



Prestwood Methodist Church

A worshipping and friendly community following Jesus

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Sunday 16 August 2020 - 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Familiar readings can often challenge in new ways, so I've given over space this week to a member of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) that advise the Methodist Church, Baptist Church, United Reformed Church and Church of Scotland on issues of public policy. I've had to summarise Hannah Brown's piece, but if you have access you can find the full text in the Vine at Home for 16 August, linked from www.barnsleymethodist.org.uk

I've started assembling articles for Open Door, so let me know if you're planning to send anything else.

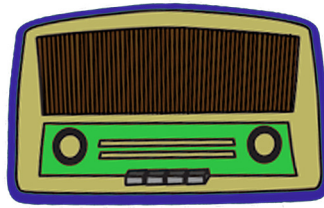
Bridget

Virtual Church



The "Amersham Methodist Circuit" YouTube channel posts twice a week (Wednesday and Sunday). CDs/ DVDs are available for the Sunday service if you can't watch on YouTube.

Radio



The 8.10am service on Radio 4 is led by Rev Dr Stephen Wigley, chair of the Wales synod of the Methodist church. The service reflects on what happens when our plans change.

The 75th anniversary of VJ Day is also commemorated.

Zoom to pray, Thursday 10-11am

Zoom prayer meetings resume this Thursday with Tina Hillas and Rev Nigel Wright. Everyone is welcome, but check here for a new meeting id and password each week.

If you can't Zoom, contact Nigel for instructions on how to phone in.

Zoom meeting ID: 874 7878 6966

Password: 117860



Readings for this week:

Genesis 45: 1-15

Psalms 133

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15: 21-28



The Methodist Worship at Home resource focusses on the Matthew reading, where a Canaanite woman pleads with Jesus to heal her daughter, showing great faith, as well as great wit and intelligence. The reflection links the message of this reading to the last verse of the hymn "And Can it Be" (Singing the Faith 345) which ends:

*bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.*

Let us show boldness in our prayer this week, and faith in how we accept the response to our prayers. And, perhaps, like the Canaanite woman, a little wit won't go amiss!

Prayer from Worship at Home by Alan Darlington

I approach your throne for the people I know personally that need a special touch from you. I picture them as I place them into your loving hands.



I approach your throne for the people who are shouting out with questions and despair and don't know where to turn. Be their comfort Lord.

I approach your throne for those far from me and give to you their needs, knowing that I can trust you to respond.

AMEN

A reflection from Hannah Brown of JPIT Excerpts from the Vine at home

Our readings this week invite us to see and explore a vision of God's kingdom founded on unity. They paint a picture of what it means to be together as God's people, and in doing so challenge us to see who gets included in God's kingdom, and what this means for our lives as followers of Christ.

Psalms 133 says that in God's kingdom, the blessing of the Lord is found when God's people are together.

In Genesis 45 Joseph shows his brothers forgiveness. These are people who have treated Joseph unjustly. And yet, just as Joseph has found life by the provision and mercy of God, so he extends this to others – even those who have stood against him.

In Matthew 15, we are called to hear this message once again from an unlikely voice. Jesus would have known the way that his people and the Canaanites were distanced from one another.

JPIT reflection continued (by Hannah Brown)

Yet this woman finds the courage and faith to declare that in the Kingdom of God, everyone is brought in. God's kingdom is a calling for unity, and in unity, transformation.

These passages paint a vision of God's kingdom where everyone is seen, heard and offered fullness of life in God's love. In Matthew 15, we hear this message from someone standing in a place of exclusion. Yet, whilst the Canaanite woman might once have been considered excluded from God's kingdom, in her faith she declared that with the coming of Christ, she is welcomed in. Justice is offered, that all might be given life.

The picture these passages paint invites us to consider what radical inclusion would look like for us today.

You might like to reflect on these questions:

Who in our community today do we see as outsiders?

Who do we exclude from our vision of God's kingdom?

In seeking unity, where might we find life in choosing to stand face-to-face with those we who are excluded, and listen to their call for change?

A prayer for others from Roots on the Web

The Canaanite woman sought your help. She loved her daughter so much, she was so desperately in need, that she wouldn't give up till she had her answer. Lord, may we learn from this woman, to wait on you expectantly, patiently, persistently, doggedly. Grant us the courage of our convictions when we truly believe we are doing your will. We pray today for those who feel excluded, whatever their situation, whatever the reason: for prisoners, refugees, the homeless; for the sick, the mentally unstable; for any who feel that they are outsiders. We pray for ourselves when our faith is weak, or we feel that we don't belong.

Bible characters in lockdown by Mary Spooner: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

When I was a child, I used to love hearing the story of the burning fiery furnace in Babylon.

Several years before, Daniel and many other promising young men had been taken captive from their homes in Jerusalem, by King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, with three other teenagers, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, became close friends in captivity. They refused to take part in many of the heathen practices and customs of their new country and were determined to remain true to the God of Israel. Daniel caught the attention of Nebuchadnezzar because of his ability to interpret dreams. He and his friends were promoted to positions of authority in the government, but this caused extreme jealousy amongst many of the other officials. Nebuchadnezzar became increasingly proud, and wanted everyone to revere him, so he made a huge golden image of himself, 30 metres high (nearly 100 feet). No wonder it had to be built in the brick fields outside the town! Then he sent messengers to all the chief officials in his empire to come to the dedication of his statue. Daniel appears to have been away at this time, but his three friends were ordered to attend.

Nebuchadnezzar was totally carried away by his own importance, and he ordered that when the band struck up, everyone should fall on their faces in the field and worship his golden image.

Encouraged by some of his friends the King added that if anyone refused to bow down to the statue, they would be thrown into the furnace, where the bricks were baked in a huge kiln.

As the band began to play, the crowd of officials fell on their faces in the field – all except for three figures who remained standing. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were pushed in front of the crowd.

The King was terribly angry but thought perhaps they had misunderstood. He said he would give them one more chance to obey his order, when the band would strike up for a second time.

'Your Majesty' they replied 'we do not need a second chance. We are not afraid about what will happen to us. Our God is able to deliver us out of your hands but EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, we cannot under any circumstances worship the golden statue you have erected.'

Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury and ordered that the kiln should be heated seven times hotter. He called on his soldiers to bind the three men and throw them into the flames. It was so hot, that even the soldiers were severely burned.

The King looked towards the fire. Suddenly his face grew pale and he began to shake. 'How many men were thrown into the fire' he stammered? I see FOUR men walking about in the flames, and one has the appearance of a God. Then he came as close as he dared to the kiln and yelled 'Come out of the fire Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the most High God.' They came out and stood before the King, completely untouched by the flames. Their clothes did not even smell of smoke, but the ropes that bound them had been burned away. Nebuchadnezzar ordered that from that day forward, everyone should worship the one true God, because no other god could have saved them from the fire.

It is very comforting to know, that even though they were thrown into the flames, God was present with them, and was able to keep them safe because they trusted Him and were not afraid to admit it.

Mary

See Daniel, chapter 3 for the full story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Babylon.