

The Address given by the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Michaela A Youngson, the President of the Methodist Conference 2018-2019

Radical Grace

I would like to begin by thanking many people – friends who have traveled a long way – you are too many to name, but you all matter to me a great deal. We have been part of each other's stories and for that I am grateful to you and thankful to God for bringing us together.

I'm grateful to people from my previous circuits in Lancashire and in Ealing, as well as those from across the London District for travelling to be here and be part of this special occasion. I want to particularly thank the London District for this preaching scarf, and also for doing without me for a while. I'm convinced that you will manage brilliantly and I know that the office will be a little quieter – though knowing Nigel and Jongi – it won't be too quiet.

I would like to say 'thank you' to Bala who has been a friend for some years but has since last summer been a particular friend and companion as we have traveled together a journey of wonder, delight and occasional panic!

I am grateful to those who have worked so hard to organise the Conference – it takes many people a great deal of work, most of which is unseen. I want to particularly thank the Revd David Campton for his work in directing the video material that will form part of this address. I'd also like to thank Geoffrey Baines, the artist who has created the postcards that you were given as you came into the hall. If you are someone who likes doodling or finds it hard to sit still during speeches, you might want to colour the cards in. You may also want to write on the back of the cards what grace and hope mean to you. Perhaps you will keep the card or give it to someone else in Conference, or take it home and give it away to a friend – it's up to you – like grace, they are a gift freely given!

I must thank my family – My Mum, Christine, who traces her lineage through a number of committed Methodists both Wesleyan and Primitive. My sister and I were baptized in the local continuing Primitive Methodist chapel which Mum attended twice on a Sunday. She also attended the Salvation Army meeting – I think she was just covering all her bases! I know Mum that you exercise your own very special ministry of speaking to groups, working at the food bank and making endless cups of tea – I'm proud of you and grateful for your example of self-giving discipleship.

Stephanie and Glen, my brother and sister, thank you and your families for all your love, patience and for the endless teasing, which shows no sign of abating!

Thank you so much to my children Tamsin and Robert, and Rob's fiancé Jen – for support, patience and care; and for keeping my feet on the ground. And of course, to my husband, Sandy, for your love, your understanding, your ability to keep me on an even keel and for helping me to remember what I'm doing next (that's going to come in very handy this year!).

There is someone I'd like to thank who is not here today. Her name is Louise and, when I was 11 years old, she invited me to the local playing fields because a group from Cliff College were going to be there to sing songs and play games. I had no idea who Cliff College were but I was sure that if Louise said it was a good idea then it must be.

So – I went along and each day I learnt a memory verse from the Bible and got a stamp in my little card. At the end of the week, because I had a full card, I was given a present. Louise said I could go with her to Sunday school if I wanted and, thinking I might get more presents, I went along every week.

I did get a gift – not the sort I was expecting – what I received at Brough Methodist Church was unconditional love. The fact that my sister and I came from the council estate at the scruffy end of the village made no difference at all – we were made to feel welcome and that our contribution to the life of the church and, particularly, the youth club, was valued and important.

During my teenage years, a place of such acceptance and love was important – things at home could be tricky at times and at school I demonstrated no great academic prowess and absolutely no sporting capabilities. I often felt left out and excluded, eventually I used this as a strength, being the only girl in the school to take technical drawing and computer studies, and I tried hard not to care that I was not a member of any of the in-crowds. It didn't matter because I had a place where I did belong, and that was the church.

Through the love and acceptance of my youth leaders and the gentle nurturing of the Revd John Goodhall I found a vibrant faith in God and knew myself to be loved and cared for. The Methodist Association of Youth Club's encouragement to live on a large map led me to many challenges and opportunities.

I attended the MAYC London Weekend on a number of occasions, the first time appearing in the Show as a triangular tomato, genetically modified to go with cheese triangles! Another time I was pulled around the arena in a Roman chariot! I think the most important of those visits, was when I was sixteen years old; a woman stepped onto the stage of the Royal Albert Hall, she was wearing a clerical collar and she preached about God's love. I'd never seen a woman minister before seeing the Revd Nicola Jones that day and in that moment I knew exactly what it was that God was calling me to be.

Going back for a minute to school life – as I said, I had no sporting prowess and so I have a clear memory of what it felt like always to be the last person chosen for team games. I remember waiting by the wall in a sports hall, similar to this one! - wondering who might take pity on me, knowing that they did not want me on their team and believing I had nothing to offer. That memory reminds me of a story that Jesus told...

