



Heaton Moor United Church

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



Church Services

Due to current COVID restrictions there will be no services at the Church building.

Sunday 15th November – Private Prayer

The Church will be open for private prayer from 11:00 am until 12:00 pm

Sunday Reflection

Jonnie Hill will be doing a short reflection which will be available on our YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhynK2FIPDTbOugBiO6D9A>

Zoom Services and Meetings

Sunday 15th November Circuit Service 3.00pm service

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

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881

Passcode: 974333

Wednesday 18th November More Than a Good Book 10:00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86886449976?pwd=R3ZSeFQ4U1crMXRTNHBUakxGYldjQT09>

Meeting ID: 86886449976

Passcode: 714757

Wednesday 18th November Coffee and Prayer 11.00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/95327541668?pwd=ekU2QWgzZjVKWtBFTjZsb0tERVQrdz09>

Meeting ID: 953 2754 1668

Passcode: 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,

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our Lord and Liberator Jesus Christ. Hope you are all doing well and are staying safe during this second national lockdown.

I understand how hard it is for us not to meet as a church for public worship, for in our Christian DNA, fellowship has always been integrated part of our being a church. However, in the current circumstances we need to follow the given Government guidelines to restrict the virus. Hoping it won't be too long before we can meet again. Thanks to our stewards who are helping in opening our church for individual prayers on Sunday. It was also good to see few friends doing prayer walk during our Sunday church service times. This week we are thankful to Johnnie for doing a video reflection for this Sunday and you are all invited to subscribe to our church YouTube channel and follow these reflections.

This week happens to be the Interfaith week and I was at Stockport Interfaith meeting and was sharing about the role of faith(s) in the context of climate change, which I am sure we are all very much aware of. As faith community we have a greater role to partake in climate justice initiatives and we as a church are called towards it.

Herewith I am sending you the written reflection for this week along with the worship resources for your kind perusal.

Thank you all for your prayers and support to one another during these uncertain times. Stay safe and look after yourself. May the blessing of God be with each of us.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,

Raj

13.11.2020

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITOR

It's been a relatively quiet week this week and this is reflected in the newsletter. I have been busy preparing the final details of our family light trail which opens on Saturday and we have had a fantastic response with 40 families taking part so far. If you are out and about over the next two weeks and see families taking part I encourage you to say a socially distanced hello.



We had our 5th delivery of meals from the Space At The Table so almost halfway through the 12 week pilot. This week's meal was moussaka and once again was distributed through The Dementia Café.

So far the project has delivered 584 meals with an average of 180 families being supported, the feedback has been nothing but positive and there is talk of the project being extended to Easter

Our Church building is still closed for worship but there are three ways we can be united in time on Sunday;

- 1) *Private Prayer and Reflection in Church*
Church will be open from 11:00am for an hour this Sunday for private reflection. You can turn up at any time and stay for as long as you require.
- 2) *Prayer Walk*
During the period 11:00 am - 12:00am take a walk. Use this time for prayer or to reflect on this week's reflections / worship notes.
If you're on social media tag us #hmuc # churchonthewalk
- 3) *Worship At Home*
In addition to the Methodist Worship at Home material our YouTube channel will have a pre-recorded message each week for you to watch.
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhynK2FIPDTbOugBiO6D9A>

I will be out on Sunday on a Prayer Walk so if you see me please give me a shout!

Whilst this newsletter doesn't contain as much as previous if you have any queries/comments or something you'd like included in a later edition please do not hesitate contact me.

JoAnne

community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk

07340 269 354

FOUND ON THW WEB - Can you help?



The Chatty Cafe Scheme UK

18h · 🌐



We currently have 19 people waiting for volunteers to call them for a weekly chat. Many of these people are experiencing loneliness and social isolation and may not see or speak to anyone from one week to the next. Can you spare just 30 minutes a week and call one of these lovely people for us? Email abi@thechattycafescheme.co.uk

Thank you

The Manchester Shoebox Appeal is running again this year. The charity, run by the Manchester Street Angels, provides gifts at Christmas to homeless people.

There are different categories – I suggest that we could assemble some boxes for the elderly. Some suggested contents are given below. You might also include a small item of warm clothing such as a hat, gloves or socks.

You are asked to wrap the box in Christmas wrapping paper (wrap the lid and box separately) and enclose a Christmas card and a one pound donation to cover administration.

The deadline this year is earlier to allow for quarantining the boxes.

