

His Story : His Song



A series of reflections for Lent exploring the life of Jesus through well known hymns and songs.

So here we are again with another booklet of reflections for Lent, produced by the staff team and a variety of retired ministers, local preachers and worship leaders from across the circuit. Thanks to everyone for their contributions

Given that the patent for 'reinventing the wheel' had already been taken, we decided to revisit a winning, trusted and accessible formula which was to invite people to explore and reflect on a wide variety of songs.

As we waited for the reflections to come in we wondered which songs would be chosen and why. Would it be chosen for the depth of theological insight captured within the words or perhaps just an ear worm chorus that is impossible to remove from your head once it's been sung? Would it be the tune and if so which tune in particular? Might it be an occasion a particular song evokes? Perhaps a time, place, and group of people it transported people back too? Would the booklet be crammed full of familiar favourites or would there be a few songs that you weren't sure you had ever sung before?

These songs focus on various sections within the Singing the Faith book which we hope will be easily accessible across our various churches should anyone wish to 'borrow' a copy to help flesh out their study. Such sections are

Incarnation and birth	STF 165 - 223
Ministry of Jesus	STF 234 - 261
Passion and death	STF 262-292
Resurrection	STF 292-317
The Holy Spirit	STF 369-401
Mission and Discipleship	STF 419- onwards

We hope that this booklet provides material for individual devotions each day through Lent but also for house groups to use collectively over the next 6 weeks as we remember that singing is perhaps the thing that unites and brings us together the most, every time to gather to worship the God who is indeed worthy of everything.

Thanks for taking the time to read it.

All those who have contributed.

This is a hymn that refuses easy optimism. It does not deny the depth of the world's pain, confusion, and brokenness, nor does it hurry us too quickly to light. Instead, it begins where so many people actually live: in darkness that feels real, heavy, and persistent.

The opening line names the truth without flinching. Darkness here is not simply the absence of light, but the presence of fear, injustice, grief, and uncertainty. This is a hymn that resonates deeply in seasons of loss, in times of global crisis, and in the quieter personal struggles we carry unseen. By acknowledging darkness so directly, the hymn offers an important pastoral gift: it tells us that faith begins with honesty.



And yet, the darkness is not the final word. The hymn's central movement is one of incarnation. God does not shout light from a distance; God comes *into* the darkness. This is the profound Christian claim at the heart of the text: that Christ enters fully into the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. As the hymn unfolds, the imagery broadens from the manger to the whole scope of Christ's life and ministry. The light that enters the world is not static; it moves, heals, challenges, and calls. This is not a comforting glow meant only to reassure us, but a light that exposes injustice and invites transformation.

What is particularly striking is how the hymn implicates the singer. This is not a hymn about something that happened long ago and far away. As we sing, we are drawn into the story. We are reminded that the light of Christ now shines through imperfect people – through the Church, through communities, and through individual lives offered in love and service. The question the hymn quietly asks is not simply, “Do you believe the light has come?” but “Where will you carry that light now?”

“Into the darkness of this world” is therefore a hymn that holds together incarnation and mission, honesty and hope, realism and promise. It reassures us that God is present even when the world feels shadowed, and it challenges us to become bearers of that light ourselves.

In singing this hymn, we do not deny the darkness – we trust that it is not stronger than the light. And in that trust, we find both comfort and calling.



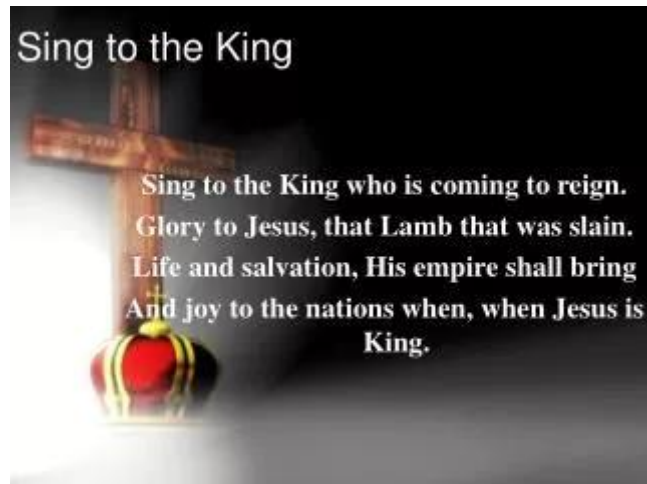
This is a beautiful, haunting hymn, which is much misunderstood today. It refers to Israel, captive and needing rescuing, but it's not about the state of Israel, which wasn't even around when this hymn was written. It means the people Israel, the people of God – all of us. We are all God's people. And so the hymn is about waiting for God to come, as Emmanuel, God with us, as our saviour, redeemer, God on earth.

To be ransomed means making us free. If someone is kidnapped and the person has to be freed with a payment – what is that payment? Usually money, but God didn't pay money for our freedom, he sent Christ instead, Emmanuel. And that's what sets us free from sins, free to love and live, free to have a fresh start when we mess up. Free to call upon Christ in times of need. Free from the things that bind us, the things that trap us and prevent us from living free joyful lives.

The chorus calls for rejoicing because Immanuel will come again and set the people free. It is a confident statement, '*Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come again!*' There is no question, there is no doubt. Emmanuel – God with us – will come again. We sing this in Advent, when we are in a time of waiting, and then we celebrate Christmas, when this advent hymn was fulfilled, Emmanuel did come again, born in the cold dirty stable that first Christmas Day. We rejoice over Christmas, we sing carols celebrating the birth of Jesus, and then we move onto the gospel stories of Jesus as a man on a mission. A mission to free all people from 'Satan's Tyranny' (as verse 2 tells us).

I pray that through all the year, whether Advent, Lent, Easter or Ordinary time, we are all able to rejoice, for Christ will come again. Christ is with us all the time, he is within us all, and he will come again in glory.

Deacon Helen Snowball



I chose this hymn for two reasons. Firstly, in my childhood and later teens, I remember it was always used at our Sunday school Anniversary at Peveril Street Methodist in Hucknall and it was my Grandma Severns' favourite. So in a sense it was a hymn that I grew up with.

Secondly, it continually reminds me of the hope Christians have in Jesus, the King who is coming again to reign in Glory. So as well as growing up with this hymn, I believe I have also grown into it.

As we at Rise Park have continued to explore the Discipleship Pathways, this hymn reflects on much of what we have learnt and discussed together. Prayer, Justice, Truth, Flourish and Challenge are all there in a hymn written over a century ago.

As I looked at the history of this hymn, I found it quite interesting. It was written by Rev. Charles Sylvester Horne (1865-1914) who was a Congregationalist Minister in London as well as the Liberal MP for Ipswich. Sadly he died in Canada in 1914 after a trip to Niagara Falls, leaving behind a 7 year old son, called Kenneth Horne, who, older readers may remember as a comedian and broadcaster, famous for shows like Much Binding in the Marsh, Beyond our Ken and Round the Horne. Also, one of his grandsons, Rev. A.R.M. Gordon was the Bishop of Portsmouth from 1975 to 1984.

In closing, I feel this hymn, whilst reflecting His Story, is also part of my own story.

Kerry Severn (Local Preacher)

Saturday 21st February STF 195 Christians Awake, salute the happy morn

I can't remember the last time I sang this carol. Perhaps it's because the opening line suggests that needs to be sung on Christmas Day, or because it has 6 relatively long verses. In verse one, once we have been called to awake and salute the morn, we are invited to 'rise to adore the mystery of love.'

Love is indeed a mystery. What makes one person love Hawaiian pizza while for others it's just not right? What makes some people love 'The Lark ascending' by Vaughan Williams while others just don't feel it. (I'm not going to say which camp I'm in!) What makes us love some people, romantically or otherwise, but find others difficult to love? But this mystery of love is no bad thing. It allows for variety, for a sharing of love, and reminds us that we are all different.

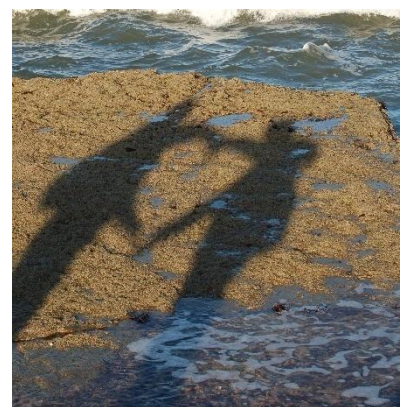
But the mystery of the love in this carol is on wholly different scale. It is of a God who loved the world so much that he knew it needed His help. It is of a God who chose to come to earth, to experience all that His people experienced, not as a privileged, powerful adult, but as a helpless baby, born in a difficult situation. It is of a man who showed what love should be as he walked alongside those who seemingly had no place in the society of the time (Interestingly it was one of those groups of people, the shepherds, who are the focus of this carol and who were the first to hear of the news of the birth of this man of love.) It is of a man who showed love through his actions in healing. It is of a man whose love called him to challenge the injustices and prejudices of the ruling political and religious systems of the day. It is of a man whose love extended beyond the Jewish community, to include the gentiles, those who many believed had no right to experience and receive that love. It is of a God who loved the world so much that the man he became on earth was crucified so that everyone, past, present and future, might really know and feel this wonderful, mysterious love of God.

V5 begins "Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind God's wondrous love in saving humankind:"

So this lent, let us ponder on this mystery of love. *How and where have you experienced this mystery of love? Where and who in our world needs to receive this mystery of love today*

V6 reminds us that '... saved by his love ... we shall sing eternal praise to heaven's almighty king.' Sing with our voices, sing with our words, but also sing with our actions, so that we can share that mysterious love with those whom we love and with those whom we ought to love and with those who need that love.

