



# 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 10<sup>th</sup> January – Private Prayer

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

Sunday Reflection

Rev. Dr Raj Patta will be doing a short reflection which will be available on our youtube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhynK2FIPDTbOuqBiO6D9A>

## Zoom Services and Meetings

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January Circuit Service 3.00pm service

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

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881

Passcode: 974333

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January Coffee and Prayer 11.00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/95327541668?pwd=ekU2QWgzZjVKWTBFTjZsb0tERVQrdz09>

Meeting ID: 953 2754 1668

Passcode: 794265

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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

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.

Step 2)

Follow the prompts you hear on the phone.

*Dear Heaton Moor United Church,*

*New year greetings to you all.*

*Hope you all had a quiet and good Christmas.*

*We had to begin this new year 2021 with a national lockdown as the cases of the virus are surging with the guidance informing us to 'stay at home.' I am glad to hear that some of our members have received the first jab of the vaccine, and some of our members are involved in the very vaccination programme. We are grateful to all our frontline key workers who have been working really hard during these tough times.*

*As you have heard, with the national lockdown now in place, though the places of worship are exempted to be closed in England by the government for public worship, our leadership team have graciously agreed to cancel the communal worship on Sundays and have agreed to open the church building only for private prayer. I sincerely appreciate the leadership team for making our church to lead by example to demonstrate what it means to love our neighbour. The circuit zoom services will continue to be offered and kindly join in those services. We also now have our YouTube channel, and kindly subscribe to it and receive the weekly video reflections.*

*Kindly don't hesitate to call any of our staff team during this lockdown for any kind of pastoral services. We as a staff team are working how to engage missionally during this lockdown, and we will keep you informed about it in the days to come.*

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

*Above all, let us keep upholding our church in your prayers so that we can be a loving community during these strange and difficult times. Make sure you keep in touch over phone with one another. We all hope and pray that the light is at the end of the tunnel, and together we can achieve that light soon.*

*May the peace and love of Jesus Christ be with you all.*

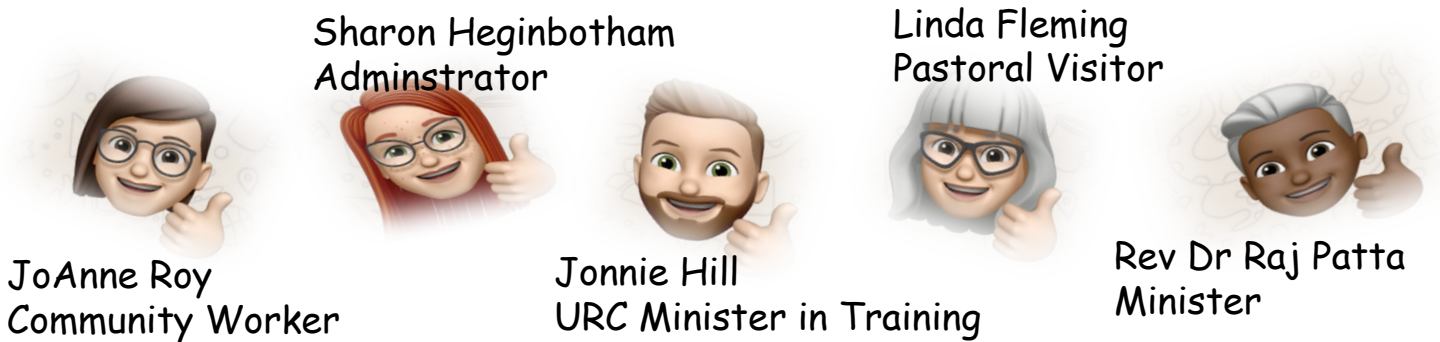
*Take care, stay safe, and stay blessed.*

*With warm regards,*

*Raj*

*8<sup>th</sup> January 2021*

# Heaton Moor United Staff Team



Happy New Year from the team at Heaton Moor United Church

Welcome to the start of 2021, and again we are having to adapt to changes. A change to the staff team is that Linda is reducing her hours from 25 hours a week to 10 hours a week . She will still be covering the pastoral needs of the church but on less on hours, if you wish to get hold of her she can be contacted either by email [lindawfleming625@gmail.com](mailto:lindawfleming625@gmail.com) or phone 07564 839380.

