

# Salford Methodist Circuit



**The Word at work - 1st November 2020**

**Ruth Dawson**

Welcome to worship, let us gather together in prayer

We are gathered here today around Word and word.  
God, your Word lives: it breathes, it encourages, it pleads.  
It urges us towards love and greater love.  
As we listen to your Word today,  
may we hear the words in our hearts  
that call us towards love of other, self and stranger.  
Your Word is an invitation towards an ever greater hospitality.  
And so, we stand, supported in the living Word that always welcomes.  
**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...*

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In preparing for our time together today, I have been thinking about how we do things. So, some questions:

When you put your socks or shoes on, which foot do you do first?

What about catching a ball – are you left or right hand?

When you eat a meal are you a eat-the-best-first or leave-it-to-the-last type of person?

Now, without causing any domestics – when you eat scones, is it jam or cream first?

Finally: when you have a list of jobs to do, which do you do first – the ones you like, or the ones you don't?

So many ways to get things done. I suppose that's because we are all different. Does it matter how you do something as long as it gets done? Isn't that to be expected if we are all different, all unique individuals?

We are going to hear two readings today, first from Matthew 23, verses 1 to 12 where Jesus challenges the false living of some of the scribes and pharisees.

Then we will hear from 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 9 to 13, where the writers recall working alongside the Thessalonians as they shared the gospel with them. The apostles' deed matched their words, and now the divine word is at work in this group, whose own lives will be worthy of God

## **Reading: Matthew 23 : 1 - 12**

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and his disciples,*

*The teachers of the religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses.*

*So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.*

*Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels. And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honour in the synagogues. They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.'*

*Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father', for only God in heaven is your Father. And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

## **Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2 : 9 - 13**

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*Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day, we toiled to earn a living so that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. You yourselves are our witnesses – and so is God – that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers.*

*And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy.*

*For He called you to share His Kingdom and Glory.*

*Therefore, we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn't think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God – which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work in you who believe.*

Thanks be to God for his word.

## **Hymn: Brother, Sister, let me serve you**

*Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.*

*We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.*

*I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.*

*I will weep when you are weeping;  
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
till we've seen this journey through.*

*When we sing to God in heaven  
we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.*

*Brother, sister, let me serve you,*

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*let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.*

Jesus continually offended the Jewish leaders, and those who followed them. In the passages previous to the scripture we heard today from Matthew, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had tried to trip Jesus up with questions of Jewish law. It is following the final of these questions that Jesus turns to the crowd and his disciples and we hear the passage as read. Jesus challenges the false living of the scribes and Pharisees. The Jewish leaders have been charged with delivering the sacred teachings of Moses and Jesus tells the crowd to practice and obey the law, but not to follow the ways of the Pharisees. His scathing criticism is of the leaders' failure to match their deeds to their words, accusing them of the promotion of self and exploitation of others, which was so often the theme of their own condemnation of the rulers of Israel.

Our second reading was taken from 1 Thessalonians. This is the oldest book in the New Testament, written less than 20 years after the crucifixion, and more than a decade before the first Gospel. It is seen as a practical document written by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to a community they had recently established. It addresses the Thessalonians' concern that although Timothy had been back to see them, Paul had not yet returned to Thessalonica. This was despite their continuing suffering and the death of some of them before 'the day of the Lord' and the coming of Christ for which they were waiting.

The letter is to be read aloud as the Thessalonians 'encourage one another and build up each other'. Indeed, the writers themselves find much encouragement in their own 'distress and persecution' from 'the good news of your faith and love'.

Previously Paul and his companions had supported themselves in Thessalonica, working blamelessly alongside those with whom they share the good news. Their deeds were consistent with their words. Now the Thessalonians were leading lives worthy of God, whose Word is at work in them.

Remarkably, in speaking to this particular situation, this earliest Christian document outlines the shape of the faith that we still recognise.

Jesus is scathing of leaders who do not practise what they preach, and whose indifference to justice makes a mockery of their piety. Like Jesus, Paul matches his deeds to his words, urging and encouraging the Thessalonians to do likewise. There is value in reflecting on how we can urge and encourage each other on our journeys of faith, reflecting on our uniqueness and the different strengths we each bring.

We may be gently encouraged when first we step on this journey, and urged to maintain our journey when we stray or find the path difficult.