Cath Smith (Local Preacher)



At the time of writing it is the Sunday before Christmas. I have been to two churches today- one for a 'Carols and Communion' service and to a carol service in the evening. Both have reminded me of the real mystery of God made human, and the mystery of meeting Christ in bread and wine. I love the three Charles Wesley Christmas hymns in Singing the Faith and lament that only 'Hark the herald' is the only one widely sung and likely to be known outside the walls of our churches. For together they give us a much more complete understanding of what it means to be able to say, 'being's source begins to be, and God himself is born!' which must be some of the most wonderful words ever written!

Many lines jump out to me in this hymn but today the part that stands out most to me is in verse 2- 'God, the blest, the great I AM, sojourns in this vale of tears, and Jesus is his name'. It is amazing to think that same God who revealed Godself as 'I am' or 'I will be what I will be' has come to be with humanity. He was called Jesus because 'he will save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21) These lines remind me that even in amidst life's pains and difficulties – both on an individual and a worldwide scale God is there. That God walks in the 'vale of tears' with us and that if we ever wonder if God is truly with us or truly cares we only need to look at Jesus to see the God made flesh, who walked among us, who loved and healed but chose to suffer and die for our sake.

I took this photo on my first trip to the 'Chapel of the Shepherd's Fields' in Beit Sahour, southeast of Bethlehem, traditionally believed to be the place where the angels appeared to the shepherds. This reminds me that this God who calls himself our friend comes to ordinary people and to an ordinary place.



James Blackhall (Student Deacon)

Monday 23rd February STF 205 It came upon the midnight clear

I remember as a child singing this hymn, well, carol really, and wondering what “cloven skies” were...! Was it something to do with reindeer, or sheep, or some other animal from the stories, capering across the skies? Well, obviously not! However, the childish question came with intrigue... I wonder; how do we work through, and seek to discover things about, the theological themes we sing and share in as we journey through our worship life as the people of God?

Of course, where I am now in my life, I ‘get’ that this is not simply about the unveiling of heaven through the cacophony of angelic song that accompanies the birth of Jesus, but also a foreshadowing of the tearing of the temple curtain - the veil, torn, cloven, in two; the holy of holies revealed to all people, no longer mediated by the powerful and a literally opaque screen, but accessible and visible and gloriously present. God with us.



The story in this song has another method of unveiling - presenting a picture of clarity about the state of the world before the people of God in this and other seasons. That is that it spotlights the need to pay attention to, to see the “strife” of the planet we live on - that this “all-gracious King” has

come for the people of the world who need justice, peace, healing, renewal and love.

These are the ones we pass in doorways and bus shelters, who we see in headlines and feel deeply for as images of refugee camps and current conflicts are shown on our screens. In the midst of the mess of the world humanity is hardly likely to hear the “love-song” that is sung...

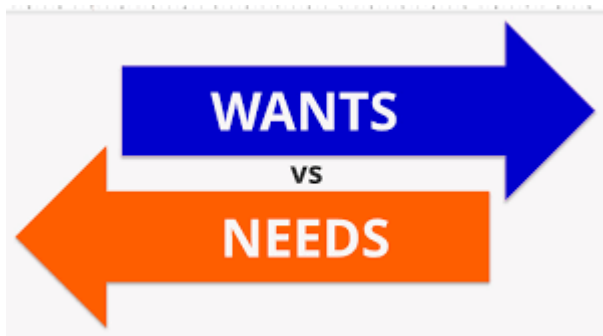
Our task then in every season is to “repeat the song” of love for the world that is Jesus entering in and God’s love being revealed to us until the day when the Spirit comes in power again to join heaven and earth as one, no longer cloven, separated, but all of creation and all God’s people reunited in song and praise.

Rev Richard Byass

Tuesday 24th February STF 222 Who would think that what they needed

I wonder if you have every considered the difference between what you want and what you actually need? It would be nice if the two of those things were the same but as The Rolling Stones sang back in 1969 “You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometime, you'll find, you get what you need”

If asked I suspect that ‘back in the day’ if the Jewish people had been asked just what kind of Messiah they wanted, well most of them would have gone with the stereotypical desires to have a great warrior king in the mould of David, who would instil and united all the people with a common pride and purpose, rouse an army of highly skilled, efficient , ruthless soldiers, and lead the nation to a resounding victory resulting in the defeat and ejection of the Romans out of the promised Land.



That might have been what they wanted but what they got and indeed what they needed was something or someone totally different, something that according to this song, one I have never sung before ‘God surprises earth with heaven coming here on Christmas Day.’

Surprises earth with the nature and context of his birth. Surprises earth with his rural backwater upbringing of which we know almost next to nothing. Surprises earth with a ministry that isn't focussed on the rich and powerful but is about coming alongside the poor and the powerless. Surprises earth with his message about inclusion, acceptance, equality and justice.

Surprises earth by choosing ordinary, everyday men and women, just like you and me, to be his closest confidants, his dearest friends, his messengers to take the ‘good news’ into the world. Surprises the earth by transforming lives through love, through forgiveness, through grace. Surprises the earth by offering up his life so that we might all learn how to live out our life in all its fullness.

Did the people then and now get what they wanted? No. Did they get what they needed? Yes, even though perhaps they didn't realise it at the time.

So the question is not as the Spice Girls once sang, “can you tell me what you want, what you really, really want”, but are you able to articulate what it is that you really, really need?

Wednesday 25th February STF 239 Sent by the Lord am I

This is a hymn of movement and obedience. It places on our lips the words of one who has heard God's call and has chosen to respond, not with certainty or power, but with willingness. It is also striking in its honesty. The one who is sent is not triumphant or self-assured, but vulnerable: open to misunderstanding, rejection, and risk. Yet this vulnerability is not a weakness; it is precisely how God's love enters the world. To be sent by the Lord is to walk the way of Christ – into places of need, injustice, and pain – trusting that God goes before us and remains with us.

Importantly, the hymn does not limit this calling to a few. It invites every singer to recognise themselves as sent people. In our daily lives, workplaces, families, and communities, we are commissioned to speak truth, to act with compassion, and to embody God's peace. This is mission not as grand gesture, but as faithful presence.

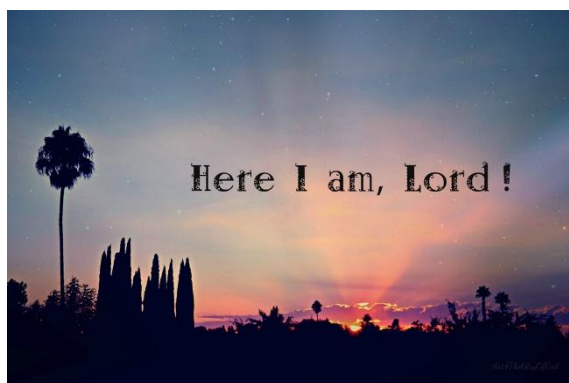
For me, this hymn resonates deeply with the experience of stationing in the Methodist Church. I did not choose where I would serve; rather, I was sent – first as a probationer, and now as an ordained presbyter – trusting that God was at work in the places and among the people to whom I was called. Stationing has taught me that being sent is not about arriving with all the answers, but about being willing to learn, to listen, and to love.

As a probationer, these words gave language to the vulnerability of beginning ministry: stepping into the unknown, finding my voice, and learning what it means to serve faithfully among God's people. Now, as an ordained minister, the hymn continues to challenge and sustain me. Ordination has not removed the risk of being sent; if

anything, it has deepened my sense of responsibility to go where God calls, to speak and act with integrity, and to remain open to being changed by the communities I serve.

Singing this hymn becomes both prayer and promise: a prayer for courage to answer God's call, and a promise that God's sending is an ongoing reality. Each pastoral encounter, each act of worship, each moment of accompaniment becomes another expression of that original call. To be sent by the Lord is not a one-time event, but a daily commitment to say, again and again: *Here am I.*

Revd Jason McMahon-Riley





Trying to work out just how many commands Jesus gave during his ministry is one that has befuddled biblical scholars far better than I. It's a prickly problem because first and foremost it depends on how you might define 'command'. I mean it does sound rather forceful, rather non negotiable, something with very little wiggle room: you either obey it or you don't. And let's be honest none of us like to be ordered about!

And then there is the quarrelsome question of whether you are concerned with brand spanking new commands or those which reinforce and perhaps reinterpret those already found in the Old Testament. Guestimates vary from dozens to well over 200, but most of those 'in the know', and I know that I am barely 'in the know' would say that there are around 50 direct commands that Jesus utters.

Some of them we might be able to recall pretty easily...

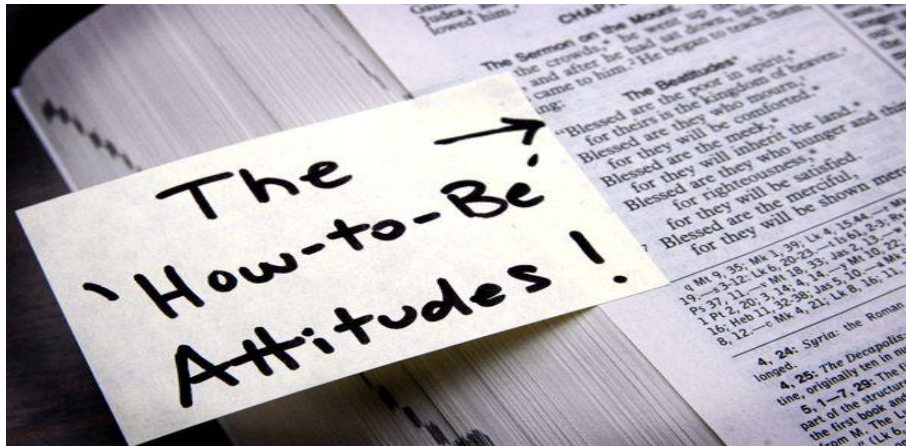
- 'Do this in remembrance of me',
- 'Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)
- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you". Matthew 28:10-20)

But it's in John gospel where we hear the command that Jesus gives which he says will demonstrate to others that we are **HIS** disciples. And that visible sign, isn't the wearing of a cross around our neck, or a particular type of clothing and certainly not by a dog collar. Instead it is by through the way we love one another just as Jesus loved us. Through our actions, through our words, through our service, our being.

