

Heaton Moor United Church



The United Reformed Church and The Methodist Church
working together in partnership



Zoom Services and Meetings

Sunday 5th July Circuit Service 3.00pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87212246881?pwd=VXpyMzRYV21UZ1ZoYlkc2R4dmV1QT09>

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881 Password: 974333

Wednesday 8th July Coffee and Prayer 11.00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/95327541668?pwd=ekU2QWgzZjVKWTFBFTjZsb0tERVQrdz09>

Meeting ID: 953 2754 1668 Password: 794265

Joining by telephone

Step 1)

Dial any of the following numbers. If one doesn't work try another and another until you are able to connect:

0330 088 5830

0131 460 1196

0203 481 5237

0203 481 5240

0208 080 6591

0208 080 6592

Step 2)

Follow the prompts you hear on the phone.

You may be prompted to enter 3 different things:

1 -- Meeting ID followed by hash #

2 -- Password followed by hash #

3 -- Participants ID -- You will not have one of these, don't worry, all you need to do is enter

"Hash"#

You should then be entered into the service.

Dear Heaton Moor United Church family,

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our friend and liberator Jesus Christ. Hope you are all doing well. We have passed 100th day since lockdown this week, and trust you are all coping ok with these strange times.

We are working on the guidance about opening our church doors for private prayer and will keep you informed the decisions of the leadership team in this regard.

Rev. Brian Jolly was inducted as the Moderator of Northwest Synod of URC during this week, and may we kindly uphold him and his ministry in our prayers. As some of you know he served as a minister at the Heatons and he has fond memories of our church and friends around here. The Methodist Church had its Conference during this week and has made some important decisions on evangelism strategy, inclusion and diversity strategy and on disinvestments in fossil fuel companies. There is more information on the website about their decisions.

Herewith I am sending you the reflection and a worship resource for this Sunday.

Let us continue to uphold one another in prayer and support one another through phone calls, chats and meetings in the gardens maintain social distancing.

May God grant us hope, peace and love to each of us.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,

Raj

3rd July 2020

Good Society Meeting by Zoom

11th July – starting at 10.30 a.m.

Dialstone Lane Methodist Church is organising another “Good Society” meeting. We ask how local government can help us work towards a “good society” and we invite you to debate with four local councillors about how to do this. We also plan to make opportunities for you to discuss with other participants.

Stockport Council is responsible for providing a range of local services - independently, or as part of Greater Manchester. These include:

- education · transport
- planning · fire and public safety
- social care · libraries
- leisure facilities · waste management
- trading standards · Council Tax collections
- Housing

It has played a major part in responding to the Coronavirus pandemic and will be crucial in building for the future

The Deputy Leader of Stockport Council, Councillor Tom McGee and three councillors from the local wards: Offerton, Manor and Stepping Hill – one from each of the main parties – will respond to your questions and the points you wish to make.

Please send anything you would like to say in advance to the Councillors to andy.stoker@btinternet.com by 4th July latest. You might want to share what you think the Council has done well - and what could be improved. You may want to thank the Councillors for their service. You may have a question We will collate everything you send and pass it on to the Councillors, who will be invited to respond on 11th July.

Whether or not you have anything you want to say, please also contact andy.stoker@btinternet.com for details of the Zoom meeting on 11th July.

Andy Stoker

Towards a gracious reversal: Risking Christ for Christ's sake

Reflecting on Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

Our quest for re-imagining church is gaining momentum, while some churches in the UK have opened for private prayers, while some are preparing towards opening their doors and while some are discussing about public worship following the government guidelines. Are we to do the same things that we have always done prior to lockdown or is this an opportune time to do things differently as churches so that we are relevant to our time and space? Is there any hope for a gracious revival of church today? By gracious revival I mean not about a numerical growth in the church, but a re-vitalisation of the celebration of Christian presence in our community. The prescribed text from our lectionary for this week speaks about a gracious reversal of things that Jesus offers, in a way inviting us to risk Christ for Christ's sake, shifting the gear from how things have always been to something new, startling and radical. In this process, Christ whom we know traditionally will have to be risked for the sake of Christ who collaborates with us, for in a changing world, "what is Jesus doing today" takes precedence to "what did Jesus do" or "what would Jesus do." These gracious reversals that Jesus offers serves as signposts in our reimagining churches today. Allow me to share three of those gracious reversals from this text:

