

The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 18th July 2021



This short act of worship has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman to use at home. 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. Please follow the links to take you to the appropriate hymns.

Let's begin by singing together STF 25

God is here! As we his people
Meet to offer praise and prayer,
May we find in fuller measure
What it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
All our varied skills and arts
Wait the coming of his Spirit
Into open minds and hearts.

Here our children find a welcome
In the Shepherd's flock and fold;
Here, as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us as of old.
Here the servants of the Servant
Seek in worship to explore
What it means in daily living
To believe and to adore.

Lord of all, of church and kingdom,
In an age of change and doubt,
Keep us faithful to the gospel,
Help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,

All we have to give, receive;
We who cannot live without you,
We adore you! We believe!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5akNpzEGrgs

Opening prayer Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. ² He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³ He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

⁴ Happy are those who make the LORD their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods.

⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted.

⁶ Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear.

Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

⁷ Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me." ⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

⁹ I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. ¹⁰ I have not hidden your saving help within my heart, I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.

¹¹ Do not, O LORD, withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

¹² For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, until I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails me.

¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me.¹⁴ Let all those be put to shame and confusion who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonour who desire my hurt.

¹⁵ Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

¹⁶ But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you, may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.

Reading 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Below is the Youtube link for a clip from the Film Chariots of fire that focussed on the Olympic dreams of Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddle. Note the references within the clip to honouring God with our sporting talents.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwyltmUR3MU

Today's message

I have to admit that the slogan of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games... 'United by Emotion' ...is one that leaves me feeling rather flat. I must prefer the one used for London 2021 which was 'Inspire a Generation' with the main thrust or focus of London's bid to host the games being the legacy is was going to hand on, its attempts to inspire a generation. The question might be which generation?

Is it the next generation...is it our children, our youngsters, our grand children? Or is the generation which the organising committee of London 2012 had hoped to inspire...your generation. No matter how old or young you happen to be.

Looking around us today at the increasing levels of obesity in our society I am not sure that any inspiration lasted very long. The UK has for the past few years been officially the most obese nation in Europe and I am sure it's not just me who has been competing in the lockdown Duathlon of decreased activity and increased eating.

From a health point of view it is important to look after our bodies, not just for the first 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years but for as long as we remain alive. We may not be able to do the things we did when we were younger as often, for as long, with such speed but if we don't use it we will almost certainly lose it.

So what about our spiritual health? If our bodies are temple, a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor 6:19) then surely we should try to maintain that temple in good shape spiritually, working towards building up our spiritual speed,

endurance, balance, flexibility, poise, strength, stamina, and motivation

For athletes competing in the Olympics, their moment in the spotlight whether it is the 2 hours taken to complete the marathon or the 9.63 seconds required to run the 100 meters is often the culmination of many years work. Because for anyone to win an Olympic medal it requires years if not a lifetime of training. It is through training that you not only become good at what you do but become better than everyone else. When Daly Thompson, twice winner of the gold medal for the decathlon was asked why he went training on Christmas day...he replied simply...because my competitors don't

In his book "Bounce", former British no 1 table tennis player Matthew Syed, suggests it takes over 10,000 hours of totally focussed and dedicated training for an individual to become an expert in their chosen field. And it is not the moments of success that make an athlete stronger but the moments of failure, the moments when things do not go right.

It has been estimated by her coach that the Japanese Olympic and world figure skating champion Shizuka Akinawa fell over 20,000 times during her transformation from also ran to champion. The moral of her story is that it is through falling on your backside 20,000 times that a really great performance finally emerges. Practice and repetition doesn't always mean perfection but it certainly means getting better at something.

Hands up how many people have looked at a particular passage in the bible and not understand what it means? I have even heard there are occasions when you might look at this Home Worship material and be puzzled by what the author has said. No one becomes an expert in the bible the first time they read it, nor the 2nd nor the 20th time. More often than not the penny does not drop all at once; 2000 years of Christian theology do not become crystal clear in the space of a 20 min sermon. Our faith can at times be difficult, be confusing, be hard

work.....but with a decent training programme we can all slowly but surely progress from also rans to champions.

We can all make....as described by the British track cycling team...those marginal gains... slight sometimes imperceptible improvements in how we understand and then live out our faith, until others are impelled to ask what is it that we have in our lives that makes us different.

For any athlete one of the most important things they are concerned with is nutrition, getting enough of the right type of food into their bodies and avoiding ingesting an enormous variety of things which may look appealing, which may taste great, which may be being eaten by their family and friends, things which society at large may deem okay and acceptable but which will for an athlete simply not aid their performance.