If you have a filled box to donate please let me know by November 20th. I will pick it up from you and take it to the depot.

Deborah Symmons 432 6069

- Suggestions for contents:
- Bath gift set
- Dominos
- Chocolate biscuits
- Hand cream
- Reading books
- Boiled sweets
- Puzzle books
- Pencils
- Playing cards
- Adult colouring book
- **DO NOT INLCUDE** alcohol or money



We still have some masks to sell to raise funds for our School Pantry Project supporting Mersey Vale School. The masks have been made by Raj's friend Tabitha and are £4 each. If you would like to purchase please contact Sharon in the office.



DATED EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

14th November Family Light Trail Opens

The family light trail is up and around Heaton Moor. If you would like a trail map please contact JoAnne. The trail will be up until 28th November at 16:00.

18th November – 10:00

More Than A Good Book

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86886449976?pwd=R3ZSeFQ4U1crMXRTNHBuakxGYldjQT09>

20th November – Deadline for shoeboxes

See information on page 4



25th November – Topsy Turvy Coffee Evening 19:00

House of Cards, contact JoAnne for further information

2nd December Loving Remembrance Service 18:00

Zoom service further details to follow

2nd December – Bible Study Group 19:00

Peace, Panic and Pandemic : Advent Bible Study Group

See text box for further information

Peace, Panic and Pandemic
Advent Bible Study Group 2020

2nd December: The vision of peaceful kingdom - Isaiah 11
9th December: The vision of a just Kingdom - Amos 8
16th December: The vision of an anti-empire Kingdom - Kingdom of God
23rd December: The vision of a Kingdom of hope - Revelation 21

Zoom details to follow.



We're delighted to invite you to

Action for Children's
Starry Night

Tuesday 8 December 2020

6.30pm – 7.30pm

Hosted by Channel 4 News' Jon Snow, our virtual concert brings the magic of Christmas into your home. Featuring live musical performances, classic carols and appearances from some very special guests including Angellica Bell and Call the Midwife's Jenny Agutter.

Vulnerable children all over the UK face a Christmas without food, warmth or love. They need your help.

Tickets: £10 per household
starry-night.co.uk



Hope in the time of unpredictability

Reflecting on I Thessalonians 5:1-11

I overheard a conversation between a Dad and his fourteen-year-old curious son, where the son was asking his Dad, “can he get to the driver’s seat and drive his car at the big car park, where there is no traffic?” For which the Dad replied, “My dear son, never try to go ahead of time, nor go behind the time, always go along with time. When you are eighteen years old, you will be legal to drive a car and then you can get to the driver’s seat and drive the car. Till then observe driving and get to know the rules of the road.” “Going ahead of time” is one of the catch words today in this post-modern world, where everyone wants to be ‘ahead of time’ and do things at an early stage. Many people are eager to get to know the future well ahead, but it is important for us to understand that living the present moment and living in and with our times is essential in the journey of life. By trying to be ahead of time, we lose to live the present fully and miss out to live a life in all its fullness, for we get busy predicting the future, trying to take everything into our control, thinking we can tame the future according to our whims and fancies.

In the reading for this Sunday from I Thessalonians 5:1-11, we see that the church at Thessalonica was very eager to know the future time, particularly the return of Jesus Christ, and in a way were trying to take everything in to their control. They have given up their works and jobs, and have been curious to know well ahead about the return of Jesus Christ, which was the ultimate event of the future. To such a congregation, Paul writes, “now concerning the times (chronos = chronological time) and seasons (Kairos = appointed time), brothers and sisters you do not need to have anything written to you.” (1v) Paul was encouraging this Thessalonian church to live the present truthfully, to live the moment faithfully and to live in Jesus Christ meaningfully. By saying that ‘you do not need to have anything written to you,’ Paul was keeping the future open, in other words, he was opening the future into a situation of unpredictability, allowing the church to recognise that it is God who works in that situation offering hope through the present. Imagine if Paul would have written to this church what the future is offering to them or the details of the future, in this case the exact date and time of the return of Jesus Christ. If he did so, I think Paul would have brought disgrace to the grace of God, for God’s grace works amazingly in situations of unpredictability, for God’s Spirit does not know from which direction it comes from and to which direction it goes forth. Unpredictability is in the very essence of God, who surprises people through God’s grace at the right appointed time in the historical time-line for every person. By keeping the future ambiguous and mysterious, Paul was upholding the unpredictability character of God. Paul further explains the unpredictability character of God by offering two common examples, which is like the ‘thief in the night’ and like the ‘labour pains to a pregnant woman.’ ‘The day of the Lord’ is the day of the ultimate future, which is a day of the unpredictability nature of God, for it is only God who knows when is that ultimate future, and offers the present for the creation to live in and live with it. In the globally most watched web series on Netflix, ‘Money Heist’ a Spanish drama of robbing Royal mint by a group of robbers, one can understand what it takes for the ‘thief to come,’ who works with careful planning and execution of plan, anticipating well ahead the situations and events that they will meet during the heist. ‘The day of the Lord,’ will come in that moment of unpredictability, which is only in the hands of God, who is timeless and eternal.

In such a context of keeping the future unwritten and unpredictable, Paul offers hope into the present time through Jesus Christ. Paul mentions several binaries in this passage, binaries like night and day, sleep and awake, drunk and sober, darkness and light to explain the living of

a Christian life in a context of persecution, false prophecies and (un)predictability of the return of Christ. However, Paul offers hope in Jesus Christ to the Thessalonian church, which also has a relevance for our context today. I want to emphasise on three signs of hope in the time of unpredictability from 8-10 verses.

Before I share the three signs of hope, allow me to share that we are trying to reimagine the meaning of this text rather than repetition of it for our times today. As we know, evidence suggest that the first book that is written in the New Testament was I Thessalonians which was around 50 CE, about 20 years much before the Gospels were written. In other words, if we have a chronological New Testament in our hands, I Thessalonians will be the first book in such a canon. Paul was writing his letters to the churches in the context of Roman empire, where military language of breastplates and helmets were part of their common vocabulary. The people in these churches saw soldiers wearing such Roman military uniforms as an everyday experience. So, Paul creatively borrows the language of his public sphere and explains a counter-public message in the gospel of Jesus Christ. A mere repetition of such military words, like breastplate, sword, helmet etc. for our context will be out of place and out of meaning for us, as they are not only out of our world-view of our public sphere today, they are also not used as our critique and contestation of occupation and war that happens anywhere in our world today. So, here are the three signs of hope in times of unpredictability.

1. Wrapping the hearts with faith and love:

Paul reminds the Thessalonian church to not be in the trance caused due to drunkenness, but be sober, awake and alert to the message of Jesus Christ. So, the first sign of hope is by calling on the church to wrap their hearts with faith and love. As a church when they were anxious with the unpredictability of Christ's return, the sign of hope is to fill the hearts with faith and love, where faith offers a grounding in God, and love demonstrates such grounding in God through actions, meeting the needs of the creation. God in Jesus provides meaning to the very understanding of wrapping hearts with faith and love, where the church is invited to reflect their faith in God through their love for God and love for one another. Such an act of exhibiting and living out love in faith is a key to overcome anxiety, for we live the moment in faith and we celebrate the moment in love.

As we reimagine this sign of hope today, when people are anxious about the future of the church in the context of this pandemic, when people are depressed with the unpredictability and uncertainty due to this lockdown, the message is clear and loud, wrap our hearts with faith and love. Faith and love offer courage to face the situation now, and also offers strength to wait on God, the source of all hope for the world today. Faith and love co-exist together, for one without the other loses their relevance. Faith without love is a dead faith, and love without faith is abstract. In the context of growing hunger in our times, faith and love has to be shown in actions today.

2. Wearing the hope of salvation as a headgear:

Secondly, Paul calls on the church to put on a headgear of hope of salvation, in overcoming the unpredictability of the day of the Lord. The good news is that what they have been waiting for has already begun in Jesus Christ. The gospel is not about a spiritual existence in some ether place, but a reality of living life in and with the times now, for the salvation in Jesus offers hope to face that unpredictability. By wearing the hope of salvation in Jesus, the church is called to be critical in their reflections, be vigilant in their faith, and be fervent in their love. Hope of salvation serves as a perspective, serves as a hermeneutic for the church, where they interpret the signs of the times in that hope of salvation. When this hope of salvation becomes a mindset for the church, all it can offer is hopefulness and optimism in facing uncertainty.

For our times today, we as a church needs this headgear called hope of salvation, where we don't take easy answers, but are open to find hope through critical and creative thinking, even in situations of hopelessness. This hope of salvation flows into our lives, as we embody God's love offered in Jesus in the here and now. This headgear provides protection to negativity and leads us into optimism and positivity. As a church we should provide these headgears to all people in our community.