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At the beginning of our worship today I asked several questions, possibly a little tongue in cheek. However, we do follow our own paths, and live out our faith in different ways. There is a uniqueness in each of us, quirks and foibles that possibly only apply to ourselves. This is the way in which we have been made, designed from the moment, or even before, we took our first breath. If you've ever tried to get a motion carried in any church council, you'll be fully aware of the many differences of opinion that need to be unpicked before any decision is made.

In recent months we have lived a very different life than those previously. You may have been shielding, or looking after people who are. You may have been protecting those you love by doorstep conversations where previously you would have had a chat over a brew in a cosy sitting room. You may have been working from home, a new and different way of working for many thousands of people across the globe. You may, like me, have been one of the privileged few who have been able to go out to work without much break to our routine, well except, that is, for the long queues for supermarkets in the beginning, not being able to meet with friends for coffee - possibly something a little stronger! - and not being able to worship in our usual ways.

We have all found ways, new ways, of being. We may have been encouraging others to worship virtually, adopt or learn new ways to communicate - the dreaded Zoom, Teams, for the virtually minded; FaceTiming or WhatsApp for the smart phone types, or simply adapting to conversing through panes of glass. As time has moved on, we have been urging each other to hold fast, to maintain Hands, Face and Space in the protection of us all. Some of us have been encouraging then urging the opening of some of our worship buildings, our church buildings that have laid closed since March. Much has been done to enable this, much is still needed to be done. Still we encourage and urge in possibly equal doses. For those who are involved this is not an easy task. Almost as I am certain the debate of jam or cream first for your scones will rage on throughout the rest of the day, the debates on how and when to open church buildings has also raged.

Earlier this week, I attended - well participated in a tweet hangout session where the theme of the evening was Trust. There were three speakers who discussed their feelings on what Trust was, why it is important, what destroys it and how we can possibly rebuild it. One of the speakers was a French Rabbi, who has been in Britain for the past ten years. His theme of self-trust both shocked and moved me. He talked about a trust that God will provide for us, but also about a sense of self trust. That we should adopt a sense of trusting in our own skills, values and faith. When we develop that sense of self trust we find peace. A concept I found interesting, and am still musing.

Jesus emphasised the importance of humility and mutual support. There is a contrast between the way in which Jesus depicts the scribes and Pharisees and



the way in which Paul, Silvanus and Timothy describe themselves. There have been many exaltations of key workers during our current pandemic. Huge murals depicting healthcare workers in uniform. Fully deserved. Yet for every uniformed healthcare worker there are several people working in support. For every surgeon that puts knife to skin there's a multitude of cleaners, porters, admin clerks, caterers, people ordering stores and equipment, the list could go on, and on. That is not to say that those in the front line don't deserve the accolades they receive; they absolutely do and so much more - it is that there is a whole team of mutual support that enables the work they do. We need to be aware of the talents we have and use them in the ways God has designed, and be humble enough to know we cannot each do what we do without the mutual support and encouragement of those around us.

We need to encourage and urge each other, so that our words match our deeds.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

As we come to our prayers of intercession, please respond with the words in bold  
– **God, be with them.**

Let us be together in prayer  
Eternal, ever living, ever present God,  
In the struggles and joys of this day, we pray:  
For those who are overburdened, weighed down, demoralised, fearful or  
desolate because of what life has thrown at them...

**God, be with them**

For those engulfed in pain and anguish, facing illness and death  
Those bereaved and mourning, left without love...

**God, be with them**

For those troubled in mind and spirit  
Who can find no peace or calm...

**God, be with them**

For those alone or lonely,  
without friends or comfort...

**God, be with them**

For those frightened and bewildered  
Who see no direction or purpose in their lives...

**God, be with them**

Eternal, ever living God,  
Bless them all in this every hour,  
In this and every step of life's journey



## Amen

Our final Hymn today is a hymn on my car list, and often reminds me that I need to follow the Lord's path, to follow the rhythm of life, remembering the joy that life is, rejoicing in the uniqueness that makes me simply me – the two lines that have jumped out at me preparing for today: "Teach me to love with your heart of compassion, Teach me to Trust in the word of your promise."

## 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 to the beat of your heart...*

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 to the beat of your heart...*

## Closing Prayer

Loving Lord:

Jesus of strong words, you were not afraid  
Calling people you knew to deeper integrity,  
Challenging our ways of seeing ourselves and others.  
Give us courage to live well in all the small choices of our day,  
To hear your voice calling us to the deepest integrity of ourselves,  
And the deepest practice of goodness with those we love. Amen

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From Heaven You Came - Graham Kendrick

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Teach Me To Dance - Graham Kendrick and Steve Thompson

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