

Sunday 4th October 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

You may like to be still, light a candle, listen to a calming piece of music as we gather in worship.

Holy God, as we come to worship you, help us to remember, that though apart, we belong to your church, your people, your world, we are not alone. The Psalmist writes of the heavens declaring the glory of God. As we worship today may we, like the heavens, declare your glory, be assured of your love, experience your grace and be restored in our hope. Draw us together by your Spirit as we worship. Amen.

(Prayer based on the words of Psalm 19)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim these words...

Hymn: Oh the life of the world (StF 114)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jy4t01ZWQFc>

Oh the life of the world is a joy and a treasure,
unfolding in beauty the green-growing tree,
the changing of seasons in mountain and valley,
the stars and the bright restless sea.

Oh the life of the world is a fountain of goodness, overflowing in labour and passion and pain, in the sound of the city and the silence of wisdom, in the birth of a child once again.

Oh the life of the world is the source of our healing. It rises in laughter and wells up in song; it springs from the care of the poor and the broken and refreshes where justice is strong.

So give thanks for the life and give love to the maker,
and rejoice in the gift of the bright risen Son,
and walk in the peace and the power of the Spirit till the days of our living are done.

Kathy Galloway (*b.1952*)

Let us pray together

Eternal God and Father, you are the source of all life, the fount of all wisdom, the well-spring of all grace. Your days are without end, your loving mercies without number. We depend on you: and we remember your goodness to us and to those who have gone before us.

We tell your story in every generation:
God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
God of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel,
God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
God of a pilgrim people, your Church.

You are our God, ahead of us, leading us, guiding us and calling us;
you are the Lord God,
the all-wise, the all-compassionate.
To you we lift up our hearts and we worship you, one God for ever and ever.
Amen.

(Methodist Worship Book, *Second Service*, p.40)

Today's Reading from the New Testament Philippians 3:4b-14

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

Time to Reflect

When I first saw the Gospel Reading set for today I have to admit I was a little perturbed. I wondered how to even begin to share anything on this parable. Yet I was inspired by seeing Jesus again in conversation.

In all his encounters with those who oppose him, disagree with him, and seek to ridicule him, Jesus shows grace and a willingness to engage in conversation. Jesus doesn't just dismiss the views of others, he listens, he challenges and he responds, sometimes forcefully. He doesn't collude with what he knows to be unjust. I wonder how we respond when faced with those who profoundly disagree with us? Do we listen well?

The religious leaders rail against Jesus because he consistently fails to conform to the expectations they have of him. He eats with the wrong people. He speaks in stories and riddles. He won't answer their questions directly. He challenges their authority. Yet Jesus is unwilling to give up the dialogue with them, to give up sharing the good news, engaging in conversation and seeking to include all. Is this how we live as followers of Christ? Even giving a hearing to those who oppose us?

In his 'explanation' of the parable, Jesus speaks of producing the fruits of the kingdom (v.43). What do you think of as the fruits of God's kingdom? If we want to see what the fruits of the kingdom are we have the example of Jesus before us. Love, mercy, forgiveness, justice, generosity, compassion, presence, wisdom, truth, healing, reconciliation, joy, thanksgiving, peace, lament, obedience, humility. Perhaps as we hear again the parable of the wicked tenants, we can long and pray to be those who live the kingdom values of Jesus in the vineyards of our lives.

Take a time to sit quietly. You may wish to listen to a piece of quiet music or simply be still.

A time of prayer

Holy God, we come to you today with our prayers:

We pray for our world...

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for the Church...

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for all those striving for justice...

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for those suffering with COVID-19 and its effects...

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We pray for those we know and love who need our prayers...

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

We offer all our prayers in and through the name of our living Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling (StF 503)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw5ZCZeS32M>

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.*

*Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.*

*Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,*

*till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!*
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

A prayer of blessing

‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’ Amen

(Philippians 4:4-7)

Original Materials by Rev Miriam Moul

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Bible Readings

Philippians 3:4b-14

⁴even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 21:33-46

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

33 'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' ⁴¹They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes"?

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. ⁴⁴The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.