile enough tests of pupils at every age and every stage of their education. But that wasn't the case in the early 70s, and I loved doing the exams, and doing well at them. I'm not sure if my friends felt exactly the same! But because we went over and over the passages, and had to learn memory verses, then there are certain gospel moments that seem deeply imbedded within me.

Today's episode, the episode I've chosen to look at is from the life of Jesus and it is one of those very familiar passages. It only appears in Luke's Gospel, which is, in fact, the longest Gospel. It's generally thought that Luke was a gentile, a greek, and that he was a physician - that comes from a reference to him in Paul's letter to the Colossian church. In fact, Paul mentions him a few times. He wasn't a close follower of Jesus during his ministry - or at least that's not very likely. He would have come to faith in the early years of the church. He was eager to find out everything he possibly could about the life and ministry of Jesus. And so it's probable that he just travelled around and had conversations with many people who remembered the events of Jesus's life. That, of course, is pure speculation, he may have had some early writings on the life of Jesus as his source. But whatever the case, Luke offers many things to us that don't appear in any other Gospel. And Luke of course is also thought to be the author of the book of Acts, the story of the early church. But that's a story for another day of course.

Let's hear the reading from Luke's gospel, so familiar that we've heard it many times before. I've chosen to have a read in a particular way, with two different voices. And after that we'll have a hymn before we think about what this all might have to say to us today.

## **Bible Reading: Luke 8 : 40 - 56**

### **Voice 1**

*Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.*

### **Voice 2**

*As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no-one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she*

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*had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."*

## **Voice 1**

*While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher any more." Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.*

## **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.*

*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.*

I'm sure you've had that situation in a dream - when something terrifies you - and you need to run - something is about to happen - or someone needs your

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help - but when you try to move your legs - they just won't go. It's like running through treacle. I usually manage to wake myself up at that point, probably because deep in my subconscious I have an overwhelming fear of powerlessness - and a desire always to be in control. I know that's true for me - it's probably true for all of us.

But of course, powerlessness, is not just a feature of our nightmares. It can be a reality.

Many people experience situations of powerlessness, and can do absolutely nothing to change situation they are in. We all know about powerlessness in this past year and more. We have longed for things to be different so often. But we have not been a position to change things. Other people have been making the decisions, and we've been required to comply. One of my lasting memories of my very last live service before we locked down in March 2020 was of people reacting to the speculation that was everywhere at the time that lockdown was coming. And the comment I remember - "no one is telling me what to do!" How little we knew what was around the corner, or how long it would go on for! I'm glad we didn't know how long it would go for, in honesty. It was overwhelming enough without the sense that it was here for a long time to come! We have been powerless to change the virus's impact, powerless to make decisions in our own lives to some extent, but more importantly we've been powerless in the face of such tremendous suffering, and the enduring pain and sadness of loss in so many lives. Our powerlessness is all relative to that of others who have lost so much.

The three central characters in this episode from Luke's Gospel were all experiencing extreme powerlessness and their situations were seemingly beyond human intervention. So let's consider each of them in turn.

First, there was the woman who had been haemorrhaging for 12 years. It was an illness that had totally sapped her energy, and although it was apparently not life threatening at this precise moment, it seems it was always likely to deteriorate further. No doctor had been able to change things, and she had tried many doctors. Because we know that she's tried many doctors, it's quite likely that she was quite a wealthy person. But her money was of no value here, because her health was seemingly beyond redemption - no amount of money could change that. And it was in this extreme powerlessness that she turned to Jesus.

The other two characters were also in places of extreme powerlessness. Jairus's daughter was sinking fast from some illness. The life was flowing away from her body. We don't know how aware of her situation she was - she may have been unconscious. She was sinking towards death, with no power to change her own destiny.



And Jairus himself, the synagogue leader, a man used to being in charge of situations, was powerless to change situation for the child he loved. There was nothing that he could do, as a parent. And no doubt he had done his best to protect her from every imaginable danger and situation in her life but in this he was unable to change anything. And in his extreme frustration, he did one thing which is probably quite out of character: he turned to Jesus for help.

