

Written Service Sunday August 11th
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev Jason McMahon-Riley

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Methodist Circuit
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Call to worship

In a world where so many people are driven by
revenge, pain and hurt,
we gather today to reflect on our own actions,
to receive forgiveness,
and to pray for peace. Amen.

Prayer of Approach

O Lord, our king, and our Father,
we come before you in the knowledge
that we are always loved and welcomed.
Your children return in joy and thanksgiving! Amen.

Hymn - StF 663 I, the Lord of sea and sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord.

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord.

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

Prayers of Adoration & Thanksgiving

Father, we adore you for your faithfulness.
You have faith in us when our faith in you falters.

Son, we adore you for showing us the way.
You are the way, the truth, and the life.
Holy Spirit, we adore you for comforting and counselling us.
You are God's gift to us.

Loving God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
we thank you for all the loving relationships in our lives,
even though they may be complicated or challenging.

We praise you for this many-faceted thing called love,
that can survive the darkest days of despair,
and lives on in our hearts even when loved ones are gone.
Thank you for your love, which neither death
nor despair can break. Amen.

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Forgiveness

Father, we confess that we find love difficult and complicated,
especially when it comes to our nearest and dearest.
We often grieve the hearts of those we love the most,
and, in doing so, we disappoint you, for you are love.
We are sorry for all the times we have let our loved ones down,
and fallen short of the standards you set for us.
Help us to love with your generosity of spirit,
your loving acceptance and unselfish intentions. Amen.

Forgiveness comes so easily to you, O Lord,
while for us it is often difficult.
May the knowledge of your forgiving nature
be our solace, our example, and our goal. Amen.

Hymn - StF 636 O love that wilt not let me go

1 O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee.
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

2 O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee.
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

3 O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

4 O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee.
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red,
life that shall endless be.

Questions to Consider

Before reading the two Bible readings, pause and reflect on these questions.

- What decisions taken by others influence your life today, positively, or negatively?
- Where are the deep-seated conflicts in your community or the wider world? Can you pray for healing for these situations this week?

- Do you or someone you know have a big decision to make in the coming weeks?

Today's Old Testament reading shows the playing out of a number of David's choices earlier in his reign. He is at war with his own son having lost first the respect and then control of his family and the kingdom. We will be exploring facing consequences of our previous actions and how we might move to bring God's grace to bear.

Old Testament Reading | 2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33 (NRSVA)

⁵ The king gave orders to Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.' And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom. ⁶ So the army went out into the field against Israel; and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷ The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. ⁸ The battle spread over the face of all the country; and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword. ⁹ Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging^[a] between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on.

¹⁵ And ten young men, Joab's armour-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

³¹ Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said, 'Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has vindicated you this day, delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.' ³² The king said to the Cushite, 'Is it well with the young man Absalom?' The Cushite answered, 'May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man.' ³³ ^[a] The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

Hymn - StF 629 God of my faith, I offer you my doubt

God of my faith, I offer you my doubt,
For life at times seems far too dark for me,
And my belief becomes more insecure,
When worldly cares produce uncertainty.

God of my hope, I offer you my fear,
When I am scared by my own anxiety,
When all I hear is suffering and woe,
In all my shadows, you will walk with me.

God of my joy, I offer you my grief,
When I sink down in sadness or despair,
When in depression I cannot be touched,
I pray in all my depths to find you there.

God of my love, I offer you my pain,
When I'm alone and feel nobody cares,
in aching age or in rejected youth,
you bear my cross and dry my human tears.

God of my life, I offer you my dreams,
Light in the darkness where I hide from view,
Light in my faith, my hope, my joy and love,
Light in my life and all my life in you.
Colin Ferguson (b1937)

Gospel Reading | John 6: 35, 45-51 (NRSVA)

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I

am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

Reflection

As a child, I was desperate to own a Rubik's Cube and was thrilled to receive one as a Christmas gift. I spent a day making small changes to the cube and then 'solving' it back to its original state, where every side of the cube is a different colour. It didn't take long, however, before I changed too much! I was over-confident and spun it through too many twists and turns. However hard I tried; I couldn't get it back to its original state. I had no one to blame but myself and I was devastated. I would love to say I persevered, learned how the cube works and returned it to its 'perfect' state, but the truth is it went into a cupboard where I wouldn't see it or be shamed by it anymore. I even considered unpeeling the coloured stickers and gluing them back on in the 'right' way or taking the cube apart, but ultimately, I just gave up on it.

David is reaping the consequences of his earlier mistakes as his children fight to succeed him. He wants things to go back to how they were – to restore his relationship with Absalom – but he can't. He asks his generals to spare Absalom, but this is a fight for the kingdom, where the losing side are rarely treated mercifully. So, Joab's armour bearers make certain of Absalom's defeat when they get the chance.

