**Sunday July 25th 2021**: **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 for individuals and churches – this is the last weekly recording that Martin*

*Neave from Watton is producing. He has done over 70 recordings – thank you Martin!*

**Welcome and Introduction** (Rev Jacqui)

Welcome everyone to our first Big Sunday! In order to keep something of the sense of community and unity that was engendered throughout the Circuit in the lockdowns of the last 16 months, we are trying this Big Sunday once a quarter as a way of enabling all the Methodist churches in the Central Norfolk Circuit to keep in touch with each other and to feel that we are all part of the same enterprise. People this morning will be worshipping using this Worship at Home sheet, they will be worshipping in churches using the same material, they will be worshipping by way of the online service [N.B. Zoom at 10.30 am] on which this material will be used (either at home or in churches with an internet connection), and others will be watching the YouTube recording – either as individuals or in churches with projection but without the internet. Just writing the foregoing makes me realise again the variety open to us now in multi-platform Church!

Our theme today is ‘The Spirituality of Gardens’ and we are using biblical material as well as pictures from the Circuit virtual Open Gardens 2021 to worship, to learn, and to reflect. We begin with the well-known hymn of praise:

**Hymn** **StF** 83 **H&P** 13

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven / to his feet thy tribute bring.

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven / who like thee his praise should sing?

Praise him! Praise him! / Praise him! Praise him! Praise the everlasting King*.*

Praise him for his grace and favour / to his people in distress;

Praise him, still the same for ever / slow to chide, and swift to bless.

Praise him! Praise him! / Praise him! Praise him! Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us / well our feeble frame he knows;

in his hands he gently bears us / rescues us from all our foes.

Praise him! Praise him! / Praise him! Praise him! Widely as his mercy flows*.*

Angels in the height, adore him / ye behold him face to face;

sun and moon, bow down before him / dwellers all in time and space.

Praise him! Praise him! / Praise him! Praise him!

Praise with us the God of grace!

Henry Francis Lyte (1793 – 1847)

**Opening Prayers** (Rev Cliff)

Creator God, you reveal yourself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

so as we gather in this place, come amongst us.

Help us to discern your Spirit in the world around us. Let us find joy in the world that you created. Help us to worship you with all our being, and to hear and receive your word and your gifts.

As we think about our beautiful gardens and the glory of the natural world may we respond to you in love for our neighbours and for your creation.

Living God, you call us to be good stewards of our earthly gardens, strengthen us to care for your beautiful creation; forgive us when, through our greed and indifference we abuse its beauty and damage its potential. Empower us, through your Holy Spirit to nurture and love the world,

that all creation sings to your glory. Amen.

**Biblical Garden (1)**: Genesis 2 v 8 – 10 & v 15 (we learn of the first garden at the dawn of creation).

**Report on Circuit Open Gardens this year** (Deacon Jen)

Following on from the success of last year’s Virtual Open Gardens we have collected photos for this year’s event. The timings are different this year as we have asked for photos from the gardens in July, a month later than previously. This was decided in order for there to be a different selection of plants on show. This has worked to some extent but as the weather has been rather cold this year it means that some plants are later to come into bloom than one would have expected. However, we have, at the time of writing this, in excess of 100 photos. This includes many people who contributed but also about 8 new gardens for us to enjoy. Whatever the challenges we face, and vagaries of the weather, gardening is clearly an important part of people’s lives. It improves fitness, well being and, for me, helps to connect with nature in a very real way. As it says on a plaque I have: *The kiss of the sun for pardon, the song of the bird for mirth, One is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on Earth.*

**Hymn** **StF** 272 **MP** 162 **SOF** 120

From heaven you came, helpless babe / entered our world, your glory veiled,

not to be served but to serve / and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King / he calls us now to follow him,*

*to bring our lives as a daily offering / of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears / my heavy load he chose to bear;

his heart with sorrow was torn / ‘Yet not my will but yours’, he said.

Come see his hands and his feet / the scars that speak of sacrifice,

hands that flung stars into space / to cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve / and in our lives enthrone him,

each other’s needs to prefer / for it is Christ we’re serving.

Graham Kendrick (b 1950) CCL no. 5365402

**Biblical Garden (2)**: John 18 v 1 – 2 (we learn that Jesus went with his disciples into a garden and that the disciples were used to going there with him) and Mark 14 v 32 (we learn that the garden was called Gethsemane – a garden for the planting and harvesting of trees producing olives, pomegranates and figs).

**Biblical Garden (3)**: John 19 v 38 – 42 (we learn that the body of Jesus is taken to a tomb in a garden near to the site of the crucifixion) and John 20 v 11 – 16 (we learn that this garden had a gardener as Mary mistakes Jesus for him).

**Report on Blakeney Community Garden** (Pioneer Sam)

Blakeney Community Garden is growing in part of the courtyard of the Pilgrim Methodist Church Blakeney, in response to the growing need for nature based spaces which support and enhance well-being in communities. It is building on the previous use of the courtyard, as a place for people to rest and take time to reconnect with each other and themselves. The Garden aims to be a safe and supportive space, where well-being is supported and the love of Jesus is lived out in ways which are grounded in the gospel narrative, whilst treading gently on the Earth. Everyone is welcome, we strongly believe in celebrating and embracing diversity and the many different skills and viewpoints this brings. We aim to make the garden accessible and whilst this has been incorporated into our design, we warmly welcome suggestions to improve.

Every third Sunday of the month we are worshipping in the garden with Garden Church, offering a space to connect with creation and the Creator. As the garden grows and develops, we hope to offer a variety of events such as meditation, storytelling and nature based craft sessions.