So these two inter-linked stories are recorded in the Gospel for a purpose, in a kind of inter-twined way, because they show the impact Jesus can have in situations of powerlessness. They demonstrate his transforming power over life and death. Jesus in these situations and in many other recorded in Gospels, does more than simply transform people's powerlessness - he transforms their fear to hope and he transforms their despair into faith.

Situations involving illness always involve fear - fear of the unknown future - fear of where things will progress to - fear ultimately that this might lead to death - a fear that almost dare not be voiced. Perhaps we have all experienced some of that as we have seen the sheer numbers affected by Covid, and watched the death statistics rising, and wondered how, if we contracted it, the virus might affect us. It has been an underlying anxiety in so many lives in this past year.

For the woman reaching out to touch Jesus, that fear was compounded by the nature of illness which made her virtually a social outcast. But in Jesus she saw a reason for hope, which overcame her fear of stepping into a crowd, her fear of verbal abuse and rejection. Jesus being there gave her a reason to step beyond her fragile comfort zone, and to reach out to him with her last vestige of courage. Jesus's presence gave her hope, and she was able to overcome her fear.

For Jairus, his fear for his daughter was seemingly justified, because by time Jesus reached his house, all hope was gone. There was no reason for fear left, because his worst fears had been realised. But even in the midst of seeming hopelessness and despair, as the community waited for the death of this child, Jesus had power to restore and to rebuild hope.

For each of these two characters, the woman and Jairus, Jesus's presence and his reputation inspired them to faith such as had not experienced before. They had the faith to reach out and touch - the faith to grasp at what God was offering to them through Jesus.

For woman, that faith grew as she got closer to Jesus. It was enough that she could reach out her hand and just touch a mere corner of his cloak. But she did it, believing with all her heart that it would make a difference, and it did. Jesus, once he had found one who touched him, commended her for her faith. He told her, "Your faith has brought about your healing."



For Jairus, it was almost impossible for him to hold on to faith, when told that his daughter was already dead. But in spite of all that he was hearing around him, Jesus urged him to hang on to his faith, even in this seemingly impossible turn of events.

And for Jairus too, that faith was justified, by what happened next, as Jesus stepped into situation. And on this occasion, the hand that reached out for healing was Jesus's own hand, as he touched the child, took her hand, and reached into her need. Jairus's daughter was herself beyond having faith. Jesus himself reached out his hand to her and lifted her into new life and new hope.

Whenever we hear stories of Jesus healing - and raising dead, it raises questions. Why wasn't everyone healed; why wasn't everyone raised? And for us - why isn't everyone healed now - why do people die? Why have so many people died of covid 19? Why have so many died in other ways through the pandemic?

Let's think about 2000 years ago first. Jesus didn't come as a one-man liberation movement. That wasn't his purpose. Some of disciples who longed for the liberation of their country from the Romans, struggled to come to terms with that fact. And he didn't come as a one man emergency medical mission, although undoubtedly some were healed. But Jesus did come to start a revolution, and he did come to bring God's healing power. However, his aims went much deeper than a quick fix for that time and place. Jesus's ministry, and healings that went on then, were signposts to the real healing that was about to occur, which would be achieved by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. These stories, these events in Jesus' s ministry, recorded by Luke, make statements to us about who Jesus is.

He is one with power to transform our powerlessness. He is the one with the power to inspire us to faith, to call us to leave our fear behind and trust in him; the one with the power over life and death itself; the one who can transform seemingly hopeless, helpless situations. And he can do that, not just by his kindness, not just by his love, not just by his understanding, but by his power. That power that was so real and so transforming to those three people in 1st century Palestine, and it is still available to us today.

We live in that bigger picture which Luke anticipated, for which his gospel is a signpost. Jesus has proved his power over life and death completely, in his death and resurrection, and death itself is no barrier to him, no finality, no ending.

For us too, here and now, that power is available. It is available to draw us close to one who can transform our powerlessness. Jesus's presence was enough to inspire that woman to confidence, and we too have Jesus's presence. He is close by through his Holy Spirit.



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It's a presence and a power as tangible as his physical presence and power was for that woman in the street who reached out. It's a presence and a power which can calm our fears, and give us hope where none exists. It's a presence and a power which ready for us to reach out to us, so that we too can receive some of that transforming power. It might not transform every illness into complete health, but it will surely transform our brokenness into wholeness: the wholeness of knowing that God of love is there for us.