JoAnne and I are still going to be working 20 hours a week, but for the next few weeks we will be working from home. JoAnne has Mondays off and I tend to have Tuesday and Thursday off. JoAnne can be contacted by email [community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk](mailto:community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk) or phone 07340 269354. I can be contacted by email [office@community.org.uk](mailto:office@community.org.uk) or by phone 07471 065729 .

Raj has Monday off and can be contacted via email [raj.patta@methodist.org.uk](mailto:raj.patta@methodist.org.uk) or phone 07443 159070

Jonnie Hill can be contacted via email [Jhillurc@gmail.com](mailto:Jhillurc@gmail.com)

We will ensure that you are kept up to date with all the things happening, either by email, Facebook (Heaton Moor United Church), twitter (@heatonmooruc), Instagram (heaton\_moor\_united\_church) or snail mail !!

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITOR

Let me begin by saying Happy New Year! I hope you all had a lovely Christmas break in whatever form it took. Traditionally myself and the little ones spend Christmas Day just the three of us, but this year thanks to COVID my parents and brother were with us as they were unable to travel to foreign destinations. Whilst I feel very lucky to have spent time with them I have to be honest and say I was looking forward to being back in the office for some peace and quiet! Unfortunately this also isn't meant to be and I am working from home whilst trying to home-school Elliott!

The team and I are busy making plans for how to best support our Church community and I am investigating ways we can be of support to the external community, whilst maintaining the current guidelines. If you are on social media do follow our pages as we will be updating these regularly along with our website.

In December I wrote about the More Than A Car Park initiative but in view of the restrictions this will be on hold until further notice.

If I can of any help during this lockdown please let me know; I'm happy to be a walking partner, personal shopper, delivery driver or anything else you may require!

If you have anything you would like included in the weekly notice's please let me know. As always if you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

*JoAnne*

[community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk](mailto:community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk)

07340 269 354

[www.heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk](http://www.heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk)



Heaton Moor United Church



Heaton Moor United Church



heaton\_moor\_united\_church

**CORONAVIRUS TIER 4**

# STAY AT HOME

[gov.uk/coronavirus](https://gov.uk/coronavirus)

**Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms** so will be spreading the virus without realising. We must all take action to protect each other and our hospital capacity.



## School Pantry

Towards the end of January / beginning of February we will be doing another collection for our School Pantry Project.

This project sees us visiting Mersey Vale School before each half term and providing much needed food for those families who need a little bit of help. The Pantry is open to all families who feel they need and to date we have had a fantastic response.

To the left is a list of items that we are currently short of. If you can help in any way that would be great.

If you would like further information please contact JoAnne on [community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk](mailto:community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk) or 07340 269 354



## Topsy Turvy Coffee Evening

27<sup>th</sup> January @ 19:00

This will be a craft evening over zoom. Please contact JoAnne if you would like to attend and to arrange supplies.

## Spiritual Sustenance when in isolation

There is a new page on The Methodist website [Spiritual sustenance when in isolation \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk) which has been set up to signpost you to resources to help nourish your spiritual life during lockdown.

If you have any other websites or social media pages you have been using please do share with us.

Well that's it now for another year,  
As we try to manage full of all that good cheer,  
Getting our bodies back to where they were,  
Despite appearances we really do care.  
The pounds and pounds that we have put on,  
We must shed until they are all gone,  
It might take some time, not just a week,  
Back to what we remember, is what we seek.

It is January now but we have until December,  
To achieve those physiques to remember,  
Before we start on another round of seasonal feasting,  
We must get on with reduced eating,  
But procrastination is a dreadful disease,  
It stops us when we should get going with ease.

