26th July 2020

The Methodist Church

South Warwickshire Circuit

Registered charity no. 1154830

An article in the weekend newspaper a couple of weeks ago introduced me to a phone app which enables you to receive phone calls from complete strangers. You might think that sounds like a nightmare – but read on! The premise is that if you love books, for example, the system matches you up with someone else who loves books. You know that at a certain time in the week your phone will ring, and you will be connected to someone who will happily chat about books. If it's not a convenient time, you just don't answer, and the person you would have spoken to speaks to someone else instead. It is completely anonymous, so if you don't like your conversation partner, you can simply hang up and they will never be able to trace you.

This app has been in existence for a year, but as the pandemic developed, its creators added a new feature: a daily call at a random time of day, with no particular theme. The idea was twofold; to relieve the isolation of people were unable to leave their homes; and to replace some of the random meetings with people which can only happen when you go out.

Today's paper included a report about the impact of lockdown on mental health – how many of those who had pre-existing issues have got worse, and many had developed a problem for the first time. Alongside this was an article saying that only 12% of people want life to go "back to normal", exactly as it was before. The rest have found at least one thing they want to keep. They have learned a new skill, or got to know their neighbours, or noticed nature, or appreciated the cleaner air. This is what times of crisis do. They put huge pressure on us, but they also release resourcefulness and creativity and pave the way for new thinking.

As we wait to see how things develop in our area, let us remember that the ultimate source of all life and creativity is God himself. What good things have you found during the pandemic? What do you hope to keep?

Reminder: Dial – a – Prayer, Methodist Church

Listen to a prayer: 0808 281 2514 Listen to news: 0808 281 2478

Sunday Worship and Daily Prayers

There are plenty of opportunities to join in worship if you have the internet. We are encouraging everyone to link up with the live stream worship being offered by the Birmingham District via FaceBook on Sunday mornings at:
https://www.facebook.com/Birminghammethodistdistrict/live

In addition, we will be offering services online on the Circuit's own FaceBook page or via YouTube:
https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=142865293925553&id=110929903785759
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9E0b5XWCv-SB0co6kiL5AyIbMJ77Q_MN

A full text of this service is also available at this FaceBook link and is being sent by post to all those people who do not use the Internet so they can join in too. These two worship opportunities will be available and sent to you every Sunday. We will be offering worship in a similar way each Sunday as the health crisis continues.

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
(The times of the TV services can alter, please check the times)

Daily prayers at 10am are led by members of the circuit via zoom https://us02web.zoom.us/j/328494818 Please contact Michael Sharman on 07818 118979 if you'd like help getting in.

Circuit Resource Centre, Wellesbourne Methodist Church, Bridge Street, Wellesbourne, CV35 9LR
www.methodist-swc.org.uk **m:07578 640013** e: **swc.katetennyson@gmail.com**

Pastoral Support

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. Audrey Simpson and she will link you up with help locally to you.

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,

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

26th July 2020

The Methodist Church
South Warwickshire Circuit

Worship for 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Whether you are local to South Warwickshire or come from another part of the world, whether you are a regular worshipper or just trying it out, whether you have been a follower of Christ for decades or are not really sure what you believe you are welcome to worship.
The service has been prepared and led by a number of people:
Kate Tennyson and Tim Pearson have carried the administrative and technical work;
Candy Evans and Nigel Saxton are the readers
David Greenwood has chosen the hymns
Barbara Greenwood is the preacher
Richard Wilde and Audrey Simpson, that's me, will lead the prayers
If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Come, bring your mustard seed of hope,
bring your yeast of expectation,
your treasure of thanksgiving.
Bring the pearls that are your prayers,
bring the net of your lives.
Come, one and all to worship God.

Hymn: StF 82 – O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder

1. **O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder**
   consider all the worlds thy hand has made,
   I see the starts, I hear the mighty thunder,
   thy power throughout the universe displayed:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!

2. **When through the woods, and forest glades I wander**
   and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
   when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
   and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!

3. **And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,**
   sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
   that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
   he bled and died to take away my sin:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!

4. **When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation**
   and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart;
   then shall I bow in humble adoration,
   and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!

Prayer of approach

Lord our God,
nothing can separate us from your love,
not things in our past, nor things to come.

