

Dear Heaton Moor United Church,

Trust you are doing well. May God's love and grace be with you all.

With the onset of Spring, I am sure it brings some cheer and joy with the flowers blooming in the gardens and parks.

Thank you all for supporting our church YouTube reflections every Sunday. Thanks to people who are joining in the circuit Sunday worship services and also circuit Lenten Bible studies on Wednesdays on zoom. Thanks to Graham Adams and Sheryl for leading Super Sunday on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March.

This week we had our staff meeting where we had the opportunity to share and discuss our work during these tough times. As lockdown eases out, we are making plans for our mission engagements. We also had a planning meeting of Stockport Interfaith about an interfaith vigil on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March for the National Day of Reflection, which is marked on the first anniversary since the national lockdown. We will share more details in the days to come. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, people across the world celebrate it as International Women's Day, and kindly think of women, and celebrate their contributions for the church and society. Kindly also remember women globally, who are still suffering under patriarchy and other forms of violence and offer your prayers for them. We are called to celebrate all genders as equally created in the image of God.

Let us uphold those that are sick among us in our prayers. Kindly take time in the week to give a call to a friend we haven't spoken for a while. Let us also pray for students who will be returning back to school from 8<sup>th</sup> of March after lockdown and also offer your prayers for teachers and all those working at schools.

Herewith I am sending you the reflection and the worship resources for this week for your kind perusal and meditation.

May the peace of Christ be with you all have a meaningful season of Lent and enjoy the Spring.

Thanking you,

With warm regards,

Raj

5<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITOR

What a week! For me this is the last week of home-schooling and we are all ready for it to be over and to get back to some sort of routine! It has been wonderful this week as all my meetings have been centred around planning things for when we can all get together, and whilst we are being cautious in our plans I'm very excited!

Please take some time this week to pray for our Leadership Team as they begin their discussions on when our Church building will be open for services. In the mean time we continue to offer the following things we can all do together but apart this week;

- Take part in Tune In to God: Fridays@5:17.
- Watch the weekly reflection posted on Sunday morning on our YouTube channel  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhynK2FIPDTbOuqBiO6D9A>
- On Thursday evening light a candle from 8pm until 9pm

Just as in the time pre-covid the team are here to answer any questions, be a listening ear or signpost to other services. Please do get in touch with us if we can be of any help.

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

*JoAnne*

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 YouTube<sup>GB</sup> Heaton Moor United Church

 Heaton Moor United Church

 heaton\_moor\_united\_church

### Prayer for Students

God in Jesus as our children return to schools after lockdown,

1. Protect our children
2. Give them curiosity to learn
3. Be mindful of one another
4. Grant them courage and grace
5. Wisdom and knowledge
6. Fill them with love and peace
7. Help them to be creative thinkers
8. Be with parents n teachers
9. May your goodness and mercy
10. follow children all the days
11. Together with you we shall overcome this pandemic. Amen

@rajpatta

### A Prayer for Thursday Evening

Loving Lord

We continue to pray for those who are suffering  
and all those who care for them

We pray for all those involved in administering  
the vaccine

We pray for wisdom for those making decisions  
as services prepare to open once again

Finally, we pray for your love and compassion as  
we move forward together.

Amen



**School Pantry  
CAR PARK COLLECTIONS**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> March at  
Heaton Mersey Methodist Church**

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March at  
Heaton Moor United Church**

**From 10:30 until 12:00**


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

**International Womens Day** is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call for action accelerating gender parity. It is marked annually on March 8<sup>th</sup> and the campaign theme for 2021 is **Choose To Challenge**. A challenged world is an alert world and from challenge comes change.

Visit [www.internationalwomensday.com](http://www.internationalwomensday.com) for further information on events and how to show your support and solidarity by raising your hand with #ChooseToChallenge #IWD2021

Two doses of the COVID vaccine might be between £4-£30. If you could have afforded to buy it for yourself please celebrate your vaccination by making a donation.



MARK 12:31 love thy (global) neighbour

## TWIN YOUR VACCINE

Communities across the UK are being protected against COVID but across the world, there are many countries where this is impossible. It may be that they cannot afford to vaccinate their people or that their infrastructure may not even include basic refrigeration in places.

UNICEF has vast experience in delivering vaccines worldwide and so will be major partners in distributing vaccines to the very poorest in the world through their association with the COVAX programme.

Join Heaton Moor United Church in raising funds for UNICEF  
[www.justgiving.com/heaton-moor-united-church](http://www.justgiving.com/heaton-moor-united-church)

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



### Super Sunday – 7<sup>th</sup> March

*Message from Graham*

Carrying on from our 'eagles' last time, in the first few minutes when we gather we'll have a go at some animal art - in whatever form is possible for you. For example, it could simply be drawing a picture with crayons or felt pens; or it could be having a go at a 'pasta lion', or a jellyfish with paper plate and string, or a 'handprint hen' ...

Like I say, don't go to lots of trouble, because I know many of us are a bit weary of having to come up with new ideas in our own homes (!) - these ideas are simply to stimulate us - and personally I may just draw a picture of my favourite cuddly toy!

I'll also ask people to look for their favourite picture book and favourite cuddly toy - for something to go and fetch - during our time. So you may want to have these accessible but somewhere to be found.

Thanks very much for joining in whenever you've been able to - and I look forward to seeing some of you on Sunday.

Here's the link -

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81450100544?pwd=cVBoNXJiT05rY2o1OWFFaDNjaysydz09>

Meeting ID: 814 5010 0544

Passcode: 8um25c

Passcode by phone: 070664

### Make a Square – 9<sup>th</sup> March at 2pm

*See your Easter pack for more details. Zoom ID 812 9419 0431 (passcode 123802)*

### Lent Roadshow – 9<sup>th</sup> March at 6:30pm

Zoom Meeting ID: 868 0545 2033

For further information contact Catriona Stoker, Dialstone Lane Methodist Church  
[cat.stoker@btinternet.com](mailto:cat.stoker@btinternet.com)

### Circuit Lenten Study – 10<sup>th</sup> March

*See notice header for zoom link*

### Stockport Inter Faith Vigil 22<sup>nd</sup> March at 2pm

*Further information to follow*

### National Day of Reflection – 23<sup>rd</sup> March

### Green Evangelism – 25<sup>th</sup> March 7:00 – 8:30pm

*What does climate justice have to do with sharing our faith? We know as Christians we are called to care for creation, but what if our mission and evangelism were more connected to climate justice than we thought? Can we do one without the other? In what way does our commitment to God's earth enable and power our mission?*

*To register click here [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)*



## Prayers from Linda



### A Prayer for Church Work's and Volunteers

Heavenly Father, you call us each to different work in your kingdom, according to the gifts you've give us. This week, we pray for those who work in many churches around us, For Ministers local preachers, worship leaders, lay workers and all the many other jobs that are involved with working for churches, for our many volunteers that work behind the scene at church keeping things going. Keep your calling fresh in their hearts, renewing and refreshing their spirit for the work ahead. May they seek your counsel daily, seeking your wisdom and guidance as they give spiritual guidance and help and supper to others? Fill them with patience, peace, and joy for their work, remembering you are with them even when times are hard, for you are faithful to equip those who obey your call. All this we pray through your Son, Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Unity and Justice



Lord, thank You for the diverse personalities, abilities, passions, and ways of seeing the world that you've placed around me. I ask you today for unity in our world. We are highly divided in our world, you alone are the Prince of Peace, and you alone are the One whose name is Love. Cover all places around the world with your peace. Teach us to love. Show us the ways of forgiveness, show us way of loving our neighbour, those most outcast or those who are hunger or wake up to war. Open our eyes to those who are rejected, powerless, hunger oppressed, or overlooked. You have such great promises for us, when we shoulder their burdens with them Let us be a voice for the voiceless. Now is your time. *Spend some time with God to pray for the country who need Unity and Justice.*  
*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.