We still have some cheese and we still have some cake,  
Can't leave those for heaven's sake,  
We intended to eat them at the time,  
But to throw them out now would be a crime,  
And don't forget those tins of chocolates,  
Intended for passing round to our mates,  
We can't really give them away you see,  
For they have been opened, mainly I admit, by me.

No more big meals for the rest of the year?  
That's not very likely to happen I fear,  
But a bit of exercise might be a good thing,  
For the slimming results we want to bring.

We have got appointments at the local Health centre,  
They want to test our blood and pressure to mentor,  
But we'd rather not go just yet,  
When we are lighter would be a better bet,  
The readings now will be all wrong,  
Something we could tell them all along.

But we do look forward to a good feast,  
Be it Greek, French, Italian, or something from the east,  
Just one of those simple pleasures in life,  
That gets you through all the trouble and strife.

Confucius, you may recall, gave lots of really sage advice,  
Some of it worthwhile and really very nice,  
For instance, one always worth keeping in your mind  
**'When in doubt brew up'** was good for the daily grind,  
And one for you to remember, for when we are no longer here,  
To offset the pain, the anguish and the fear,  
**'When the heart is sad, fill the stomach'** he opined,  
So there you have it, an instruction to feast that is being kind.  
On reflection it may not have been him,  
It might have been his brother Jim,  
That gave these maxims to live by,  
Or at least for us to learn and try.

Feasting or Fasting is only one letter away, The E is for eating obviously!

## The Stokers' 2020 Quiz - Items of clothing

The answer to each question is an item of clothing (if it's a hat, we need the type of hat - e.g. "Trilby" or "Stetson" etc)

All money donated will go to **Action for Children** – a national charity which "protects and supports children and young people, providing practical and emotional care and support ensuring their voices are heard and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives." (actionforchildren.org.uk). If you are able, please donate via our "*Just Giving*" webpage at <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stokerquiz2020> - which enables Gift Aid to be claimed automatically.

We operate a "Trust the Puzzler" policy and welcome a donation of at least **£1.50** from anyone who uses this quiz. If not using *Just Giving*, please pay us by cash or cheque (payable to "Dialstone Lane Methodist Church") and we'll pass it on.

This year, we are again indebted to Jane and Mike Hollins, who road-tested the rough clues we produced.

**Please add your name and contact details on the bottom this sheet before you return it.**

Please send answers to us at 162 Mile End Lane, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 6BY or to andy.stoker@btinternet.com before midnight(!) on **31st January 2021**. A gift token prize will be awarded to the best set of answers. Feel free to use this quiz for your own purposes after this date - electronic version of this, and past quizzes, available. Answers available after 31 Jan (SAE /email please).

1	Apparently accommodates 40 quarts up top		21	What Desmond wears for ballet?	
2	Connecting the head of a large marine reptile to its body		22	As worn (musically) by a small rodent in a Dutch windmill	
3	From an atoll, sometimes yellow with polka dots		23	Baseball equipment poetically lost by young cats	
4	Helmet exposing part of the face and possibly worn by the gallant six hundred		24	Maybe coming from Wormwood to be worn in hospital	
5	Fosbury, Edwards and Beamon, sometimes woolly		25	Is in to garb like a Roman	
6	Neckwear for William Tell and Robin		26	Knitted opening sweater from the west Wales bay?	
7	Often feather, worn loosely around the neck but sometimes can constrict		27	Not long - and ideal underwear for Cooper, London and Liston	
8	Sounds like they steal female underwear		28	Casual top, said to be got after going there.	
9	Sounds wholly minty - worn for chukkas?		29	Headwear in a well-fed or a satiated type	
10	The topping from Melton Mowbray perhaps		30	Took property without permission - worn around the neck	
11	Trousers that might be thought to include a clanger at the end		31	Straw headwear for three men but probably not Montmorency	
12	Workwear covering everything		32	Sleeveless garment - the craft of William Schwenck and Arthur	
13	( <i>groan alert</i> ) - what the constable jokingly said his chest was under		33	Worn over and goes with gooseberry, Cod, Horn and Wrath	
14	Directional marine headgear		34	A two-piece in the rain or a one-piece for the water	
15	A former PM was said to have encouraged embracing this casual top (or the person wearing it)		35	Tailored briefs that might be expected to disappear in a triangle	
16	A hooded coat, found in tartan or a knitted object		36	Worn on top by Trueman, Anderson and Willis?	
17	Footwear formed from transgressive additions to coffee and cocoa mix?		37	Footwear created when Notts shopkeeper Jesse met an Iron nobleman	
18	Headwear found in a sombre room		38	A schoolchild's jacket from a roaring fire	
19	A type of bread, flowers on display or knee-length knickers		39	Protection in the kitchen or the front of a stage	
20	Apparently belonging to Ms Harlow, Ms Shrimpton, M. Cocteau or M. Renoir		40	Headgear traditionally worn by Dr John's companion solving a speckled band mystery	

