

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of January 2024

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Sunday 7th January 2024 – Covenant Sunday

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

It all begins here!

We begin a new day, a new week, a new year.

Let us begin again by listening and looking for God's Spirit,
and expecting God's light to shine in dark places.

Hymn: God Is Working His Purpose Out (H&P 769)

God is working his purpose out,
as year succeeds to year;
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be:
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
where human feet have trod,
by the mouth of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God:
"Give ear to me, ye continents,
ye isles, give ear to me,
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea."

Let us go forth in the strength of God,
with the banner of Christ unfurled,
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth
may shine throughout the world.
Let us all fight with sorrow and sin
to set the captives free,
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth
unless God blesses the deed.
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide

till God gives life to the seed.
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

Living God, in the beginning
you called all life into being to reflect your creativity:

we celebrate your generosity.

At his baptism you called Jesus to reflect your purpose:

we celebrate his coming among us.

Today you call us to receive your Holy Spirit, and
to reflect your love in the world:

we celebrate your trust in us.

Amen.

*Response after each phrase: **Forgive us and shake us up.***

O God, when compassion should begin with us, but doesn't:

When justice should begin with us, but doesn't:

When unity should begin with us, but doesn't:

When understanding should begin with us, but doesn't:

When hospitality should begin with us, but doesn't:

When hope should begin with us, but doesn't:

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

All powerful God, giver of life, as you affirmed your Son at
his baptism, so you affirm us as your children, forgiving us
that which has marred our past and offering us a new
beginning. So with confidence and trust, we set out afresh
on our journey of faith to your glory.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth
was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw
that the light was good. And God separated the light from the

darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Hymn: Longing For Light (StF 706)

Longing For Light, We Wait In Darkness.
Longing For Truth, We Turn To You.
Make Us Your Own, Your Holy People,
Light For The World To See.

Christ, Be Our Light!

Shine In Our Hearts.

Shine Through The Darkness.

Christ, Be Our Light!

Shine In Your Church Gathered Today.

Longing For Peace, Our World Is Troubled.
Longing For Hope, Many Despair.
Your Word Alone Has Power To Save Us.
Make Us Your Living Voice.

Longing For Food, Many Are Hungry.
Longing For Water, Many Still Thirst.
Make Us Your Bread, Broken For Others,
Shared Until All Are Fed.

Christ, Be Our Light!

Shine In Our Hearts.

Shine Through The Darkness.

Christ, Be Our Light!

Shine In Your Church Gathered Today.

Longing For Shelter, Many Are Homeless.
Longing For Warmth, Many Are Cold.
Make Us Your Building, Sheltering Others,
Walls Made Of Living Stone.

Many The Gifts, Many The People,
Many The Hearts That Yearn To Belong.
Let Us Be Servants To One Another,
Making Your Kingdom Come.
Christ, Be Our Light!

Shine In Our Hearts.
Shine Through The Darkness.
Christ, Be Our Light!
Shine In Your Church Gathered Today.

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:4-11

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son,^[a] with you I am well pleased."

Thought of the Day:

Blah, blah, blah!' Who would have thought that these three words – are they even words? – would be the start of a serious challenge to a group of powerful politicians and world leaders? The [young Greta Thunberg was referring to a series of climate change conferences](#), suggesting that they were 'just talk' and that serious action should be taken before it was too late. 'Blah, blah, blah!' was no use when serious, far-reaching, action was needed. The courage and foresight of this young girl was and is a catalyst for action.

Over the centuries people have spoken words or carried out actions that have triggered action or new movements. The civil rights movement in America was triggered and strengthened by the actions of people such as Rosa Parks, the woman who refused to sit in the area designated for black people on a bus; or in the powerful words of Martin Luther King in his speech 'I have a dream'. That might remind us of the words of another Martin Luther, generations earlier, who said, 'Here I stand, I can do no other', triggering the reformation with his words and actions.

