

Stamford Methodist Church and Circuit service Sunday June 28th, 2020

Led by Chris Pursehouse

Welcome

Good Morning and Welcome wherever you are to our morning worship from the Stamford Methodist Circuit. A special welcome to you if you are joining us for the first time, my name is Chris Pursehouse, and I am a Methodist local preacher who worships at Deepings Methodist Church which is part of the Stamford Circuit.

Call to worship

Lord, our God,
You create and you sustain.
You are with us in the rhythm of work and rest,
In the pattern of praise and silence,
In the balance of silent prayer and spoken word.
and in the spontaneity of friendship and love
You are with us all our days.
Make us aware of your presence now
As we crown life with worship.
In the name of Jesus
Whose renewing life we celebrate this day.

Hymn No 409, Let us build a house where love may dwell

Let us build a house
where love may dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ
shall end divisions.
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house
where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ
the feast that frees us.

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house
where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger.

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house
where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured,
taught and claimed
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim
from floor to rafter.

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Prayer of Praise & Adoration

To be surrounded by a world of beauty and wonder,
To be awakened from refreshing sleep,
to witness the glory of the seasons,
to feel the warmth of the sun, the cooling breeze, the dampness of rain,
is to appreciate and know the love of creator, our Father God.

God is good: **We praise him**

To be surrounded by the affection and trust of friends,
To feel the supporting love of the fellowship of the Church,
To hear a reassuring word, to see an encouraging smile,
Is to know God's Son Jesus among us
With his healing touch and renewing grace.

God is good: **We praise him**

To be surrounded by the atmosphere of worship
To feel a sense of purpose and faith,
To come with longing to know God more clearly,
To love him more dearly, and to follow him more nearly,
Is to know the Holy Spirit alive in our midst.
He is here - his power is in us all

God is good: **we praise him**

To be surrounded by the Majesty, the humanity, and the daily strength of
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to know ourselves richly blessed,
deeply forgiven, strongly inspired and
wonderfully loved each new morning.
For this daily miracle we are moved to say, over and over again, Yes!

God is good: We praise him

Amen

Testimony sharing Rachel Hamby Teacher at Linchfield Primary School

Interview with Hannah Kane a child at Deeping Methodist Church

What was it like going back to school after lockdown?

What did you most look forward to about going back?

What did the teacher do to make you feel welcome and safe?

Hymn Wide and long and High and Deep

Wide and long and high and deep;
Wide and long and high and deep;
Wide and long and high and deep
Is the love of Jesus.

Wide and long and high and deep;
Wide and long and high and deep;
Wide and long and high and deep
Is the love of Jesus for us.

And we pray that we will know this love,
And we pray that we will grow in love,
And we pray that we will be filled up
With the Spirit of God!

Colin Pye

Reading Psalm 139 v1 - 18 (Read by Georgina Kane)

1 LORD, you have examined me and you know me.

2 You know everything I do;

from far away you understand all my thoughts.

3 You see me, whether I am working or resting;

you know all my actions.

4 Even before I speak,

you already know what I will say.

5 You are all round me on every side;

you protect me with your power.

6Your knowledge of me is too deep;

it is beyond my understanding.

7Where could I go to escape from you?

Where could I get away from your presence?

8If I went up to heaven, you would be there;

if I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there.

9If I flew away beyond the east

or lived in the farthest place in the west,

10you would be there to lead me,

you would be there to help me.

11I could ask the darkness to hide me

or the light round me to turn into night,

12but even darkness is not dark for you,

and the night is as bright as the day.

Darkness and light are the same to you.

13You created every part of me;

you put me together in my mother's womb.

14I praise you because you are to be feared;

all you do is strange and wonderful.

I know it with all my heart.

15When my bones were being formed,

carefully put together in my mother's womb,

when I was growing there in secret,

you knew that I was there —

16you saw me before I was born.

The days allotted to me

had all been recorded in your book,
before any of them ever began.

[17](#)O God, how difficult I find your thoughts;

how many of them there are!

18 If I counted them, they would be more than the grains of sand.

When I awake, I am still with you.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess all in our lives that grieves you.

Forgive us for fearing to trust you.

Forgive us for fleeing to gods of our own making,

As if to find there the support only you can provide.

Forgive us for wounding with words instead of healing with hands.

Forgive us for being quick to anger

And devoid of steadfast love.

Forgive us for being slow to care

And abounding in indifference.

Forgive us forgetting to affirm

And being ready to condemn.