Reader (David):

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew, beginning to read at the first verse...

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers...

Interruption – Breaking News

Reporter: Good evening, I am reporting this evening on an emerging story about unfair employment practices in the agricultural sector. And I am joined this evening by Matthew Levison local shop-steward with the United Vineyards Union. Mr Levison what seems to be the problem here today?

Matthew: Well Sophie I am just astounded at the way that the labour force has been treated here today... This is an example of an employer, a local landowner, thinking he can ride roughshod over our members... Taking them and their goodwill for granted... Trample our workers underfoot like his grapes being turned into his cheap plonk...

Reporter: There's no need for that Mr. Levison... Could you tell us what happened exactly?

Matthew: Well first thing this morning the vineyard owner took on some casual labourers to bring in the harvest. The job situation around here is so bad at the moment that the lads were desperate for work so they grabbed the jobs at the first opportunity.

Reporter: Was there a problem with the rate of pay?

Matthew: On no... it seemed reasonable at first...

Reporter: Seemed reasonable? What was the problem?

Matthew: Well as the morning went on it became clear that he hadn't taken on enough staff... And you know what harvest is like, you need to get the goods in before they are past their best or before the rains come... But it was clear he just didn't have enough men on the ground for the job in hand... So he took more on 3 hours later, then 3 hours after that he needed more, and 3 hours after that he took on still more... No workforce planning at all!

Reporter: Sounds poor...

Matthew: Poor doesn't even do it justice... Even an hour before knocking off time he was still taking on more staff... Ridiculous...

Reporter: And then?

Matthew: And then when it came to paying up at the end of the day you'll never believe what he did?

Reporter: Please go on...

Matthew: He only went and paid all the staff the same...

Reporter: The same hourly rate...

Matthew: No. The same in total. I can tell you Sophie that the staff who had worked all day were furious... There they were working all day in the blazing sun and they didn't get a penny more than those who only started work an hour before knocking off time.

Reporter: There doesn't seem to be much justice there...

Matthew: Justice! This guy doesn't know the meaning of the word!

Reporter: We approached the landowner for a comment and he said that he had already agreed a fair rate with the workers... and he paid what he promised.

Matthew: It doesn't matter what he promised, he also said to those who he took on later that he would pay them what was right... Well what's right about paying someone who worked all day the same as someone who worked only an hour or two... I'll tell you it's not right... It's not fair... And we won't stand for it...

Reporter: And so there you have it... Injustice in the vineyard. This is Sophie Wisdom reporting for MCGB News, Galilee.

Reader: ... Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

For me this is a troubling parable, at first sight, it doesn't make a lot of sense and suggests that the Kingdom of heaven is an unfair place.

As a twin, I developed an early and abiding instinct for injustice and can identify unfairness at a hundred paces! When you are half of a pair who are essentially the same, any hint that one might be receiving preferential treatment cuts to the quick. Being a twin has also left me with an intense dislike of mistaken identity plot lines in films – but that's another story...

How might we understand the story of the Workers in the Vineyard if we move our focus from the issues of fair wages and instead ask the question, "who got chosen first and why?"

If I were the landowner with a bumper crop and a tight schedule, who would I employ to work in my fields? I would be looking for the strong and the healthy;

those I've hired before that have done a good job. I would want those who came with good reputations and good references. After all, I have a precious crop to harvest and protect – no slackers need apply.

But who gets chosen later in the day? Is it the widow, the stranger, the orphan and the refugee? Is it the disabled person, the person from another country, another faith, another political view?

And who gets chosen last? Who are the least likely, the unpromising, the dejected and rejected that no one else has employed all day?

I want to introduce you to Francis and Sahal, these video clips are based on their stories but have been anonymised and are acted by Methodist friends from Belfast.

VIDEO: Francis' story

When I grew up it wasn't what you knew that mattered, but who you knew... That's how you got a job in my home town... but I was from the wrong side... Kicked with the wrong foot... So there was no way I was getting a decent job there... So I left home and crossed the water... Where it didn't matter what foot you kicked with... unless you were Geordie Best... we were all Irish in those days and although it wasn't no blacks, no dogs, no Irish any more (not necessarily in that order) we still weren't always welcomed with open arms... particularly when some of our countrymen had decided to plant a bomb or shoot a soldier... So you kept your mouth shut and just took work where you could find it... when you could find it... until the sort of work I was qualified for dried up... Or there were others starting to come over here from elsewhere willing to work longer hours for even less... And while things were picking up back home with the ceasefires and the Celtic Tiger in the south, it was only the young cubs who were roaring... There was nothing for someone like me with no qualifications... No qualifications... No hope...