The ultimate example, of course, is the ‘wind from God, sweeping over the face of the waters’ dividing light from darkness and bringing order from chaos – the word and breath of God in action. This week’s Psalm offers other examples of the power of the voice of God: ‘The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness’, ‘The God of glory thunders’, ‘May the Lord bring peace to his people’.

There is much ‘stirring up’ in the pages of the Bible, such as the story of John the Baptist. He certainly stirred things up, and paid the ultimate price for it. He proclaimed a new start, with people acknowledging their wrongdoing and turning their lives around – beginning again. He announced the coming of Jesus who would bring another new start through his death and resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The effects of this were seen by and in the people whom Paul baptized in Corinth; and the effects are seen in people today, filled with and stirred up by the Holy Spirit.

Action and stirring to action are the name of the game when God’s Spirit moves. And there is just as much need today for us to look out for signs of God’s spirit ‘moving over the waters’ and bringing new life and new beginnings. Let it never be said of us that we are just ‘Blah, blah, blah!’

Hymn: Show Me How to Stand for Justice (StF 713)

Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day, in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Prayers for Others:

Eternal God, in our ever changing world in you there is stability and the opportunity of a new beginning. So, we pray now for those whose lives are in turmoil, those whose lives have been turned upside down, those who feel lost.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope,
and use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for those for whom life is difficult due to abuse, for those who need to know your love and care, for those who feel desperate, alone and worried about their jobs, their finances, their mental health.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for children and young adults in their schooling, we pray for those who enjoy learning from home, pray too for those with confidence and self esteem issues and feel vulnerable.

We remember their parents and the parents of children with special needs, struggling to cope.

We pray for teachers, administrative staff, and all those who feel overwhelmed, by their roles.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for the people of your world, where there is so much turmoil, unrest and pain. Grant to the leaders of nations your wisdom, courage and strength to speak out for all.

We pray too for countries around the world struggling with ethnic violence and militancy.

May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
Lord, use our prayers in Jesus' name to strengthen them.

We pray for one another, our families,
our communities, our church fellowships.
May we support those who are unwell or grieving.
May we bring fresh hope to those who feel forgotten and are vulnerable,
and may we – both practically and prayerfully – share our faith
in your Son Jesus in whose name we entrust these prayers to you.
Amen.

Hymn: The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy (StF 255)

The kingdom of God is justice and joy;
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy.
God's power and glory in Jesus we know;
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;
The captives are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share;
And hope is awakened in place of despair.
The kingdom of God is challenge and choice:
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
God's love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross:
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal;
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole.
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call;
And all things cry "Glory!" to God all in all.

Sending out Prayer:

Help us to look for you, Lord, around every corner,
in every place and at every time.
Help us to be in tune with new things you are doing,
and help us to join in.

Amen.

Sunday 14th January 2024 – Ordinary 2

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton. For those who were unable to attend out Circuit Covenant Service last Sunday. Some of you will have heard this before, for others it will be fresh. The message remains the same!

From the earliest days of the Methodist societies, John Wesley invited the Methodist people to renew their covenant relationship with God. This service is a reminder of God's immense and generous love for us and gives an opportunity for us to respond to that love by renewing our commitment to live out God's love in our lives.

Opening Words:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31: 33 – 34 NRSV

Hymn: O Thou Who Camest From Above (StF564/H&P745)

O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me –

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayer:

Gracious God, with many others, both near and far, I seek in this moment to renew my covenant with you.

Your love is strong and faithful, and you never stop loving us. Our love for you is weak and fickle and we often fall short of what we have committed ourselves to be and do.

Forgive us for our reluctance to follow Christ, for our half-hearted worship, our failures in caring, service and witness, and our unwillingness to challenge injustice.

Have mercy on us, O God, and renew in us both the desire and the ability to be people of love.

Thank you for your gracious words: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Amen

Reading: John 15: 1 - 9

I am the true vine, and my father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

Hymn: You Are The Vine, We Are The Branches (StF258/MP792)

*You are the vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.
You are the vine
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.*

Then we'll grow in your love,
then we'll go in your name,
that the world will surely know
that you have power to heal

and to save.