3. Wondering by offering a destination of life for all people:

There isn't any greater hope than to know that God has destined all people not for wrath but for salvation offering the gift to live with him, whether they are awake or asleep. When the Thessalonian church was wondering what would have happened to those who died before them in meeting Jesus Christ on his return. Paul was writing that the God in Jesus is a God of love, a God who surprises by receiving everyone and offering a destination of life to all. God in Jesus is a God who offers life in situations of unpredictability. Paul also writes that God has destined everyone salvation through Jesus Christ. Such an assurance, such a belief in God offers hope to the church.

The church today is called to offer life to all people, and all means all, irrespective of their identity, race, gender, whether asleep or awake. We in following Jesus are not called to preach wrath and judgement against people, but offer hope to cope with situations of uncertainty. In verse 11, Paul says, "Therefore encourage one another, build up each other, and indeed you are doing." The assurance that one receives in the vertical relationship with God needs to be shared and shown horizontally with our neighbours, so that collectively we celebrate life, and courageously face the unpredictable future.

In closing, let me conclude this reflection using the words of Graham Tomlin, who in his book "Why being yourself is a bad idea" where he offers love and wonder as the purpose of life. He says,

"According to the Christian faith, that is what you are here for. Whether you become famous, earn lots of money, travel the world and collect amazing experiences is all secondary and relatively trivial against the real purpose of your life, which is to learn to live in tune with the power that gave birth to the world, to live with the grain of universe, to become somebody capable of love. And again, to avoid misunderstanding, this is not primarily about feeling warm thoughts about others, but about the slow, steady, patient ability to surrender your own comfort and prosperity for the sake of someone else – not just your friends and family, but your neighbour and, even more, your enemies. It is to extend to your neighbour exactly the kind of care that you would give to yourself and to find in doing so that you thrive and flourish – finding yourself by losing yourself."

May God's grace and hope always remain with us. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Raj Bharat Patta,
13th November 2020



The Methodist Church

United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

A Message from the Superintendent Minister

November 11th 2020

Dear Friends,

As I write, we are still awaiting the definitive outcome of the US Presidential election. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have been introduced as the President and Vice-President elect, they have been declared the winners by most media outlets and they have given speeches to that effect. Yet the current incumbent, one Donald Trump, has so far refused to concede, insisting without any evidence that he is the true winner and that there have been improprieties in the voting system leading to his rightful victory being taken from him illegally. In whatever way this plays out, it seems certain that come January, Donald and Melania will have to pack their bags and leave, or be forcibly removed from the White House. It is unthinkable that someone could be so narcissistic as to not realise just how foolish all this makes him look; to not realise that his actions undermine to the very core his (misguided!) self - understanding as a strong, fair, powerful and compassionate human being; to not realise that to concede with grace and offer an authentic and respectful handover is the very basic expectation of someone in his office.

Grace does not seem to be in Donald Trump's vocabulary, certainly not in his mindset and definitely not in his actions. Yet it is something which is at the heart of the Christian faith which he claims to follow. There are of course many different definitions of the word *grace*. In Hebrew, it literally means 'favour' - to bend or stoop in kindness to another. We often use it to refer to movement which is flowing and elegant, or to describe the act of someone honouring us with their presence. We talk about 'saying the Grace' as a little prayer or blessing before sharing a meal, or at the end of an act of worship to acknowledge that God is with us.

But when life is hard, Grace is about the unconditionality of God's love. It is about God's offer of life and peace and freedom, not because we have done anything to earn or deserve it, and not because we are asked to offer anything in return. Simply because that's the way God is. It's the ultimate example of that parental response to the child saying, "Why?" Well, simply "because." Saint Augustine of Hippo said that "grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them." In that sense, grace becomes both a gift, a lesson, and a way to live.

One of my most hated expressions is that which we use when looking on at someone else's misfortune. We say, "there but for the grace of God go I". We use that idiom all the time, yet while we want to thank God when we are spared a trial, do we really want to suggest that God has at the same time, withheld his grace from the poor person whose shoes we are glad not to be in?! Such an expression goes against the very grain of grace – which is that it is there always, and for everyone. Neither our own, nor others' misfortune is caused or allowed by God. The idea that God is one who chooses to take life or spare it, to cause pain or prevent it, does not sit well with the idea of an all loving God. Rather I like to think that God is one who pours grace onto us, even in

the lowest and most wretched of times, giving us the chance to live and grow and find fullness of life. And just as God pours out that grace on us, so we too, in our beautiful movements and kind words, in our very presence, can offer grace to others; grace which manifests itself in a non-judgemental outlook, in humility, in the capacity to forgive and to be kind, in the recognition that sometimes all that is possible and necessary is to be alongside someone else in their distress, either in person, or in prayerful solidarity. As Charles Wesley wrote:

