

# The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023



This act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, 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.

I have included some links to allow you to access versions of the hymns / songs / music via YouTube

## Let's begin by singing STF 489

All I once held dear, built my life upon  
All this world reveres, and wars to own  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss  
Spent and worthless now, compared to this

*Knowing you, Jesus  
Knowing you, there is no greater thing  
You're my all, you're the best  
You're my joy, my righteousness  
And I love you, Lord*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more  
To be found in you and known as yours  
To possess by faith what I could not earn  
All-surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh, to know the power of your risen life  
And to know You in Your sufferings  
To become like you in your death, my Lord  
So with you to live and never die

Graham Kendrick  
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## Opening prayers: Psalm 89

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;  
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness  
known through all generations.<sup>2</sup> I will declare  
that your love stands firm forever, that you  
have established your faithfulness in heaven  
itself.

<sup>3</sup> You said, "I have made a covenant with my  
chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant,  
<sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your line forever and make  
your throne firm through all generations.'"

<sup>5</sup> The heavens praise your wonders, Lord,  
your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the  
holy ones. <sup>6</sup> For who in the skies above can  
compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord  
among the heavenly beings? <sup>7</sup> In the council of  
the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more  
awesome than all who surround him.

<sup>8</sup> Who is like you, Lord God Almighty?  
You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness  
surrounds you.

## Today's 1<sup>st</sup> bible reading: John 3:1-12

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus,  
a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> by  
night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that  
you are a teacher who has come from God; for  
no one can do these signs that you do apart  
from the presence of God." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered  
him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the  
kingdom of God without being born from  
above."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can  
anyone be born after having grown old? Can  
one enter a second time into the mother's  
womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very  
truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom  
of God without being born of water and Spirit.  
<sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is  
born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup> Do not be

astonished that I said to you, 'You<sup>[d]</sup> must be born from above.'<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>8</sup> The wind<sup>[f]</sup> blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

<sup>11</sup> "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you<sup>[d]</sup> do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

### **Today's message pt 1 Sharing our questions**

We first encounter Nicodemus, a Jewish leader and member of the Pharisee party, in chapter 3 of John's gospel. He comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness, after all as a respected religious figure he would not want to be seen associating with a radical rebel like Jesus would he. Nicodemus comes ready to **share his questions** and leaves with a multitude of answers he perhaps doesn't understand. Answers that will lead to yet more questions, questions about God, questions about faith, questions about who this man Jesus actually is.

One can perhaps understand his confusion because the word that Jesus uses could have three possible meanings: born again, born anew or born from above. Maybe it's a deliberate play on words, not the first or last time Jesus has employed such a device, but it certainly appears to stop Nicodemus in his tracks. He appears to like a God that fits nice and neatly into parameters he can understand and is comfortable with.

Now suddenly he finds that the box in which he would like to contain God is no longer big enough and will never be big enough. Jesus' comments about the need to be born again / anew / from above mean perhaps for the first time in a long time Nicodemus has to think outside of the box.

But Nicodemus' curiosity has been stirred. A small as yet hidden seed has been planted during this initial encounter. Now he wants to

know more, he is not afraid to ask and even to display his lack of understanding, something I wish more of us were like after listening to sermons, during our fellowship meetings and within our bible study groups. Yet at this point in his faith journey although Nicodemus is interested he is not yet ready to accept the invitation being offered.

**Q:** What stops us from asking questions about our faith, is it shyness, is it embarrassment, is it that we are never given the opportunity to ask about the things of which we are unsure? Perhaps like Nicodemus we simply need to find the courage to voice our questions because believe me you will not be the only one who is struggling to find the answer.

### **Let's sing again, words that pick up on the passage we have just read set to the familiar tune of 'What a friend we have in Jesus'**

Nicodemus sought out Jesus  
at a lonely, quiet hour.  
He said, "Teacher, God is with you!  
For in you we see God's power."  
Jesus turned and gave an answer  
filled with challenge and with love:  
"You can never see God's kingdom  
till you're born from heaven above."

"Born again!" said Nicodemus.  
"Is that something one can do?"  
Jesus said, "Don't be surprised now  
that you must be born anew.  
And it's not by your own doing;  
wind and Spirit both blow free!  
They are not for your controlling;  
trust in God for what will be."