## The Revelation of God is Dynamic, Diverse and Diligent

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### Reflection on Psalm 19

After I have experienced the call of God through the Word of God to go into ministry, I joined the ministerial training and pursued my theology. The first year of my theological education was quite tough on me, for I was exposed to the historical and critical methods of doing theology and getting to learn the history & politics of how the books of the Bible became a canon, they were hard nuts to crack. Five of us who were studying first year of theology, in our conversations with our senior student friends expressed our discomfort of learning the hard facts and even shared we might quit doing theology any further, for our faith was shaken. They tried to counsel us, asking us to be strong. This news of five first year theology students are planning to quit their theological education became the talk of our college, and we are summoned by our Principal immediately to discuss this matter with him. The Principal invited five of us into his home for an evening tea and listened to our fears and doubts of doing theology. All five of us expressed how those first few months of exposure to theology has shaken our faith. After giving a patience listening to all five of us, our Principal said to us, "If by listening to things that we did not want to listen, our faith is shaken, then our faith isn't faith." He further said, "Ok fine, you can quit theology and go back home because you are learning some hard facts of history here, however, if your faith keeps shaking on hearing some hard facts, then your faith is not grounded firmly, for it is wobbly and it will keep shaking as you encounter difficult situations in life. Be open to God's revelations, ask God to strengthen your faith and allow God to work through each of you." He sent us all back to our hostel by offering a prayer to us. We all spent time in prayer, and waited on God to open our hearts and eyes for God's ongoing revelations. Such openness to God's revelations changed the course of our faith journey and theological journey, for all five of us, rather than quitting theology eventually went on to do our masters in theology and spent for about six years learning theology. During this our journey, God's revelations came to us in various ways, which include through theology, through context, through experience, through reason, through the Word, through friends, through films, through songs, through nature, through community etc. God in God's graciousness offers God's revelations only to demonstrate that God is dynamic.

Psalm 19, is a Psalm that records the dynamism of God's revelation as experienced and understood by David. The Psalms were compiled during the post-exilic period expressing the language of lament, doubt, despair, hope, repentance, confession praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 19 is written to offer hope about God's revelation to God's people. On their return from the exile as they were reconstructing their faith, tradition, history, this particular Psalm served as a directional Psalm to understand and celebrate the revelation of God's glory. God's revelation is dynamic, diverse and diligent, is the message that this Psalm offers. In contrast to what me and my four friends in the first year of our theology course thought that God's revelation is mono-directional, the Psalmist in this Psalm explains God's revelation in at least two ways. Allow me to share the two kinds of God's revelations from this Psalm.

#### **1. The wordless God's revelation (1-6v):**

This famous saying, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary," is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, has a great significance in the journey of faith. The Psalmist in this Psalm 19: 1-6 in a way serves as a prelude to this quoted saying, where he explains that the nature serves as a channel for God's revelation, with no words at all. The heavens declaring the glory of God, the firmament proclaims God's handiwork, and in the heavens, God has set a tent for the sun. These explain God's revelation, and it is interesting to note that in verse 3-4, the Psalmist says, "There

is no speech, not are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.” God’s revelation comes through in the formats where there are no words, no speeches but only through their acts and presence. It is also important to recognise that these wordless revelations are also anti-empire revelations. Some scholars have noticed that the 1-6 verses in this Psalm brings some shades of a Canaanite poetry, where the sun is personified as a bridegroom, and serves as an intermediary god. Psalmist contests such notions of gods and empires, and explains that sun, heavens, skies all direct and point out to the Creator God, with no words. To recognise such a wordless revelation of God, it requires an open heart, mind and eyes, for there isn’t a place where God is not present. This Psalm served as a sign of hope for the post-exilic community to know that God’s revelation is dynamic, diverse and diligent. For it is dynamic because God reveals through the known things with no words, for it is diverse because God reveals not just in ways and means that people know for example through the temple or prophets and it is diligent because God’s revelation is clear, in the familiar and known to all, not just for few chosen ones.

**2. The word-filled God’s revelation (7-11v):**

The Psalmist then explains the second mode of God’s revelation, which is through the law, a word-filled revelation. The post-exilic community were also recovering the importance of scripture, which they have forgotten during the exile. This Psalm therefore emphasises the importance of the scriptures, which again explains another form of God’s revelation, this time through words. Unlike in the previous section of giving examples like heavens, skies, sun as means of God’s revelations, the Psalmist in this section does not give the examples of the texts like the ten commandments or Levitical laws or festival laws etc. rather explains in this section the rewards of the law or the Torah. The Psalmist explains six characteristics of the scripture and their subsequent rewards, which demonstrate the word-filled God’s revelation. I have tabulated it here to give us a snapshot of the word-filled God’s revelation.

