



# The **Methodist** Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020

*walk the talk.*

This short 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 together:**

**STF 461 There's a wideness in God's mercy**

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of our mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify His strictness  
With a zeal He will not own.

If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

**Opening prayer: psalm 107; 1-8 and 33-43**

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. <sup>2</sup>Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble <sup>3</sup>and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. <sup>4</sup>Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; <sup>5</sup>hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. <sup>6</sup>Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; <sup>7</sup>he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. <sup>8</sup>Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.....

<sup>33</sup>He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, <sup>34</sup>a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. <sup>35</sup>He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. <sup>36</sup>And there he lets the hungry live, and they establish a town to live in; <sup>37</sup>they sow fields, and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield. <sup>38</sup>By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their cattle decrease. <sup>39</sup>When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, trouble, and sorrow, <sup>40</sup>he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; <sup>41</sup>but he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks. <sup>42</sup>The upright see it and are glad; and all wickedness stops its mouth. <sup>43</sup>Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the Lord.

## This morning's reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

<sup>2</sup> "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

<sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

<sup>5</sup> "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries<sup>[a]</sup> wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup> they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

<sup>8</sup> "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you will be your servant. <sup>12</sup> For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

### Let's sing again, a new song but to the familiar tune of 'Alleluia sing to Jesus'

Lord, you teach us to be humble  
in the things we do and say  
So that others will not stumble  
or discouraged turn away.  
For a faith that's lived for glory  
full of bragging, full of show  
Cannot tell the gospel story  
that your people long to know.

How do other people greet us  
as we journey through our days?  
Do we hope that they will meet us  
with a word of thanks or praise?  
Do we seek congratulations  
for the kind of life we lead?  
Do we want their admiration  
for the things that we believe?

May we never burden others  
with a faith that's hard to bear.  
Make us kind to one another;  
make us humble in our prayer.

As we give up seats of honour,  
may we give you glory, too.  
Lord, you teach us to be humble;  
may we humbly follow you.

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### Today's message.

I wondered if you have ever ventured into a Camping shop looking for a few bits and piece for a weekend away only to be met by a sales assistant shaking his head at the meagre kit list you have thought would be sufficient. Within moments the sales assistant has attempted to persuade you that what you really need and indeed want is a veritable A-Z of all the latest high tech (and high expense) state of the art equipment which to your untrained eye appears enough to kit out an army going on manoeuvres rather than one man going to the peak district overnight.

Placing the myriad of essential items in your bulging trolley and wondering how you are ever going to be able to get it in your car never mind carry it, you ask the sales assistant where was his last camping trip. The assistant looks at you puzzled before replying "Camping, me, na mate I go all inclusive!"

This scenario reminds me of today's reading where the Pharisees are quite content to tell the people to do one thing, whilst they themselves do something different.

In our readings since September in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has been going hard at the Pharisees and other religious leaders. They are like the complaining labourers who don't like others getting paid the minimum wage, they are the wicked servants in the vineyard who produce wild grapes, they don't show up to the great royal wedding banquet, they challenge Jesus on taxes and yet carry around Caesar's coin. Today's text is Jesus' parting shot at the Jerusalem leadership. And yet it is perhaps surprising that Jesus starts off by actually offering a compliment to his supposed antagonists.

The Pharisees are speaking the Word of the Lord in a way that one ought to listen too. They have been issued with a God given authority but then they

begin interpreting the text and their own interests begin to infect the meaning of God's word to God's people. Their words and more importantly their subsequent actions have betrayed the seat of Moses.

They are people who dress the part and appear in all the right places. They talk the talk but they have forgotten how to walk the walk. At its heart what they say is right but they do not put it into practise. They have attempted to put a fence around the law, obscuring its true meaning with innumerable rules, regulations and restrictions. What should have been easy for the people to follow has instead become something that weighs heavy. It has become a burden as opposed to a route to freedom.

Is it any surprise that one of Jesus' more famous invitations in Matthew's gospel s to...

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

Whereas the ring fencing of scripture by the Pharisees simply increases the load for God's people, Jesus' interpretation, one that he revealed during the Sermon of the Mount declares...

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfil.

**18**"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

**19**"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

**20**"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

In the eyes of Jesus, the Pharisees are a cautionary tale: they started out with good intentions, but some ended by seeking to be great, seeking to be exalted. They started out concerned for holiness but some ended in exclusion. They started out seeking to recognize God in all things but some

ended by seeking recognition at banquets and in the synagogue. In summary within 13 short verses Jesus accuses them of not practising what they preach, being show offs and attention seekers seeking celebrity status, revelling in the titles and names they are given and misunderstanding what care in and of a community is all about.

They are hypocrites, a word rooted in the Greek word 'hypokrites', which means a stage actor, pretender, dissembler". Someone who perhaps hides their true self behind a mask. They say one thing but their actions do not match their words. They are very good at talking the talk but forget they also need to walk the walk.

We have already seen how Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened to come and find rest but the invitation does not stop there. The invitation is to come but also to remain or as John says in ch15 of his gospel to abide in....

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Jesus calls those who are his disciples, those who will become the early church not just to come but to abide, abide in him and to live in such a way that they can say to the world: "Do as we say *and* as we do."

So how to this going to be accomplished? Well perhaps replacing one word beginning with 'H' for another. By swapping Hypocrite for Humble. For Jesus being part of the new community or should that be new kingdom that he is inaugurating is about placing love above law and service above self interest, realising that honour will come through being humble. By remembering that in their community "the greatest among them must be their servants" and that "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted"

It is often said that those who lead best lead by example. Those who lead countries, businesses,

organisations and communities. Those who talk the talk and walk the walk. And within this priesthood of all believers that make up our churches, we all have a responsibility to ensure that our words and actions we are not seen by society as hypocritical but as complimenting each other and reflecting the glory of God

As Jesus himself heads towards the cross, ready to be weighed down by the heaviest burden of all, so that we can find true rest. As Jesus heads towards the cross willing to take our load, yours and mine on his shoulders , so that we would never have to be weighed down by it again. As Jesus heads towards the cross, having talked the talk and walked the walk, let our words, actions and being mark us out as one who truly follow in his way.

**Amen**

### **Prayers of Intercessions**

We pray for the issues that have dominated our news headlines during this past week

We pray for the election taking place in USA this week

We pray for those who offer leadership; may their words and actions be one

We pray for those who are isolated at this time and under far greater restrictions than other parts of the country

We pray for our local communities, our church families and ecumenical partners

We pray for any that we know in need of your love and support at this time

We join together to say the words of the Lord's prayer...Our Father.....

### **Let us conclude this act of worship by singing STF 504**

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and pow'r controlling  
All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through His pow'r.

May the peace of God my Father  
Rule my life in everything,  
That I may be calm to comfort  
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing,  
This is victory.

May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.

May his beauty rest upon me  
as I seek the lost to win  
and may they forget the channel  
seeing only him

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRTL0cMzTvs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRTL0cMzTvs)

### **A blessing...**

May the words of our mouths, actions of our hands  
and the meditation of our heart be acceptable in  
your sight, LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer.