

Sunday October 27th 2024: CIRCUIT BIG SUNDAY!

Churches throughout the Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit, and the morning online service via the Zoom platform, are using this material today. The YouTube recording of the worship sheet is also available (on the Watton Methodist website from the 25th for use by individuals and churches.



The zoom link is <https://zoom.us/j/98994448513?pwd=O7dtjaVXt2ZAEWrCZSrY1ybakiZZnq.1> Passcode 726085

Words of welcome from Derek

Good morning, everybody, this is my first experience of BIG SUNDAY, and it is good to be sharing with the Churches across the circuit. This is all very new to me, so I hope that you find the service today helpful. I have selected the two lectionary readings for the day and a theme that springs out for me from both readings is one of **“God’s light in a darkened world”** In so many ways, the world feels to be a dark place today with wars raging, public services in this country breaking under the strain of modern living and people around the world feeling the pressures of twenty-first century living. With these thoughts in mind, we have two reflections, firstly from Anna Hall who cares for people facing some of the biggest challenges in their lives and how Anna’s faith speaks into those experience. Our second reflection is a conversation with Rev Jonny about where he sees the Light of God in the twenty-first century Church and where there are signs of hope.

Hymn StF 134 H&P 457

Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Opening Prayer

We are in God’s presence, whether we worship at home, or in church.

We are in community, joined by God’s spirit, as the people of God called Methodists, whether we are in presence or logging in online.

Today we celebrate being part of our Methodist Circuit in various ways.

Today we are thankful for what it means to follow God within the wider Methodist Church, and for being reminded that we are part of a bigger group of people – many disciples following Christ in our homes, villages and towns across Central Norfolk. And so, God, we bring you our thanks and praise for you are the one who calls, the one who equips and the one who brings us together.

In your great mercy and grace, you see us through the sacrifice of Jesus. Whatever we are going through, we know that you are with us through each moment of every day. We thank you for the moments when we have been aware of your love, maybe in the love we share with one another and our families, maybe in the quiet places of our hearts.

We thank you for the moments when we are struggling to find light in dark places, and we recognise that you are there, alongside us, illuminating our lives with your peace.

Forgive us when we curse the darkness instead of turning to you for light.

Forgive us when we add to someone else’s pain through harsh words or actions.

Forgive us and restore us, we pray.

May we be so filled with your Spirit, that we can only bring light and life to others, which sustains us each day, As we worship you on this Big Sunday, draw us closer to you and to one another - strengthen the bonds of love and fellowship that tie us together. Through this worship may we be strengthened to serve you in our homes and our churches, this day and forever more, AMEN

Old Testament lesson

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Hymn StF 693

Beauty for brokenness

Gospel Lesson:

Mark 10: 46-52

Reflection by Anna Hall from Gressenhall

Well, hello, as you may already be aware I am a local preacher on Trial and as part of one of my assignments I am recording a video message for you as part of the Big Sunday. I have been tasked with talking about caring for people in Dark places, one I hope I am qualified to do. I am a Registered Adult and Children’s Nurse with extensive clinical experience in Hospital and community work caring for the sickest individuals and the dying. We know that Life is a journey filled with unpredictability, and the emotional rollercoaster it brings can leave us feeling helpless and overwhelmed. Despite our best efforts, sometimes things do not turn out the way we

expected. In moments of uncertainty and adversity, I find that faith can be a powerful force that helps me find hope, courage, and peace.

My faith has a great role in my caring, it brings me comfort and hope. I know it is a great privilege to care for the dying and bereaved, to be present in the last moments of life as someone slips away to be with the Lord, you can feel their life-force leave their body and the peace surround them. Many of my colleagues take great pride in providing excellent palliative care, in sharing dark days and making them have some light. Sharing memories and words of comfort. Bringing a sparkle into their suffering eyes as they remember the good times and share their story with you. I also like to focus on making special memories for the families, days out, memory boxes, foot and handprints of children, photos, locks of hair and I always have a moving card to give with appropriate words. I often struggle to find the words and cards often do it better than me. Often just the physical presence of someone who is knowledgeable, caring and willing to share the dark times is enough to bring comfort.