No.	Word	Character	Reward
1.	The law of the Lord (7a)	Perfect	Reviving the soul
2.	The decrees of the Lord (7b)	Sure	Making wise the simple
3.	The precepts of the Lord (8a)	Right	Rejoicing the heart
4.	The commandment of the Lord (8b)	Clear	Enlightening the eyes
5.	The fear of the Lord (9a)	Pure	Enduring forever
6.	The ordinances of the Lord (9b)	True	Righteous altogether

We again notice the aforementioned characteristics of God’s revelation, that they are dynamic, diverse and diligent. All of these word-filled God’s revelations are more desired than the fine gold and sweeter than the pure honey (10v), which explains the dynamism in God revelations. The six characteristics of the scriptures or the word explains the diversity of the word and in their understandings. The diligence of God’s revelation is understood in their rewards that they bring in. The word-filled revelations of God are not about authority and power, they are not discriminatory or hateful, rather are about hope, love, revival and refreshment to the people of God. This again explains the anti-empire understanding of God’ revelations, for the words of the empire were more about authority and power.

Towards the end, the Psalmist ask God to keep him blameless and innocent of great transgression and concludes this Psalm in verse 14, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer,” drawing a

relevance in understanding God's dynamic, diverse and diligent revelation with and without words.

C.S. Lewis in commenting about this Psalm 19 said, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the great lyrics in the world," and indeed it is a very meaningful Psalm, for it has a relevance for us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century too. The message is clear and loud for us from this Psalm, that God's revelation whether in word or without word is dynamic, diverse and diligent. This Psalm calls us to give up our narrow mindedness, particularly when it comes to God's revelation, for there is no only one way that God choses to reveal God's love and God's self to this world, for God's revelation comes to us in very many ways including in ways we haven't thought or imagine. Particularly in the context when there is a roadmap for the easing down of the lockdown in the UK and as churches gear up to return to worship in the church buildings, it is important to recognise God's revelations happening beyond our known traditional modes and cultivate those new models of God's revelations. The task for us as churches is to account for the kinds of God's revelations that came in during the last one year of lockdown and nurture them, where transforming community will be at the heart of our mission with God. Experiencing God's revelations are always rewarding and refreshing, and as a church we need to ask God to strength us to be open to God's new means of revelations. In our preparedness for a post-lockdown church, we need to struggle with God in knowing God's revelations for our times today. God's revelations today come to us through songs, through music, through films, through our daily exercises, through conversations, through reading books, and several other mundane acts of our routines. God's revelations come to us in all freedom and are always liberative. Let us keep looking out for God revelations in our daily lives and let us keep experiencing God's love in our lives and in the lives of our communities. God's revelation is happening today particularly among people on the margins and may we have the humility in recognising God there and join with God in working towards their transformation.

Having been frightened to new learnings in theology, imagine if I and my four other friends have quitted our theological education in that very first year, I wouldn't have known the dynamism, diversity and diligence of God's revelations, for I would have always argued about my own way of God's revelation. But I need to testify that theological exposure in my life has deepened my faith in Jesus Christ, giving me new insights on learning from different perspectives, by making be to be open to all streams and variants of faith understandings. God is gracious, and in that grace, God reveals God's love and generosity to all people on this world. May God's revelation which is dynamic, diverse and diligent comes to each of us and grant us the needed courage and strength in working for the kingdom of God here in our localities. Amen.

Raj Bharat Patta,  
5<sup>th</sup> March 2021





# The Methodist Church

## United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

A Message from the Superintendent Minister

March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all as we approach the one-year mark from when Covid-19 really started to make an impact in the UK and we became aware that there might be a need for a period of lockdown.

