

Salford Methodist Circuit



Remembrance Sunday - 8th November 2020

Pat Wilson, Carole Barratt and Brian Barratt

Welcome to worship our today.

I welcome you from wherever and whenever you join us.

All are welcome as we share together in praising God, in offering our thanks, and in seeking to find the hope and motivation we need for living, in this strange and unfamiliar world of right now. I guess most of us long for a bit of normality, and would gladly see the back of this pandemic. But we trust in God and in the promises given to us, of constant love, peace beyond all reason, and real hope for a better day. We can't see, we can't know when that day might be. But we can believe in it and trust in the One who is beside us in our every day, where ever we are.

Bible Reading: Psalm 90

*Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!
Before the mountains were born,
before you gave birth to the earth and the world,
from beginning to end, you are God.
For you, a thousand years are as a passing day,
as brief as a few night hours.
Let us, your servants, see you work again;
let our children see your glory.*

That Psalm in its entirety reminds us that life is fragile and fleeting, but that the God we worship is eternal and powerful. Although we are nothing compared to God, our tiny fleeting minds matter in him. And he calls us to worship Him with our hearts and serve him with our lives. And so today let's do just that. Let's sing our first hymn: Joyfully sing in praise to your maker.

Hymn: Joyfully Sing

*Joyfully sing in praise to your Maker, lift up his name on wings of your song,
You are called holy, child of his mercy, called to be righteous, called to belong.*

*Sing him a new song, play to your Maker, tuning your voice to notes in his praise,
Living your life in time to his rhythm, giving him worship in every phrase.*

*Creator Spirit, Maker of all things, composing life in true harmony
All the world moves to the beat of creation, conductor of the great symphony.*

Salford Methodist Circuit



*Lend to our worship your Holy Spirit,
Breathe through our minds your power and your peace,
In you our hope finds promise unending, your love song to us will never
cease.*

Prayers

Loving God, the song we just sang or listened to reminds us of who you are, and of who we are to you. You are our Maker, the creator of all we see and hear, touch and taste and smell, And of everything that is beyond our senses - the power behind this world, this universe, all time and all space. You are bigger than anything we can imagine or grasp, and yet you care for us. We matter to you, not just as the vast array of human beings, like tiny ants existing across your world. But as individuals, known and loved, each one of us, with all our thoughts and fears, our joys and our sadnesses mattering to you. You accept us just as we are, and remind us that nothing can ever separate us from you. You give us worth and respect, and you give our lives meaning and purpose. And so we choose to worship you - to praise you - to offer our gratitude and love to the One who loves us beyond measure.

We may be apart, but we never worship alone, for you share with us in our worship, receiving our praises, and giving us hope when all life feels strange and challenging. Accept all that we can give to you this day, and draw new depths of praise from within us as we connect with you and share with you now in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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.*

As a musician - rhythm is very important to me. Rhythm holds music together, and is always present in some way. Even when music sounds very free and uninhibited in its rhythm, it is held together by an underlying pulse that remains steadily there in the background.

And our lives have rhythm too. We may not think about that rhythm too much in normal circumstances. In fact we only really notice it when it's interrupted - a poor night's sleep, a meal appearing later than normal, an unexpected illness.

Salford Methodist Circuit



I'm sure you can think of dozens of other examples. This pandemic has well and truly interrupted the rhythm of our lives, with disturbing consequences. I remember the way I floundered around, unsure what to do or who to be in those early weeks of the first lockdown. My work routine was interrupted; my ability to plan ahead was whipped out from under my feet; even shopping for food became something that needed careful consideration before it could be attempted. It was all profoundly disturbing.

But I'm sure you, like me, eventually re-found a rhythm. It wasn't the normal rhythm but it was one that filled the gap. I even wrote down some suggestions of things to do each day, to consciously provide a rhythm. These included things like ringing someone from a church; doing something physical in the house or in the garden; keeping on top of emails; reading a book; preparing food; exercising, relaxing. I tried to do as many of these things each day as I could. And soon other things were added - new routines in my life as a minister, including writing and recording for services. And gradually a new rhythm emerged.

Through these recent months, there have been other changes to the rhythms of life, as first the virus began to abate, and then we began to look at the possibility of re-opening church buildings; we began to reopen church buildings. Then the virus re-surged, and we had to rethink. We don't know how long the present rhythms of life will last for any of us. We can't read the future. We can't be certain about anything. And that's probably the hardest thing of all of us.