1. A gracious reversal of identity (18-19v)

When John the baptiser came neither eating nor drinking, but preaching a prophetic message of repentance in his public sphere, many mistook him for a messiah, which he graciously denied, saying that he has come to prepare a way for the messiah. Jesus in 14v, affirmed that John was Elijah, who is to come. However, Jesus later responded the public talk about John as they were saying "he has a demon" (18v). When John stood to be prophetic in his faith, when he humbled himself by preparing a way to Jesus the messiah, the public sphere framed and branded him to have a demon. This was a common feature of the religious authorities to brand dissidents as 'demonic,' in order to discredit them amongst the populations. I think such a branding came up because he was on the mission of casting off the political demons in his context. John's proclamation of repentance was branded anti-God, because he was exposing the demons among the religious and political authorities, which he did courageously.

On another note Jesus explains the branding of Jesus' own identity when he as Son of Man came eating and drinking in his own public sphere, they said, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (19v). By uttering these words about his identity in the public sphere, Jesus was unashamedly affirming that among those people and sites who have been (mis)branded as 'sinners,' as 'excluded,' as 'outcasted,' and as 'unrighteous' according to the standards of temple and empire, that he identifies with and his presence dwells among them. Jesus subversively reverses his identity from being a rabbi, a teacher, a leader, Son of God, Son of David, Lord, Messiah, Son of Man to be called as glutton, drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. In that subversion of all the great Christological titles that Jesus was known and ascribed as, there is a gracious risk in him being recognised as a glutton, drunkard and as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. The gracious risk was in his identifying with those people who are considered 'outcasts', for he has come for such people on the margins. The graciousness is further revealed, when Jesus said, "yet wisdom is vindicated by

her deeds," (19b v), by which Jesus was ascertaining his friendships with the 'excluded' and 'outcasted' as a conscious choice which he demonstrated in his actions for and with them.

Risking Christ for Christ's sake is an interesting book written by an Indian theologian MM Thomas in the context of religious pluralism. Thomas explains that, Christians "risk Christ for Christ's sake" by allowing their faith to be interpreted in the categories of 'others.' When Jesus graciously reverses his identity and rebrands himself as a 'friend of tax collectors and sinners,' he is inviting us to risk the conventional identities of Jesus, church and mission to more subversive identities for the sake of Christ today, because in such subversion there is graciousness and relevance of our Christian faith. Are we bold as a church to be branded and called 'Look at this church, friends of 'misfits' and the excluded?' Jesus did not attribute morality and judge these people, rather demonstrated love of God to these people who are (mis)branded by the society as 'misfits,' by being with them and allowing to work with them. This text is inviting us as church and as disciples to take on a gracious reversal of identity, by allowing ourselves to befriend 'misfits,' with and be branded as friends of the 'misfits.' Such a rebranding is our public witness today, for we need to vindicate our solidarity in actions and in building communities of love and hope.

2. A gracious reversal of agency (25-26v)

Jesus did give thanks to God on occasions like blessing the bread before serving to 5000 people, when Lazarus came back to life, at the Passover meal with his disciples, and oddly he gives thanks to God for hiding his revelations from the wise and revealing them to the children (25-26v). 'Knowledge is power' has been one of the colonial ideologies on which the empires were driven, for they have always kept knowledge with the powerful as they constructed knowledge making it 'power is knowledge.' Jesus in rebranding his identity and mission, graciously reverses the agency of knowledge, the agency of interpretation, the agency of discernment from the so called 'wise' and 'intelligent' to infants, for which he thanks God of the heaven and the earth. This reversal of agency is a matter of praising God for Jesus, in which we recognise graciousness. Has such a reversal ever been a part of our praise and thanksgiving? In this reversal Jesus celebrates the knowledge and discernment of the infants, who are considered powerless in contrast to the adult powerful, and upholds that 'in powerlessness there is knowledge,' 'powerlessness is not weakness and never is it foolishness.' Jesus was exposing the arrogance of the so called 'wise' and 'intelligent' by allowing God's revelations to come through the powerless people.