Some things are beyond our power but that doesn't mean hiding away from them. David's grief at his son's death is natural and without it he would not be human, but he clearly wishes he could do things over again. He can't – and now he will need to live with what has happened. We have all made mistakes in life, some of which have consequences that we are still bearing today. We can't undo what has been done. God is not punishing us. The consequence of God giving us free will is that they can't protect us from the results of our own decisions. God is, however, right there with us, in the midst of all our grief and anger and regret. As we turn back to God we receive forgiveness, wisdom from the experience and the certain hope that God will be with us in the future, helping us as we try to follow him more closely.

The death of Absalom in battle makes David's throne more secure but David can only see the wasteful death of his son. God is our parent, who looks on us with love and care whatever our situation, whatever we might do. God looked on as Jesus, their Son, hung on the cross in place of us. It is easy to get carried away with judging what people deserve but God's heart is always one of love and compassion.

We return to Jesus' bread motif in our Gospel reading, where he offers unequivocal clarity: 'I am the bread of life' (v.35). Bread, the ancient and modern symbol of life, is now used to declare Jesus as God incarnate, to the bafflement of his hearers (v.41). Being drawn into a relationship with Jesus is initiated by God (v.44). The relationship between the heavenly father and his Son Jesus Christ is, unlike that of David and his sons, secure and motivated by love, mercy and justice. God's unconditional love for Jesus is what allows him to offer his life on the cross. Therefore, believing in Jesus is the way to receive eternal life and to have hunger satisfied (v.47). Jesus uses the terms 'coming to him' and 'believing in him' interchangeably; therefore, dissecting them is as futile as separating hunger and thirst or the elements of the Eucharist (Christ's broken body and shed blood). The manna that sustained their ancestors was temporal; those who partook have all died (v.49). However, the 'bread of life' is eternal. Those who participate will live with God eternally (v.51).

Who do you think you are? Jesus meets opposition in our Gospel reading from people who know his family and therefore assume that they know all about him. They want to dismiss his words and put him back in his place in a way that will stop him from disturbing their peace. Sometimes it is too easy for us to shrink Jesus down to our level, to assume we know what he is like. Jesus came

down from heaven and is beyond our ability to conceive. If we dismiss his claims, then we will ultimately face the consequences of this.

Loving God, we are sorry for those things that break our connections and cut us off from other people: our mistakes, our assumptions, our pride. Forgive us and help us to be peacemakers and bridge-builders, bringing people back into relationship with us and with you. Amen.

Hymn - StF 254 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.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and you shall find.
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds out from the mouth of God.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father, as tensions have continued to erupt into violence on the streets of many cities, we pray for peace and a healing of divisions within our nation and the world. May there be restoration of calm, common sense, and common decency. Let respect and regard for the rights of all be restored.

Lord, shine your light upon our darkness.

Father of us all, please be with those in need of your comfort and care this day. We pray for the grieving; for the sick in body and mind; and for all whose human needs are not being met. We remember the community of Southport, and the three families grieving their children there, and all those affected; a community bewildered by what has happened among them, and by what has happened as a result.

Lord, shine your light upon our darkness.

Almighty God, the changes that have swept our world in recent decades are double-edged swords. Many use the internet and social media to pursue conflict and to disseminate lies and misinformation. We pray for the owners of these platforms to take greater responsibility, and we ask for a spirit of discernment so that all may use these services wisely.

Lord, shine your light upon our darkness.

God of the world, as the Olympics draw to a close, we think of the values that inspired the Olympic movement, particularly those of respect and friendship between competitors and nations. May those who have met in Paris, athletes and spectators from different cultures and walks of life, carry the Olympic spirit home with them and endeavour to uphold its ideals.

Lord, shine your light upon our darkness.

Lord of love, in these testing times, we pray for your Church and for ourselves as Christians. Help us to uphold the ideals of our faith. Aid us in following the way of Christ and help us to examine ourselves – to root out any wrong thinking, any lurking hatreds, and prejudices in our hearts. May we be the calm centre of our communities, the reassurance of your love, the sharers of your light and of the life of the risen Christ.

Lord, shine your light upon our darkness. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name;
Thy Kingdom come;
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

StF 615 Let love be real, in giving and receiving

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
Without the need to manage and to own;
A haven free from posing and pretending,
Where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
Give me your love wherever we may go.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
That strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
That helps us face the risk of truly living,
And makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness;
Give me your love in spite of all you know.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
No secret wish to harness or control;
Let us accept each other's incompleteness,
And share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments
Give me your trust when all my failings show.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and
space to grow.

Michael Forster

Blessing

Almighty God, we thank you for the freedom you give us.
Guide us in the week to come.
Through our actions, may we share your love and kindness
and draw people closer to you.
When we make mistakes,
help us to make amends quickly
so your grace is still seen.
We give this week to you
and ask that your will would be done. Amen.