One of the key elements of faith is hope. It is the belief that things will improve, and there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Hope gives us the resilience and determination we need to endure hardships and persevere through adversity. My Faith assures me that there is a greater purpose behind our struggles and that we are not alone in facing them, this is something that Job learnt, and we can also find it in the reading from Mark about Blind Bartimaeus, he believed and was rewarded that Jesus had the power to let him physically see. As a blind man at that time, he would have undergone great hardship, he would have been unable to work and had associated struggles as he would have had to beg on the streets, his family would have suffered from associated financial and physical stigma. Jesus not only restored his sight but his life, to work, to be an active member of society and be respected. What an amazing story, letting the light shine in the darkness, we know that Jesus is the way to the light, the light of God. He can banish all darkness even death.

Another important aspect of faith is courage. It takes courage to face our fears and step outside our comfort zones. We see that both Bartimaeus and Job had great courage to face adversities. When we have faith, we know that we are not alone in our struggles, and that we have God who is supporting us. This gives us the strength and courage we need to face life's challenges with confidence and determination. In my work I often face challenges, it can be difficult to provide the care you want to due to time, financial and resource pressures but having the courage to be physically present during a person's last moments costs nothing and brings great comfort and peace not only to the dying but also their friends and relatives. For me sometimes I know that showing you are not afraid and have the empathy to know the difficulties they are facing shows love and compassion.

So, what does this mean to you? We know the Lord provides comfort, hope and peace. He is our light in times of darkness, Jesus said, 'I am the light' and is always there when we need him. He is our good shepherd, our protector, our friend, our saviour and redeemer. I have learnt over the years that even when you face the darkest moments there is light waiting to get in and shine bright and banish the darkness. We should trust and believe; not always easy when we face despair but needed more than ever as we climb back up again stronger and more committed to the battle ahead. Our faith is what makes us strong, and our faith is unstoppable, it comes from personal experience and our relationship with Jesus. The teachings of Jesus form the basis on how we act and behave towards others and guide our lives, as we grow in our relationship and faith we become more like Jesus every day, which is after all the ultimate goal for every child of God.

Hymn StF 18 Be still and know that I am God

Conversation:

Derek and Jonny discuss the places where we find hope in the Church today.

Derek: I wonder how you think the church might look in 5 or 10 years time? What is your vision for the future of the church?

Jonny: I think that generally speaking, we are living in radical times, things are changing, something new is emerging in the world, which has the potential to be really good and I think mirroring or going running parallel to process the church is changing as well. I think the institutional churches structures that we've had for centuries are going to be less and less. I think things will be very, very different. I imagine that instead of it being like a tree root system, with all these roots going up to one trunk, it's more like a mint root rhizome, of a mesh of roots going all over the place.

I think the church will be more like that. Where we've got all these different expressions which can come up at any time instead of having a central trunk. Very recently I have come across an idea called polydoxy. Orthodox means the 'right-thinking' the 'right way of believing'. Whereas polydoxy is a kind of mixture of beliefs that can be coming together and is a way of living alongside those differences. Which is very much how Churches Together works, but on a bigger scale.

Derek: Historically, in church, the key focus has been worship, and there has been an expectation of worship in a particular way and all we do is tweak it. But it still sort of remains quite sacred to church life. How do you see that fitting in with the polydoxy of church?

Jonny: It will be quite contextual, depending on the people and communities also those who are leading the worship – whether lay or ordained. Worship will still have a really important role to play, but I think that it will kind of have more of an emphasis on the gathering part of church. I occasionally talk about the fact that ecclesia means gathering. This is the first word for church and community, gathering, is really big part of the church. I think that will be emphasised more and more. So, it may not be worship in the traditional sense; they might be serving other people, supporting them and being Christ to each other

Derek: The Church at Holt is one of your bigger churches and it is embarking on an ambitious building project, and it sits in a very prominent place in the town. I wonder, in a church with an ageing congregation that there might be people that would say to you, "Is it good stewardship to be spending a huge amount of money on working with the building? And what difference is that going to make to the mission of the church?"

Jonny: The building project is going to cost, in round figures, £1.1 million. It requires hundreds of thousands of pounds anyway just to keep it upright and not collapse. Something that came out of mission planning was that people realised that the building isn't the church, it's the people. It was a really good insight for the church to have, to see that the building is a tool, a way in which we can express a particular expression of being a gathering of lovers of Christ. To invest that money in a building means that you can start to create community in different ways. We are doing a lot of work at the moment, of building these connections and relationships. It might be some adult learning for literacy and numeracy skills, involvement with the Holt youth project, which serves most of North Norfolk, working with Love Holt for the Holt lights and the Holt festival; different groups like the Brownies, Guides and so on. It ends up being a space almost like a node or nexus for all the different connections in the community to come to and to be able to facilitate that community building stuff.