There is nowhere we can go to flee from you,
nor can anyone come between us,
for your love is with us in life,
Your love is with us through death.
Amen.

Prayer of Adoration

We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for the richness of the parables
that root our faith in the ordinary
and yet transform it.
Increase in us a sense of wonder,
that we might see signs of your kingdom
wherever we are,
and bless us with the words to tell new stories
of your love and grace to all we meet.
We pray in your name.
Amen.

Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins.

Silence

Loving God,
We have sinned against you
in what we have thought, said and done.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong.
Forgive us for the sake of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Silence

Declaration of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
This is his gracious word:
'Your sins are forgiven.'
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 254 – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

1. **Seek ye first the kingdom of God,**
   and his righteousness,
   and all these things shall be added unto you;
   Allelu-, Alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!

2. **Ask, and it shall be given unto you;**
   seek and ye shall find;
   knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;
   Allelu-, Alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!

3. **We shall not live by bread alone,**
   but by every word
   that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
   Allelu-, Alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading 1 Kings 3:5-12
(New Revised Standard Version - NRSV)

5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a
dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should
give you."
6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and
steadfast love to your servant my father David,
because he walked before you in faithfulness, in
righteousness, and in uprightness of heart
toward you; and you have kept for him this great
and steadfast love, and have given him a son to
sit on his throne today. 7 And now, O Lord my
God, you have made your servant king in place of
my father David, although I am only a little child;
I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And
your servant is in the midst of the people whom
you have chosen, a great people, so numerous
they cannot be numbered or counted. 9 Give your
servant therefore an understanding mind to
govern your people, able to discern between

good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked
this. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked
this, and have not asked for yourself long life or
riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have
asked for yourself understanding to discern what
is right, 12 I now do according to your word.
Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no
one like you has been before you and no one like
you shall arise after you.

Psalm Psalm 119:129-136
(New International Version - UK - NIVUK)

129 Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.
130 The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
131 I open my mouth and pant,
longing for your commands.
132 Turn to me and have mercy on me,
as you always do to those who love your
name.
133 Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.
134 Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may obey your precepts.
135 Make your face shine on your servant
and teach me your decrees.
136 Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed.

Epistle Romans 8:26-39
(New Living Translation)

26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.
For example, we don't know what God wants us
to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with
groanings that cannot be expressed in words.
27 And the Father who knows all hearts knows
what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for
us believers in harmony with God's own will.
28 And we know that God causes everything to
work together for the good of those who love
God and are called according to his purpose for
them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and
he chose them to become like his Son, so that his
Son would be the firstborn among many
brothers and sisters. 30 And having chosen them,
he called them to come to him. And having called
them, he gave them right standing with himself.
And having given them right standing, he gave
them his glory.

Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love

31 What shall we say about such wonderful things
as these? If God is for us, who can ever be
against us? 32 Since he did not spare even his own
Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give
us everything else? 33 Who dares accuse us whom
God has chosen for his own? No one—for God
himself has given us right standing with himself.
34 Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ
Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and
he is sitting in the place of honour at God's right
hand, pleading for us.
35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's
love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we
have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or
hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened
with death? 36 (As the Scriptures say, "For your
sake we are killed every day; we are being
slaughtered like sheep.") 37 No, despite all these
things, overwhelming victory is ours through
Christ, who loved us.
38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever
separate us from God's love. Neither death nor
life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears
for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not
even the powers of hell can separate us from
God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the
earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will
ever be able to separate us from the love of God
that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52
(New Living Translation)

Parable of the Mustard Seed

31Here is another illustration Jesus used: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. **32**It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches."

Parable of the Yeast

33Jesus also used this illustration: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough."

Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

44"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

45"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. **46**When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Parable of the Fishing Net

47"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. **48**When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. **49**That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, **50**throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **51**Do you understand all these things?"
"Yes," they said, "we do."
52Then he added, "Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old."

Sermon

When I was a teenager I remember being entranced by a cartoon which was published in the newspaper my parents took. It was entitled *Love Is…* and each installment depicted a cute cartoon girl and boy illustrating one possible way of completing that sentence: Love is bringing her a bunch of flowers, just because; Love is rubbing his feet when they're aching; Love is cooking the meal she likes best, even when you don't.