**Please add your name and contact details:**





## Prayers from Linda

**We praise you.**

Bless us with new beginnings, we pray.

Renew our vision. Where we have failed in reaching out to our neighbours in love, missing the moment to extend a hand of wholeness,

Renew our hope. At this beginning of a New Year, dear God, our arms are still warm from cradling the Baby of Bethlehem. Help us to keep that memory strong. Strengthen our arms to welcome your people in your communities of love. Prepare our hearts to burst forth with a spring of possibilities and new life. Stir us to be and share your love with all people. Help us, your church, your disciples, to stand strong for your justice and peace. O God at the beginning of this New Year, we know that you are about to do new things. And help us to join in. In the name of Jesus, our greatest new beginning.

**AMEN**



Jesus, the hope of all who trust you; the power of all who serve you; the wisdom of all who follow you; the unity of all who worship you. Grant us light at the beginning of this New Year; Fill us with strength and boldness according to your promises, that we might reach out to our needy nation, with your love, in this season of Hope.

We humbly acknowledge our weakness and failure, but our eyes are fixed on you.

Fulfil your purposes and plans that your name may be honoured in our land.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

**Amen.**

If anyone would like to share a Prayer  
with the church family, please call Linda  
on 07564839380 or

E-mail [lindawfleming625@gmail.com](mailto:lindawfleming625@gmail.com).



No names required because  
God Knows.



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**The Voice of God: Distinct, Diverse and Disruptive**  
**Reflecting on Psalm 29 on the first Sunday after Epiphany**

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At the start of this New Year 2021, the cartoon from my favourite theologian @nakedpastor caught my attention, in which he has drawn the setting of the garden of Gethsemane, where the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus, and impulsively Peter chops the ear of a soldier in his anger for the arrest. Jesus then fixes that ear on to the soldier and says to him “Happy New Ear.” These words, “happy new ear” sets the tone for our wish for this year as we greet “happy new year.” In other words, if we are anticipating a “happy new year,” we need “happy new ears,” so that our ears are open to hear the fresh voice of God that comes wondrously and surprisingly from unexpected quarters of life and life situations.

The season of Epiphany, where God in Jesus reached out to the “outsiders” is an occasion to celebrate the freedom of God in revealing the light of God to anyone and everyone, defying the norms that God is only available to the chosen and that God’s revelation happens only in the known unidirectional ways. It is also a season where we are called to recognise the voice of God that comes distinctly from means and ways which we never anticipate. The voice of God came to king Herod from the magi, when they have enquired about the saviour being born, which caused a great distress and disturbance to him and to his city. The voice of God came to the magi in a dream, after presenting their gifts to baby Jesus, and asked them to return in ‘another way.’ The gospel lesson for the first Sunday after Epiphany from Mark 1: 4-11, is a recording of Jesus’ baptism, where the voice of God came out as the heavens tore open saying, “you are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (11v).