Forgive us for treating as duty what should be delight,

As burden what should be privilege,

And as intrusion what should be loving sacrifice.

Forgive us for insisting in our own fallenness

And failing to see your grace at work in our lives

Forgive us for being too concerned with sin

And too little aware of forgiveness.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer,

And in your mercy, forgive Amen

Hymn 416 There's a wideness in God's mercy

1. There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

2. For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

3. But we make his love to narrow
By false limits of our own
And we magnify his strictness
With a Zeal he will not own

4. If our love were but more simple,
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be all gladness
in the joy of Christ our Lord.

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863) and Jubilate Hymns
© in this version Jubilate Hymns

Reading Mathew 10 v40 - v42 (Read by Karen Kendall)

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.

Sermon

I am a child of the manse; my father was a Methodist minister, and one of the memories I have is how busy the manse was on a Sunday. My father would sometimes be taking three or four services on a Sunday. My father had habit of inviting people back to the manse for Sunday lunch or tea. Sometimes my mother knew about this sometimes she did not. So, on a Sunday mum would often prepare additional vegetables because she never knew how many would be joining us. It was the same on Christmas Day, we often had two or three people who might have otherwise spent Christmas on their own join us. Friends I have many happy memories

of meals shared with strangers who became friends of the family. Strangers joining in with our playing of Christmas games and the sound of laughter filling the house. The importance of welcome and hospitality given to others should never be underestimated. It is an important ministry in the life of Christian Church. Our short brief reading from Matthews Gospel Chapter 10 is a powerful reminder of how important welcome and hospitality are, and I would like to share some thoughts on this.

The reading from Matthew comes in a section where a lot of the emphasis is on the sending out of the 12 Disciples on mission, Jesus instructions to them and warnings of what might happen to them as they go out and do that work, they will be like sheep among wolves, Jesus shares that it won't be easy and the likelihood is that some will face persecution and rejection. However, Chapter 10 v40-43 the instructions that are given are not to the Disciples but to those in the Communities that the Disciples will be going to, the instructions are to welcome and offer hospitality. The word welcome is mentioned five times in three verses and the instruction is to give a cup of water to them, hospitality.

The welcome you receive can often make all the difference. I once attended a Church on the fens near Ely. We had a steward who was a wonderful man but a bit of stickler for time keeping and the way things should be done. One evening he was waiting outside the Church door for the visiting minister to arrive, it was a minister from another circuit who had never been to us before. At ten to six the minister had not yet arrived, but the steward went to the car park where he saw that someone had pulled up on high powered motor cycle and having parked his bike in the Church car park proceeded to get off his bike and take his helmet off. The steward challenged the man right away that it was a private car park of the Church and he should not be parking there. The man unzipped his bike leathers and from his side paniers took out his clerical cassock, dog collar and bible and asked of the steward if he could be shown to the vestry so that he could get ready to take the service. So often we make our decisions about who we will welcome from the outward appearance that we see. Like the embarrassed steward, sadly we can do the same.

I wonder how good we are as a church community in welcoming people who cross the doorway of the Church, who come along as a new person to a service or one of our mid-week groups. Those of you like myself, who have been members of the Church for some time, may perhaps not appreciate how someone who has never been to Church service before feels if they walk into a Church for the first time on their own. It can be a daunting experience for them, some of what we do in worship and how we do it may seem quite alien.

To really welcome someone takes time and effort and I would like to suggest is much more than introducing ourselves and saying the word welcome. Our opening hymn had as a chorus All are welcome, All are welcome, All are welcome in this place. But if you look at the verses of that hymn, the emphasis of each verse is on building, building a community of people, where people can fulfil their dreams and visions, where people can be empowered to speak and witness, a community that will welcome the outcast and the stranger. Welcoming does involve building safe space where people can come into just as they are where people are not afraid to share how they really feel, if their life has fallen apart or if they are hurting and if they do, they will be listened to with grace. The last verse of the hymn talks of a community

built of tears and cries of laughter. The Church must be a welcoming space where people can come into just as they are and feel.

During the past three months of lock down I have been keeping in contact with some of our members by phone, some have shared quite openly some of the challenges and frustrations they have faced, unable to meet their friends and families and go to some of the groups that they belong to. Sometimes some have gone on to then apologise to me for sharing comments about how they are really feeling, as if I didn't want to hear them. It is very important that we create those welcoming spaces and relationships where people can be real with each other.