There are many, many ways of ending that sentence, because there are many, many ways of experiencing love. And I would say the same approach would work if we swap the word Love for Life. Life is beautiful; Life is difficult; Life is not all a bed of roses; Life is what happens while you're making other plans; Life is a sexually transmitted disease which is invariably fatal; Life is a journey, a puzzle, an enigma, a gift.

Human beings have always wrestled with, and argued about, the right way to live. A lot of the angst we feel about it has to do with social expectations – they way we are accustomed to people behaving, and the pressure we put on one another when someone doesn't fit in. But social mores change over time and place. Six months ago, if I had met someone for the first time in a formal setting I would have put out my hand to shake theirs, and I would have been a bit miffed if they declined. In early March, we had three new people turn up to Bread Church at Warwick, each of whom put out their hand to shake mine when I approached them, and I declined – I do hope they weren't offended. Now – I just can't imagine shaking anyone's hand, for a very long time.

One of the ways in which we cope with the complexity of life and relationships is by making rules. We've certainly had a lot of those in the past few months – we've struggled to adapt, to

keep up when they change, and to know what to think when other people seemed to be either ignoring them, or taking them to the nth degree. The trouble with rules is that they cannot cover every single situation or occurrence. Hence they need to be interpreted.

When God offered Solomon, who had just been made King, anything he wanted – offered to grant him one wish, if you like – he asked for wisdom. Wisdom to know how to interpret and apply the law; wisdom to decide between competing priorities, to discern the best way forward for all of the people he was called to rule over. In so doing, he implicitly acknowledged that he would often face situations when he wouldn't know what to do for the best. I'm sure we've all felt like that at times, not least during this pandemic. When the way ahead is unclear or confusing, our readings this week offer us encouragement and hope.

Our Gospel reading ends with Jesus saying that every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. What is he talking about? Well, scribes were scholars of the law. They had read and studied and pondered how to understand and apply the Hebrew Scriptures, what we tend to call the Old Testament, for years and years. That's the old treasure. But the Kingdom of Heaven – the intimate, personal knowledge of God, the relationship with our creator which Jesus speaks of, is the new treasure. It is like the wisdom which Solomon asked for and received – but it's so much more. It is the ability to read the times; to understand the way that things are changing and moving, and react accordingly.

I don't know about you, but I feel that that would be a wonderful ability to have, and I'm also aware that I have plenty of room to grow in that regard. So, in these rapidly moving and confusing times, where do we turn? Here are two thoughts for you take away and ponder for yourself.

The first comes from the parables in our Gospel readings. The mustard seed and the yeast show us the potentially enormous power of small things. The habit of reflection or prayer – taking even a minute or two to pause at regular intervals, to allow our mind to still, can be incredibly powerful. In those few moments, we may find an insight which unlocks the problem we've been wrestling with; we may find new feelings of compassion towards the person who's been annoying us, enabling us to engage with them in a more graceful way. Small things make a big difference – a word of welcome or encouragement, a smile to the stranger we pass on our walk, a phone call or a text or a card to tell someone we are thinking of them, can have far-reaching effects. Each act on its own may seem insignificant; but if we make them our daily habit, they can add up to a great deal.

The second comes from our reading from Romans. Do you sometimes feel that you don't know what to pray for – or how to pray? Do you ever wonder if God is listening, if there is any point in praying at all? You are not alone in that. But the promise of Romans is that God's Holy Spirit helps us when we don't know how to pray. God is praying for us and in us, even if our own words and actions feel inadequate. In truth, our words and actions will always be imperfect. But they are still precious to God, because we are precious to God. Our trying, our desiring to please God, pleases God. We try and we fail, or we fail to try – but that won't stop God loving us. Nothing will stop God loving us. Nothing can cut us off from God's love, even when it doesn't feel that way.

Remember the power of small things. A word of prayer here, a kind action there, a moment's stillness to invite the Spirit to speak. These are

the small things of our daily lives which add up to one big thing – building the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now. Remember the love of God, which is always with us, whether we are aware of it or not. God's love is amazing, unconditional, all-embracing, never ending. God's love is yours, and it's mine, for ever.