In May 2020, in the third month of lockdown, I wrote about the ways in which the pandemic was starting to impact upon the church and in the world. I wondered if we could be a Church which is flexible enough to respond in a situation of crisis, which has an informed and prayerful understanding of the social and political context in which we live and move, and I talked about how the things we were discovering could offer a vision, a renewed identity and a potential strategy for the Methodist Church moving into the future. I asked the question whether or not in the Methodist Church, we could take the whole pandemic situation and the things which it has been teaching us in the wider world, and create our own change and critical mission response which prioritises those things which are at the heart of scripture – love of God, made manifest in love of neighbour, and the proclamation of justice for the most vulnerable?

How the church will look as we emerge from the crisis is still not totally clear. In our own Circuit at least 2 churches have needed to come to the sad and difficult decision that they can no longer continue to meet in their existing premises. This is very tough, of course, but I also believe that we have a great opportunity if we can resist the temptation to go back to exactly how things were before. Remember those questions:

**“what would Jesus do?”, “where would Jesus be?”, “who would Jesus be alongside” and “what would Jesus say?”**

In trying to respond to them, a group of Methodists, myself included, wrote in June last year, an ‘Open Letter’ to the British Methodist Church which ended up being signed by over 700 people – you may be one of them! The letter has provided an impetus to continue to think about what we can learn from a year of global pandemic, and how we can shape the Methodist Church **in a way which places** social justice at its heart as a key priority for growth alongside discipleship and evangelism. Many of those who signed the letter have been involved in a process of conferring on Zoom over the last few months to continue to dream and to develop the thinking of the Open Letter, exploring what needs to happen for its vision to be realised. It is now the start of Lent 2021, and clear goals and objectives are emerging. I want to share with you the ‘Lenten Update’ from the Open Letter. Some of the ideas within it are already reflected in Connexional initiatives and this is a cause for celebration. Others will require further engagement and commitment from Methodists to ensure they come onto and remain on the agenda for the British Methodist Church. This can, and is already happening through personal, local church, circuit and district actions and hopefully this Summer through the formal structures of Methodist Conference. I want to encourage you to think about how some of the ideas and actions within it might be relevant in our own churches and circuit, and to start a conversation locally! ***At the heart of all this is the belief that the search for justice in the church and in the world is the foundation of who we are as Methodists, not just one piece of the jigsaw.*** This includes racial justice, gender justice, justice for those who identify as LGBTQI+, environmental justice, economic justice, justice for all who find themselves marginalised. Here is the update.

# Following on from the Open Letter to the British Methodist Church

## A Lenten Update

### The Vision

A Methodist Church<sup>i</sup> with social justice at its heart as a key priority for growth alongside discipleship and evangelism

#### **In order to achieve this:**

There is a need to create an environment which will engender deep systemic and cultural change

#### **This will involve (Goals):**

- Greater grass roots participation in decision making and the setting of strategy
  - Developing a flexible use of resources
- The Church having a 'louder clearer voice' into situations of social injustice

***The following specific objectives have been defined as ways of reaching these goals and fulfilling the vision which has been defined.***

#### **1. Greater grass roots participation in decision making and the setting of strategy**

- Make Conference a 'year-round' conferring body using Zoom or similar.
- Embed conferring into the Connexion at all levels in order to achieve a less hierarchical feel - find and listen to the voices of young people specifically, and all those in the pews, the marketplaces, and communities on and of the margins.
- Seek greater transparency, grass roots involvement and positive action in appointments to committees, voluntary roles, and the Presidency.
- Encourage all churches to conduct an audit of priorities – what we will do and what we won't do - whilst emerging from lockdown, challenging congregations to use this liminal moment in a missional way and including people on the margins of the church.

#### **2. Developing a flexible use of resources**

- Advocate for a total re-think of Connexional structures (District and Circuit), which is not a re-arrangement of what currently exists but something more fundamental that releases people to focus on social justice, alongside discipleship and evangelism, and not just on buildings, finance and numerical growth.
- Use church land for permanently affordable housing (e.g. Community Land Trusts, best value disposals, partnerships with Registered Social Landlords) and voluntary/cell communities.
- Use church land creatively within the community, seeking partnerships with other community based organisations to meet local needs.
- Seek to change Standing Orders to allow other World Faith communities to use Methodist buildings for worship.

