

Sunday 17th May 2020

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Warm greetings to you as we share together in worship via post and Internet for the eighth week. Peter Powers has asked me to write this week's letter (normal service will be resumed next week!). In a week when the Government has started to ease the lockdown many will be wondering when we can resume worship in our churches. Their new guidelines suggest July at the earliest. However, we will be taking a cautious approach and will be in no rush. We expect to adopt a phased approach. A tricky area is singing, a key and defining aspect of Methodist worship. Unfortunately singing is a particularly effective way of spreading the virus. Solutions will no doubt be found in due course, but for now it remains an obstacle.

Ministers on the move

The other important piece of news relates to our minister, Revd. Barbara Greenwood, who looks after Warwick, Whitnash and Wellesbourne. Her appointment ends in the summer of next year, 2021. After careful consideration Barbara has decided not to seek an extension and will 'sit down', the Methodist term for retirement. At the appropriate time we will of course thank Barbara for all she has brought to the circuit, and the 3Ws in particular, but she will be with us for another year so it's not time to say goodbye just yet!

This does mean that we will now start the process of finding a new minister, focusing on the 3Ws. This will not be easy, given the shortage of minister nationally. However, we will put our best foot forward. The process is quite a long one and we will not know the result until later this year, or even next.

Of course, we haven't yet finished this year's moves. We are still hopeful Peter Power's move to Oxford and Iain Ballard's move to Kenilworth can proceed as planned but there is still some uncertainty. Both have young families, so please keep Peter & Deborah, Iain & Sarah, and their children in your prayers.

Dial – a – Prayer

The Methodist Church has launched a new telephone service. If you would like to hear a prayers or current Methodist Church national news there are two freephone numbers, shown below,

Listen to a prayer: 0808 281 2514

Listen to news: 0808 281 2478

Chaplaincy at MHA Charnwood

An opportunity for a part time chaplain at MHA Charnwood in Coventry has arisen. If you are interested please see further details at <http://www.mha.org.uk/careers> or the sheet attached with this letter. If you know of someone who may be interested, please let them know. **Closing date is 7th June.**

Sunday Worship

Although we are not able to worship in the traditional manner, a whole variety of new possibilities have sprung up. Many in the circuit are among the 500 or so across the Birmingham District and beyond, enjoying the live streamed worship offered by the District via FaceBook at 10.30 on Sunday mornings. Note, you don't need to have an account: <https://www.facebook.com/Birminghammethodistdistrict/>

In addition, you are invited to join the recorded Circuit services online on YouTube. You can view this at any time from 9am on Sunday 17th by clicking on the link below. As usual, a printout is also included with this letter: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9E0b5XWCv-SB0co6kiL5AylbMJ77Q_MN

We would love to know how you are getting on with these online worship offerings. Has logging on been straightforward? What aspects do you like? What could be improved? What other online worship are you enjoying? If you have a moment please email or phone Kate at the Circuit Resource Centre (see below). Please also contact Kate if you know of someone else who would like to receive this letter, or if you wish to stop doing so.

TV & radio opportunities for worship:

Radio 4, Sunday Worship, Sunday 8:10am,
 Radio 4 Long Wave, Daily Service, 9.45am Mon-Fri,
 Radio 3, Choral Evensong, Sunday 3pm.
 BBC 1, Sunday Worship, Sunday 10.45am,
 BBC 1, Songs of Praise, Sunday 1:15pm

Contact Details		
Rev Barbara Greenwood	01926 740846	barbara.greenwood@methodist.org.uk ,
Rev. Audrey Simpson	01789 267971	revaes@gmail.com ,
Rev. Jeongsook Kim	07741 461060	revjeongsook@gmail.com ,
Chris Flood	07772 292033	chrisflood_erniescheu@hotmail.com
Rev. Jemima Strain	07969 345389	jemima.strain@methodist.org.uk
Rev. Sam McBratney	07706 586860	s.mcbratney@methodist.org.uk ,
Rev. Richard Wilde	07971 218356	revrichardwilde@gmail.com
Rev. Peter Powers	07941 328155	revpeter.mwc@gmail.com
Circuit Resource Office – Kate Tennyson	07578 640013	swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

A reminder that if you are in pastoral need of any kind please contact your own Minister direct by email or phone. We may also be able to arrange practical help with shopping and so on. Our details are below.
If in any doubt, please contact Rev. Peter Powers and he will link you up with help locally to you.

Trevor Pethick,
 Circuit Steward.

Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying. With every blessing to you and yours.