The prescribed Psalm for this Sunday, Psalm 29 is a poem of David on the ‘voice of God.’ Psalm 29 is one of the three Psalms on creation along with Psalm 8 and 19. We recognise the public theological engagement of David as he weaves the creation imagery into this psalm recalling the ancient near eastern battle songs, singing victory in praise of God the sovereign ruler of the world. This is a Psalm with predominant usage of the name of Yahweh and also the voice of God. In the 11 verses the name Yahweh occurs 18 times in this psalm and the voice of God repeats 7 times, allowing the readers to decipher the meaning and message of the voice of God. Here are the seven understandings that the psalmist presents about the voice of God. The voice of the Lord is over the waters(3v), is powerful (4a), is full of majesty (4b), breaks the cedars (5v), flashes forth flames of fire (7v), shakes the wilderness (8v), causes the oaks to whirl (9v), The seven usages of the voice of God in this Psalm offers a rainbow of understanding about the voice of God, explaining the depth and heights in the voice of God.

Allow me to share three things from this psalm about the voice of God.

**1. The Voice of God is Distinct:**

When describing a voice, the psalmist is not speaking about the sound of the voice, but was describing the voice of God as distinct, definitive and dynamic, with various characteristics. The psalmist was reflecting on the creation account where the Spirit of God was brooding over waters and it was the voice of God that brought order to chaos. Therefore, he was emphasising that the voice of God was over waters, calling the readers to recognise the voice of God over the situations of chaos, for the voice of God can come as a thunder, as lightening. The community around these Psalms were also afraid of seas and waters because of the leviathans residing over them. Into that context, the psalmist emphasises that the voice of God is over the waters, for it is this voice of the Yahweh that is over the sea monsters offering hope and consolation through thunders. The voice of God’s distinctiveness was further explained that when the psalmist says that the voice of God

is powerful and is full of majesty. The Psalm begins by ascribing the 'heavenly beings,' which is translated as 'sons of God' to know that the voice of God is all powerful over the powers of the world and above, and is full of grace and majesty.

When the listeners have 'happy ears', they listen to the voice of God, finding hope over the powers, finding grace and majesty in God's voice. God's voice thunders, burns, shakes, strips, challenges and offers hope, and in such characteristics the distinctiveness of the voice of God is exhibited. One not only listens the voice of God, but also experiences it.

## **2. The Voice of God is Diverse:**

Why does the psalmist explain the voice of God in at least seven flavours? By mentioning the seven colours and flavours of the voice of God, the psalmist was explaining that the voice of God is not monotonous, rather it is diverse and, in that diversity, lies the richness of the voice of God. In the history of the Scriptures, one can recognise that the voice of God came to people of different contexts in various different ways. The voice of God does not have one template, one pattern or one paradigm. The voice of God comes in diversity and the seven flavours are a mere representative of how the voice of God appears. The voice of God at one context is majestic, at another context flashes flames, at another context shakes, at another context strips and whirls, at another context thunders, at another context comes in silence, at another context comes in a small shrill voice and at another context awakes, comforts and consoles. There is no one tone suits all people in the voice of God. The diversity of the voice of God also explains the distinctiveness of God, for God is dynamic and shares God's voice according to the time and context, for God holds the time and the context in Godself.

The listeners to the voice of God are called to be humble in acknowledging that God's voice appears differently to each person, for God's voice is God's prerogative and not driven according to the faith of the listener.

## **3. The Voice of God is Disruptive:**

Out of the seven flavours of the voice of God in this Psalm, we notice that three of them are with a disruptive character. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness and the voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl. Cedars are mentioned as the grandest forest trees, and those grown at Lebanon as the loftiest of their species. The cedars in the scripture are referred to as remarkable for their size and grandeur. The voice of God breaks the cedars, even the cedars from Lebanon, disrupting the pride and powers of the world. There isn't a place or a person to whom the voice of God cannot penetrate. They might be the mightiest, yet the voice of God penetrates like a thunder and affirms in humility in the presence and the voice of God. The voice of the Lord also disrupts the wilderness by shaking it, again to explain that there is no place that the voice of God cannot penetrate into. Oaks symbolised strength, and the voice of God spins the strength of the mighty and bring them down. No power can stand against the voice of God. In all of this, we recognise that the voice of God disrupts the mighty, the powerful, the grandest, the loftiest and can bring them down to teach humility and to wait on the power of God than on their individual self-seeking strength and power.