*Lord, in the strength of grace,
With a glad heart and true,
Myself, my residue of days,
I consecrate to you.* (Singing The Faith 448)

Ultimately, Grace is the selfless expression of our basic human need for others; to be able to give and receive without conditions – love, care, wisdom, compassion, companionship. We need these things to live and as Christians we believe they flow from God and through our lives, centred upon the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As we continue through this second lockdown may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you and with the world.

And please remember as always, especially as we and others face further restrictions and lockdown measures:

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of God's spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another.

- **When we feel lonely let us know that in Christ we are never alone.**
- **When we feel isolated may we be reminded that within the worldwide Body of Christ we are always connected.**
- **When we need a hug help us to feel the warmth of God's embrace**
- **When we are compelled to keep our distance, may we be drawn close to each other within the Spirit of Companionship that flows from God and which moves through and between each one of us.**

With love and blessings,

Rev Cathy.

NOTICES

Worship

See your local church notices for details of 'live' worship in your church, but for the time being we are continuing our Circuit wide Zoom service at 3pm on Sundays.

Sunday 15th and 22nd November 3pm

Login details as usual as follows:

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

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881 Password: 974333

Circuit Prayer

While we are once again unable to worship in our churches, let's continue to say this prayer together when we can, at 11am on a Sunday morning. This way we stay connected in a very really and tangible way. You can also read more about each church on the Circuit Website www.stockportcircuit.org.uk

God of Love and Life,

We pray to you this morning for the life the United Stockport Methodist Circuit, for our sisters and brothers who belong to:

(pausing briefly to reflect after each name)

Christ Church Methodist /URC , Dialstone Lane Methodist Church , Davenport Methodist Church , Edgeley Community Church , Hazel Grove Methodist Church, Heaton Mersey Methodist , Heaton Moor United Church, Jubilee Methodist Church, (Marple Bridge), Marple Methodist Church, The Ridge Methodist Church, (Marple), Romiley Methodist Church, St. Johns Methodist Church, (Cheadle Heath), Tiviot Dale Methodist Church (centre of Stockport), Trinity Methodist Church, (Bramhall Lane), Windlehurst Methodist Church (High Lane), Woodley Methodist Church

We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. We ask that this time of crisis might pass and that those who suffer might find comfort and strength within the knowledge of your grace, revealed through the kindness and compassion of the people of God. Eternal God, though the self-offering of your Son you have filled our lives with your presence. Help us in our sufferings and trials. Fill us with hope and strengthen us in our weakness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Food for Schools and Traidcraft Shopping

For details of how to support Davenport Methodist Church in their collection of food for Adswold Primary School, or to buy Traidcraft products for Christmas, please look at the Circuit Website www.stockportcircuit.org.uk or call your minister for details.

Sunday 15th November 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

'Lord, we come into your awesome presence, from the shadows into your radiance' May the light of your presence guide our worship today. Amen .

Hymn: Be Thou my Vision (Singing the Faith 545)

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

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/hymns/be-thou-my-vision-o-lord-of-my-heart-stf-545/>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Irish, 8th century
translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931)
versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860-1935) (alt.)*

Let us pray together

Prayer of Praise and Invocation

Lord Jesus, Light of the World;
You came to turn our world upside down,
or rather the right way up.
Word of God made flesh,
You came to show us how to truly live, to love and to serve;
how to live out the values of your kingdom here on earth.
As we gather to praise you for all that you are
and all that you bring, we pray;
'mirrored here, may our lives tell your story'
today and everyday.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Lord we acknowledge that there have been times
when we have not shared the riches of your
kingdom with others.

Times when we have taken the easy route, choosing
options that require less time, less energy, less
thought.

Times when we have turned back to the ways of the world, that are contrary to the values of your kingdom.

And in a moment of quiet we bring into your light our own personal confessions.

Lord, we remember you are a God of mercy and grace, who forgives us and transforms us, by the power of your Spirit, into the people you have truly made us to be.
Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 25: 14-30

Today's Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

You may like to read Acts 17: 1-9 which details Paul's visit to Thessalonica.