The Ministers and Stewards of the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit of Churches

Worship for 6th Sunday of Easter (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to this time of worship. We gather around God's word again and give thanks for the sense of fellowship that remains for us despite being unable to meet in our churches. Our thanks to all those taking part and helping to make our worship during lock down possible. If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with me on revpeter.mwc@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

This morning we are asked to remember our partnership in the Gospel with Christians in the Church of North India and the Church of South India. After independence several Protestant denominations including Anglicans and Methodists joined together to be more effective in mission and evangelism and more able to speak prophetically. However, unlike this country they are a minority faith at times and in places persecuted sometimes subtly others directly; but they continue to name the name of Jesus transforming society incrementally - spiritually and socially. In this country today we are linked with the Lincolnshire District.

We begin with a prayer written in the 13th century by Gertrude of Helfta:

**“O Lord most powerful grant us your strength.
O love so sweet let us taste your goodness.
O love most faithful let us rejoice in your presence.
O love most victorious persevere with us to the last;
for Jesu's sake. Amen”**

StF 503 - Love divine all loves excelling

**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!**

Prayer of Adoration / Confession / Absolution:

Let us pray

We thank you Lord for the experience we share with all Christians of the touch of your Love. In our own generation we see and feel the signs of Your love among us – acts of care and support, the warmth we feel when we worship even when we do so remotely as in this service. We rejoice in our link with the generations before us – the outstanding contributions of inspirational women and men - Florence Nightingale in her bicentenary year; the driven ministry of John

Wesley and inspired poetry and hymns of Charles, the prayer and depth of Suzannah; We think of the love of the first followers of Jesus who gave up so much yet gained so much more. We give thanks for their faithfulness during the rapid learning curve between the resurrection and the ascension we will celebrate this week.

While we draw inspiration from those first followers and the observation of how they loved each other we identify with their failing too. Lord we are grateful that you reinstated Peter with a threefold affirmation of Love that later he would write with gratitude of his certainty that "Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you (that is us) to God".

Lord we still have work to do creating space in our heart for your divine love; work to do to grow in that Love within us doing acts of compassion in your name; glad that you continue to work in us restoring us through life long recreation.

If we have fallen into despair, **Lord, Forgive us.**
If we have failed to hope in you, **Lord, Forgive us.**

If we have been fearful of death, **Lord, Forgive us.**

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ **Lord, Forgive us.**

If we have frustrated your love through disobedience. **Lord, Forgive us.**

May the living God raise us from despair; give us victory over sin, set us free in Christ and renew us in love. Amen

StF 306 – Now the green blade rises

**Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;**

Love lives again, that with the dead has lain:

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

**In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***

**Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***

**When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
*Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.***

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Epistle *1 Corinthians 15:1-20*

The Resurrection of Christ

¹Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.²By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Sermon

If Christ has not been raised ,..... your faith is useless. 1 Cor 15.14

My wife and I enjoy travelling – or we used to until the lock-down. I guess the writer Jules Verne did so too to judge by his books. One of the best known is Around the world in 80 days.

This story is about Phileas Fogg who makes a bet that he can go round the Victorian world in 80 days.

After all sorts of adventures he is on the last lap on a ship sailing from America to Britain, but the weather and wind turn against him. Normally at that time the ships would have used both engine and sail to save fuel. Now going into the wind, the captain is able to use only the engine and Mr Fogg insists that it be kept going flat out to arrive on time. Therefore the coal runs out. Will the bet be lost?

Mr Fogg immediately buys the whole boat, except the iron hull and engine. He orders the crew to run the steam engine on the wood from which the boat is made. The first day they burn the cabin fittings and contents, the next the masts and spars, then the superstructure, the day after that the rails and then they start on the wooden deck. Just as the last of the deck is being burnt they arrive in Cork, Ireland. Mr Fogg was determined to arrive on time and was clear what was essential to enable this. Only the hull and the engine were crucial. Everything else could be burnt.

The apostle Paul was a determined traveller. He was on a trip to Damascus when Jesus met him. He was keen on one occasion to press on with a voyage back to Jerusalem – though without steam – so he could be there for a Pentecost deadline. He dared not stop at Ephesus in case he got delayed by friends. They had to see him briefly at a nearby port.

And he wrote to the Christians in Rome saying that he could not stay long with them because he had to travel on to Spain. It was important that he completed his journeys – even in one case via a shipwreck on Malta.

Paul and the character Phileas Fogg both got down to essentials. What was crucial to enable them to reach their goals? All Mr Fogg wanted

was to preserve the hull and engine of the boat so it could keep steaming. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians saying what was crucial for him and them on their journey of life and faith. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith".

Here is the heart of the matter. What is crucial for our Christian faith? Without what does our faith become useless? The answer lies in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The authorities in Jerusalem knew this only too well. They put a guard on the tomb to stop the body disappearing following what Jesus had foretold of his rising again. Then, when that plan went pear shaped, they bribed the guards to spread another story. But that too failed and after Pentecost thousands of people believed the testimony of the disciples. Jesus was alive.