The Community Garden relies entirely on donations and every penny raised goes towards growing this space for our community. You can follow our story on facebook by following us at The Pilgrim Methodist Church Blakeney, where we share updates on our progress and information about events. And, of course, you are very welcome to come and visit the garden in person anytime!

**Hymn** **StF** 306 **H&P** 204

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain / wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;

Love lives again, that with the dead has been: *Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

In the grave they laid thim, Love who had been slain / thinking that he never would awake again,

laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen: *Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain / he that for the three days in the grave had lain,

Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen: *Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain / then your touch can call us back to life again,

fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been: *Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.*

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872 – 1958) Copyright permission as above

**Biblical Garden (4)**: Revelation 22 v 1 – 2 (although the setting here is a city, there is a river, there are trees and leaves and crops of fruit – this has the feel of a beautiful and fruitful garden!)

**Short Talk on a surprising Biblical Garden verse** (Rev Jacqui)

I love gardens of all sorts – big gardens, little gardens, specialised gardens, my own garden, Open Gardens! Whatever is going on in the rest of life and in the rest of the world, somehow time in a garden can bring peace, centredness, and a strong awareness of God’s presence in creation. The importance of gardens in God’s universe is emphasised for me by the number of gardens mentioned in the Bible. There are few actually named but dozens of references to gardens generally. Four gardens are enormously significant ones and provide a structure to the Bible – there is one at the beginning, one at the end, and two embedded in the Gospels that form the backdrop to the critical events of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

The garden of Eden was the original garden created by God for humankind. Mythological but beautiful. This garden of course got spoilt by the people for which it was created. As part of the solution to the spoilt garden and damaged world was the garden where Jesus agonised over what was going to happen to him – the garden of Gethsemane which can still be visited today. Another garden near the site of the crucifixion held a tomb that was used for the body of Jesus. A body that was transformed – amazingly, joyfully, victoriously – by the resurrection and the transformed body of Jesus met Mary outside the tomb in the garden – in fact, she believed him to be the gardener! The final garden of the four is that of the eternal city and this garden represents hope for evermore, for everyone, with final healing and bringing together of all things.

As a thought to take away with us, I want to mention one more garden mentioned in the Bible. This is a surprising garden and it is hidden away in one verse in the book of Isaiah. The verse is this:

*The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;*

*and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of waters, whose waters never fail.* **Isaiah 58 v 11**

This verse says, in effect, that if we let God guide us continually – not just from time to time! – we will be like a watered garden. Just pause a moment and think what a watered garden is like….

The opposite would be a dry and parched garden. God will guide us, satisfy our needs and provide water for our dryness – water that comes from a spring that will never fail. I end with a prayer:

*Dear Loving God, We thank you for our Big Sunday, for our Open Gardens, for each and every garden, for the wonder of realising that we ourselves can be like a watered garden! We offer ourselves to you today as metaphorical gardens – with green backdrops, with colour and interest, with potential for continuing life and growth, with readiness to serve others and to fulfil our unique potential at every stage of our lives. We offer ourselves and our prayer, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

**Time for Reflection**

Look at the selection of photos from our Virtual Circuit Open Gardens event. Take time to immerse yourself in them and to see the beauty of creation in them.

**Prayers of Intercession** (Rev Anne)

Heavenly Father, we bring to you our concerns for the Church and the world.

We come in confidence, knowing that the creator who designs every leaf and seed with care,

also cares for us.

Bless the gardens of the world, the soil and rain and sunshine,

and the work of all who sow and reap.

We pray for the places where there is drought and famine,

sometimes through climate change, sometimes through war and violence.

Give strength to all those who work to improve harvests and to enrich the lives of

ordinary people around the globe.
Teach us to share them with justice and to use resources wisely. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the garden of your Church, O God. Guide those who plant and tend it.

We pray for all who work in our Methodist Church, here in Central Norfolk,

for each one who gives their time and talents in your service.
Protect the young, strengthen the flourishing, and make us fruitful in ministry and mission.
God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the gardens of our community, the shelter of families, the fragrance of friendship.

In all our care for one another, make us grow in wisdom and love,
in gentleness, kindness and truth. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Give tender care to all who are struggling through weakness, sickness, grief or change.

We name those we know before you now.

Show us your grace at work in the times when growth is painful, or when death is near.
God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Give eternal life to all whom you love, through Jesus Christ, the true vine.
Give us grace to abide in him as fruitful branches,
and bring us at last with all your saints to resurrection life. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

**The Lord’s Prayer:**  Our Father, who art in heaven…

**Dedication of Offering**

**Hymn** **StF** 82 **MP** 506

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder / consider all the works thy hand hath made,

I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder / thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee: how great thou art, how great thou art!*

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to thee: how great thou art, how great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander / and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur / and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing / sent him to die, I scarce can take it in

that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing / he bled and died to take away my sin:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation / and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart;

then shall I bow in humble adoration / and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:

Stuart K Hine (1899 – 1989) Copyright permission as above

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

Central Norfolk Circuit ‘Big Sunday’ – once a quarter for the time being

Central plank is an online zoom service at 10.30 am

*Everyone invited, each church encouraged to have at least one representative there*

Zoom service includes contributions from all the staff and planned together

Material for the zoom service prepared in advance and used for the Worship at Home sheet *– extended and expanded for this special week*

YouTube recording made of the Worship Sheet material

Churches meeting in their buildings asked to use the same theme and the same material

Options for Churches:

* Use the paper material and get different people to take part
* Join in with the zoom if a wifi connections exists (at least 3 churches doing this)
* Download and use the YouTube recording if projection exists but no wifi (at least 2 churches doing this)

Options for Worshippers:

* Use the Worship Sheet at home
* Attend the zoom at home or at Church
* Worship in Church
* Use the Youtube recording at home