Derek: What would spell success for you with that?

Jonny: The reading we're having for Big Sunday is the healing of Bartimaeus, and it is one of the unusual miracles. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants. It's almost like asking that same question, "what spells success?" and "what do you want?" Quite simply, church is not the building, it's not CPD, it's not emails, meetings, and all these sort of things. They are things that help facilitate church to happen, they are tools for church to happen. Ultimately, it's showing people that they are loved, helping them know that they are loved. I think that's the deepest desire that every person has, that need in every person. Being able to do that for other people would be a sign of success. And to me it's not about numbers; it's about relationships, which aren't quantifiable

Derek: Because Bartimaeus didn't immediately start attending worship and singing hymns. Bartimaeus followed Jesus, and that was a part of this journey. Bearing all of that in mind then, you have got some larger churches, and you've also got some very small churches. There can be a culture that says small village chapels are failing churches. I'm not convinced that is always the case. So how do you encourage your smaller churches where there is a handful of very faithful, very devoted people keeping the work going? How do you encourage them in their mission going forward?

Jonny: I think again, it comes to those relationship to those connections they have with each other and care in the support they show each other. In this season of church councils, I am asking each church council what makes them proud to be a part of this church or chapel. The things that come through are all about those relationships and how they love each other, have a laugh with each other, share experiences, both the highs and lows, feed each other with literal spiritual food, and all those sorts of things. I also try to think with them how we can unburden them with the ever-increasing amounts of governance and administration that need to be done. How can we make it easier and navigate that so it's as life-giving as possible.

Derek: I find it really encouraging in the reading from Job, that he is steadfast in his faith through everything that happens, and he is rewarded doing the work. Bartimaeus regains not just his physical sight, but he has an insight and follows Jesus, light comes into his life in both ways.

Intercessions

Loving and faithful God, we come to you today to pray for ourselves and for others.

We look at the world around us, and we see something far from what you desired for us.

We pray for those who are victims of systems of oppression – The exploited and the deprived.

For people who have no hope, only despair.

For those who are suffering and calling for justice; only to be ignored and disregarded.

But we also pray for those who are perpetuating these systems because they benefit themselves rather than challenging the injustice.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are sleeping rough. For those without a safe place to rest.

For those who experience unspeakable violence and inhumane treatment because of homelessness.

For the dispossessed and those who are forgotten.

For those who are hungry for food.

For those who have nothing to eat and don't know where their next meal is coming from.

For those whose sunken, starved faces contrast strikingly with our own.

But we also pray for those who have more food, wealth and resources than they need personally and refuse to share with those without.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

We pray for refuge and a safe haven for those who are in conflict zones across the world - Israel-Palestine, Ukraine and Russia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen and so many more.

We also pray for the volunteers in conflict zones around the world who provide food and emergency shelter to those who are suffering.

But we also pray for the governments and world leaders who are responsible for keeping the people in their countries safe but are failing to do so.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for those who place their trust in you. For the Christians around the world who live out their lives as true followers of Christ. We pray for those who let your love be reflected and shown in all they say and do, telling of your power, love and mercy.

But we also pray for those who weaponize religion, using it as a tool to control and manipulate others; and for those who feel like their Christian duty and identity is reserved for an hour each Sunday.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for our Churches, our Circuit and the communities which we minister to.

Help us to be a light in our neighbourhoods, offering love and assistance to those who need it, and be fruitful and effective in serving others and glorifying Your name.

But we also pray for the church, and for the historical issues which we long to forget, but the reconciliation and growth we know we must do.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

And Lord, for ourselves, may we act peacefully when anger bubbles inside us.

May we be kind to ourselves and others then life around us seems chaotic.

May we forgive when we have been wronged. And may we go today in the assurance that we are utterly and wholly loved by you.

We will now have a time of silence where we can pray aloud, or in the silence of our hearts for people in our mind.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

For we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lord's Prayer and Dedication of Offertory

Hymn StF 706

Longing for light, we wait in darkness

May the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, and all those we love, this day and always, Amen.

Circuit News:

The next Big Sunday will be on **Sunday 29th December**, when we will reflect on what "Traditional Christmas" actually means in the modern world.