In our reimagining church today, we are called to reimagine worship, for what constitutes our praise and worship? We are called to join with Jesus in praising God for the new revelations that are erupting from the infants and the powerless people in our community, which might be risky on the one hand and be totally different from what we have always known as praise and worship on the other hand. Our context also invites us to reimagine the hermeneutics (interpretative tools) we apply in our churches, for who interprets the texts for us? Only when there is a gracious reversal of agency happening in our churches, a willingness to take the risk, where the powerful give up and stand down to listen to the revelations of the infants, the children, the women, the disabled, and several from others in the margins, only then will we as churches be relevant. The revelations of the powerless communities will come as a surprise for they may come in song, in dance, in drawing, in music, in poetry and in creative messiness, which will be radically different from what we have always heard and done in our churches.

Are we ready for such a radical risky reversal of agency in our churches today? In such gracious risks, new creation in Christ flows and evolves.

3. A gracious reversal of liability (28-30v):

These words of Jesus, “come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (28v) is an invitation to all people in the public sphere, irrespective of their identity. Jesus offers rest by giving his yoke which is easy and light, by taking restlessness of people on him. Jesus through this invitation was reversing the heavy liability that people carry with his own easy and light yoke by offering rest. The graciousness of this reversal is found in following Jesus who is humble and gentle and find rest in him. A yoke is a farming instrument, where two oxen are joined so that they share the burden equally and work in partnership with one another. Jesus in reversing this liability was offering himself to be in partnership with people who are carrying heavy burdens so that he shares in their heavy burdens and thereby offers some solace and rest in him. The liability is no longer carried by one person, but is carried together in companionship with Jesus who gives his easy and light yoke to the people, coming and taking his invitation of walking and working with him.

In the context of post-lock down, walking and working in partnership with Jesus by carrying and sharing the yoke together with him is a way forward for us. Jesus is willing to be a partner to us; the big question is: are we willing to be his partners in the work of God? In learning to be like Jesus, we as a church are called to walk and work with people in our community who are weary and carrying their burdens of loneliness, hunger, poverty, anxiety, so that we as a church become a space of offering hope and rest in this restless world. As church offering ourselves to be a partner to carry and share the burdens of weary people around us is a challenge in our reimagining as a relevant church for today.

With a gracious reversal of identity, agency and liability, our churches become new spaces, where we celebrate Christian presence in our communities unashamedly. On that note, I want to conclude my reflection with three distinct fellowships in Christ that Thomas recognises in his *Risking Christ for Christ's sake*, which I think are relevant for us today. There is no hierarchy among these fellowships, and come as three different understandings of fellowships. Firstly, the *koinonia* (fellowship or communion) of those who acknowledge “the *person* of Jesus”; secondly, a fellowship of faiths that acknowledge “the *pattern* of suffering servant hood” exemplified in Jesus; and thirdly, a still larger fellowship of ideologies whose struggle for community is “informed by the agape of the cross.” In our reimagining church post-lockdown, we as church form to be one or more of these kinds of fellowships, complimenting with one another, so that we can offer public witness to the love of Christ to all the people in our community.

May the spirit of Jesus Christ be with each of us so that we are called to risk, to graciously reverse our identity, agency and liability and offer rest and hope to communities living in restlessness and hopelessness. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Raj Bharat Patta
2nd July 2020



Sunday 5th July 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. 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.