VIDEO: Sahal's story

I was a doctor at home. Both my husband and I were doctors. So we could pay to get out. I was pregnant at the time. And we were frightened what would happen to our child. But when we got here we could barely get medical care for my child to be born. She was born at home. If you could call it a home. A flat in a run down high rise where all of us refugees were placed. I had to go to hospital afterwards because I had lost so much blood...

And my first thought was that I might have been better off back home. The place was a mess and the staff were so busy. Some were lovely, but others were dismissive... When I was talking later with one member of staff cleaning the floor she said it was the fault of me and my sort... I told her that I was actually a doctor but I don't think she believed me... But then the authorities don't believe me either... my qualifications weren't able to be verified... especially as we didn't have all the paperwork with us... And because we didn't come through the official channels, the authorities here weren't inclined to help us much. Eventually we want to go home, but while we are here we want to help others... We want to use our skills in hospitals... But at the moment I can't even get a job as a cleaner in a hospital... They won't let me work at all...

Both Francis and Sahal have so much to offer, yet the systems around them have prevented them from enjoying the fullness of life.

The world looks kindly on the young and strong, the ones who fit in, people like 'us'. Our economic system elevates self-sufficiency as a totem against which all who fall short or make other choices are condemned. Divisions of status, class, culture, gender and sexuality become sub-categories – the implicit in a phrase such as the 'deserving poor' is an assumption that the rest of the poor are undeserving – constantly drawing attention away from the corrupt systems that create poverty in the first place.

The story that Jesus told suggests that the kingdom of God has a different value system. Why would the landowner pay everyone the full daily wage? Let's hear John's story.

VIDEO: John

I didn't ask for any of this... I have had to work hard for everything I have ever had up until this... My parents gave me nothing, except life... From I was aged 4 I was on the streets... earning money for all sorts of jobs... cleaning yards, sorting rubbish, scavenging on tips... and stealing... for myself and for gang-leaders... But I was one of the lucky ones... I didn't have HIV and I got out... I learned to read and write at a local free school... and as soon as I was able I made my way north. Begged borrowed and stole my way through Africa, across Europe and eventually made my way here clinging to the back axle of a truck. People I met got me papers, and got me a job... No more thieving... I've been here 20 years now. And I have made a life for myself, I have a wife and daughter, and a good job... Until I took ill suddenly two years ago... I ended up in hospital breathless with a terrible pain in my chest... I say my parents gave me nothing... But that is not quite true... It turns out they gave me a heart that didn't work properly... And it looked as if my luck had run out. But someone else, someone I never knew gave me a new heart, a good heart... There were all sorts of questions asked about who I was and where I was from... The doctors and the nurses and the other officials knew that my papers weren't right... that my story didn't add up... But in the end, when the news came through that there was a heart available for transplant, everything else was forgotten... for then... There are still questions I have to answer... but at least I am still able to... Out of the pain of someone else's loss, I got a new chance at life...

This is where I begin to see the story of the workers in the vineyard as being something other than a matter of fairness, because I believe it is about God's economy of grace – in which all are entitled to life. God longs for us to have life in all its fullness. Acts of outrageous generosity that respond to the humanity in another person are the marks of God's extravagant love.

The landowner in the parable recognised the value of each person, not in terms of yield or hours worked, but in terms of their value as a human being. It's worth

remembering that a daily wage at the time of Jesus was not extravagant, it was essentially a living wage – just enough.

It was enough to feed the worker for one day. For the landowner to pay less than a day's wage was to condemn people to death. God's kingdom is not a realm of death and condemnation, it is a place of justice and joy; a place where those considered least in the world's economy find themselves seated in the place of honour. It is a place where those that the world holds in high esteem take the place of a servant and joyfully wait on their neighbours.

Those who had worked all day had not been promised a bonus – they were offered life and received all that they needed for that day.

In God's economy of grace there is no need to build up barns of excess, no profits left over to loan at interest to others. God's economy of grace offers enough for today – like manna in the wilderness. If the landowner is God then God's providence is sufficient.