\*God, your Spirit still surprises  
like an ever-changing wind,  
Bringing life and love and justice  
where despair and death have been.  
May we see your Spirit working  
as a gift from heaven above.  
Blessed, may we then be a blessing  
to this world that you so love.\*

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNIwh4vRbPo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNIwh4vRbPo)

## Today's 2<sup>nd</sup> bible reading: John 7:45-52

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' <sup>46</sup> The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' <sup>47</sup> Then the Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?' <sup>48</sup> Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? <sup>49</sup> But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.'  
<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> before, and who was one of them, asked, <sup>51</sup> 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?' <sup>52</sup> They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

### Today's message pt2 Sharing our support

The second appearance of Nicodemus is in the seventh chapter of John. Some of the Jewish religious leaders want to kill Jesus but Nicodemus, himself a member of the ruling religious elite remember, offers a defence by citing a legal loophole. Now of course his actions could be interpreted simply as Nicodemus being pedantic about the interpretation, imposition and implications of the law. Perhaps he is simply a man who likes to dot all the i's and cross all the t's, but I don't think that is what's happening.

Nicodemus might still be in the shadows but it appears he is no longer lost in total darkness. Perhaps some of the **questions he shared** with Jesus have been answered. While perhaps still not an open follower of Jesus, who knows perhaps he lacks the courage at that precise moment, Nicodemus is certainly taking his first tentative steps towards the light. Nicodemus is happy to **share his support** of Jesus or at least to defend him from an unfair kangaroo court. He has certainly moved on in his faith journey but he has yet to reach the point from which he could not turn back. And yet that seed sown during his initially encounter with Jesus is certainly beginning to show signs of new life emerging.

**Q:** In recent days there have been stories on our news bulletins about groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil interrupting sporting events in order to protest about issues they are passionate about. Whilst we might not condone their actions we cannot doubt that they put their ideological ideas into action through the practical support they offer.

How passionate are we, how much support do we offer to try to solve some of the issues that lie at the heart of our Christian faith? How much support do we offer in helping to solve homelessness, food poverty, injustice, loneliness to name just a few?

### Let's sing a familiar hymn STF 661

Give me the faith which can remove  
And sink the mountain to a plain;  
Give me the childlike praying love,  
Which longs to build thy house again;  
Thy love, let it my heart o'er-power,  
And all my simple soul devour.

.I would the precious time redeem,  
And longer live for this along,  
To spend and to be spent for them  
Who have not yet my Saviour known;  
Fully on these my mission prove,  
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,  
Into thy blessed hands receive;  
And let me live to preach thy word,  
And let me to thy glory live;  
My every sacred moment spend  
In publishing the sinner's Friend

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart  
With boundless charity divine,  
So shall I all my strength exert,  
And love them with a zeal like thine,  
And lead them to thy open side,  
The sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI9\\_D\\_9x1n0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI9_D_9x1n0)

## Today's 3<sup>rd</sup> bible reading: John 19:38-42

<sup>38</sup> After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. <sup>39</sup> Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. <sup>40</sup> They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. <sup>41</sup> Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

### Today's message pt3 Sharing our faith

Finally we find Nicodemus once again in John 19, only this time he is not hiding in the darkness anymore. He is not asking questions and his support for Jesus and the type of kingdom he is trying to bring into being has obviously grown. Nor does he appear to be fearful of speaking out, indeed one might say his actions speak louder than words as he buys a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and assists Joseph of Arimathea in placing Jesus' lifeless body in the tomb. By identifying himself with the events of the cross, Nicodemus risked much more than his reputation. His job and his life were on the line as he **shares the faith** he now possesses.

Finding himself standing in the spotlight of the cross is for Nicodemus the point of no return. The man who once came to Jesus under the cover of darkness for fear of guilt by association has now committed an act of care and compassion and reverence Jesus, one that is carried out unashamedly in broad daylight!

Here at this moment in time when the 'light of the world' has been snuffed out and darkness once again covers the earth, it is the shining light of Nicodemus' new found faith that pierces the gloom. The seed that was planted and slowly germinated to reveal fresh shoots of life has now blossomed to produce fruit.

Sometimes it is easy to assume that Nicodemus' faith journey was linear, simply progressing from one stage to another with no back tracking or stumbling on route. It truth I suspect it was far from straight forward (excuse the pun) but rather more like a circuitous route more akin to ascending a spiral staircase, with repeated moments of questions, hesitation, fear and certainty.

As Christians I think we are all like Nicodemus. We all have moments when we need courage to **share the questions** we have about our faith. We all have moments when we are asked to **share our support** on issues that form the backbone of our Christian faith. We should all be searching, investigating, exploring, discussing and hoping to develop discipleship. And part of that discipleship is being comfortable to **share our faith**.