Opening Prayer

Jesus, I come to you to celebrate your love and to receive your word.

You taught that we must worship God in spirit. I long to worship with your people, but I know you are with me, in these difficult times. Amen.

Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling (Singing the Faith No 503)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CNfpUrKzpM>

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,

till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together:

Lord God, I am in wonder at the world you have created and the life you have given me. I thank you for that gift of life and the joy of sharing my life with others.

I have not always lived my life as you would wish. Yet, even as I confess this to you, I know your forgiveness by the suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ, my Saviour. Amen.

Today's letter to an Early Church: Romans 7. 15-25a

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

Time to Reflect

Matthew 11: 28-30

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Jesus' says that he is offering a new way to God. Like the old way, it aims for salvation, but He offers us strength and comfort on our path to God.

He calls us to accept the need for forgiveness, and the salvation He offers to us. Then we can receive the Spirit to follow God's way with the knowledge of His Love.

Jesus says people criticise him for not conforming to their expectations. Those who fear his message point to how he lives his life, as they had done regarding John the Baptist.

If, through our calling, we receive or fear such criticism, we must rise above it. Seeing others we should look to what their words and actions mean for us, rather than judging their outward appearance.

It is reported that when Sydney Carter wrote the well-known hymn "Lord of the Dance" he expected the Church to dislike it because it was different. Happily it was accepted, perhaps not as quickly as it deserved, and is now a familiar celebration of Jesus' life.

Jesus speaks of the word of God being hidden from the wise, of those who allow wisdom or knowledge to hide the love of God, and who see the detail of the Law as overriding God's calling that we should love God and our neighbour.

In the tale of the 'Good Samaritan' it was a priest and a Levite (someone who would assist the priest in the Temple), who would know the Law, who walked by.

In writing to the Romans, Paul speaks of the conflict between following the Law and accepting the call of Jesus.

This does not mean that we can disregard the Law. Indeed often the Law shows us how to love our neighbour, but the love God shows us is not following a set of rules but a supreme act of love through suffering. Our call to respond should also be through Love.

All this is through God's love for us, shown in the grace we are offered when he sent His Son to die for our forgiveness and salvation.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

I thank you Lord for the gift of your Son: for His life, His sufferings and death and for His Resurrection and Ascension, for the witness, salvation and hope He gives.

I thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit to those who have come to you, and especially for the gift of that Spirit in your Church.

I rejoice in the work and witness of your Church and pray that it may continue to strive to fulfil your work and proclaim your Love.

I pray for the needs of the world, thinking especially at this time of those affected by the Coronavirus, but remembering too all who suffer including those whose plight seemingly goes unnoticed. Be with all those suffering in any way. Especially be with.....(people known to me)

Be with those whose lives impact others: leaders in government, or the workplace, health care workers, teachers, emergency workers and all those on whom people depend. Grant them the wisdom and the strength to know and to follow your way.

Lord, I commend all men, women and children to your unfailing love through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to "Lord of the Dance" Singing the Faith no 247

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLGqavkDszU> or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

I danced in the morning
when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon
and the stars and the sun;
and I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth,
at Bethlehem

I had my birth.

'I Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance.' said he,
'and I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance,' said he.

I danced for the scribe
and the pharisee,
but they would not dance
and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John;
they came with me
and the Dance went on.

I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame:
the holy people
said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
and they hung me on high,
and they left me there
on a Cross to die.

I danced on a Friday
when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance
with the devil on your back.
They buried my body
and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the Dance
and I still go on.

They cut me down
and I leapt up high;
I am the life
that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord
of the Dance, said he.

Sydney Carter (1915-2004)

A prayer of blessing

May the blessing of God the Father, Son and
Holy Spirit rest and remain with each of us
sharing His worship today and always.

Original Materials by Ralph Frankland

Hymns reproduced under CCLi 1144191

Romans 7. 15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;

we wailed, and you did not mourn."

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except

the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'