

**FORTH VALLEY METHODIST CIRCUIT WEEKLY SERVICE
SUNDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2020**



Call to Worship

The Creator of the Universe calls us
to leave the darkness behind and live in the light.

Our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again, greets us this day.

The One who danced at Creation's birth
calls us now into their presence.

So come, let us worship.

[Hymn: Jesus Calls Us Here to Meet Him \(StF 28\)](#)

Follow the hymn in your own hymnbook or click on the link above to watch a video on
YouTube.

Opening Prayer

O God, You adorn the poor
binding rulers in chains
and allowing the people to rejoice.

Rise up, O God, anew,
adorn Your creation,
bind all that seeks to destroy it,
that we may not perish, but live.

O God, often it seems we have to eat bitter herbs
as the Angel of Death has not passed over us;
we grieve those who have died from Covid-19,
lives lost from all over our land,
old and young, fit and frail,
care-worker and bus driver, nurse and doctor.

As we grieve
we have to accept our complicity,
our failure to plan,
our failure to learn the lessons,
our failure to care for our world,
and our failure to treat nature and animal life with respect.

Forgive us, good Lord,
and help us to turn our sorrow into action,
our failure into change, our guilt into grace.

God, the source of all mercy,
has sent the Holy Spirit amongst us for the forgiveness of sins,
the equipping of the saints and the fine tuning of our hearts.

Know that you are forgiven,
know too that you, with all of humanity,
need to use the grace of forgiveness to be an energy of change.
Amen

[Reading: Romans 13: 8-14](#)

Use your own Bible or click on the link above to go to the reading on the Bible Gateway website.

[Hymn: Darkness like a shroud covers the earth \(StF 170\)](#)

Follow the hymn in your own hymnbook or click on the link above to watch a video on YouTube.

Reflection: Wake from Sleep

In Methodist speak, today is the first month of the new Methodist Connexional Year – a year which runs from 1st September - 31st August. We as Methodist Churches are part of the Methodist worldwide Connexion – this movement of people, inspired by John Wesley to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. A movement inspired by song, particularly the hymns of Charles Wesley.

We have a new president and vice-president of Conference, Rev. Richard Teal and Mrs Carolyn Lawrence – and so begins the new round of meetings and activities as we journey through the cycle of life, as we seek to discern the will of God in this time.

During my travels I have passed through Bristol, where I visited the New Room, which is the oldest Methodist Chapel in the world. It was built as a meeting place for the many people who had responded to John Wesley's preaching and had become Christians and now wanted to be instructed in the faith. It also provided a place for providing education for the poor, giving help and comfort to those in need, and first aid and medicines for those who could not afford them. The artefacts and exhibits remind you of the call of John and Charles Wesley, and many others, who were inspired to proclaim the love of Christ to all, in the belief that all can be saved. As such, in their day, because of the methodical way they studied and served others, they were nicknamed 'enthusiasts' or 'Methodists!'

I say all this, because for me these experiences acted as a kind of wake-up call as I was reminded whence the Methodist movement emerged and that today we cannot sit still, and as it were, let the world go by, or expect the world to come to us. From the outset the Methodists have been a movement calling the church and the nation to 'wake up'. We need to "Wake from Sleep". But, what are we called to be awake to?

One answer is to wake up to the fact that our faith cannot mean anything if we, as it were, only dip into it. Being a disciple of Jesus is not just about getting a little sprinkling of religion, then giving priority to other interests. We need to wake up to the truth that Christianity is a life we live, not just a creed we follow

The passage from Romans reminds us of this.

Let me thus briefly acquaint you with what is going on in Paul's letter to the Romans. In chapters 1-11 Paul is unfolding the gospel of grace – helping us, the reader, to understand what God has done in and through Jesus Christ who, by his crucifixion and resurrection, has defeated for all humankind the power of sin and death. In the light of that grace, in the beginning of chapter 12, we are called to present ourselves as 'living sacrifices, and then in the rest of chapter 12 and in chapter 13 the focus is more about the practical outworking of sacrificial living. This is the new way to live as shown in the life and ministry of Jesus and what we are called to live as disciples of Jesus. Thus we, the reader, begin to see what it means to be persons transformed by the renewing of our minds so we are able to discern the will of God.

The place we begin this renewal is shown most deeply in the way that we who claim to be followers of Christ, love God and our neighbour. This is the wake-up call.

I always like seeing the answers given by school students on exam papers.

- *The death of Francis Macomber was a big turning point in his life.*
- *The wind is like air, only pushier.*
- *Meteorologists look something like people.*
- *In order to get the different seasons, we had to get the earth tilted over on its axis, but it has been worth it.*
- *The people who followed the Lord were called the Twelve Opposums.*

A list like that reminds us that the right answers are important. But just as important are the right questions. To be awake as Christians, means that each of us should be asking the right question – the most crucial one being, what is it that God wants from me? And it is for us as the church together in all our fellowship groups, work teams, activities and meetings to ask – what is it that God wants from us? And respond in faith. For when we pursue the answer to that question, we will indeed be awake, and no longer asleep. It is about living our faith daily and committedly – loving God and loving our neighbour.