Many times it has been said in recent months - "where is God in all of this?" And the answer has been offered many times too - God is right here in the midst of it all, involved in all of our limited lives, in touch with our every thought, and surrounding us in love, now as was always the case. God is in no way dependent on our buildings, and we've learned not to be as well. But God does require our worship, our love and our involvement in His purposes for this world.

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been those who have isolated themselves in communities, and have dedicated their lives to prayer and self-discipline, with the purpose of living close to God. We call them monks and nuns. We call their life style monastic. Their lives were conducted under a rule, which gave them a pattern, a rhythm, for each day, including regular worship and prayer and Bible reading, as well as some kind of work, times of silence for contemplation, and of course time to sleep. Some such communities lived largely in silence, while others allowed for a greater freedom. And many still exist around this world of course. All of this is very far from our own normal lives. Are you aware that in the midst of the Methodist church there is an order of ministry which includes following a proscribed pattern of life, and that is the order of Deacons. I don't propose to delve into the rule of life to which a deacon is ordained, but I simply want to alert you to the fact that it exists. Deacons in no way isolate themselves from the world - in fact completely the opposite - they immerse themselves in it and they seek to serve the world in which they live for



God's purposes. But they do commit themselves to certain disciplines which give rhythm and shape to their lives.

But what about the rest of us in the Methodist church, or in any church for that matter? What is the rhythm that we are called to adhere to? Where can we find a pattern in living, and a rhythm to our lives, especially now when all normal rhythms are out of the window?

Perhaps as Methodists, we should look to John Wesley. What rhythms did he value in his 18th century life? Wesley committed himself to regular prayer and Bible study from an early age, and encouraged others to follow his lead. He also believed in regular fasting, and in attending services of holy communion each week. And he also gave a great deal of attention to working for the poor and for justice in the world of his day. Wesley died more than 200 years ago and life is very different now. And life is even more different for us during a time of Covid. So what rhythm could we adopt for our lives that may help us to grow closer to God and to sense the guidance that God is offering to us?

Over the last couple of years some work has been done to create something that has been called 'A Methodist Way Of Life'. And if you hadn't already had it, you will at some point receive a card, which has the details of A Methodist Way Of Life on it. I'll talk some more in a moment about that, but first a Bible reading and then a song.

Bible Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 1 - 10

This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to show you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace.

We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance[c] that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece - throughout both Macedonia and Achaia. And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned

Salford Methodist Circuit



away from idols to serve the living and true God. And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven - Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from fear.

A few phrases from that reading ring out for me. I thank God for the people who are His Church here in Salford, for your faith and endurance in the midst of suffering, and for your commitment to live out your faith and service for his message here, and even now while times are, at the very least, challenging.

So let's sing a song which is a kind of prayer, inviting God to inspire us in the way we live for His purposes.

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...*

I know that many of you will be aware of what is known in the Methodist Church as "Our Calling", which states this:

"The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through: worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism."

I think I want to say at the beginning of this talk that I don't believe that these things are in any way uniquely Methodist, or that being a Methodist is any way

Salford Methodist Circuit



different from being a Christian. Every brand or denomination of church has its own distinct way of being Christian, which has evolved from its historical origins. But all of us share in faith in God through Christ. Each denomination does things in a particular way, with a particular emphasis. And we as Christians find our home within the church setting that makes sense for us. That's just the way it is.

So A Methodist Way of Life is just one of many interpretations out there of what it means to live as a Christian in today's world. And because it's Methodist, it is presented in a kind of ordered way that's been our hallmark right through history. It also chooses to take the four headings of "Our Calling" that I mentioned earlier and offers them as a four-legged stool, remind us that none is more important than any of the others. And that we are all called to do all of them.

So I want to go through those four headings - the four legs of the stool, the four prongs of A Methodist Way Of Life, and see what they have to help us to live and grow in God, as Christians and as part of the huge family of God's church.

Let's just look at what kind of things are being suggested. There are three things under each of the four headings.

The first heading is Worship, and I'll just focus on that for a moment. It says:

We will pray daily.

We will worship with others regularly.

We will look and listen for God in Scripture, and the world.

Prayer is a very personal thing. We do it in the ways that suit our personality. And that's fine. Whether you have a particular time and place for praying, or you just chat to God on and off all day long; whether you like to pray prayers that others have written or make it up as you go; whether you pray out loud or silently - it all counts!

Worshipping regularly with others is something of a challenge at present, but it is part of our regular rhythm of life. We're doing it now actually, this moment, in a virtual way. It's not perfect but it definitely counts.