As the lock down is slowly lifted we will one day be allowed back into our buildings for public worship, I would like to suggest that welcoming people back to Church and the groups that use our buildings will be a really important part of our ministry. Some members of the community may have been shielding, others self-isolating, it is natural that to begin with people may feel reluctant and perhaps fearful of being with large groups of people again.

It may also be the case through our online Church presence that some may visit one of the Churches in the Stamford Circuit for the first time out of interest, the warmth of welcome they receive will be very important. The Welcome is an important part of Christian Ministry.

The importance of Hospitality

The passage also reminds us of the need to show hospitality to those that visit us. Matthew reminds his readers the importance of offering a drink of water. Now in a hot climate like the Middle East you can see the need for refreshment to be offered immediately to anyone who calls at your house. Perhaps in our culture, a cup of tea or a coffee is our welcoming drink.

I wonder if I asked you what you have most missed during lockdown, I wonder what you would say? I guess some of you might say, you have missed not having your hair cut. I have not. What I have missed most during the last three months is not being able to share any meals with my family and friends. Every meal I have had has been on my own. I long for the time when I can share a meal with members of my family, have people round for a meal in my own home again. To go to my favourite pubs and restaurants for a meal with other people. Offering and receiving hospitality, being with people you love and care about, sharing the same physical space is very life enhancing. I will never take that for granted again!

It is no wonder that in the Gospels they record our Lord Jesus, having meals with his Disciples, with his close friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany. He joins a community wedding at Cana and saves the host's embarrassment when the wine is running out. In his encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house. In a lot of these situations Jesus is the invited guest, one who appears prepared to accept the hospitality of strangers, outcasts and sinners and is not afraid or embarrassed about the company he has around the meal table. When we offer hospitality to others, we are offering a place at our meal table, sharing food and refreshment, most of all we are sharing the gift of our time with other people. When we offer hospitality strangers become guests, guests become friends, friends can become fellow Disciples of Christ.

Illustration A visit to Second Helpings in Stamford

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 v44 Luke shares a picture of the early Church which is deeply attractive and challenging to us.

All who believed were together and had all things in common, they would sell their possessions and good and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Reward

In that passage from Matthew Jesus words are that if we welcome the stranger, you are in fact welcoming him Jesus, and if you welcome Jesus and you welcome the one who sent Jesus God. If you offer a cup of water to a stranger, we are offering it to Jesus. The reward is that we will know that we are doing Kingdom work. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says a similar thing in one of her books. When ever you feed the poor and the hungry, whenever you welcome the stranger with a smile you welcome Christ.

So in these three short verses Matthew stresses to the early Church and to us the importance of welcoming people and offering hospitality as an important part of Christian ministry and my prayer is that post lockdown we will rediscover that ministry and practice it as part of our Christian communities. That we will truly be places where all can feel welcome and supported where we are generous in hospitality to strangers, a place where strangers can become guests and friends quickly, Amen

Prayers of Intercession (Led by Ruth Charlesworth)

Holy and loving God

In the beginning you created the world and breathed your life into it.

We think of those bringing new life into the world,
giving thanks for families welcoming new members of all ages
and we pray for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones.

Sharing food with friends and with strangers you
showed God's presence
in the ordinary, everyday act of living.

We remember all those ordinary people who have
allowed us to meet God alive within them.

We give thanks for those who have inspired us,
those who have cared for us when things were rough.
We pray for those who seek to inspire and care for
those who are struggling and those who are sick.
We pray that you would enable us all to offer something
of you in ordinary acts of kindness and hospitality.

We remember your family encompasses all and pray
for respect one for another, and enable us to create a
world where all are valued, regardless of creed, gender,
age or ability, and love because You loved us first.

Make your church a people of welcome, where all may
find solace, and where all may celebrate, all are valued,
all are loved and all find refreshment.

We bring all our prayers to you as we share in the words Jesus taught us

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name
Thy kingdom come:
Thy will be done.
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation.
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen

Hymn 545 Be thou my vision, O lord of my heart

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord

Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one

Be Thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight,
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight,
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower,
Raise Thou me heavenwards, O power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art

High King of heaven, after victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n Sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my Vision, O ruler of all

Repeat 1st Verse

Blessing

As you continue on your way
May you know that God goes before you,
By the strength of his Spirit,
Share your faith with the uncertain.
Share your love with the unlovely.
Share your presence with the lonely.
and share God with everyone,
Just as God has shared himself with you,
In the unfading blessing of Jesus Christ,
Our Lord and Saviour

Amen