The listeners to this voice of God are called to recognise that the voice of God not always comes to sooth and comfort, but also comes to disrupt and challenge, for it on the voice of God we are called to wait upon and not on powers and principalities of the world.

Reminding the listeners that the voice of God is distinct, diverse and disruptive, the psalmist concludes this Psalm 29 by emphasising that Yahweh is the Lord over the creation and is a king

forever. He sends out his listeners, who recognises the strength in the voice of God with a prayer in verse 11, “may the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!”

In the context when there is a surge in the cases of the new variant of the virus in the UK, and with a national lockdown in place, how do we understand the voice of God today? The voice of God during this third lockdown is “love God and love your neighbour, be thankful for the vaccine, act responsible, stay at home, be compassionate to others.” The dynamism of the voice of God reminds us that God has been a speaking God who continuously offers God’s voice to this creation for the cause of justice and peace. Those of us who hear God’s voice are called to be channels of God’s voice of love, peace and justice to this world. The second learning from this Psalm 29 is to celebrate the diversity of the voice of God, for there is no one template suits all kind of God’s voice. God speaks to us through the Word, through prayers, through friends, through families, through films, through books, through songs, you name it and you have it, for God speaks in that many diverse ways to us. God speaks to us in the church, outside the church, in the community, on our streets, and everywhere. God doesn’t stop speaking. God is a speaking God. Each experience of listening to the voice of God is unique and different, and we are called to learn humility in celebrating each other’s experience of the voice of God. The voice of God calls for humility in us and also calls us to overcome the exclusivistic claims and attitudes with regards to the voice of God. God speaks in God’s graciousness to the entire creation in God’s own diverse ways. Thirdly, the voice of God disrupts and unsettles us from our pride, strength, self-righteousness, prejudices, and calls us to love, share, care, offer hope, strive for peace and justice, and work for the Kingdom of God here on earth. Let those that have new ears, hear the voice of God in our midst and in our times today.

Allow me to conclude this reflection quoting the lines from one of my favourite hymns, “Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred” by Jaquie G. Jones, hymn no. 662 in *Singing the Faith*.

Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?  
Are you still prepared to follow?  
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
Though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much,  
And embrace the pain and sorrow?  
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
The disciples of tomorrow?*

In your city streets will you be God’s heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat and when friendship starts,  
Will you share your faith with the faithless?

Raj Bharat Patta,  
7<sup>th</sup> January 2021



# The Methodist Church

United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

## A Message from the Superintendent Minister

January 5<sup>th</sup> 2021

My Dear Friends,

Whilst I want to wish you all a very Happy New Year, it is with deep regret that I write having just heard the news of yet another National Lockdown. Some of us were fortunate enough to have been able to attend services in person over the Christmas period. Others were beginning to think that in the New Year this might become a possibility for them once again. And whilst the promise of a vaccine allows us to think that the end might be in sight, we are yet again faced with the challenge to 'Stay Home, Save Lives, Protect the NHS.' Whilst places of worship do not have to close — as we did during the first national lockdown — many of the churches in our Circuit have regretfully taken the decision to close our doors for the foreseeable future. Where this decision has been taken it has not been taken lightly of course, and it relates to the capacity of churches to offer worship safely without putting pressure on stewards and preachers and worship leaders to be present when they feel that it is in their best interests and those of their families to isolate. It is really important at this time that we support and respect one another in the personal decisions we are all having to make. We would all love all our churches to be open but with limited personnel and resources it may not always be possible.