- Explore creative ways to redistribute wealth across the connexion, placing money and personnel into work with the poor and those who suffer injustice. For example, churches and circuits with significant Model Trust Funds offering interest free loans or grants to churches and circuits working at the economic margins.

### **3. The Church having a 'louder clearer voice' into situations of social injustice**

- Establish a Connexional Campaigns Team to assist the Methodist Church to:
  - campaign openly on justice issues, not restricted by the need for ecumenical consensus or JPIT's work programme
  - be able to speak swiftly and clearly, through local and national leaders, into situations of injustice.
  - Support, and be informed by, those engaged in direct, prophetic action in situations of injustice.
- Support, and be informed by, those holding local or national political office Find ways of giving JPIT a higher profile as a policy, research and advocacy body by, for example, reporting annually to Conference.
- Re-affirm a commitment to organisations which have historically been part of the Methodist Family - Action for Children, MHA, All We Can and The Fund for Human Need, recognising them as more than the recipients of fund-raising but as key partners and expert witnesses as the church speaks into situations of social injustice. In addition, explicitly partner with other organisations such as the Fairtrade Foundation, Christian Aid, Eco Church and Citizens' UK, which are focused on changing the systems which keep people across the world in poverty.
- Re-discover and define anew an identity which respects the origins of the Methodist tradition of placing social justice at the heart of the Christian life.
- Promote existing and continue to produce new theological materials and resources for prioritising social justice, for lay, ordained and those in ministerial formation. This could include, for example, a social justice lectionary and preaching resources.

If you are not already a part of this conversation and movement towards action, and you would like to be, please email [methodistopenletter@gmail.com](mailto:methodistopenletter@gmail.com)

And please remember as always:

**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.**

- 1. When we feel lonely let us know that in Christ we are never alone.**
- 2. When we feel isolated may we be reminded that within the worldwide Body of Christ we are always connected.**
- 3. When we need a hug help us to feel the warmth of God's embrace**
- 4. 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, blessings and deep thanks for all your messages of sympathy and love over the last few weeks. They have been a great comfort and source of strength to me.

**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 Lenten Study Course 'Life Changing Stories: Scripture From the Margins'**

Every Wednesday in Lent 7pm -8pm on Zoom, starting Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February led by the ministers.

The Bible shows us again and again that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. People on the margins. But too often, when we read scripture in our churches, we focus on other aspects of the story, or we are so familiar with the text that we don't notice the challenging things it has to say to us. *Scripture from the Margins* is a series of Bible studies that encourage people to focus on the voices and perspectives in scripture that we don't usually hear in our churches. If you are hoping to join the course, please download the associated book here: <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/bible/lifechangingstories/>

If you are unable to download the booklet please contact your minister or Christine Hufton in the Circuit Office and we will get a printed copy to you. email [admin@stockportcircuit.org.uk](mailto:admin@stockportcircuit.org.uk)

*The Lent Course will use the same Zoom Link as for Sunday Worship.*

### **Forty Days of Faith**

During Lent, we want to share what our faith means to us with one another through social media. Look out for #FortyDaysOfFaith on our social media feeds.

**All WE CAN** are also running an online Lent Course 'Change Begins in Lent' running at 8pm every Wednesday in Lent. To register please go to <https://www.allwecan.org.uk/event/lentgroup/>

### **Circuit Prayer**

As we continue into 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 7 March 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

God, whose temple is the whole creation,  
we praise you for the signs of spring:  
crocuses breaking through the cold earth,  
early morning sunshine through the clouds,  
days lengthening.

We praise you that earth tells us of your presence.

God, whose temple is found in community,  
we praise you for the people around us:  
our families and friends,  
the neighbours we'd like to know more,  
the strangers who surprise us with kindness.  
We praise you that we look at others and glimpse you.

God, whose temple is written into our bodies,  
we praise you for our human bodies, and we praise you that our bodies are a temple of your Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

#### Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling (StF 503)

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

[Love divine, all loves excelling \(StF 503\) \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)

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

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are wisdom in our world; you flow through creation and consciousness.