If people looked at you, how would they know that you were a disciple of Jesus?

Friday 27th February

STF 245 Blest are the poor in spirit



The gospel of Matthew is one in which Jesus comes across very much as a 'teacher' with five large chunks of material mirroring the five books of the Torah, thus helping to present Jesus as the 'new Moses'.

Probably the most famous of these blocks of teaching is the Sermon on the Mount, parodied in 'The Life of Brian', where characters at the back of the crowd mishear Jesus' statement "Blessed are the peacemakers" as "Blessed are the cheese makers", leading to a humorous discussion about whether this refers to all manufacturers of dairy products

This hymn sets the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5, within a musical setting allowing a congregation to explore themes of being poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger for righteousness, mercy, and peace through the medium of song. Its structure mirrors the biblical text, with each verse focusing on a specific blessing and a refrain that calls the congregation to "Rejoice and be glad, blessed are you, Holy are you, rejoice and be glad, Yours is the kingdom of God"

Through his teaching of what God's kingdom will be like, Jesus often turned the understanding of the world upside down and inside out. And in the Beatitudes we see that those people that the world might consider to be unfortunate or weak are in fact blessed (or blest).

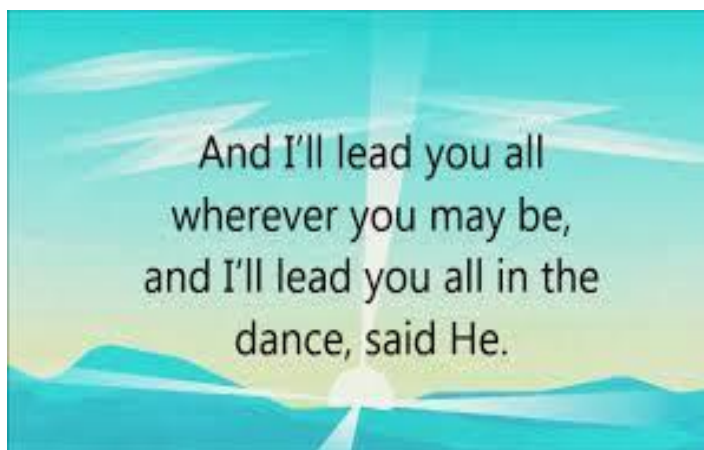
This is the kind of social justice revolution Jesus is bringing into being, one based on service, sacrifice, peace and love rather than position, power, oppression and injustice.

So what can this hymn and its message teach us about how we might live, how we might treat others and how we might fight for and alongside those that the world tries to keep downtrodden?

Rev John Wiseman

I always found this a strange hymn when I was a child – I still do to be honest. I just can't imagine Jesus dancing around Galilee!

I have no doubt he danced, maybe at the wedding in Cana, or at joyful evenings with his disciples, but dancing for the scribe and the pharisee – I just don't get it.



The hymn begins with the words '*I danced in the morning when the world was begun, and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun.*' Is this a reference to God and Jesus being one and the same – expressing that Jesus was there at the beginning of everything? Or, is it simply about joy – not anything more theological than that.

Is it Jesus just expressing joy at God's creation in song? That's what dancing and singing are about aren't they? Expressing emotions, joy or sadness, comfort and love. I think maybe it's about both, it's about the fact that Jesus is God and was with God at the very start of everything, but also just at the sheer joy of creation. If I'd created something as marvellous as the stars or the earth, I think I might dance too! And if you've come up with something as majestic as a snow leopard or a graceful tree, well you might be pleased, declare your creation 'Good' and have a little jig in joy.

The chorus has a great expression from Jesus too – '*...I'll lead you all wherever you may be, and I'll lead you all the in dance said he.*'

What's the dance Jesus wants to lead us in? The dance of life – is life a dance made up of movements and steps? I suppose you could think of it like that – a dance or a song, but I reckon the important part of that however you view it – a dance or a song, a poem – it's Jesus leading us. It's Jesus who guides us, Jesus showing us the way, and Jesus being beside us through all the ups and downs of life.

Deacon Helen Snowball

Sunday 1st March STF 148 I heard the voice of Jesus say

I do choose this hymn quite regularly and it's one of very few hymns where might give a preference for a particular tune, but that's another story, or rather song!!!

Verse 1 gives us an invitation from Jesus himself, "come unto me and rest." In today's busy world, and as someone who has periods of not sleeping well, being invited into a place of rest sounds wonderful.

It also gives me the assurance that I can enter that place, just as I am. I may be tired, I may be frustrated, I may be sad, I may even be angry, but however I am, I can come and rest. Verse 2 gives us another invitation; stoop down and drink the living water which Jesus freely gives.

Jesus is offering us both rest and refreshment or rejuvenation or recuperation or revival or renewal or resurgence. In today's lingo lots of different 'R and Rs.'

Where do you find your rest in today's world? Maybe it is in a quiet space on your own where you can just 'be.' Perhaps there is a paradox in that you find rest in going out running or walking or other forms of exercise. Maybe it's listening to music or singing or playing an instrument. It may be reading or doing your favourite hobby.

Are you aware of God in any of these places?

Do you experience the 'living water' in any of these places?



Do these places give you the recuperation you need? I find that one of my favourite places to rest is baking.

It takes my mind off the things which are going on in my life. It quite literally provides refreshment and it gives me joy to be able to bake for others. But the hymn takes things a step further, Jesus is telling us that he is this world's light. If we look to Jesus our life's walk will be in that life.

One of my favourite verses is Matthew 11: 28–30, read from the Message.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace."

It seems to me that these words capture the essence of this hymn.

Invitation ... Rest Living Water Light ... Life

Cath Smith (Local Preacher)

Monday 2nd March

STF 251 Jesus Christ is waiting

John Lamberton Bell (born 1949) is a Scottish hymn-writer and a member of the [Iona Community](#), a broadcaster, and former student activist. He has written many songs and hymns, some with **Graham Maule**, who died in 2019. Both men were passionate advocates for challenging injustice and encouraging others to be involved in today's world as followers of Jesus.

This hymn, "Jesus Christ is waiting" has a lively tune and is often played and sung at a quick pace, something which I feel takes away the impact of the words. In this hymn we are led to see images of Jesus as he lived out his ministry in his world, and are then challenged to reflect on our world and our reaction today.

Jesus is seen as waiting, raging, healing, dancing, and calling us to follow his way of living out God's kingdom here on earth. We see a Jesus who is angry, raging at injustice: a Jesus who brings healing as he sees people in their pain and offers compassion: a Jesus who is dancing as he sees where people show love as hatred is defeated by the actions of others: a Jesus who calls us to follow him as he continues to guide us today.

I can remember, many years ago now, when I first sang the hymn being quite disturbed by the idea that Jesus could be raging at anyone as he was surely about love for all. But over time I saw the times when Jesus was angry in his day, e.g. the men who were going to stone the woman caught in adultery

Can you think of places in the gospels where we see these different aspects of Jesus personality?

Which image of Jesus is the one that you are drawn to most and why?

Which one do you need to reflect more upon?

What can you do today as you respond to the challenge of Jesus to follow him that will make you the answer to this part of the Lord's prayer; "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?"

Every blessing

Susan Johnson (Local Preacher)



THE "I AM" 7 STATEMENTS of Jesus



"I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE"

Jesus is the only one who can satisfy us forever. (see John 6:35)

"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD"



Jesus is our hope and source of goodness in this dark world. (See Jn 8:12)



"I AM THE DOOR"

Jesus is the way to heaven. (See Jn 10:9)

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD"



Jesus saves and protects those who believe in Him. (see John 10:11)



"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE"

Jesus will raise believers back to life after death. (see John 11:25)

"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, & THE LIFE"



Jesus is who we must go to for salvation and purpose. (see John 14:6)



"I AM THE VINE"

Jesus is the source of spiritual life. (see John 15:1)

In John's gospel, and only in John's gospel, do we find the famous seven 'I am' saying uttered by Jesus.

And whilst Jesus might simply be using the words 'I am' in the way we might say 'I am a man, a Capricorn, a Wiganer' let's also remember that by using the phrase 'I am' (Greek: Ego Eimi) Jesus is linking himself to the very words God instructs Moses to offer to Pharaoh if asked who it is that has sent him on this mission... "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14)

Now although some might find this song a simple and repetitive one to sing, it is highlighting deep theological truths as to who Jesus is, was and will continue to be.

Using ordinary everyday metaphors that spark the imagination into action, (bread, light, a door, a shepherd, the correct way, a vine and not forgetting resurrected life) Jesus offers memorable statements for his audience to latch on to.

It should also be noted how many 'I am' sayings there are. Seven a number which in the Jewish faith represents completion and perfection Those simple declarations tell us about his character, his mission, his purpose, a metaphorical unpacking of just who Jesus actually was, is and will be.