One consequence of this early January lockdown is that many churches are having to postpone annual Covenant Services. The traditional Methodist Covenant service — which is also beloved in a whole range of other Christian denominations too — stems from the time of John Wesley himself. Wesley saw the need for a regular opportunity and ceremony to enable people to open themselves to God more fully. He looked for some means of helping people to hear God's offer and challenge ever more deeply, and to allow God to prompt and enable them to respond. The Covenant Service that we celebrate today evolved from that conviction, reminding us about the extraordinary and miraculous things which are made possible within the life and the love of God, made known to us in Jesus Christ. It is ironic that at a time when we perhaps need to be reminded of these things more than ever that our Covenant services cannot take place. As soon as we can, we will plan Covenant Services in those churches which have not been able to hold them, but for now I want to use this space to offer a few reflections, particularly upon the very special Covenant Prayer. Let me remind you of it, and you may wish to say it prayerfully to yourself at this time, and commit yourself to all that it represents, even though you are not able to participate in the full liturgy and ceremony within the presence of the wider faith community and congregation. I have re-produced the traditional words here, rather than the modern version which we often use these days:

**I am no longer my own, but yours.  
Put me to what you will,  
Rank me with whom you will;  
Put me to doing,  
Put me to suffering;  
Let me be employed for you  
Or laid aside for you,  
Exalted for you  
Or brought low for you;  
Let me be full,  
Let me be empty,**

**Let me have all things,  
Let me have nothing;  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
To your pleasure and disposal.  
And now glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
You are mine and I am yours.  
So Be it.  
And the covenant now made on earth,  
Let it be ratified in Heaven. Amen.**

Perhaps more than ever this year we can identify with the sense of suffering, of being laid aside and brought low, of being empty. For many people, the Covid-19 situation has left them, literally, with nothing. Poverty, hunger, loneliness, unemployment, grief and loss of all kinds, all these things have come into sharp focus over the last 10 months. And more than ever it is important to recognise that the Covenant prayer is not asking God to inflict these things on us. Rather it is recognising that life takes many and varied turns, some of which are easier to follow, understand and bear than others. In saying the prayer we are expressing our faith that no matter what, we believe that God is with us, and that with God's help, we can be the people God wants us to be as we face these trials.

As the preface to the service in the Methodist Worship Book reminds us, "The emphasis on the whole service is on God's readiness to enfold us in generous love, not dependent on our deserving. Our response, also in love, springs with penitent joy from thankful recognition of God's Grace."

In Old Testament times, in the face of great misery, the people of God clung on to their understanding of a God who was so tied to them that he would ultimately liberate them. They began to talk about a Covenant, which was their way of expressing their belief that God would come through for them in their time of sorrow and need. And throughout the ages it has been the experience of individuals and groups or nations of people who have lived through difficult and turbulent experiences that God is a God who is committed to deliverance and freedom. For us today these stories of liberation can be uplifting and inspiring and a source of hope, as we live through our own version of exile. Later on, in the New Testament, we hear about a New Covenant, centred on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it promises new life for all in Jesus, new hope and new possibility, as we live to love one another just as God loves us. And it is in the light of that promise in which we live today, and in our annual Covenant service we take the opportunity to remind ourselves that no matter what else is happening or changing in the world, one thing will always remain the same: God has promised to love us and to care about us.

And all this is freely given. It is not a Covenant in the sense that we often use the word today — some kind of two way deal, in which I will do something for you, if you do something for me. It is not a contract in which God and human beings agree to provide particular goods and services for each other. The Covenant is not something that we have to do to create a relationship with God. God has freely, unconditionally and graciously already made that relationship possible. No, this is an unconditional covenant, in which God simply offers Godself to us, and in that, the Covenant is the means of grace through which we can become more fully aware of and accepting of the relationship and then seek to sustain it through the way we choose to live our lives.

So please, do read or speak the words of the Covenant Prayer and allow them to touch you and challenge you in whatever way they will at this time. Take peace and courage from the knowledge that God is with us, has always been with us and will always be with us. Trust that God has not willed these times on us, but rather is sharing our frustrations and concerns and pain and is holding us in all that, that we might make discoveries and see things afresh as we seek to do God's perfect will.

With love and thanks to you all for the many greetings and messages of goodwill I have received from so many of you over the last few weeks. May the coming year bring peace and hope into our lives, and into the world. And please remember as always, as we continue to live with 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 but for the time being we are continuing our Circuit wide Zoom service at 3pm on Sundays.