Our attempts to house you in bricks and mortar are foolish. Come to us as we gather here within this church made to honour you, and lift the stones from our hearts, so that we may be your Church in word and in deed.  
Amen

**Today's Gospel Reading:** John 2: 13-22

#### Time to Reflect

When I am writing we are in the middle of a lockdown. Many of our church buildings are closed for public worship, though a few are open. We have had to get used to worshipping in our homes, using You Tube videos or Zoom video meetings, or through worship sheets

like this one, or a mixture of all three and perhaps other possibilities. Many will miss the architecture and the atmosphere of their building, or the fellowship and bustle and chatter before and after services. Some people have been deprived of that for nearly a year. This causes us to ask what makes a church?

In the story we just read, Jesus was forcing people to face the same question. Traditionally there was only one “house of God” for the Jews - the Temple. That was where God dwelt. There is very little archaeological evidence of synagogue buildings in and before Jesus’ time - some scholars would say there was none. There is evidence in Jewish writings that synagogue meetings happened in this period, but not perhaps in dedicated buildings. The house of God was the Temple. And, as you may imagine if there is only one house of God it becomes even more special. And here Jesus is, wading into this holy place, clearing it out and laying down rules as to who can do what there! What right had he? Jesus would appear to be claiming to be the “messenger of the covenant” whom God promised to send to his Temple in Malachi 3: 1-4, who would purify not only the Temple, but God’s people - starting with the religious officials! But then he gets even more radical. When he says “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days”, he is essentially saying God is not living in the Temple Herod built, but in his own body. He is the real temple, the real house of God.

Do we tend to get too attached to our local building? Sometimes churches are called Bethel, which is Hebrew for “house of God”, and sometimes we think God dwells there and we feel we cannot worship him anywhere else. Jesus challenges that way of thinking. He is the one above all in whom God dwells. In him God became flesh and dwelt among us. And it is in drawing closer to Jesus in a personal relationship that we enter God’s house and offer him the worship he truly seeks. And we can do that anywhere - in our kitchen as much as in St. Paul’s Cathedral, or

in our local chapel. Draw close to Jesus, and he will draw us close to the Father and the Spirit, so we can worship him in Spirit and in truth.

Take a time to sit quietly

### **A time of prayer**

In the name of the one who came to cleanse the Temple, we pray for the institutions by which we organise our society: for churches and chapels and house groups; for educational establishments; for places of healing, law and order, commerce and recreation.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time. In the name of the one who came to redeem the world, we pray for those institutions by which we regulate global relations: for governments and rulers, democracies, monarchies and dictatorships; for bodies that regulate trade, diplomacy and the balance of peace; for environmental, development and welfare organisations.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time. In the name of the one who came to save us from ourselves, we pray for those institutions we have in our lives: for our friends, families and colleagues; for our local communities; for the church communities to which we belong.

May they serve the greater good, and adapt to the changing needs of the time. Amen.

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

*Our Father .....*

### **Hymn: Listen to:**

<https://youtu.be/SnuRldNwiwg> or sing a

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

### **A prayer of blessing**

The almighty and merciful Lord,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
bless us and keep us, now and always. Amen.

Original Materials by John E Staton

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Local Churches please insert CCLi No here

**John 2: 13-22**

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.



# Simon the magician: Gifts and power

A Bible study by Sue Richardson

## Read: Acts 8:9–24 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>9</sup> Now a certain man named Simon had previously practised magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. <sup>10</sup> All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” <sup>11</sup> And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. <sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed. After being baptised, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup> The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit <sup>16</sup> (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus). <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup> saying, “Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” <sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money! <sup>21</sup> You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness.” <sup>24</sup> Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me.”

## Reflect

- How do we feel about magic in the 21st century?
- Have we ever sought to acquire or buy something because of its ‘magical’ properties? (Things that promise to revolutionise our life or appearance!)
- Has someone lost status or respect in our eyes because of the way they have sought power or influence?
- How does a gift to us compare with a purchase we make ourselves? What are our feelings in response to a gift made to us?
- How does ‘gifting’ work, or could it work, in our economy?

## Think

This passage has given us a word in English: ‘simony’, the payment of money for spiritual wellbeing. Occasionally, commentators have described Simon as a pagan, without faith and offering money for it. Perhaps we should approach the story more subtly, paying attention to its setting and the understandings of the times.