Wednesday 4th March STF 287 When I survey the wondrous cross

My love of this hymn was only increased when I heard that Isaac Watts wrote it after the woman he loved rejected him. She said that she loved his soul. It was his face, she couldn't stand. How to let someone down gently!

Instead of giving way to depression, Isaac Watts remembered what Jesus went through, and compared his own life and attitude to His. The line 'pour contempt on all my pride', always speaks to me when I feel mistreated.

It is a hymn which comes from the heart and speaks to the heart, and makes me want to be more like Jesus'.

My preference has always been to omit verse 4, 'His dying crimson like a robe'... as it seems too flowery and less from the heart than the other verses. These verses express how the depth of simplicity can reach us in a way that few other things can.

Rev David Speed



Thursday 5th March STF 266 All the room was hushed and still

When I think of the bits of His story that I think will grab peoples' attention, that give reason to pause and ponder, it's the big, impressive things: the time with the voice from heaven, the one where he did the thing with the water, the one with the fish, the one with the clever words, that time he told that story, the one with that person... THAT Friday... THAT Sunday... the one with the clouds... THEY'RE the things that speak loudest, right!? THEY'RE the things that command a room and would cause people to hush and be still and notice!

At least when I think of what might leave me that way my mind conjures up images of the big, the grand, the impressive. And if I were tasked with doing something that would cause a room to be hushed then I'd be thinking of those sorts of things too. What could I do or say to silence the room? I mean, maybe if I stripped off my outer garment and wrapped a towel around my waist I'd get a bit of attention, but probably more noise than hush!?

Whilst there are the "impressive" bits in Jesus' story, and undoubtedly moments that left people awestruck, there are other bits to the story. There are the relatively dull and accidental bits of journeying alongside people and moving from one place to the next. There are quick and simple words and stories that make a brief "normal" impression. And there are bits like the washing of the disciples' feet that simultaneously hush and still the room and also cause a stir because they are subversive, counter-cultural and out of the ordinary, even in their simplicity.

I sometimes think that Jesus' story is too supernatural. When I get lost in the miracles and the God-ness of Jesus he becomes difficult to follow. How am I supposed to be like him if I can't heal the sick or walk on water!? What if my water never turns to wine!? What if I find it hard to speak the right words!? What if I struggle to pray!? How could I die for someone else!? How could I live so well!?

But this song, reflecting on the part of His story in John 13, sings of what it really looks like to be a follower of Jesus. It reminds me of his mission and calling. It assures me I'm not supposed to be a miracle worker or orator. It makes following him simple and it makes discipleship and the imitation of Christ possible.



"This is what I'm asking you to do, why I'm kneeling here beside you, what I want my Church to be, what I want the world to see: who it is you follow. Love each other, one another. Love each other in the way that I have loved you. Walk together, and whatever comes, love each other in the way that I have loved you."

It is this story that will cause the world to be hushed and still and really cause a stir.

Marc Williamson (Local Preacher)

Friday 6th March STF 269 To see the King of heaven fall

This hymn for Good Friday draws us into the deep mystery at the heart of our faith: that the glory of God is revealed not in power or triumph, but in humility, vulnerability, and self-giving love. It invites us to stand at the manger and the cross, where heaven stoops low and God chooses the path of costly compassion. In Jesus, the King of heaven is not distant or untouchable, but present among the poor, the broken, and the overlooked.

As the hymn unfolds, we are challenged to see afresh what true kingship looks like. Christ reigns not through force, but through love that empties itself for the sake of the world. To sing these words is to be confronted with a question: if this is who God is, then how are we called to live? The hymn gently but firmly turns our gaze outward, calling us to follow Christ's way of humility, generosity, and service, so that God's love may be made visible through us.

As I sing this hymn, I am reminded that my calling is shaped not by status or certainty, but by willingness – to be sent, to serve, and to trust God at work in places I might not choose for myself. In ministry, I am continually learning that Christ is found most clearly not in moments of success or recognition, but in quiet faithfulness, shared vulnerability, and the daily offering of myself to God and to others. This hymn calls me back to the truth that following Jesus means allowing my life to be shaped by his humility and trusting that God's kingdom is revealed precisely there.

Prayer

Loving God, we marvel at the mystery of your grace:
that the King of heaven chose the cradle and the cross,
drawing near to us in humility and love.

Open our eyes to see your glory
in the ordinary, the fragile, and the poor.
Shape our hearts to follow Christ's way of self-giving,
that our lives may reflect his compassion and mercy.

Send us out to live the song we sing,
to serve rather than to be served,
and to bear your love into a world
longing for hope.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Revd Jason McMahon-Riley



Saturday 7th March STF 270 “Come and see the King of love”

Ask the man in the street what the season of Lent means to them and the picture that it is likely to conjure up, is a season of ‘giving something up.’ This may mean a from of fasting (giving up chocolate!) or perhaps it may involve taking up a new habit for self-improvement. For many it is a season of effort, of disciplines, of self-examination and spiritual renewal and of course these may play their part, as we journey with Christ towards the cross and resurrection. But I believe Graham Kendrick’s hymn ‘Come and see the king of Love’ invites us that before we do anything we must simply look. We are not to strive but to behold.

The repeated opening words of the hymn ‘Come and see’ echoes the words spoken to the first disciples in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, in response to their enquiry about who Jesus was and where he was staying. A reminder to us, and to others, that discipleship begins with curiosity and encounter. Except that in this hymn we are asked to come and see the ‘King of love.’ Not a king as we



would normally imagine, but a kingship reimagined. A king dressed in a purple robe and wearing a crown of thorns. A king who is lifted up on a cruel cross, the subject of mocking and sneering. For the kingship Jesus represents, is not a king who rules by power in the earthly sense but by self-giving. Kings demand allegiance; Jesus kneels to wash feet. Kings preserve their lives; Jesus lays his down. To “come and see the King of love” is to confront the truth that love in its fullest

expression is costly, sacrificial, self-emptying. There is no sentimentality about the kingship expressed in the person of Jesus.

Kendrick refuses to sanitise the suffering of the cross but frames everything through love. The season of Lent asks us to look at the cross long enough for it to speak to us: It is the call of a God who has already seen us. Who knows our failures, and our longing to begin again. Who sees our wounds and knows our desire for healing and our hope for renewal. Lent is not about proving ourselves worthy. It is about letting ourselves be seen by the One who loves us to the end.

When we bring ourselves, and others, to the foot of the cross to see the King of love, lives can be changed. The cross becomes not only a place of devotion but a pattern for living. Lent asks us to consider where are we called to costly love? Whose suffering have we ignored and what injustices do we tolerate because they benefit us? And finally, to confront the challenge of how might we embody Christ’s compassion in our community, our nation, our world?

Ian Pickering (Local Preacher)

Sunday 8th March STF 270 Come and See (an alternative view)

Come and see - not from a distance,
not with hurried eyes, but come and stay.

Come and see the King of love
where you might least expect him:
clothed in weakness, crowned with thorns,
his glory hidden in suffering.

Come and see the hands that shaped the stars,
now opened, wounded, waiting-
love held fast by nails, mercy written in flesh.

Come and see how heaven bends low,
how power kneels,
how the throne becomes a cross
and the cross becomes a doorway.

Come and see, and do not turn away too quickly.
Let the sight undo you.
Let it soften what is hard,
and heal what is fearful.

Come and see- and as you look,
learn again how to love,
how to serve, how to follow.

For the King you are shown
is the King who gives himself,
and the love you come to see
is the love that calls you by name.



Rev Nikki Bates (Anglican minister at Rise Park)

Monday 9th March STF 272 “From heaven you came”

This hymn begins with a real sense of vulnerability; from heaven to a manger, from glory to obscurity. Jesus is not distanced from our world; but enters it fully, quietly and humbly.

“This is our God, the Servant King, He calls us now to follow him.”



These words gently remind us Lent is not only about remembering what Christ has done, but about listening to his call. To follow the Servant King means learning his way of love - a love that kneels, that serves, that gives itself away.

In a season often marked by giving things up, this hymn invites us to take something on: the attitude of a servant.

Where might Jesus be calling us to humility?
To quiet faithfulness rather than recognition?
To loving service in ordinary, unnoticed ways?

“Hands that flung stars into space. To cruel nails surrendered.”

Here, the hymn leads us toward the cross. The contrast is stark and holy. The hands of the Creator become the hands of the Crucified. Lent gives us space to sit with this mystery - not to rush past it, but to let it soften our hearts.

We are reminded that love is costly. Grace is not cheap. And yet, it is freely given.

“So let us learn how to serve, and in our lives enthrone him.”

Lent is also a season of learning - learning again the way of Jesus. As we walk toward the cross, let us pray that our lives might reflect the Servant King we worship. That our words, choices, and habits might continue to be shaped by His self-giving love.

Rev Nikki Bates (Anglican minister at Rise Park)



I wonder if you had to describe your favourite 'mood' of music what would it be? Would it be upbeat, happy, energetic, romantic, epic, dreamy, laid back, quirky, pumped up, novelty or sad to name just a few. For me it would probably be 'melancholy'.

If I was feeling a little bit low the last thing I would listen to would be a happy upbeat song. For me the thing that would lift my mood would be something moody, melancholy or as some might say downright miserable! Which goes a long way to explaining why I like 'My song is love unknown'

It is a song that fits in perfectly with by far my favourite service of the year, which it might (not) surprise you to know it is not Christmas, Easter Sunday and certainly not harvest. It is in fact the dove tailed services of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Originally written as a poem in the 17th century by the Puritan minister Samuel Crossman, it is one that gained increased popularity only after it had been set to a new tune by John Ireland in 1918, one that according to popular legend was written in 15 minutes on the back of a menu. And it is perhaps the tune that elevates this song in my mind, one characterized by its haunting melody, perfectly capturing the mixture of grief and praise.