Login details as usual as follows:

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

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881 Password: 974333

### Circuit Prayer

As we enter a further lockdown, 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 with all those who are not yet able to come back to church. You can also read more about each church on the Circuit Website [www.stockportcircuit.org.uk](http://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.

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

### **Opening Prayer**

We gather before you creator God,  
To bring you our praise and worship,  
And to experience your love for us.  
Be with us, unite us with our family of faith  
Refresh us body, mind and soul  
And open our hearts to your word.  
Amen.

**Hymn:** 161 Speak O Lord,  
Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen  
to it here <https://youtu.be/ubRIJj8xkds>  
Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

*Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

Let us pray together

Almighty God,  
We search for words to truly tell your glory,  
But there are none.  
We look for ways to describe your creation,  
But can't express its beauty and complexity.  
We long to show you how much we love you,  
But struggle to achieve our goal.  
You, O God are our greatest love, your service  
our deepest desire, your love for us our most  
precious gift and more than anything we want  
you to know that we adore you. Amen.

### **Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 1:4-11 NRSV**

#### **Time to Reflect**

I'd like to invite you to take a few moments to  
think about water.

The gentle way it washes dirt from our skin

The powerful force that carves channels  
through rock.

The refreshing, heaven sent gift that brings  
life to our world.

A few years ago I visited Bushmead in  
Zimbabwe and the school my church has  
helped to fund there.

It was, as you might imagine a life changing  
experience, I was welcomed into the  
community and family home as both dear  
sister and honoured guest. Unlike many  
homes in Zimbabwe there was running water  
which meant that while my hosts took turns in  
the same bath water I was given the luxury of  
my own bathroom.



I'd been fundraising for the school for years so I knew what life in Zimbabwe was like or I thought I did. But the shock of turning on the tap to find no water (common place for them) was very real.

I have never been without easy access to clean water, even during essential plumbing works provision has always been made and I have known when water will be restored.

Of course, my hosts were prepared, in my excitement and wonder at all around me and the love I'd been shown I'd failed to notice the most basic, there in the corner was a pack of bottled water, ready for us.

Water is life, life without water cannot exist.

So what better symbol for baptism could there be, water's ability to cleanse, its power to transform and reshape and our total inability to live without it tells us much about the Spirit of God.

Through Baptism in Christ we have been washed clean and offered a source of ongoing renewal.

Through Baptism in Christ we have received the Holy Spirit, God's presence in our lives, helping us to change and reshape ourselves into the people we are called to be.

Through Baptism in Christ we have been given life, true life, eternal life.

God is with us, flowing through us and out from us into our world. The source of life for all, a force which can never be completely cut off, a blessing that will never leave us.

There may be times when we don't notice God's presence, when we feel he is distant or has abandoned us and the tap gives nothing.

Don't be fooled, God is always with us, waiting for us to discover him, turn to him, rely on him, waiting to wash through us and make us truly alive.

**Take a time to sit quietly**

## **A time of prayer**

### **Please pause to consider each situation**

Father God, we come to you with open hearts and minds to pray for our world,

For all who are working to help others.

For all who are unwell in body, mind or soul.

For all who fear violence, in the streets or their own homes.

For all who struggle to fill their daily needs and fear for their future.

For all who feel alone or isolated.

For Church, family, friends and neighbours.

For ourselves, right here and now, all we are and think and feel.

Father we place our world into your hands, in all things and all places may your will be done Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father .....*

**Hymn: Listen to** <https://youtu.be/iEPclC92yLg>

**or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind**

## **A prayer of blessing**

Loving God, be with us this day and always, flow in us and through us, cleanse, renew and reshape us. Reminding us always that no matter what, you remain with us. Amen.

Materials by Liz Wood

All Hymns reproduced under CCLI 1144191.

Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administered by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team. We aim to continue to provide these resources until the end of August 2021.

**Mark 1:4-11 NRSV**

<sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."