Hymn: StF 255 – The kingdom of God

1. **The kingdom of God**
   is justice and joy,
   for Jesus restores
   what sin would destroy;
   God's power and glory
   in Jesus we know,
   and here and hereafter
   the kingdom shall grow.

2. **The kingdom of God**
   is mercy and grace,
   the prisoners are freed,
   the sinners find place,
   the outcast are welcomed
   God's banquet to share,
   and hope is awakened
   in place of despair.

3. **The kingdom of God**
   is challenge and choice,
   believe the good news,
   repent and rejoice!
   His love for us sinners
   brought Christ to his cross,
   our crisis of judgement
   for gain or for loss.

4. **God's kingdom is come,**
   the gift and the goal,
   in Jesus begun,
   in heaven made whole;
   the heirs of the kingdom
   shall answer his call,
   and all things cry glory
   to God all in all!

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

We offer prayers of thanks to God:

We pause and think back through what we have read, seen or heard today. We think of the outstanding women and men of faith down the generations. King Solomon of whom we heard today whose birth in controversial circumstance perhaps nurtured humility and his quest for wise discernment. Queen Deborah who, years later, would give good and Godly leadership with compassion for her nation informed by her faith, Mary whose response made possible the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way in which He modelled wholesome and holy living.

Then think of those down the centuries to our own time who have stood out from the crowd exercising wisdom and compassionate leadership.

Then thank God for those who would never stand out – indeed would shrink at the very idea, who have been role models, mentors and guides for us in our life's journey.

For all these good and Godly people we give thanks.

And now the prayer for day 26 in the Handbook penned by Teresa of Avila

All creation blesses you, O Lord,. Exiles offer you worship. Pilgrims hallow your name. Saints adore you. Humanity offers its praise. And we your servants lift our hearts and voices to you in joy and thanksgiving.
Amen

Hymn: StF 654 – The love of God comes close

1. **The love of God comes close**
   where stands an open door
   to let the stranger in,
   to mingle rich and poor.

The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

2. **The peace of God comes close**
   to those caught in the storm,
   foregoing lives of ease
   to ease the lives forlorn.

The peace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

3. **The joy pf God comes close**
   where faith encounters fears,
   where heights and depths of life
   are found through smiles and tears.

The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

4. **The grace of God comes close**
   to those whose grace is spent,
   when hearts are tired or sore
   and hope is bruised and bent.

The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

5. **The Son of God comes close**
   where people praise his name,
   where bread and wine are blest
   and shared as when he came.

The Son of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.

Prayers of intercession

We bring the needs of others and ourselves to God. Let us pray:

Father God, we rejoice in the feeling of belonging to this amazing organism, The Church. Today celebrating our partnership in the gospel with Christians in Eurasia Area of the United Methodist Church – a church which is growing and in need women and men to hear a call to ministry giving wise leadership. WE also pray for the United Protestant church of France, and Belgium and in Germany we pray for mission partners Rev Barry and wife Gillian. We acknowledge the link our District has with German Methodists. For our circuit and churches naming our superintendent Peter who we say farewell to and his successor, Iain, as he and his family prepare to move here. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer

Guide the nations in the ways of justice, liberty and peace; We pray for those who are negotiating our future relationship with the E U and the huge implications for so many who are concerned about jobs, travel and security. Lord, we need leaders who seek wisdom to lead the nations with integrity and deliver on 'leveling up' our nations. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer

Comfort those in sorrow; heal the sick in body or in mind and deliver the oppressed . WE pray for victims of neglect and abuse, for those who grow up in dis-functional families. May they, like Solomon, grow into maturity finding healing and wholeness. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Receive our thanks and praise for all who have served you faithfully here on earth, and those coping with bereavement…….
May we and all your people share the life and joy of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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

Many of us make bring our gifts and offerings through standing orders,

through charitable gifts that we make, giving our time and our availability, our care and our compassion. We offer all we give as part of this worship this morning. We say together:
Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives to be used in your service; through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 545 – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

1. **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.

2. **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.

3. **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.

4. **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.

5. **High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,**
   O grant me its joys after victory is won;
   Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
   still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Prayer & blessing

We finish our service with the words of blessing from epistle of Jude
Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever.
Amen.