Contrasting the fickle nature of humanity, the 'hosannas' of Palm Sunday somehow turn to the cries of 'crucify him' on Good Friday. Yet despite human indifference and hostility Jesus continues to be a channel of God's grace offering 'love to the loveless' right to the end.

And last but by no means least, there is also the personal connection imbued in each of the seven verses where both Crossman and I / you are able to ask the question that sums up the mystery of the passion; "O who am I, That for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?" Who indeed.

Wednesday 11th March STF 295 Alleluia, Alleluia

The hymn *“Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks to the Risen Lord”* is a joyful proclamation of Easter faith, but its message reaches beyond a single season. It’s interesting that for me as a preacher, this is a hymn that I would most likely choose at other times of the year rather than at Easter. It is a reminder that the power of the resurrection of Christ is for all seasons.

From the opening words, the repeated “Alleluia” invites the singer into praise that is both communal and confident. It’s not a quiet or private gratitude, but a shared declaration that Christ is risen and alive among his people. A natural response to victory over death. There can be no doubt that ‘Jesus is Lord of all the earth, he is the King of creation’!



As the hymn continues, we are instructed to ‘spread the good news over all the earth’, a call to evangelism and a reminder that the love of Jesus and the hope that he brings is not a message to keep to ourselves. It is to be shared as widely as possible and in as many different ways as are most appropriate to your context; whether that is a conversation on a park bench as you watch your dogs chase a ball, in the church coffee morning or giving a card to the sales assistant in the butchers because she told you last week that her mum was ill.

The hymn goes on to state that ‘we have been crucified with Christ’. When Christ was crucified, it was as if we were crucified with Him. The price was fully paid—just as if we had been crucified for our own sins. When Christ rose from the dead, it was as if we rose, too.

Ultimately, *“Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks to the risen Lord”* is a song of mission as much as praise. By lifting our voices together, we witness to a hope meant to be shared. Praising Christ’s name is not confined to worship, but extends into acts of love, service, and gratitude in everyday life. The hymn leaves us with a sense that Easter joy is not fleeting—it is a lasting reality that shapes who we are and how we walk in the world.

Thursday 12th March STF 296 Christ has risen while earth slumbers

I'm always struck by how triumphalist Easter Day often feels. It can be wonderful, yet it stands in deep contrast to how that first Easter Day would be. In John's account Mary is found by Jesus weeping, and when Jesus appears to the disciples in the evening their doors are locked because of fear. Thomas was not there and was unable to believe until he had met the risen Christ. It was confusing, it will have been a day of mixed emotions. In Luke, when Cleopas and his companion were discussing what they had heard about the resurrection, they were described as 'looking sad' (24:17). When they ran to tell the others and Jesus appears again Luke records 'for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering' (24:41). Even with the joy of news of the resurrection there was still the trauma of what they had gone through and the confusion of asking questions like 'how could this be?'

So often that is like our lives, even when we have a Christian faith we can doubt or not be able to feel the joy of the resurrection. We just cannot hold onto that joy in that moment. In years where we feel like that at Easter this hymn can be a welcome relief from the wonderful triumph of 'thine be the glory' as it expresses the doubts and denials we have; that Christ's resurrection comes even when all hope is gone and that Christ's resurrection brings transformation for all people whatever the circumstances of their lives. Whatever our feelings Christ is still risen.

The photo is one that I took at The Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. It is not the most likely site of the resurrection but gives us an idea of what the empty tomb may have looked like. I invite you to imagine one of the people who went to the empty tomb- perhaps Mary Magdalene, or Peter or the Beloved Disciple and think about how they may have felt as they found the tomb, think about how you may feel as you approach the tomb today and prepare to encounter the risen Christ anew this Easter.



James Blackhall (Student Deacon)

Friday 13th March STF 297 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

This hymn is not a triumphal shout from a safe distance; it is a declaration spoken in the midst of the ordinary, the fragile, and the unfinished. It insists that the resurrection is not confined to an empty tomb or a single morning long ago, but is woven into the present tense of our lives. Christ is alive *now* – in questions as much as in certainties, in wounds as much as in healing, in the long work of hope.

What moves me most is the hymn's refusal to separate faith from the world as it is. The risen Christ is not lifted out of human struggle, but is encountered in the poor, the prisoner, the broken, and the searching. As a minister, this feels deeply truthful. Resurrection faith is not about having all the answers, but about trusting that Christ goes ahead of us – into hospital wards and church meetings, into moments of joy and seasons of exhaustion, into love that costs us something.

This hymn reminds me that Easter is not simply something we celebrate, but something we practise. To sing that Christ is alive is to commit ourselves to living as though love really is stronger than death, forgiveness more powerful than fear, and hope more stubborn than despair. It is a song that calls us not just to belief, but to embodied, courageous discipleship. It is one which inspired me to write the following poem:

Christ is alive
not only in alleluias,
but in whispered prayers
and half-sung faith.

Alive in cracked bread
and poured-out wine,
in hands that tremble
as they learn to bless.

Alive where love refuses
to stay buried,
where hope rises slowly
on tired feet.

So let us sing –
not because the world is healed,
but because Christ walks it still,
scarred, risen, and present.



Revd Jason McMahon-Riley

Saturday 14th March STF 304 Jesus is risen, alleluia!

I struggled picking a song for this one. There are so many resurrection songs that we sing at Easter, and throughout the year, that remind us of that glorious day, that happy day, that mean so much to so many of us. There are songs about singing and joy, dancing and celebration; Songs of praise for that one morning which echoes into the coming dawn that we are yet to experience; Words of hope and the promise of life after death; Songs of triumph and victory, conquering and defeating; Promises of heaven and the Jesus' future return. Most of these songs convey our personal gratitude and hope for humanity.

None of these things are bad! We should be celebrating life triumphing over death, love conquering sin, and Jesus' victory over the grave. We should recognise the joy and hope and peace that can bring to our lives and the belief that Christ is raised for us, and with us, and in us... His story becomes our story!

I think as I was looking through this section of Singing the Faith I found myself asking two questions. They come from my recent studying and my character. This song came closest to answering both!

The first question is: "How are we celebrating the resurrection as good news for more than just us personally or just for humanity?" Some of the other songs referenced nature and seeds and flowers and grass as symbols of life springing from the ground. Nature gives us plenty of imagery and reminds us of things like the "circle of life" and life after death, but what is the resurrection of Jesus is supposed to be good news for the whole of the cosmos!?

"Let heaven echo, let the earth sing: Jesus is saviour of everything."

But my bigger question is always the same: "So what!?" Yes, on the one hand we raise an alleluia because of His story. We worship and we sing. We accept the offered forgiveness. But is there more that we need to do? This song (in my opinion one of very few in this section) suggests there may be and important answer to my question:



"Christ has arisen! Now all can see how humankind is meant to be free. Though powers of darkness threaten their worst, through every barrier Jesus has burst. What God intended, Jesus fulfilled; what God conceives can never be killed. Go and tell others, Christ is alive: Love is eternal, faith and hope thrive. All those who trust him, Christ will receive; therefore rejoice, obey and believe!"

Marc Williamson (Local Preacher)

Sunday 15th March STF 307 On the day of resurrection

The story of the two people walking the road to Emmaus is almost like the second part of the Easter story. We've had the rollercoaster ride of the events at the tomb early on that Sunday morning; the stone that has been rolled away, the linen cloth neatly folded, the angels asking why the disciples were looking for Jesus amongst the dead and off course Mary Magdalene's encounter with the man she thought was the gardener.

Now it is evening and we pick up the familiar story of Cleopas and his unnamed companion, who despite having heard stories that Jesus was alive, appear to carrying the weight of doubt on their shoulders as they drag their heavy feet step by step away from Jerusalem. And we know how the journey unfolds as suddenly 'a stranger' appears on the road and begins to walk with them.

What I like about this particular Easter song is the last line of each verse and the progression that occurs during their journey together.



Jesus comes to us, unknown

Jesus walks with us, unknown

Jesus speaks to us, unknown

Jesus stays with us, unknown

Jesus is himself made known

But it is the last line that I find the most challenging

Jesus is **through us** made known

Those two people walking to Emmaus are through that encounter and sudden awareness of just who it is that has been walking with and who has now just broken bread are suddenly equipped for transformation through God's. Does that sound familiar? I hope so because it has been our circuit vision statement for the past few years. They are so transformed by the experience that I picture them running all the way back to Jerusalem, despite darkness having fallen, to tell the others.

Are we open to allowing God to work on us, in us and **through us** so that God's love is revealed in this world? If so then perhaps we can bring the enthusiasm of the Emmaus road right here to this part of the world

Rev John Wiseman

Monday 16th March STF 309 See What a Morning

I am not a morning person! That is despite having had 2 children (one of whom was a very early riser!) and having spent half my working life as teacher, necessitating getting to school early each morning after dropping of aforementioned children at their childminder. Now, I enjoy more leisurely mornings with only occasionally having to see 6.00am or 7.00am for trips for the work I do. That said, I think THAT morning, that great and glorious Easter morning, I would have been a morning person! How about you?



Take a moment, as many of us will during Lent, to reflect on the devastation caused to the friends of Jesus, by his death on Good Friday. A children's book of Bible stories I often use in my work with children titles the story of Good Friday as 'A Dreadful Day' it ends by saying 'In the sadness and the dark Jesus died.' For me, that is very powerful to read as it sums up that day –

sadness, darkness, a day full of dread.