I wonder what our church would look like if we had faith in God's sufficiency - if we were to let go of the security we find in our buildings, in our reserves, in our particular way of doing things?

And what would our world look like if we adopted a way of living in partnership with our planet that meant no individual, nation or corporation used more of the earth's resources than was sufficient for each person to live a wholesome, healthy life?

The story Jesus told is about far more than a fair distribution and appropriate stewardship of wealth – it is about grace.

Two years ago, my daughter, Tamsin, and I walked a 200 mile stretch of the Camino de Santiago. The full route stretches for 500 miles from southern France across northern Spain to the ancient pilgrim city of Santiago de Compostella.

As we walked each day, beginning before dawn and resting when it became too hot to continue, I found myself increasingly in awe of those who had walked the full distance. I did not feel as entitled to be called a 'pilgrim' as those who had begun their journey back in the Pyrenees.

As we went further, another feeling began to emerge – I found myself feeling somewhat superior to those who were walking just the last 100 kilometres – which is the minimum distance to earn one’s certificate of pilgrimage. I began to judge them, especially those who were being fetched by coach each day from comfortable hotels and carrying only a light daypack – as opposed to my pack, with everything I needed for three weeks on my back. Why should they get their Compostella? Surely I deserved it more?

I began to get a new perspective on the parable of the workers in the vineyard. I realised that I was losing sight of the truth of pilgrimage. It is my journey with God that counts, not miles walked, and certainly not a matter of my judging anyone else’s worthiness or lack of it.

In fact, such judgement is the opposite of grace.

God’s grace is radical. It goes beyond what is only fair, to a prodigious reckless generosity. It is prevenient grace, which flows from the Lover’s desire to see the beloved flourish, to be whole and to live in delight.

That is all good news! Grace is a wonderfully holy word – that seems to cost God everything and cost me nothing. I can comfort myself with a poetic and cheap understanding of grace that makes my life comfortable and leaves me feeling I have no work to do. But I want to suggest that grace is not so convenient after all!

I want to revisit my feelings when I first read the parable of the workers in the vineyard – to revisit the sense of unfairness. Perhaps it’s my natural inclination towards the trades union movement and my distrust and disapproval of the ‘bosses’ mistreating their workers that makes me feel so uncomfortable.

The unfairness though, is not really to do with how much anyone got paid – the unfairness is rooted in a system that leaves people behind, that values them less, that assumes because of some element of their humanity – be it age, colour, gender, ability, sexuality, reputation and so on, that they have less to contribute.

The unfairness is in a system that relegates whole sections of humanity to the scrap heap and leaves them to die in distress. A system that values some lives more than others leads inevitably to the horrors of the Grenfell Tower.

The unfairness is made real in a person being stopped from receiving benefits to which they are entitled because a hospital appointment caused them to miss a time slot at the benefits office.

The unfairness is in a person who has lived in the UK for decades deported on a technicality to a country that is not their home. I have yet to visit a church in the London District where a member is not themselves, or a member of their family, affected by what we now call the 'Windrush Scandal'.

The unfairness is in an asylum seeker having no recourse to public assistance and no right to work.

How might we live as a church and as followers of Jesus with a true ethic of radical grace?

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God's radical grace is inconvenient! My experience on the Camino is an example - I had to learn that what really matters is each person's relationship with God - which may be deepened by the pilgrimage experience, but is not dependent on walking a single step. The more my feet hurt the more I struggled to get past the idea that this was not about earning righteousness!

God's radical grace is never about earning righteousness. It is about an activity of God's inclusive love. The inconvenient thing about grace is that if we take it seriously it requires a response.

It is wonderful to know, when reflecting on the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard that God loves me just as much as the people I hold in high regard - those who have shown the kind of courage, wisdom or practical love for humanity that I can only imagine, and never achieve. It's good to know that God loves me as much as God loves Nelson Mandela, the Pope or Margaret, my late, truly saintly, mother in law.

It is much less comfortable to know that God loves people I despise, people who frighten me, and people who have acted in appalling ways, just as much as God loves me. I find that much more difficult to handle - how do I work out an ethic for grace-filled living that allows me to relate to Donald Trump or to the fascists, misogynists and homophobes who make the life of so many people a living hell?