Looking for and listening to God in Scripture and the world; I love thinking about that as part of our worship. It encourages us to be alert to God as we live our daily lives. Whatever we are doing there is the possibility that we may sense God's presence, or notice evidence of God at work, and that in itself is exciting!

The thing about A Methodist Way of Life is that it is not just a list of things to do, though it is to some extent just that. It also encourages to share our experiences of living it out with other people. It suggests that you find someone - another person or a couple of people - and that you chat to them regularly about how it's all going for you. So on the back of the card there are some

Salford Methodist Circuit



questions which take the points from each section and invite you to share how you feel it's going for you. So under worship the questions are:

What is the pattern of your prayer life?

How easy or hard do you find it to pray?

What has spoken to you recently in worship or in the Bible?

When, lately, have you felt close to God or distant from God?

You could, of course, think about those things alone. But I would encourage you to find someone to think about them with. You might need to do it by telephone or in some other way at the moment, during this strange time of pandemic, but it is still possible. And maybe when this is over we'll find more conventional ways of meeting and sharing, and giving an account of how it's all going for each of us, but this is not something to leave until we can do that in an unknown future time. It can be done now.

So let's think about the second heading: Learning and caring.

We will care for ourselves and those around us.

We will learn more about our faith.

We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Caring for ourselves and others. Some of us find one or other of those things easier to do - caring for ourselves, or caring for others. But both are important. We are called to care. "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" is the phrase from the Gospels. We hear that neighbour bit - we know we need to care about the needs of others. But we mustn't forget about the other half - love your neighbour as you love yourself - don't forget to care about your own needs as well.

Learning more about our faith. There are dozens of different ways that we can do that, now and at any other time. And there is always, for all of us, more to learn. But we can't expect to receive that on a plate - it may need us to make a bit of an extra effort ourselves, especially at present.

Practising hospitality is frustratingly a real challenge at present, but generosity can be shown in all kinds of ways. Because need is all around us. And the smallest act of kindness can make an enormous difference to others - more than we can realise.

And the questions:

How have you practised generosity since we last met?

How have you shown hospitality to others recently?

How are you caring for yourself?

How and what are you learning now?

Salford Methodist Circuit



They are not difficult, and not beyond any of us to answer.
Though they are certainly worth thinking about, and chatting about.

The third heading is service:

We will help people in our communities and beyond.

We will care for creation and all God's gifts.

We will challenge injustice.

Some of us feel very drawn to the service aspect of our faith, while I know that others find it more difficult. But it is not an optional extra - it's important. Especially at this time of great need, with the challenges of global warming and climate change, of pandemic and suffering, and of great injustices in the lives of many people around this world, across our nation, and indeed in the heart of our own communities. There are many things we can do to make a difference.

So the questions ask:

How are you seeking to serve others in your communities and beyond?

What has helped or hindered you in your service of others?

How are you caring for God's creation?

How are you using God's gifts (including your financial resources)?

What issues of injustice are you currently concerned about?

What are you doing in response?

Those are big questions, big challenges. Important matters to really get our teeth into as God's church - as God's people. I believe that this time of pandemic has focused many people's minds on these kinds of issues. So what can we do to serve God and to make a difference? These are matters for each of us to decide and answer, both now and in the future.

And the fourth heading is evangelism:

We will speak of the love of God.

We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus.

We will share our faith with others.

Right since the beginning of Our Calling, evangelism has been the most scary of the four headings. How many times have I heard people say, "my faith is personal to me and is private"? It may feel like that, but if you think of the church of 40 or 50 years ago, and the church of now, the evidence is all around us. We have forgotten the importance of sharing faith, and of passing on our beliefs and the foundations of our lives to others. With a result that church congregations are shrinking, ageing and disappearing altogether. And that's not a feature that is by any means unique to the Methodist church. It is not our Christian faith that is out of date or irrelevant - far from it! It is our attitudes to

Salford Methodist Circuit



sharing that faith that need to change, if we are not to shrink and disappear altogether.

So with that thought in mind, the questions ask:

When was the last time you were able to talk about God?

What opportunities to share your faith have there been since we last met?

How have you responded to opportunities to share your faith?

Is there anyone you might invite to consider Christian faith?

These are perhaps the most challenging part of Our Calling and of the Methodist Way Of Life for us, but they are far from being optional extras. If our faith is real and significant and important to us, there is no way that the right course of action is to keep it to ourselves.