So, the question remains vital for our Christian journey.

We can debate in what form we worship. Quietly or excitedly. Speech or music. Eyes closed or looking at visual aids. They matter not if Christ is not risen.

We can discuss when and where we worship. At set times or spontaneously. In a church or on a mountain top or at home via the internet. It is of no consequence if Christ is not alive.

We can argue over exactly what Christ's words in our Bible mean. How have they been remembered and translated. The really important thing is that Christ is risen.

People today are still tackling this basic issue of Christianity. What if there were some other explanation? But it is no easier to deny than to accept.

The possibilities of the disciples being deluded or mistaken are countered by the evidence provided by Paul about those who saw Jesus after his death.

The claim that Jesus' body was taken away looks unarguable. The authorities must have looked exhaustively so that they could demonstrate that the disciples were wrong but to no avail. And we know from the real world that hiding a dead body is extremely hard now, never mind in a close-knit, ancient society.

The gradual development of a story over time as direct memories fade does not hold up. The very earliest writings are absolutely clear about what happened. This is quite contrary to the way stories usually grow.

Finally consider the witness of the 'saints' throughout the ages.

So like Paul, we hang on to what really matters. Christ was raised from the dead.

Now, Christmas time is wonderful, enchanting and joyous for all ages. But for me the time in the Christian year that speaks of what the church is about is Easter. That's where we are now - in this year's Easter period.

Now, we see new life arising where there was death. We hear joy where there was grieving. We experience light where there was darkness.

Yet there is more. Because Jesus was raised to life, we too can be assured that in him we ourselves are promised eternal life.

The present pandemic has caused us to think more about the meaning of life and what lies ahead. People who have felt strong, have been brought low. The tide of the virus seems to sweep with its own power and our science is shown to be struggling to understand. Even so we can see new life beginning to emerge, just as the deadly gloom seemed unending.

The raising of Jesus assures us that death is not the end. Our faith is not in vain.

This assurance is the iron hull around us in the stormy seas. This assurance is the engine to give

us power against the angry wind. This assurance will take us to the haven of peace and without it the rest of our ship is useless.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

StF 628 – Faithful One

**Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.**

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Loving God, we thank you again today for the fellowship we share in our churches. For all it offers, all it means and all the ways it enriches our loves and enlarges our experience.

Thank you, God.

We thank You for the unity we have discovered in Christ, for the love that binds us together.

Thank You, God.

We thank You for the experiences we have shared over the years, for the bond they have created between us.

Thank You, God.

We thank You for the care we are able to show to one another in these unique times, and in turn for the care we have received.

Thank You, God.

We thank You for the opportunities we have to discuss and learn our faith, and the way our understanding of You has grown as a result.

Thank You, God.

We thank You for the way we can talk together openly and honestly, and know that our friendship will not only continue but flourish.

Thank You, God.

Loving God, we do not claim to be a perfect household, for we are all too conscious of our weaknesses as individuals and as a gathering.

We praise You that You have called us to be one people, being in Christ and being in fellowship with one another, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

StF 350 – I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship

**I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
or why as Shepherd, he should seek the
wanderers,
to bring them back, they know not how or
when.**

**But this I know, that he was born of Mary
when Bethlem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived in Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is
come.**

**I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is
here.**

**I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know all flesh shall see his glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in
splendour,**

when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will
answer:
'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is
King!'

Prayers of intercession

Lord of all, we pray for all who search for peace
in their lives.....

Those burdened with anxiety about themselves
or others facing difficulties or troubles to which
they can see no solutions.

God of peace, **reach out and bring stillness.**

We pray for those wrestling with inner fears and
phobias, torn apart by emotional and
psychological strains. Who may feel there is no
one to listen or provide support.

God of peace, **reach out and bring stillness.**

We pray for those living amongst change and
upheaval, especially those in the midst of conflict
or illness.

God of peace, **reach out and bring stillness.**

To all who are in chaos and turmoil, all who are
troubled, grant your calm, your tranquility, your
quietness and your peace which passes all
understanding.

God of peace, **reach out and bring stillness.**

In the name of Christ.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say together the 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 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

The Offering & prayer

God of grace and love, we set aside some of all
that you have given us as a gift for your work in
the churches and the world. Help us to see that
we give not of our own but of that which you
give to us, for we cannot earn your love, help us
to share it freely.

For Jesus sake.

Amen.

THE DISMISSAL

StF 476 – One more step along the world I go

**One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you:**

*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.*

**Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me:**

*and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.*

**As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go**

you'll be telling me the way, I know:
and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:
and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you:
and it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Prayer & blessing

As members of the Body of the risen Christ, we
say the grace to bless each other:
**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, ever more. Amen**