It is relatively easy to work out how to be a church that responds to the needs of the most vulnerable in society. We run our night-shelters, we open our food banks, we train as Street pastors and we raise huge quantities of money for all kinds of causes. We also from time to time challenge the structures that mean those agencies are needed in the first place.

It is less straightforward to work out how to live alongside people we disapprove of, people who challenge our notions of humanity, people who do not share our ethical or faith framework.

You may say, 'There is no one I disapprove of; no one I'm not prepared to deal with.' – you may be right – if I'm honest I'm not sure I can say that – there are perpetrators of harm that I would find it very difficult to look in the eye, let alone love. There are those who wield great power in the world who seem to speak a language so alien to me that I would not know where to begin to have an honest conversation.

I know this is a journey and a challenge and I could choose to let God deal with this in some time of endings and gatherings and judgement. However, God has called me to live in the world, at this time, and God has called the Methodist Church to live in the world at this time – so I believe we have to work out what that means in the light of God's radical and inconvenient grace.

One of the resources that can help us to work out our response to God's grace, is the 1999 Conference report on the nature of the Church, Called to Love and Praise - a rich treasure trove that can help us engage with questions of how to be a church saturated in grace.

The report asks a number of questions including:

- *In what kind of society do human beings best flourish?*
- *How may a person find true fulfilment and happiness?*
- *Why should, and how can, justice be established on earth?*

In the conclusion to the report are words that begin to answer those questions:

“At the heart of this Gospel is the revelation that God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, embraces the world, each member of the human race, and every living creature, with a love which not only creates, but re-creates and heals in the face of humankind's tragic, self-centred fragmentation.”

God's upside down economy of grace goes way beyond how the world measures value and acceptability. How would we live our lives and what would the church be like, if we truly reflected that grace for ourselves and for all of creation?

We sometimes sing 'all are welcome' but our body language as a church would suggest that this is aspirational rather than realised. We often send messages that are less than inviting. Sometimes it's about our buildings, too often inaccessible with doors closed for most of the week; shabby and drab - peeling paint, hard to heat and inefficient to run.

Sometimes it's in the signs on our doors and gates that are all about rules - what you can't do, where you can't park, where to bring buggies and not to bring buggies.

There are Churches that display no contact details, let alone details of services (which is more than just what time they are on - how can people know what to expect if they walk through the doors?).

Now, if you really want to get me worked up, get me to spend a few minutes looking at church and circuit websites! The front pages with no address, no contact details, no times of services - written in language for those who already come to church - aimed at the insider, the member of the club.

But a welcome that reflects God's radical grace requires bigger questions than matters of window dressing.

What might a welcome truly based on God's radical grace look like? What would an engagement with the world beyond our buildings look like?

It might look like Adavu. A Birmingham District project, working with survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery. For me this work is at the heart of the Gospel. It is careful and sensitive work, signposting individuals and agencies to where they might report suspected incidences of trafficking and slavery; and supporting vulnerable people who have suffered at the hands of cruel criminals. The word Adavu is the name for the basic steps in a form of classical Indian dance. Dance is an expression of freedom and beauty. Adavu aims to work in collaboration with other local and national agencies, together supporting women and men who have experienced trafficking and exploitation, in taking the small steps to begin to transform their lives.

And how might we demonstrate God's grace through a mission focused hospitality that is as willing to receive from others as it is to try to 'fix' them?

That hospitality might look like The Holy Biscuit - based in a church in Sheildfield, an area of deprivation in Newcastle. The church has been transformed into a space where art, theology and community come together. It's an inviting and participative space, offering transformational hospitality. The team at the Holy Biscuit recognise the God-given potential for art to change minds and attitudes.

What kind of ecumenical hospitality are we called to offer, if we take seriously that God loves 'the other' as much as God loves those who pray and worship in the same way as we do? In the complex maps of our ecumenical structures it is the quality of local relationships that best demonstrates the nature of God's love and expresses our joint responsibility to respond to the great commission.

Those of us with strategic decisions to make about how churches relate to each other, mostly need to recognise the benefits of 'getting out of the way'! That is to break down and remove those barriers which in any way prevent God's love being offered to a world in need of healing and prayer. We live in a new age of ecumenism and the possibility of new partnerships in mission are attractive and attention needs to be paid to them. And alongside that we do need to continue to pay attention to effective ways of working well with our historical ecumenical partners, not least our covenant partner, the Church of England and with partner churches around the world.