But we've got out of the habit of sharing it in recent years. We've been contented to just be with others who think like us, and enjoy the fellowship of one another's company. But if we are to avoid disappearing down the plughole of history we need to change. I'm not suggesting that you should go and stand on street corners and proclaim your faith. I'm not suggesting that you need to go knocking on doors and demand the attention of others in this matter. What I am suggesting is that you practise the art of sharing your faith and what it means to you with another person - a friend or two - on a regular basis. And support one another in the process. I'm asking you to increase your comfort in verbalising what you believe. And I am very clear, that if our faith is real for us, if we can grow in our confidence in speaking of it to a friend, then it will become part of our way of thinking and speaking which will touch the lives of others who live without faith. It may even be enough to spark their own faith journey into life. It will require us to step out of our comfort zones on this, if we are to see a living church moving forwards after this pandemic is over. I cannot emphasise enough that this is an imperative and not an option.

A Methodist Way Of Life. You may or may not be a Methodist. You may or may not even be a Christian. You know who you are and what you believe. And God certainly knows who you are! Are you willing to give this rhythm of life a go and to be accountable to at least one other person in the way that you are doing it?

Your cards, as I said, will be with you soon, if you haven't already yet received them. You can, of course, find all the information on the Methodist website: www.methodist.org.uk where you just need to search "A Methodist Way of Life". I offer this rhythm of life to you now. I hope and pray that it may inspire you to adopt a conscious faith rhythm in your life, or to deepen the one you already have. I am certain that God longs to engage more fully with each one of us, and that any effort we make in that relationship can only be a positive experience for each of us. I can only make this as a suggestion. The rest is up to you.

Salford Methodist Circuit



And I pray the prayer at the bottom of the card:

**May we be a blessing within and beyond God's Church,
for the transformation of the world.**

Prayers

Loving God, our father, our Saviour, our friend. You call us, the people of your church, to dance to your rhythm in this world, If we are to dance, we need to listen for your heart beat - your pulse of love, and your voice setting us on the right path. We need to discern the shape of the dance in which you are calling us to share. We need to practice to steps we need to take in order to dance as close to your desire for us as possible. And then we need to have the courage to step out, with you, in this dance for your purposes in this world.

Help us to find rhythm in our worship and in our praying. And help us to remember that prayer is not solo dance that we do **for** you. It's a dance we do together with you. A dance for two. Show us how to connect with you in the world in which we live - to catch a glimpse or two of what you are doing each day, and to join in with your dance. May we dance in praise and worship with one another and with you, for your kingdom on this earth.

May we sense the pulse of your love flowing through this world, and may we join in that beat for the people around us. May the love that we experience that comes from you, be reflected in the way we live our lives, and in all our dealings with others. Give us a desire to learn more of you too. Not to just fall in with your basic rhythm, but to deepen our knowledge and understanding of you. and begin to discern not just the melody but the harmony and texture - the sheer perfection of who you are and what you mean for this world.

May you lead us in the dance for justice, freedom, and hope for all in this world. May we learn from you how to discern the voices who cry out for a better world, a better system, a fairer share all that this world offers, a brighter future. And may we dance alongside them, and alongside you, to bring about the changes we believe are at the heart of your desire for your world. May we learn to dance on injustice and help bring change.

You have loved us from the beginning, and throughout our lives. And you have promised that your love will never leave us, in all eternity. That love changes our perspective on everything - absolutely everything. May we take steps towards building our confidence in telling others and showing others who you are. May our partnership with you never be selfish, but open as a way for others to come to experience your love for themselves. May our dance with you be for the building of your kingdom in this world.

Loving God, our Father, our Saviour, our friend.

Salford Methodist Circuit



Receive all that we can and want to give to you. Help us to receive all that you want to give us. Fill our lives with your love, your peace, your vision and your hope, and leads us forwards in your dance for the life of this world. Amen

Our final hymn takes ancient words from around the 6th century, offered as a prayer for vision, wisdom, strength and hope as we live our lives as Christians in this world.

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;
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, what ever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.*

Blessing

Heavenly One,
you are beyond all knowledge and yet known to us.
You are outside of our experience and yet deep within us.
We commit ourselves anew to following your will
and to work towards your purposes that all the world might be transformed
for the benefit of all creation.
Fill us with hope, we pray, in Jesus' name.
And may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit
be with us all, this day, every day and always.
Amen.

Salford Methodist Circuit



Joyfully Sing - Clare Stainsby
Words: © 2000, Clare Stainsby

Teach Me To Dance - Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson
Words and Music: © 1993, Graham Kendrick / Make Way Music Ltd, PO Box 320. Tunbridge Wells, Kent. TN2 9DE UK.
www.grahamkendrick.co.uk

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

Boléro - Maurice Ravel