Philip is preaching in Samaria, a land with negative connotations for Jews, although the faith of both peoples was very similar. So, Simon was most probably a believer in Yahweh. His practice of 'magic' does not automatically make him suspect. In pre-scientific times, 'magic' was a way in which ordinary people could make sense of the world around them which they often struggled to understand. Magic was ritual, helping to mediate the everyday with the supernatural, and would also include acts that, in difficult circumstances, produced relief or resolution. We are not talking about witchcraft as Simon's practice.

He was probably a healer of ailments of mind and body, a finder of lost things, and through attentive listening, an adviser to people about their lives. He must have been skilled, people are amazed. He has earned the appellation 'great'. When Philip comes preaching Jesus, Simon does not oppose him; indeed, he gets baptised like many others. We may envisage this adding another string to his bow, another line to his CV. However, just as he has gained status through his work, he assumes that Jesus' message comes with an equivalence: the extra benefit of membership, something more than baptism, the exercise of power, and he expects to pay for it. Does he think that this will increase the value of healing amongst those who need it? Does he imagine he can create a monopoly of power? He really doesn't understand the nature of gift. Do we?

## Listen

We are often told that if you receive without making any contribution or any obvious effort, you will not value that which is given. This is offered as a criticism of aid, or of our welfare support system and its benefits. We are encouraged to believe that there is a virtue in being able or willing to pay for something, and that this is evidence of character.

We are also a society that understands marketing. Every day we are offered miracles large and small that, if we purchase, will smooth our difficulties, aid our daily tasks, solve problems we weren't even aware of and, perhaps most ambiguously, ensure physical beauty, calmness of mind, greater status or influence, if we purchase.

We are torn between gift and product. Simon sees the miracles of healing as the product in this story; they bring public acclaim and notice, but they are rooted in a gift, which is the Holy Spirit. Simon wanted the product but he could not understand it within a gift freely given, because it also had to be freely accepted and this was not a framework within which he lived.

Yet gifting is not a simple act. It occurs within and creates relationship, and not one that is only one-way, for gifting brings with it an expectation of reciprocity. "What goes around, comes around" we say. Indigenous people see a gift as something to be passed on and eventually returned to the giver, albeit in a different form. Gift actually creates more obligation than transaction, the paying of a price, after which the product is yours and you are free to do what you like with it.

"Some things cannot be bought and sold and retain their essence", like dignity, respect, inclusion, participation, security, love. (*Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, page 27). In creating systems of welfare that seek these things for all, we are building a social system and an economy that binds people together in mutual expectation. We want support for people at specific times of hardship in life, but as a society we are locked into a way of thinking that expects some contribution or the gift element must be minimal. As we face, post Covid-19, unprecedented challenges to people's livelihoods, we must explore better ways to create an economy that binds people into systems of mutual care. A Citizen's Income is proposed, giving

an income at a certain level to everyone, regardless of status or contribution, but because all can receive it, critics see it as getting something for nothing.

The Holy Spirit looked like this to Simon. How could it have value without a market price? Buying and selling turns people into winners and losers; the magic of gift is that everyone wins.

(See an example of how community spirit and reciprocity have helped people pull through the pandemic at [www.church-poverty.org.uk/how-one-estate-pulled-together-and-how-covid-could-change-it-forever](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/how-one-estate-pulled-together-and-how-covid-could-change-it-forever))

## Act

- Join a Basic Income Group in your area or through your trade union. Details from [www.citizensincome.org](http://www.citizensincome.org)
- Campaign for more generous benefit support for people with disabilities, people without jobs, people seeking sanctuary, and all struggling with our welfare system.

## Pray

Generous Lord,  
Your earth speaks of abundance, but we speak only of scarcity.  
Your mercy knows no boundaries, but we create distinctions, entitlements and rationing.  
You took a gift and fed 5,000, but we echo your disciple Philip in costing the whole exercise.  
You forgive our desire to have more, our clutching at possessions, our withdrawal of grace and invite us to consider the paradox of giving.  
Show us abundance, break down the barriers we build, encourage us to dare to give more and to let more go. May your Spirit be the limitless gift we need of life and hope in our measured world. Amen