Time to Reflect

I used to work for a company where every month we were visited by a mystery shopper. There used to be quite a lot of anxiety amongst certain staff around the time this visit may occur. When exactly would they come? How would we be rated? Our boss had us doing lots of extra tasks to prepare. However, I was never that worried, thinking if we were behaving as we should be, we would have nothing to be concerned about.

One of the questions concerning the people in Thessalonica, who Paul is writing to, is 'when will the day of the Lord come?' Paul replies, 'about times and dates we do not need to write to you', that day 'will come like a thief in the night' (1 Thess 5: 1-2).

However, for those who are living in the way God has guided them, 'this light will not come like a searchlight to reveal the sins done under the cover of darkness', but like the light of a new day (Howard Marshall, 2011, p1283).

The Thessalonians focus should not be on trying to predict this day, but living as children of light. In my job the mystery shopper came to assess how we were treating all customers. It wouldn't have done the company any good if we had only treated the mystery shopper well. It was the many other customers every day that would be speaking to their family and friends and at risk of not returning.

How we treat all people, how we live our lives on a daily basis, amidst the challenges and competing values of the world, matters.

The church in Thessalonica was relatively new. Paul had to leave after only three preaching sessions due to mob violence from those who opposed his teachings.

The new believers were living during a time of persecution. There is the military image of being awake and on watch, but here, 'peace and security', a slogan sometimes associated with imperial Roman rule, is not brought about through military might and threat of violence, which only brings fragile peace. Rather the Thessalonians are to put on the defensive breastplate and helmet of faith, hope and love (Roots Nov – Dec 2020). They are to live as a contrast society. They are to live the Jesus way. Our Gospel reading is also set at a time where the values of God's kingdom are clashing with the values of the world.

This parable is told two days before the Passover festival in what we now call Holy Week, where the story reaches its climax and Jesus himself brings about peace, not through violence but through the way of the cross.

Jesus, firstly is offering a challenge to his own day, a time where he is forcing a final confrontation between God's kingdom and the system that had resisted it.

The third slave could be seen as representing the Pharisees, who had been given the Law of Moses, the Temple, and the command to share God's blessing and yet had kept the light to themselves. The other slaves can be seen as those who take the good news of God's kingdom they have been entrusted with, share it and act to help it grow (Wright, 2004).

To ponder

What do we do with the news of God's kingdom that has been entrusted to us?

How do we live each day in light of this news?

As Paul writes to the Thessalonians, how can we encourage one another and build ourselves up in our faith?

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

We pray for places where people face persecution for their faith and are not free to worship you, and for people who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus;

Lord, help us shine your light and share our faith.

We pray for those who fear for the future,
those facing job uncertainty or loss,
those anxious about the continued impact of the Covid
pandemic;

Lord, help us shine your light and share your hope.

We pray for those who are ill,
those facing loneliness, isolation and separation from
loved ones;

Lord, help us shine your light and share your love.

In a moment of quiet we bring before you our personal
prayers.

Lord, we remember 'the light of your love is always
shining' as we offer you these prayers in Jesus' name.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Hear the Call of the Kingdom (Singing the Faith 407)

<https://youtu.be/d5AKyRFIKaM>

Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...
*Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart
Townend (b. 1963)*

A prayer of blessing

As we are sent out to live as children of light;

May we walk in faith,

be sustained by hope,

and share the all-embracing love of God

with everyone we meet.

Amen.

Original material by Rachel Atkinson
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Matthew 25: 14-30

The Parable of the Talents

14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned
his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he
gave five talents, ¹⁶to another two, to another one, to
each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The
one who had received the five talents went off at once
and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In
the same way, the one who had the two talents made
two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the
one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid
his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of
those slaves came and settled accounts with them.
²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came
forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you
handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five
more talents." ²¹His master said to him, "Well done, good
and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a
few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter
into the joy of your master." ²²And the one with the two
talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed
over to me two talents; see, I have made two more
talents." ²³His master said to him, "Well done, good and
trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few
things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into
the joy of your master."

²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also
came forward,
saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man,
reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you
did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid
your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."
²⁶But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You
knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and

gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,* you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, ‘There is peace and security’, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved,* are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Acts of the Apostles 17:1-9 **The Uproar in Thessalonica**

¹After Paul and Silas* had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ²And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, ³explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah* to suffer and to rise from the

dead, and saying, ‘This is the Messiah,* Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.’ ⁴Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the market-places they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason’s house. ⁶When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers* before the city authorities,* shouting, ‘These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, ⁷and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus.’ ⁸The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, ⁹and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.