And if we are beyond reaching out - if there is no faith left and no reason for hope - it is then that presence of Jesus reaches out to us, and touches us, and restores us to life and hope. Because in Jesus is one and only power that can bring fullness of life, the one and only power that lasts for ever. It's the power which heals bodies, and minds and spirits. It's the power that reaches out to us in love and invites us to reach out in faith. And as we touch that power, we find ourselves filled with God's love, forgiven for our weaknesses, our lack of faith, our despair. We find ourselves at one with God, and in God we find the strength to endure all that we encounter in this life and beyond it.

Death has been swallowed up in victory says Paul - Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. This power is ours, for us to reach out to in faith, and it is reaching out to us too: today, tomorrow, every day and for ever.

Let's spend a few moments in quiet now - recognising where we are at this moment. Where we are on scale of fear and despair? Where are you on road towards faith and trust. Where are you in recognising the presence of Jesus with you, inviting you to reach out and receive? And can you see Jesus reaching out to you, offering us healing and wholeness that only he can supply?

**[Silence]**

## **Hymn: The Lord's My Shepherd**

*The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
he makes me lie in pastures green,  
he leads me by the still, still waters,  
his goodness restores my soul.*

*And I will trust in you alone,  
and I will trust in you alone,  
for your endless mercy follows me,  
your goodness will lead me home.*

*He guides my ways in righteousness,  
and he anoints my head with oil;  
and my cup - it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.*



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*And I will trust in you alone...*

*And though I walk the darkest path -  
I will not fear the evil one,  
for you are with me, and your rod and staff  
are the comfort I need to know.  
And I will trust in you alone...*

## **Prayers**

*Be still and know that I am God,*

God of love, in you we put our trust. We pray for your church throughout the world.

For all who worship you, and trust you, through the circumstances of their lives. We pray that your church may be ready to share your love, ready to proclaim your worthiness, and ready to accept the trust you have placed upon us, as your body here on earth. You are bringing us through the hardest of times, out of darkness into light. May our trust be always in you. Today, on this Conference Sunday we remember all who will be ordained today.

*Be still and know that I am God,*

God of love, in you we put our trust. We pray for this world, which teams with life given by you. But where your name is so often dismissed, your love so often ignored. We pray that those in positions of authority may be worthy of the trust placed in them. And that decisions which affects people's lives may be made with wisdom. We pray that your peace may rule in the hearts of all people, and that your kingdom may come.

*Be still and know that I am God,*

God of love, in you we put our trust. We pray for this community of the Salford circuit, for the people among whom we live our lives, the people alongside whom we worship. We pray especially for those who are in particular need at this time. Those that are ill, or distressed, anxious or isolated in loneliness. May they put their trust in you, and find in you their hope and their peace. We pray for one another and for the needs which are on our hearts. Fill us again with your Spirit that we may trust in you in every circumstance of our lives to you.

*Be still and know that I am God,*

We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen

Our final song, asks God to teach us to be all that he wants us to be, including people who trust.



## Hymn: Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart

*Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart,  
teach me to move in the power of your Spirit,  
teach me to walk in the light of your presence,  
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.  
Teach me to love with your heart of compassion,  
teach me to trust in the word of your promise,  
teach me to hope in the day of your coming,  
teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.*

*You wrote the rhythm of life, created heaven and earth;  
in you is joy without measure.  
So, like a child in your sight, I dance to see your delight,  
for I was made for your pleasure, pleasure.  
Teach me to dance...*

*Let all my movements express a heart that loves to say 'yes,'  
a will that leaps to obey you.  
Let all my energy blaze to see the joy in your face,  
let my whole being praise you, praise you.  
Teach me to dance...*

## Blessing

Loving God, teach me to love, teach me to trust, teach me to hope,  
Teach me to dance in tune with this world, in all that I am and do.  
And may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, today and always. Amen.

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Now Thank We All Our God - Martin Rinkart

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

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Be Still And Know That I Am God - Anonymous

Teach Me To Dance - Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson

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