If your journey is anything like mine there will be numerous occasions when you end up scratching your head in confusion at the answers you are given.

We will all have moments when we lack courage to speak out, speak for, speak against issues that go against our beliefs.

But I also hope that we have an increasing number of moments when we can stand in the full glare of the world's spotlight and declare who we are, proclaim the good news of what we believe it, announce who it is that we don't just follow but also trust by sharing our faith.

Just as seeds of hope were once sown in Nicodemus and also in us, we too must act as sowers out in our communities. Just as others helped to tend and care for our fledgling faith, we too must walk alongside others as they take their first tentative steps out of the shadows. Just as our faith blossomed and produces fruit, we too must allow others to bloom in their respective ministry and produce a bountiful harvest.

Our faith journey might on occasions feel as if it is two steps forward and one step back but as long as we are heading along 'the way', one that involves a journey to the cross, to the empty tomb and then onwards through Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, then we can be sure that individually and together as a family of faith we are headed in the right direction. One that involves moving out of the darkness and into that glorious light that only Jesus can offer. Amen

**Q** What are those ordinary everyday moments within our lives when we might be able to share a little about our faith?  
I don't mean parading up and down in our local communities wearing a sandwich board proclaiming 'The End is Nigh', although if that is your thing then be my guest!  
But rather the moments when we might just be able to slip a little something into conversation that highlights our connections with church, with faith and with Jesus. After all if we never share our faith how will other ever head the good news?

### Let's sing again, STF 553

I am a new creation,  
no more in condemnation,  
here in the grace of God I stand.  
My heart is overflowing,  
my love just keeps on growing,  
here in the grace of God I stand.

And I will praise You, Lord,  
yes I will praise You, Lord,  
and I will sing of all that You have done.  
A joy that knows no limit,  
a lightness in my spirit  
here in the grace of God I stand.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwjOLFMZhQo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwjOLFMZhQo)

### Today's message pt 4 Sharing our journey together

Over the past 6 weeks it is hoped that those leading worship at your church and also through these written services have been doing so based on some of the themes contained within the Discipleship Pathways. These have included...

**Challenge:** with emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion

**Hospitality:** how can we become better at both giving and receiving hospitality?

**Noticing:** Can we notice God in scripture and in our communities and then join in with and where God is already active?

**Flourish:** How can we engage better with God's creation and help to address, slow down and ultimately reverse some of the damage we have done?

**Serve;** How can we be servants of the Servant King in the communities in which we live?

And today well hopefully you have realised that the topic is about **sharing**.

Hopefully in the next few weeks you will receive either in electronic or paper form a copy of Discipleship Pathways: Travelling Together.

This contains a lot of the information collated from the last circuit sharing day, ideas about how you and your church might encounter, explore and engage with some of these areas.

Thanks to Marc Williamson, the circuit staff team and all those who contributed to providing this material.

The next step, well that is down to us. At the back of the booklet there are some spaces for you to write down and **share** (did you see what I did there!!) ideas you have.

Idea that you can **share** with your leadership teams, **share** with your church councils hey even with **share** with your minister, about how we can continue to move forward on this journey together.

Because that is what God calls us to do, as individuals, as churches and as a circuit, to journey forward together from the old to the new, in faith, in hope and in love.

### Prayers of Intercessions

Please pray for ways that you, your church and your circuit can respond to **challenge**, to improving our **hospitality**, to **noticing** God, to **flourishing** as part of God's creation, to **servicing** our communities and to **sharing** our faith

Please pray for those news stories that have dominated our thoughts this week

Please pray for your family of faith, your own family and yourself

Let us conclude our prayers by joining together with the Lord's of the Lord's prayer...Our Father

**Let's conclude this act of worship by  
singing STF 476**

*One more step along the world I go,  
One more step along the world I go;  
From the old things to the new,  
Keep me travelling along with you:*  
And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
Keep me travelling along with you.

*Round the corners of the world I turn,  
More and more about the world I learn;  
All the new things that I see  
You'll be looking at along with me.*  
And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
Keep me travelling along with you.

*As I travel through the bad and good,  
Keep me travelling the way I should.  
Where I see no way to go,  
You'll be telling me the way, I know.*  
And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
Keep me travelling along with you.

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

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

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PXV3dwaeNU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PXV3dwaeNU)

**A blessing...**

Go from this place to continue on your journey  
of faith knowing that you do not walk alone, but  
alongside other pilgrims, all moving slowly but  
surely from darkness into light.