How we do that is being asked of us right now by the global community in the light of the horrors of warfare, deadly disease including Covid-19, our response to hurricane and earthquake devastation, and the growing number of people who are poor and homeless.

To wake up means to realise the transformational power of God's love – a love that is incarnate in acts of justice and kindness, humbly shared with a world in need.

Paul realises as he writes to the Roman church, as the gospels testify in the life and ministry of Jesus, is that this love is subversive to the status quo. It is a love that subverts covetousness and greed, that is about right relationship, a love that always does good to one's neighbour. But at the core is the transformation of the heart that comes through the grace of God into our lives. This change, this transformation of the heart through Christ, is central to all that we are and do. Love of neighbour desires justice. As people commented some years ago on the MP's ridiculous comments that charities should stick to knitting and should not be getting political – they were saying, quite rightly, that true charity involves justice.

There was an incident a few years ago when the backdoor of an armoured car carrying money from a bank accidentally flew open on the interstate in Ohio. Apparently some \$2 million in bank notes was flying all over the place and there was a mass furore as people grabbed the money and drove away.

One man picked up \$57,000 – but he couldn't live with himself, so he handed it in. His was the bulk of the cash recovered, and his friends thought he was nuts. Yet his parents said – "Well we sure could have done with the money and made good use of it, but we are proud of him. It was the right thing to do."

To do justice is to do the right thing. But it is not just about doing but also working for justice. Certainly, that has been at the core of our Methodist past as the Methodists sought tirelessly to end the Atlantic slave trade, seek reform for prisons, promoted education, campaigned for better working conditions for the ordinary working men and women. And so forth.

If you remember the 1960's you will remember Peter, Paul and Mary's popular folk song – *If I had a hammer*. The verses speak about hammering out justice, working for freedom and cultivating love all over the world. That is what God wants us to be awake to.

It is vital that we cultivate in our church amongst ourselves, first an atmosphere that encourages attitudes of loving kindness, that imitate the loving kindness, the grace of God. Our kindness might actually be the only sermon some person may ever hear. This is what God wants us to be awake to.

I remember a preacher using the text from Isaiah 40:31 which reads,

"We shall mount up with wings of eagles, we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not be faint."

He commented that this order seemed out of sync, that is, he felt it should be turned around – that we should walk, then run, and then fly. But then he said he spoke with a good friend who was in her eighties about this. In her humble way she told him the order in the scripture is actually correct. When you get a little older you will understand and appreciate it better. Isaiah was right, she said, because that is the way the faith pilgrimage works. When you first have the faith experience, you are so excited you want to fly like an eagle. Then you settle back after a while and run with perseverance as if running a marathon. But the real test of faith is the test of time and endurance, that daily humble walk with God. Because that is what it is all about.

I think as I am now a little older, I understand that truth – that to be awake is that daily humble walk with God, where daily our hearts and minds are transformed and reoriented to the mind of God, to the mind of the age to come – which is to be awake – to love God and to love one's neighbour.

Or, as someone else put it: It is not how loud you shout, it is not how high you jump; it's how you walk when you hit the ground.

I encourage you to wake up and walk daily in the power of God's transforming love. To God be the glory for ever. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray with Christ:

God, who makes us with the Earth
God, who gives us to the world
God-with-us in our struggles:

**Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.**

We pray for the world:
We reflect on stories on our news channels.
We remember communities in need,
and give thanks where needs have been met.
We bring before you stories of sorrow
and rejoice with you over news of hope.
We pray for peace throughout your creation.

**Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.**

We pray for the Church:
We give thanks for the faithfulness of Your church.
We give thanks for all who support your mission in prayer.
Grant us wisdom and discernment as we seek to heal divisions.
May we serve you and care for your creation
As we continue to seek a deeper fellowship with You.

Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us.

We pray for ourselves:
In silence, we bring our personal concerns to God,
who knows and understands our deepest thoughts...

Give us perseverance Lord when we struggle.
Create in us a desire for change when this is needed,
rather than accepting the way things are.
Let us know peace in our hearts and the joy of Christ in our lives
as we walk in Your ways.

Hear our fears and needs
Hold our hand as You walk beside us
Advise, encourage and guide us. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name.
your Kingdom come.
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever, **Amen.**

[Hymn: Tell Out My Soul \(StF 186\)](#)

Follow the hymn in your own hymnbook or click on the link above to watch a video on YouTube.

Blessing:

May the One who adorns the poor,
binds the rulers,
and causes the people to rejoice,
adorn you with love,
bind all that seeks evil,
and give you cause to rejoice.

And the blessing of Almighty God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you, and all whom you love,
now and ever more. Amen.

With thanks to Rev Eddie Sykes for preparing this week's reflection.

*Call to worship and prayers by Rev'd Andy Braunston,
taken from Church of Scotland, Weekly Worship, Sunday 6th September 2020.*