This hymn we are reflecting on today then begins with completely contrasting words to those – glorious, bright, dawning, hope. Wow! What a contrast! Here we read of the culmination of God's great and glorious plan. This plan that spans the years, speaks life and hope into the most challenging of situations. And the best bit? That comes in the last verse that affirms the risen Christ is crowned with power and authority and that death is defeated, love has won and we will reign with this King of Kings because he is risen! How amazing is that?

For me, this hymn is one of hope and how much we need that now, in our own lives, in the life of our country and our world. This most amazing event in history stirs hope – hope that things do not have to be the way they are now, but that they can and will be different if we walk in the light of this glorious hope that Jesus is risen and death is defeated.

A quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu rings true for me here: 'Hope is being able to see that there is light despite the darkness.' Those first disciples were in the depths of darkness on Good Friday. Maybe we sometimes feel we are in the depths of darkness. I think it is unlikely that the disciples thought there was any hope, even though Jesus had told them that he would come back to life. Standing this side of the resurrection, however, we know there is hope. A hope, neither dawning nor stirring, but a reality.

Jane Lewis (Local Preacher)

Tuesday 17th March STF 310 Sing a song, a joyful song

I wonder by the time you get to the end of this booklet how many of the songs that you have reflected on might have been suitable for an All Age Worship service....and no I am not opening the can of worms as to what All Age Worship is before you ask. But let's imagine you wanted a hymn / song to accompany a children's address for example, something easy to follow, memorable and with a catchy tune (or at least not a dirge!!)

Now many of you will know that I like a good action song. Hey if I'm honest I can even make do with a bad action song providing it is uplifting, fits in with the message of the service and get people moving. And the more bits of the body it gets moving the better in my opinion because to channel a former life, 'if you don't use it you lose it'

Well I think a song that gets us to sing (a given I suspect) but also to clap your hands, jump up and down, dance to the beat and last but not least wave your hands isn't a bad one. A spiritual and physical workout all in 3 minutes

And why are we doing all this movement I hear you ask, can't we just be a quiet, passive Christian. Well yes you can but remember the context of the song, it's the resurrection of Jesus and the answer to how we should react to that news is in the lyrics of the song, in all six verses in fact. It's to celebrate



Because if news of the resurrection doesn't get your heart beating like a drum, your hands waving, your voice shouting and your whole body feeling alive then well you must still be in your tomb.

Imagine if Mary upon meeting Jesus in the garden had just shrugged her shoulders, mumbled a muted response and then dawdled her way back home without telling anyone else....it doesn't have quite the same 'Good News' feeling does it. So come on let's get up, raise those voices, shake those limbs and dance for the sheer joy of Easter!!

Rev John Wiseman

Wednesday 18th March STF 370 Breathe on me, Breath of God

This is a beautiful reflective hymn, which has imagery rooted in the Holy Spirit as the breath of God, the words echoing biblical moments such as the creation narrative in Genesis, where God breathes life into Adam, and the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit fills the disciples with power and purpose. This hymn invites the worshipper to open themselves to the renewing presence of God, asking not merely for guidance, but for a deep, inward change.



To me it reflects a personal prayer a prayer that takes us through our lives with God, that we are renewed by God breathing on us filling us with a “life anew” how our faith grows as we follow the way God want us to live our lives leading us to know how God wants us to live our lives.

The third verse has the beautiful words “until this earthly part of me glows with fire divine”, this brings to my mind that we should all be glowing with the love of God and full of the Holy Spirit so that others can see, almost like ET when his tummy glows with love for Elliott.

The last verse reflects on the end goal, that we will be spending eternity with God, gives comfort to us as Christians that we will live with God.

I imagine the Holy Spirit is like when you blow out a candle, watching it extinguish, as the smoke floats off into the atmosphere not knowing where it is going but it is all around us. Just as God is around us working in and through our lives all the time.

This hymn speaks of our transformation where the believer seeks not just forgiveness but ongoing transformation.

Ultimately, the hymn is both a prayer and a declaration of faith, trusting that the breath of God can empower us to live eternally in God's presence, both now and in the life to come. Reminding us that God is closer to us than our own breath.

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

-John 20:21-

Rev Claire Sutcliffe

Thursday 19th March STF 373 Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire

There is something profoundly humbling about singing this hymn and realising how many voices have already carried these words. This is not a hymn of novelty or fashion, but of deep continuity. For centuries it has been sung at ordinations, confirmations and moments of discernment, whenever the Church has known that human words, plans and confidence are simply not enough. To sing it today is to stand in a long line of those who have knelt, prayed, and waited upon the Spirit before us.



What strikes me most is the simplicity of the prayer. It does not ask first for skill, authority, or success, but for inspiration – for the breath of God to be breathed into fragile human lives. “Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire, and lighten with celestial fire” acknowledges both our need and our hope: that what God ignites within us can warm, illuminate and transform, even when we feel unsure or inadequate.

As a very recently ordained minister who sang this at his ordination, this hymn feels like both a comfort and a challenge. It reminds me that ordination is not about personal calling alone, but about being caught up in something much older and much bigger than myself. The same Spirit invoked in this hymn has been trusted to guide the Church through faithfulness and failure, courage and compromise. My prayer, then, is not to be exceptional, but to be faithful – open to the Spirit’s work in me and through me.

As we sing this hymn together, we make this ancient prayer our own, not as individuals alone but as the gathered Church. We place ourselves within the long story of God’s people, trusting that the same Holy Spirit who inspired and sustained generations before us is present among us now. Together we pray to be shaped, enlivened and sent – a community inspired by God’s breath, lit by celestial fire, and ready to serve Christ faithfully in our time and place.

“Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Revd Jason McMahon-Riley

Friday 20th March STF 382 Holy Spirit, come, confirm us

His Story. His Song. And the Holy Spirit is the one who means the saga continues and the song resounds evermore in each of us, individually and together.

John 20:21-22 have been the verses that I keep coming back to this year:

Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you." When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Or, to quote another song, my mind paints the picture that Jesus says:

"staring at the blank page before you, open up the dirty window, let the sun illuminate the words that you cannot find... Today is where your book begins, the rest is still unwritten." ("Unwritten", Natasha Bedingfield)



But the page isn't completely, dauntingly, blank. We have His story as the starter. He lays the foundations of the narrative to be continued, and sends the Spirit, the illumination, to help us write the story of our lives. It is a story that is to be written not just for ourselves, or about ourselves, but to be woven into the narrative of God and God's world.

Brian Foley's song therefore becomes a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to enable us to write our part in the story:

Verse one is perhaps about having confidence in the story we have inherited, both in what it says and what it might mean for the world;
Verse two may be about recognising the struggles we face in writing the story and cultivating an awareness of God through the struggles;
Verse three speaks to me of the need for something to change in me in order for that story to be a reality in my life and my story to reflect Jesus';
And verse four suggests that we, as storytellers, can find our place within and alongside the Trinity, particularly when our story is defined by love.

Each of us has our own blank pages, our own stories. If we're disciples of Jesus then we are trying to write them in line with His story. We do not do it alone but with God's own help in the person of the Holy Spirit.

I wonder how you might pray for help in writing the next part of His story?

Finish this sentence as your prayer: "Holy Spirit, come,"

Marc Williamson (Local Preacher)

Saturday 21st March STF 391 O Breath of Life come sweeping through us

This hymn is beautiful to use as a prayer, if you're ever struggling to find the words. It speaks of the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a gentle hymn, calling on the Spirit to come, as 'breath of life'.



The words are beseeching, asking for help, to show us the way and to renew us, remake us, revive and restore us. We sense that the Holy Spirit is gentle, without anger, with patience and grace.

All these words beginning 're' tell us that we need the Spirit to come and lift us, to give us life in all its fullness (John 10:10), when we might just be existing.

Renew us, because perhaps we're a bit stale.

Restore us, because perhaps we're a little broken.

Remake us, because perhaps we've become a little damaged and need the potter to remake and remodel the clay.

And revive us, - because maybe we need the Spirit to awaken us from our slumber.

We need the Spirit in order to exist – as people, as communities and as the Church. The Holy Spirit, often depicted as a dove – is in all our churches, the Spirit is within all of us. But, sometimes we may need a little nudge to pay attention.

This hymn, for me, says most of what I need to know about the Holy Spirit. She is with us, she has a job to do, and we need her to help us with all those 're...' words. Renew, remake, revive, restore.

Holy Spirit – help us - show us the way, and fire us up for the way ahead.
Amen.

Deacon Helen Snowball

Sunday 22nd March

STF 393 She sits like a bird

'Enemy of Apathy' is a hymn that comes from the Iona community and reminds us of the fact that the Holy Spirit calls us to action. The picture I have chosen which I took only a few minutes walk from my house reminds me of that. The Holy Spirit is described in this hymn, as well as in scripture, as a dove. Yet when I sing this hymn I also remember that the Holy Spirit is also like a majestic bird like a cormorant- who seem to own the waters and could be unsettling. Both the gentleness of the dove and the unsettling nature of other birds tell us something about who the Holy Spirit is.

The hymn talks of how the Holy Spirit challenges us through the words of scripture How the Holy Spirit calls us to action to challenge injustice and to make the world a better place. She also challenges us to expand our vision of God from what we have contained. When I first heard this hymn I struggled with it because of the language it used for God- and yet in the wrestling with it it has become one of my favourite hymns. It is one I often find myself singing to myself or quoting in preaching.

I wonder where it is that we prefer a safe image of God rather than opening ourselves up to the possibilities that God is calling us to? Where is it that God is calling us to move out of "apathy" and into action.

Why not spend a few moments of prayer reflecting on where God might want to challenge you, or to lead you into a deeper relationship with Gods-self. For, we know we do not do any of this in our own strength but in the strength of the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts.



James Blackhall (Student Deacon)

Monday 23rd March STF 398 There's a spirit in the air

The hymn '*There's a Spirit in the air*'s peaks to the very core of our faith; that as Christians we should be seeking the infilling of the Holy Spirit, not so that we can appear 'holier than thou' but so that we can live and work in the world as disciples of Christ.



This infilling of the Spirit offers a practical application in our discipleship journey. Whilst individuals can often relate to God and to his son Jesus, many struggle with the concept of the Holy Spirit. Maybe because this is the aspect of God that they fear the most because there may be some belief that Christians will be expected to participate, rather than be passive, in the work of God and they feel unworthy of the call.

The first verse echoes the above as it indicates that it is a calling to all Christians to be active in the world, in relationships, in communities, in public spaces, in the church, and it is a reminder that God has gone before us and calls us to join in with his work wherever that may be.

The second verse represents an evangelical call not to be shy but to speak out about how God has been at work in the world. The story that we tell at Christmas of the baby in the manger is often sugar coated and even amongst the young can be treated with disdain (the man in the white beard and red outfit offering more appeal). As the verse concludes, 'God in Christ has come to stay'!

Whether we participate in Communion where we express our love for Jesus and remember the sacrifice he made for each one of us, as we share the bread and wine we also recognise the need for bread to feed the body as well as the soul. Food Banks and the work of projects like God's menu in Arnold are a means by which the body as well as the soul is fed.

Later, our attention is drawn to the plight of those who struggle with loneliness and isolation and or who have no home. The Spirit moves in these situations and shows us how practical needs can be met. People who may have felt very far from God because their primary need has been for food, warmth and shelter may experience love through the unexpected actions of others.

'There's a Spirit in the air, calling Christians everywhere' is a rallying call to us all, not to stay behind our closed doors but to be out in the world, in the market place, the shopping centres, just being ourselves and offering the gifts that God has given us through his Spirit, so that people might experience the all-embracing love of God.

Deacon Julie Morton

Tuesday 24th March STF 503 Love Divine, All Loves excelling

It's the age old question which comes first the words or the music? For Elton John, it was always the words, sent to him by his long time writing partner and collaborator, lyricist Bernie Taupin, leaving Elton with the task of composing a suitable tune to accompany the words, thoughts, emotions and story that had been written by another.

How did he know what tune would suit? Why for example did he set the words for 'I'm still standing' one of his most well known songs, to an upbeat, piano pounding, bass thumping, drum bashing score rather than to a melancholy downbeat tune that I have always thought would have worked better. But then again I haven't got two Academy awards, an Emmy, a Tony and six Grammys so what do I know.



All of which brings me to Love Divine, written by the Elton John of the 18th century, Charles Wesley, although in truth he probably didn't have quite the same lifestyle. Hand on heart, I have never really liked the hymn; it's just too in your face, too bombastic and just too full on for my tastes.

The tunes whether it be Stainer, Blaenwern, Beecher, Hyfrydol or Fairest Isle just don't do it for me. And whilst I realise that many of you will by now foaming at the mouth and screaming the words' blasphemy' and 'heretic' in my general direction, that's just how I feel.

Then we had the pandemic and lockdown during which the NNE circuit posted a whole variety of worship material on line. And one of those things was a version of Love Divine performed by Suzanne Williamson, performed to a tune I didn't recognise (I later discovered it was based on a version by Rend Collective) but one that completely transformed the words and meaning of the song. For a moment it was like the scales had fallen off my eyes, or perhaps my ears had been opened would be a better way of putting it.

This version would, whenever I get asked to go on the programme, and surely it can only be a matter of time, be one of my Desert Island Discs, it will be one of my funeral hymns. It was, and still is 5 years later simply 'divine', the best version of a faith related song I have heard in years. But don't take my word for it, check it out for yourself on YouTube.....love divine + NNE.

Rev John Wiseman

Wednesday 25th March STF 489 - All I once held dear

This Graham Kendrick hymn is almost a progression through someone's life of faith. It begins with their story of a life of materialism, imagine someone collecting expensive watches, or judging based on foreign holidays or the car someone drives, or having the biggest house – what they have built their life around.

But then, following the discovery of Christ, they realise that everything is worthless compared to Christ. The meaning that Christ brings into our lives is far greater than anything we could earn through working for money. It is far greater than anything we can buy.

The hymn also goes by the title 'Knowing you Jesus', because that's what is really important.

Knowing you Jesus – there is no greater thing – and I'd hope that sentiment is true for everyone reading this booklet. I wonder how many people can remember their life before they accepted Christ in their heart. I don't mean knowing Jesus and his stories, and what his mission and ministry was, most of us learned this as children. I mean when you actually understood who Jesus was, what he did for us on the cross, and what he continues to do in our lives today.

Before that moment, what was your life like? What did you hold dear and what do you hold dear now? What were your priorities then and what are your priorities now? And now that you know Jesus fully in your life, what do you hold dear instead?



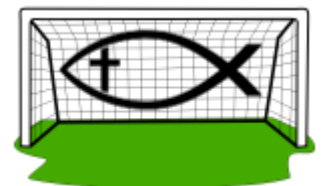
Deacon Helen Snowball

Thursday 26th March STF 547 Beyond these walls of worship

I am not over familiar with this hymn, the words of this hymn leapt out at me as a real challenge. What does our discipleship look like after we leave our worship space, be that on a Sunday morning or evening, or a Tuesday afternoon, or a Wednesday morning. When we walk through the door out onto the street, do we leave God, our faith, our calling behind, or do we keep God at the centre of our lives for the other 6 days of the week?

We all have a life “beyond the walls of worship,” even if it may not seem like it at times! For each one of us there is a story beyond our church life. We have our families, our work, our hobbies, our concerns, our responsibilities. The question is, do we use our faith in our outside story?

On December 16th 2025, a Macclesfield Town Football player, Ethan McLeod, was tragically killed in a car accident. Another member of the squad, Danny Elliot, regularly leads bible studies at the club and prays with groups of players before matches. He spoke of how the whole squad met together after the accident and he led a prayer group. "Nothing can help you with that feeling of pain and suffering, but I have tried to do what I can in terms of helping and supporting the other players," Elliott said. "A lot of the players have looked towards me as a source of comfort which is refreshing and feels like an honour and a privilege ..." A real life example of someone using their faith in their everyday work.



Hucknall Engage United is a football team which is sharing the Christian, story not in a church building, but on the football field. The manager, Mark Daft, who some of you will know, prays with the team before every game and speaks of God’s love with the players wherever they are in life. Some members of the team have begun to attend church and one person has been baptised.

But it’s not always easy to live out our faith in the everyday world, where we may be the only Christian, or feel isolated or even ridiculed about our faith. Verse 2 asks the question, “will we display your love for all when our faith’s put to the test?... Will we display our faith in you, in life in praise, in prayer.” But verse 3 gives us reassurance and hope because it asks that the Holy Spirit will strengthen us to make the whole of our lives our worship.

This hymn is about whole life discipleship,” says Ian; “that sense that your faith matters after an hour of worship is over.” Is there anything you could do to show God’s love beyond the walls of worship?

Cath Smith (Local Preacher)

Friday 27th March STF 548 Blessed Assurance



This well-loved hymn written by Fanny Crosby in 1873; during her lifetime she wrote around 8,000 gospel songs and hymns. But what makes Fanny remarkable is that she was blind from 6 weeks old. She was a devoted Christian and in her later life was known fondly as Aunt Fanny.

One day Fanny was visiting a friend, Phoebe Palmer Knapp, who had written a melody, she played it for Fanny on the piano and asked her if she had any words to go along with the melody, Fanny spent a couple of minutes in prayer, then exclaimed “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine”. Fanny poured her heart into the hymns that she wrote, and this hymn reflects her unwavering love of God.

The words of this hymn resonate in my heart; it speaks to me of my calling to serve God. In the assurance of faith and having a personal relationship with Jesus. When I sing this hymn, I feel I should fall to my knees and praise God.

I particularly love the hymns refrain “This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long,”. That my relationship with God is my own, how I choose to tell my story of my faith is personal to me. Just as your relationship with God is your own. We all have a story to tell, the Methodists Presidential theme for this year is Our story, our song, reminding and encouraging us to share our church’s story and our own.

This is an uplifting and joyful hymn it speaks of salvation, particularly in this season of lent reflecting on how Jesus died for us, we remember this in our acts of communion, “washed in his blood”, of love, of hope, of joy that is experienced in knowing Jesus. The words create beautiful imagery in the second verse visions of rapture, angels and whispers of love. “Praising my saviour all the day long”, such wonderful words, this hymn speaks of God’s steadfast love for us and brings us peace when we surrender to God in worship and lift our voices praising our saviour all the day long.

Rev. Claire Sutcliffe

Saturday 28th March STF 564 O thou who camest from above



I've chosen STF 564 "O thou who camest from above". Why? As time has passed and my faith has changed, and I hope has grown, I've found myself believing more strongly in some core things and looking on everything else (on a good day) as colour and depth, or (on a bad day) as noise and froth. It's the same for me when it comes to Methodism. I wasn't brought up as a Methodist but as a wee Ulster Presbyterian. I chose to become one. So, when people ask me – what is Methodism, what's it about, what's the difference? – I've really had to think about it.

