



# The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020

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 our act or worship by raising our voices in song as we sing STF 481

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me lie in pastures green.  
He leads me by the still, still waters,  
His goodness restores my soul.

Refrain: And I will trust in You alone,  
And I will trust in You alone,  
For Your endless mercy follows me,  
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,  
And He anoints my head with oil,  
And my cup, it overflows with joy,  
I feast on His pure delights.

Refrain

And though I walk the darkest path,  
I will not fear the evil one,  
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know.

Refrain

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## Opening prayer: Psalm 97

<sup>1</sup>O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! <sup>2</sup>Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! <sup>3</sup>For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup>In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. <sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. <sup>6</sup>O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! <sup>7</sup>For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

## Today's reading: Matthew 25:31-45

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, <sup>[g]</sup> you did it to me.’

<sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not

do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'<sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

### Let's sing again:

A new song to an old tune for "Immortal, Invisible,  
God Only Wise"

"Whatever you do to the least ones of these,  
I tell you in truth that you do unto me!"  
Lord Jesus, you taught us! May we learn anew  
That when we serve others, we also serve you.

When poor, waiting children pray hunger will end,  
When those long-forgotten cry out for a friend,  
When thirsty ones whisper, "O Lord, where are  
you?" —  
We hear, in their longing, that you're calling, too.

In prisons and jails, Lord, we find a surprise;  
We see you in people whom others despise.  
At hospital bedsides we offer a prayer  
And find, when we visit the sick, you are there.

When we reach to others in flood-stricken lands  
And offer our hearts there, and offer our hands —  
We notice, Lord Jesus, the gift of your grace:  
We see, in the crowds of the suffering, your face.

"Lord, when did we see you?" Your teaching is  
clear  
That when we serve others, we're serving you  
here.

And when your church heeds you and helps those  
in pain,  
Then out of the chaos, hope rises again.

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzCSMhG0Fcc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzCSMhG0Fcc)

**Today's message:** We can often put ourselves in the shoes of one of the people listening to Jesus. Today I invite you to put yourselves into the hooves of one of the sheep gathered on the hillside as Jesus begins to speak

Oh there we go. This in a nice spot! Not too far towards the front to be asked a question. Not so far away that I can't hear anything. And high enough up so that I can see everyone. No, this rock will do just fine for me thank you very much. Oh there's quite a crowd here today. I can see

Barry and Barbara and Bartholomew and Barbie and Barnaby and Barnabas. Everyone's turned up. But that's not surprising because he has quite a following or flock if you'll pardon the pun. Who does you ask? Well Jesus off course. He's been drawing the crowds wherever he goes.

Did you know that we are connected? Me and Jesus. No, I said connected not related. Although people do call him the lamb of...but that's just being silly. Let's settle for connected. It's true because my family were there, right at the start. In that stable.

Remember when the angels appeared on that hillside over Bethlehem and scared those poor shepherds to death. And remember when they ran down the hillside to find the baby and one of the shepherds was so keen on brining a present that he scooped up a lamb in his arms. Well that was my great grandma, Batya, which in case you don't know means daughter of God. How appropriate that the daughter of God was there to meet the son of God. Anyway that's enough of 'who do you think you baaaa...are ? for now.

And I suppose it's because we have been around humans for so long that we have learned to understand what they say. I know most people think we only respond to the yelps and barks of the dogs but we only do that to help keep them in a job to be honest. If the shepherd just told us what to do well we'd follow his instructions because that's what sheep do. We know the sound of his voice and so we'd follow.

Anyway normally whenever people gather to listen to Jesus speak you can normally hear little 'oohs and ahhas' of appreciation as he tells his story, normally followed by a real rumble of chit chat as people discuss what he had said. Not today though. Today you could have heard a pin drop. And Jesus seemed to be in a different mood too. Far more serious than he usually is. In fact I'm sure I saw him wagging his finger at one point when he spoke about God's judgement. And then he said the strangest of things. He said that everyone would be divided up into two groups, sheep and goats.

Now if I'm honest, not many people are able to tell the difference between a sheep and a goat. But it's all just a trick of the tail. Sheep, you see, have tails that point down whereas the tail of a goat sticks straight up in the air. Have a look next time you see

one. I'm not sure how you tell with a human to be honest because I don't think they have a tail. Well not one that I've ever seen.