Nicola Adams, the first British women to win a gold medal in boxing celebrated by having a night out at Nando's...something she probably hasn't been able to do in the build up to her event. But having seen all her hard work pay off who would begrudge her such an indulgence...not me, not her coach, not her family and friends

So what about us...where do we get our spiritual food? Is it just from our church services, twice a week on a Sunday? Is it from things such as Songs of praise? Services on the radio? Thought for the day? Daily reflections or bible reading plans? Weekly or monthly church magazines? Do you use the Methodist Prayer handbook? Attend a regular Bible studies or one of the other fellowship groups that meet in this church? Heaven forbid you might even gain your spiritual nutrition by meeting other Christians in other places that are not within these four walls

Where, how and how often are we getting the spiritual food we need so that as followers of Jesus we can perform to our best?

Behind every athlete whether they won or lost is the support of a team of people helping and

assisting them. Their success had been built upon and was reliant upon the many and varied members of their back up team all working together in different ways but all with the same aim.

Teamwork is important and every single member of that time is as important as the next. Even Jesus felt the need to have a support team....choosing people of different talents, abilities, gifts and graces to work alongside him during his ministry. Each one of those odd shaped pieces fitting together to make up the complete jigsaw that Jesus knew was possible. Note too that whenever he sends the disciples out he does not send them out alone but in two's, in teams to work and learn together.

And Paul is a great one for working alongside others, links up with Barnabus, with John Mark, with Timothy, with Silas and on and on and on

And of course being a team player sometimes means taking turns between standing in the spotlight in the full beam of everyone's attention and working away in the shadows unseen and unnoticed by anyone. Being part of a team sometimes means putting the wishes of others above your own, it means giving someone else an opportunity often at your expense.

Being part of a team means being prepared to make sacrifices for others like we saw in the road race events...members of the team who had a slight chance of winning sacrificing their own chance to give a team member with a far greater chance of winning a better opportunity to do so.

I do not think you can be a Christian on your own; being a Christian is about being part of a team, it is about being in relationships, relationships with God and with each other. It is about being part not of Team GB BUT Team JC

And finally once the games are over there is the inevitable...what happens now? For some it will be the end of the road....they will retire from their particular sport taking the same qualities and attributes that made them formidable athletes with them into their new lives

But for many, following a short well earned period of rest, it will be case of not resting on their laurels, not looking back to the glory days of the past but setting new goals. Setting their sight on the next competition, the next championship, the next Olympic Games

So my final thought for this morning is this

What about this team, what about this family of faith, this circuit, these individual churches as we slowly but surely begin to establish more normal patterns of worship and fellowship together. What are our training plans, how will be nourished and help nourish each other, how can we work together as teams to ensure that any goals that we set have a better chance of being attained?

Are we happy to just be part of the also rans or can we really set our focus on going for the golden prize that really matters! Amen

Let's raise our voices as we sing a new song that picks up on some of those themes set to a familiar tune of 'Alleluia sing to Jesus'

Let us run with perseverance,
on this Jesus fix our eyes
who endured from grief to glory,
faith's beginning and its prize.

Let us shed all things that hinder,
blur our vision, weigh us down;
look to him who brought redemption,
bore the cross and won the crown.

Some who run are counted heroes
gaining silver, bronze or gold;
all find joy in their competing,
round the track and round the world.
Some take part as paralympians,
climbing mountains to compete;
all need skill and strength and balance
for their course to be complete.

Some will measure time or distance,
record speed or length or height;
all in squad or team or solo
know the rules to keep them right.
Some will not be there for medals;
they too share this world of sport,

all who coach, supply and steward -
vital champions in support.

Trained and tuned, let us be ready,
hear the signal, start the race;
focussed to complete the circuit,
each in our appointed place.
Fully tested, still enduring,
on the goal we fix our eyes;
Christ for us has won the glory,
faith's beginning and its prize.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c6lOXSNxIk

Intercessions

Pray for all those competing in the Olympics
which start on Friday 23rd July

Pray for all those entering the final stages of
training for the Paralympics taking place in
August.

We pray that as we run the race for the ultimate
prize we can accept both victory and defeat with
grace and humility

We pray for a fair and level playing field for all in
the areas of health, education, equality, justice
and inclusion

We pray for all those whose strength is failing,
for those who struggle to receive daily bread, for
those who do not feel part of any team and for
those whose hope and dreams are constantly
dashed.

Finally we join together to say the prayer that
Jesus taught the members of his first team to
say...Our Father

Let's sing our final hymn STF 634

Fight the good fight with all thy might,
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
thy joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race, through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the path and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside, lean on thy Guide;
his boundless mercy will provide;
trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arms are near;
he changeth not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YppcFC8mxKM