It's a similar story to that of my faith in general. I've found myself believing more strongly in some central things and worrying less about the rest. So, what does it really boil down to? For me at least it's grace. God's grace. God's prevenient grace. God's prevenient grace in all things. God's grace that is already there and enables us to use our free will to respond - or not - to his gift of salvation and life-changing love. For a wee Ulster Presbyterian brought up on Calvinistic double-predestination, that's a real release, and it's certainly an experience-and-a-half of grace.

For me, God's grace is at the heart of my experience of God personally and as a (now retired) minister: especially in terms of loving and using me as I am - not as I ought to be. God forgiving me again and again for my mistakes, sins, weaknesses, vices and stupidity - loving me as I am, not as I ought to be. God rejoicing in the good in me and not the bad, having faith in me when I have little or none – walking alongside me as I am, not as I ought to be. Hence the picture of 'the first pilgrim'.

And so, this hymn. This has been my 'stepping back from the brink' hymn. When I've really, really wondered about what I believe – and we've all been there. Or when I've wondered if I can go on, or should continue, or why I'm a minister– and we've all been there. Or when I've so disappointed myself, others and God in what I've said, thought, and done that I want to crawl away – and we've all been there.

Instead, I've been met my God's grace, forgiveness, healing, love and blessings. Whether or not I've been a good minister– and I hope I have, or a good Christian or not – and I hope I have, I've certainly experienced an amazing God and a graceful God and a loving God and a life-changing God. I've continually asked, and still do ask, and will go on asking him, in these words inspired by Leviticus 6:13: "O Thou who camest from above, the pure celestial fire to impart, Kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart". For I know that God will, and that really is grace.

Rev Alan Boyd

Sunday 29th March STF 566 *Take my life and let it be*

I have always been led to the thought of faith as a physical journey. At junior school we were read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which reinforces the travel aspect of the journey. However, much as one is physically moving in the direction of God the appearance of your body at the gates of heaven is insufficient.

The hymn is directing you to be spiritually aware of the need for non-corporeal preparation. By taking moments and days to praise your God you are required to recognise that there is a need to be prayerful in your life.



At other points you are guided to renounce worldly riches and to come to the Father instead offering up your intellect for the sole use of the Lord. The component parts of your earthly life are to be given over for the use of God in his wisdom and care.

The final verse is the returning of the most precious of God's gifts to humankind in that your Love is offered and received. In this way the journey ends with God taking possession of not only your physical being but the full sacrifice of your love and life into His Kingdom.

The journey itself is hard and long. The effort required is monumental, but the rewards promised are far beyond any imaginable.

Along the way you will be asked to praise God, to tell others of His glory and to follow His Word wherever it may lead you.

By exercising daily, it is hoped to keep your corporeal body healthy. *Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love; take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.* However, with a similar outlook one can claim better spiritual health.

When your journey reaches the gates of heaven your body will not be alone in preparedness but also your spirit and soul will also be ready.

David Fensome (Worship Leader AMC)

Monday 30th March STF 636 O Love that wilt not let me go

In this hymn we have words which point to how we might experience and express our relationship with God, who, even though we may currently know weariness, 'twilight', pain, and trial, offers us fullness of life...

The words of this hymn hold potential - the same kind of potential we hear throughout the words within each of the different verses; that is the potential of God's love, light, and joy;

- In ocean depths; richer, fuller be.
- In sunshine's blaze; brighter, fairer be.
- In rain, rainbow; in despair, tearlessness.
- In dust, and death; life that shall endless be.



Whatever this Lent has in store - as we experience this 'wilderness time' for ourselves, and as community; wherever we are, whatever our experiences have been - and indeed

whoever we travel with - as we take this journey through to Easter, I pray that we might enter with confidence.

That we might know an assurance that, even in a time of conflicts, outrageous and inexplicable actions and traumas inflicted upon innocent lives by powerful and remote people, and in societies where we see suffering that many of us cannot imagine - in our own streets and neighbourhoods, in communities where we have doubts and anxieties and fears for the future too - that we would know the unfathomable, abundant, and majestic grace and love of a God who WILL NOT let go of us... a God who will ALWAYS hold us in love. Love that is full, fair, tear-less, and eternal...

And not just for 'us'...

Specifically - YOU, and me, and each of the 8 billion+ people on this planet.

Love, eternal and sure.

Rev Richard Byass

Tuesday 31st March STF 663 I the Lord of sea and sky

My earliest memory of singing the hymn 'I, the Lord of sea and sky' is during my time at primary school, probably aged around eight or nine years old. I always enjoyed the tune and found the words pretty easy to pick up too.

After leaving primary school, it was comfortably over a decade before I heard the hymn again and whenever I did, it was just one I used to sing and enjoy as a young child but now one that I felt was a bit of a 'golden oldie'.

The turning point came when I felt God calling me to be a local preacher in late 2019. One of the ways in which God spoke to me was through incredibly vivid dreams. It was a really clear indication that this was truly from God. It was humbling, exciting, and terrifying in equal measure. Following this experience, I have always connected with the lines: 'Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night,' having experienced this myself.

Once this calling had been placed over my life, I had a choice, I could ignore it and hope that it went away, or I could embrace it and trust God to use me for His purpose. For me, it became an easy decision to do the latter and therefore the words of the hymn became synonymous with discernment and calling. Because of this connection it always feels special to sing it and if I'm in the congregation when it has been chosen, I always feel moved by its inclusion.



The opening line of the hymn indicates the power of a God who created the earth and everything in it. With each passing year, I feel more and more of an appreciation of nature. I notice God in the intricacies of creation time and time again.

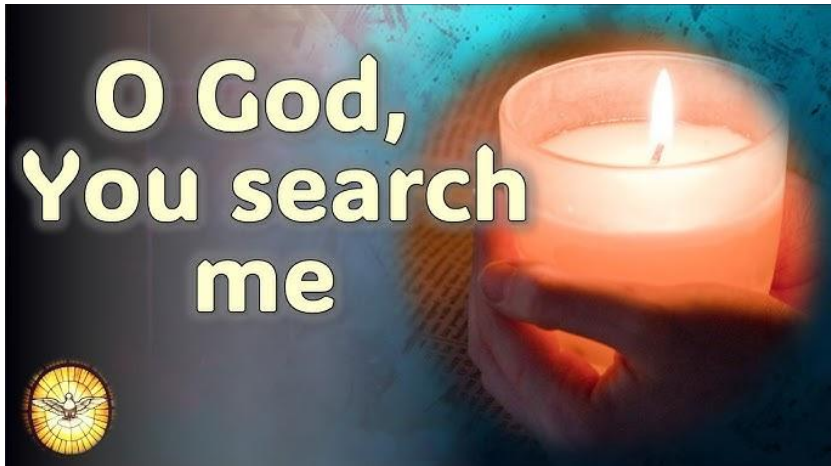
I was asked to include a picture with this reflection and the one I've chosen shows the sheer beauty of the juxtaposition of sea and sky at Filey beach on a fresh but beautiful February morning a few years ago. I never claim to be much of a photographer but this is one picture I'm proud of.

Tom Surgay (Local Preacher)

Wednesday 1st April STF 728 O God you search me

Psalm 139, which this song is based on, and the poetry and devotional material associated with it, have been a particular source of comfort, assurance, and insight into a relationship with a creator God over thousands of years. The sense of knowing and being known, the invitation to belonging and nurture, the potential softness of maternal parenting and the imagery of safety and protection have been able to assuage doubts and uncertainties for millennia.

Despite that sense of being gently enveloped, this imagery holds power too.



Being known in such a way is also the kind of knowing seen in 1 Kings 19's 'terrifying still small voice', is the kind of knowing of Gethsemane's 'take this cup from me...yet not my will but yours'. This is the scrutiny of being seen wholly, deeply, fully - every

part of us - and still being loved, cherished, named as worthy and valued beyond all treasure or commodity.

Furthermore, it is not a 'when I am in this place or moment or attitude', for even when we are as far away from where we would want to be in our lives, metaphorically or literally, we are seen, known, and loved. A colleague who works with the Royal Navy's Submarine Service as chaplain speaks of this imagery as a crucial part of connection with God when in the deepest depths of the seas and oceans of the world and cut off from all communication with anyone outside of the boat.

In waking and sleeping, in activity and rest, in being employed for God and laid aside for God - we are seen, known, and loved - eternally, perfectly, faithfully, and truly. And finally, we are reminded that in this seeing, we are renewed, us, and all of creation - under the gaze of a God whose eyes of love rest on us always - are re-created into the best version of ourselves in the hands of our God.

Rev Richard Byass

Faces of Jesus through Lent

On seven consecutive Sunday through Lent and Holy Week, Rev John will be facilitating a series of films looking at the many different faces of Jesus. This will take place at Hucknall Central Methodist Church. This is open to anyone from our 15 churches across the circuit. Come to see one, come to watch them all. Please invite anyone you know who might be interested.

Sunday 22nd Feb 4pm *The Last days in the desert*

A film that explore the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness

Sunday 1st March 4pm *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Come and sing along with the musical arena tour version of this classic

Sunday 8th March 3.30pm *Son of Man***

Imagine how the story of Jesus might be retold in a modern day South African township

Sunday 15th March 4pm *The gospel according to St Matthew*

Explore the story of Jesus through the eyes of Matthew

Sunday 22nd March 4pm *Maria Magdalena*

Mary Magdalene, much misunderstood and maligned. Come and explore the story of Jesus through her eyes

Sunday 29th March 4pm *The Miracle maker (animated)*

Sunday 5th April Easter Sunday 4pm *Risen*

A Roman tribune is tasked with finding the missing body of Jesus