



# The **Methodist** Church

**Nottingham North East Circuit -  
Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> Sept 2022**

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.

## **1<sup>st</sup> song Give me joy in my heart**

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising  
Give me joy in my heart, I pray  
Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising  
Keep me praising 'til the end of day  
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna  
Sing hosanna to the King of kings  
Sing hosanna, sing hosanna  
Sing hosanna to the King

Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting  
Give me peace in my heart, I pray  
Give me peace in my heart, keep me resting  
Keep me resting 'til the end of day

Sing hosanna...

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving  
Give me love in my heart, I pray  
Give me love in my heart, keep me serving  
Keep me serving 'til the end of day

Sing hosanna...

Give me light in my heart, keep me shining  
Give me light in my heart, I pray  
Give me light in my heart, keep me shining  
Keep me shining 'til the end of day  
Sing hosanna...

## **Opening prayer:**

O God of grace and truth, we gather together here in this space to offer you all thanks and praise,  
Gathered with the promise that even when heaven and earth pass away, your words will never pass away.

Like a potter you created the earth, and we are your handiwork.  
And today we stand full of Advent expectation, waiting for a sign, waiting for a light in the darkness.

In Jesus, you have come among us, teaching us to live in readiness for your reign, for your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.  
Though he was killed, you raised him to life, restoring to us the light of your presence, and empowering us by your Holy Spirit..

Therefore, with our hearts full of excitement we offer to you all that we are and all that we can be.

Forgive us that we still fall short, that we still falter, that we still fail  
Allow us to hear your words of grace telling us that once again you offer grace and forgiveness.  
And be with us this morning in this act of worship. Amen

## **This morning's reading: Luke 10:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.  
<sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at

the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

<sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

<sup>41</sup> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. <sup>f</sup> Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

### Let's sing again

#### Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
And His righteousness;  
And all these things shall be added unto  
you.

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;  
Seek, and you shall find.

Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.  
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Man shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word  
That proceeds out from the mouth of God.  
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

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### Today's message

Offering hospitality is not always easy. On the outside we might look like swans swimming calm and graceful but underneath the surface of the water our

little legs are going like the clappers simply trying to keep up.

Hospitality is of course a core value of the Bible, and in the narrative world of Luke, hospitality is multi-dimensional and in this gospel story, we are offered the chance to see it from several different perspectives. From the point of view of Martha, through the eyes of Mary, via the words of Jesus or perhaps we might imagine ourselves as one of the other guests seeing and hearing all three others' views at once.

Mary and Martha live as we know in Bethany, a village on the very outskirts of Jerusalem, and Jesus arrives perhaps unexpectedly with his disciples catching the two sisters Mary and Martha off guard. Immediately Martha head into the kitchen to begin preparing something to eat and drink for her guests no doubt expecting Mary to be right behind her in offering hospitality. Instead to her surprise Mary is nowhere to be seen. Or certainly nowhere in the kitchen.

The passage says that Martha was "distracted with much serving" (10:40). The verb is *periespato*, which means "to be anxious, to be unduly concerned." Is Martha anxious that she has been left alone to prepare hospitality for Jesus and his friends or perhaps is she concerned about what her sister Mary is actually doing by sitting at the feet of Jesus.

By sitting at the feet of Jesus Mary had crossed over not just a boundary within the house but also one within the society in which she lived.

Rather than this being the passive act that we might initially imagine, a sign of being lazy, a sign of shirking her responsibilities, Mary's action in leaving her expected role of serving dinner in order to listen to Jesus

is a bold, provocative indeed perhaps shocking action. It did not matter if this was her house, just who did she think she was, what did she think she was doing, how could she behave in such a shameless way! Shouldn't she go back into the kitchen where she belonged?

Perhaps when viewed in this light we can see the urgency behind Martha's request that Jesus tell Mary to go back into the kitchen. It was not simply to ensure her sister Mary did her fair share of the work but to save her from any further shame and disgrace that she had already brought on herself. Get back here now in the kitchen where you are supposed to be, before it's too late. And yet Jesus refuses to do so, saying that in this instance Mary has chosen the better option

In acknowledging and affirming her right to simply be present there at his feet, Jesus uses Mary as an example, an illustration, an inspiration, an acknowledgement that the kingdom of God that he has come to proclaim is not restricted to certain groups of people. But that the love of God is like a river overflowing its banks, rushing out into a parched countryside, irrigating, reviving those parts that have until now been dry, barren, unfruitful.

In this story I feel that Martha often gets short changed. She often comes across as grumpy and grumbling...a real irritable fussy. But of course, there is one other thing that we need to remember, something that we have not spoken about today, something that relies on our knowledge of the bible and of being able to see the bigger picture.

Let's jump forward to John's gospel, let's stop at chapter 11.... the death of

Lazarus...and the role of his two sisters Mary and Martha.

Which of the two sisters is the one that goes to meet and confront Jesus? Which of the two sisters is the first to ask the difficult question of Jesus....what took you so long....if you had got a wiggle on and got your act together, if you had pulled your finger out and got here sooner...my brother would not have died!!

And most importantly which one of the sisters has the theological insight to declare....and this is important...**to declare before Lazarus has been raised from the dead** that Jesus is 'the Messiah, the Son of God'....words that echo Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi, but words and a declaration that we seem to remember far less easily.

Which one of the sisters is it that does all of that....it is of course Martha....it is now her moment to be the one in, on and through whom God works to declare the good news. Whilst Mary remains in the house, it is Martha's turn to be the ideal disciple, the messenger, the teacher.

The Martha-and-Mary narrative does not ask us to choose between one or the other, doing or being, but challenges us to balance practical action and contemplation.

If we are so busy doing that we can't stop, regularly and long enough, to listen for God, well, then, as the wonderful Catholic priest Henri Nouwen says, "our lives will remain full, but unfulfilled" and if we simply listen but do not then put those words into action then what will those lives achieve on behalf of others or even ourselves?

We all need to be still and listen to how God is speaking. And we all need to be

active participants in allowing God's will to be done and bringing about God's kingdom here on earth

Because it is only after dwelling in and on the word of God that we will best be able to offer hospitality, care and love to others. Much in the same way here that it is only when this act of worship stops that our actual service can begin. **Amen**

### **Prayers of Intercessions**

Pray for all those trying to bring an end to the increase in fuel prices

We pray for the start of the Methodist connexional year

We pray for all ministers taking up new appointments and for churches meeting their new ministers

We pray for Pakistan and the terrible flood they are suffering

We pray for our own churches

We pray for those that we know in need of God's love and grace

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

### **Let us conclude this act of worship by singing a new song to the tune Alleluia sing to Jesus**

Martha laboured in the kitchen; there was much yet to be done!  
There was cooking, cleaning, baking — too much work for anyone.  
For the Lord had come to visit; Jesus sat there as her guest.  
So much work! She longed to share it, so the meal would be its best.

Mary sat and humbly listened to their guest — her Friend and Lord.  
She just thought of Jesus' teaching — not the need for bread and board.  
So when Martha came complaining, seeking Mary's help that day.  
Jesus turned to her explaining, "Mary chose the better way."

God, we see in her distraction — Martha lost sight of her goal;  
In her grumbling and complaining, she forgot food for the soul.  
For there's always something pressing — something urgent we must do,  
Yet for us there's also blessing in the time we spend with you.

Were there days when Mary laboured, helping others, serving well?  
Were there times when Martha savoured stories Jesus loved to tell?  
May we worship, pray and study; may we serve you well today!  
All are needed on the journey as we travel Jesus' way.

**A blessing...**

May the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God and the fellowship of the  
Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

Amen