But in this particular story Jesus said that at on the day of judgement all of the people from everywhere would be divided just as a shepherd divides sheep from goats. The sheep would go to the right and the goats to the left. And the sheep, are you ready for this, the sheep turn out to be the special ones and get rewarded. Well of course we are special; I could have told them that.

I looked up from where I was basking in the sun and spotted the goats, Gary, Gertrude, Graham, Geraldine, Gus and Gloria gathered together, munching on grass. "Baaaaaa," I bleated out at the top of my voice, which all the goats knew meant 'Did you hear that you horny hoofers! Special, us, the sheep!'. Graham stopped mid chew, looked at me, looked at Jesus but then acted as if hadn't heard or understood what either of us had said. Yeah of course he hadn't!

Perhaps the humans do have tails after all, tucked away under all that clothing, I pondered. I mean how else would Jesus be able to separate them when this judgement came? I should have known it wasn't going to be as simple as that, wasn't going to be anything to do with tails in fact. It rarely was that simple when Jesus told a story. No, it turns out Jesus was just using the image of sheep and goats as a way of getting his point across. It was another of his preambles, no that's not right, what's the word, another of his parables that's it. An earthly story with a heavenly meaning illustrating that although people might look the same, they are not.

According to Jesus, what divides people into sheep (the ones who will be blessed remember) and goats (ones like Graham who won't) is how individuals reacted and acted when they saw someone in need. Did they offer food when they came across someone who was hungry, a drink when someone was thirsty, hospitality when people needed rest, clothing when they were naked, and love when they were lonely? And not just to people who they thought were important and powerful but to everyone.

Because, continued Jesus, when they did that to the lost, the lonely and the loveless, they were in fact doing it to him. Or to try and remember what

he actually said, and you know sheep don't have the best memories, but it was something like ...."Whenever you did or didn't do it to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me"

There I told you, nothing to do with tails at all. It was all to do with actions, how people had behaved when they met someone less fortunate than themselves, someone in need.

And then it all made sense as I remembered the stories my Mother had told me about Jesus when I was a little lamb. Stories about how Jesus himself always put others first, always welcomed those who were normally made to feel unwelcome, always had time for the sick, for the disabled, for the lonely. She even said at one point that Jesus himself was a shepherd, one who was prepared to go out and search for any sheep that got lost. Oh that story struck home alright. A shepherd who was prepared even to lay down his life to protect his sheep.

Anyway you should have seen the look of the faces of the humans. Talk about shocked. I think some of them has just realised that they might not get an invite to the party God was going to throw despite thinking that they must be on the guest list. Others were perhaps pleasantly surprised to hear that their good deeds, their kind words, their service to others had not gone unnoticed, even though they had done it quietly so as not to draw attention to themselves.

I looked over towards Graham, still munching away. Does he ever stop eating? Our eyes met. And I knew that he knew. He knew that I'd initially got it wrong and that Jesus wasn't actually talking about sheep and goats at all, and that he and his herd were not as bad as I'd made them out to be. Neither was I as special as I had originally thought either.

Graham's expression told me it was not the last I would hear of the matter but that it was the last time I would be able to try and pull the wool over his eyes. It was all I could do to stand there blushing and feeling more than a little sheepish for my earlier assumption that I was better than him. But I'm not too worried to be honest because after all looking sheepish, well that's something I'm pretty good at.

### Prayers of intercessions

Let us pray for areas of the world where there are  
unfair divisions

Let us pray for all those who judge others unfairly  
and for all those who are unfairly judged

Let us pray for the 16 days of activism to bring an  
end to gender-based discrimination and violence

Let us pray for our church family, for our family  
and friends

Let us pray for ourselves

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

### Let's sing one final time STF 256

When I needed a neighbour,  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
Were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty,  
Were you there, were you there?  
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
Were you there?*

I was cold, I was naked,  
Were you there, were you there?  
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
Were you there?*

When I needed a shelter  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a shelter were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
Were you there?*

When I needed a healer,  
Were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a healer, were you there?  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
Were you there?*

Wherever you travel,  
I'll be there, I'll be there.  
Wherever you travel, I'll be there.  
*And the creed and the colour  
And the name won't matter,  
I'll be there.*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym8yOdCFGpc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym8yOdCFGpc)

### A blessing...

Go now, and embrace the hope to which God has  
called us.

Recognise Christ in friend and stranger,  
and as Christ has been gracious to you,  
so be gracious to those in need.