And how might a reconnection with the inclusive nature of God's radical grace, change the way we relate to people of other faiths?

From time to time, I have preached at a Methodist Church in North London where, at the end of the service, as people gathered for coffee, a Sikh woman would walk into the sanctuary, kneel at the communion rail and pray. I asked one of the stewards about this and she said that for some reason the woman was not able to pray at the local Ghurdwara but recognised the church as a holy place, so would come and pray there. Surely such hospitality was an expression of God's grace?

Two years ago, I was privileged to attend the Senior Faith Leadership Programme run by Cambridge University. I'm delighted that alumni and faculty from the programme are here in Conference today. The course involved spending time with senior faith leaders from the three Abrahamic faiths – learning together about

leadership. In learning about a common theme together, we were able to get past doctrinal and cultural differences, to those things that we have in common.

One of the techniques for interfaith engagement that I learnt was that of 'Scriptural Reasoning' - it is a simple and effective way of sharing scriptures across the three faiths. A common theme is explored using texts from each other's holy books and this leads us to not only learning about other's scriptures but also allows us to see our own texts through the eyes of other people of faith. Those in Conference on Tuesday will share in an experience of scriptural reasoning, when we explore this as one expression of the inclusive nature of God's radical grace.

Another of the ways that we as a church demonstrate God's radical inclusive grace is in the work we continue to do to safeguard those who are vulnerable and to carefully and appropriately include those who do harm to others.

This is one of the places where God's radical grace is at its most challenging – what does it mean to love those who bully, harass and harm others? And how as a church do we put robust processes in place to see that justice is done and that appropriate support is offered to victims and survivors?

How might a fuller understanding of God's radical grace change the way we relate to creation itself?

The most urgent of issues facing the world are rooted in the unsustainable and corrupt use of the planet's resources and its creatures. As a Conference we adopted the report 'Hope in God's Future' in 2011, committing ourselves to reduce our carbon footprint as a Connexion, as churches and as individuals.

In January I visited the United Church of Papua New Guinea and heard of the way that land is not owned by individuals but held in common by communities. This attitude to land use is common in that part of the Pacific – there the perspective is that we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.

In Papua New Guinea, I saw firsthand, the effect of rising sea levels on communities of the Pacific, who have had to move whole villages, as the shoreline has receded. We are running out of time to respond in a way that will protect the world's most vulnerable people. Once again it is the poor that will bear the brunt of the actions and inactions of the wealthy.

Grace, like love, is not a passive thing – it is active.

God's grace is made manifest in the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not demonstrated through some fatalistic, theoretical, hands-off approach to restoring our relationship with God. It is a positive, deliberate act of self-emptying, hands-on, mucky, magnificent love.

If we are to understand ourselves as recipients and beneficiaries of grace, then our response can be no less active and deliberate – how as a church can we reflect the reality of God's self-emptying love?

For a start, we can tear down the signs and barriers that send people away...
Physically in our buildings
Personally, and in the body language of the church itself.

And, to borrow a phrase from Mr Wesley, we can 'become more vile'!
We need to let go of our tendency to 'niceness' and, prompted by just how uncomfortable God's grace is, make a nuisance of ourselves again in the market place and in the public square, refusing to remain silent in the face of systems that reinforce injustice, and oppress vulnerable people.

We can take risks ...
We can take risks with our resources, trusting in God's sufficiency.
We can take risks in finding new ways to tell the story of Jesus that connect with people today.
We can take the risk of engaging with our neighbours who have learned of God through stories other than our own.

A mindset of risk-taking is also a mindset of hope – we do not take risks in the expectation that all will go wrong but in the hope that God can transform our meagre efforts into a splendid work of grace.

Borrowing again from *Called to Love and Praise*

We conclude with hope - For nothing of the Church's life, worship and mission can be properly understood, unless it is seen in the light of the final fulfilment of God's purposes."

God's radical grace leads us to hope. And it is in hope that we can risk spending ourselves, not to prop up the church. God forbid that we might see any of our endeavours as being for the salvation of the Methodist Church! No, through grace, we take the risk of joining in God's longing for a restored creation in which all have

a part to play and all can live life in its fullness. Let us spend ourselves in helping God build a world where the weak and vulnerable, the broken and disturbed, are the first to be invited to the party; where those regarded as the least have a seat of honour at the table, and where all share in a feast made possible through God's radical and generous grace.

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