*You are the vine,
we are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.*

Danny Daniels and Randy Rigby

Reflection:

My dad used to grow beautiful roses and would let me help him when he was pruning them. As a child I could never quite understand the need to cut back quite so much of the plant and was convinced it would die. But, of course, it never did and each year the blooms were more wonderful than the year before! My dad explained how a rose bush couldn't just be left to look after itself. Before too long it would begin to strangle itself, the buds wouldn't get enough light and the plant would become weak. A rose needs a bit of help, my dad would say. And he would show me which shoots to cut away and which to leave, so helping the plant to get as much light as possible and thus be as productive as possible. Over the years there have been many times I wished I'd listened more carefully!!

That principle of pruning a rose to enable it to reach its full potential applies to many plants, vines included. Jesus calls himself the true vine and likens us as the branches of that vine – the branches that bear fruit. Left to our own devices, like the branches of the rose and the vine, we quickly get tangled up and begin to get 'straggly' in our faith and our discipleship. And so there are things that need pruning in order to keep us close to Jesus, things that may block us from the light he offers to guide us through life. The 'dead wood' in each of our lives will be different: but anything that prevents us from knowing Jesus better; from working with him in the world; from staying in touch and in tune with him, is 'dead wood' and needs pruning.

And that applies not just to us as individuals but also collectively as the Church. Covid lockdowns and the subsequent resumption of regular activities has perhaps given us an opportunity to consider where the 'dead wood' might be in our churches. Have we simply gone back to how things were or is there some pruning that could be done to allow the light of Christ to shine brighter, to draw us closer to the heart of God, to help us to bear fruit for God and even to grow. What needs pruning? The coffee morning that has looked the same for 20 odd years? The worship that isn't attracting new folk or appealing to our younger members? The buildings no longer fit for purpose that take so much of our energy and resources?

Pruning can be painful. I still have scars from some of the rose thorn scratches! But it is pruning that creates vibrant and healthy growth. As we again commit ourselves to trust God, to walk with Jesus and to live in the ways of the kingdom let us each reflect on how we will fulfil that commitment and what it is in our lives and the life of our churches that may need pruning in order for that commitment to become a reality.

Listed below are the commitments to be found on the Methodist membership card, a copy of which all members have received. These commitments reflect the calling of the Methodist Church and her people and, before we come to the Covenant Prayer, I invite you to read through these commitments and reflect on which of them you wish to grow in during the coming year and what you may need to do, or possibly ‘prune’, to enable this to happen.

As far as we are able, with God’s help:

Worship

We will pray daily.

We will worship with others regularly.

We will look and listen for God in scripture, and the world.

Learning and Caring

We will care for ourselves and those around us.

We will learn more about our faith.

We will practise hospitality and generosity.

Service

We will help people in our communities and beyond.

We will care for creation and all God’s gifts.

We will challenge injustice.

Evangelism

We will speak of the love of God.

We will live in a way that draws others to Jesus.

We will share our faith with others.

You are invited to say aloud ...

I am no longer my own but yours.

Your will, not mine, be done in all things,

wherever you may place me,

in all that I do and in all that I may endure;

when there is work for me and when there is none;

**when I am troubled and when I am at peace.
Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;
when I have all things, and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you,
as and where you choose.**

**Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen**

Hymn: All I once held dear (StF489/MP799)

All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.

Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

*Chorus: Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best, you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Graham Kendrick (b 1950)

Prayers:

In a moment of quiet pray for your church.....that it may be a faithful witness to God's love.

Silence

In a moment of quiet pray for the church worldwide.....that in word and action it may help people to see God's glory.

Silence

In a moment of quiet pray for the leaders of nations.....that they may act justly and guide wisely.

Silence

In a moment of quiet pray for those who are sick, those who are anxious, those who are grieving

Silence

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace to make these prayers.
Answer now your servants' prayers according to their needs;
and in this world grant that we may truly know you,
and in the world to come graciously give us eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Come on and celebrate (StF44/MP99)

Come on and celebrate
his gift of love, we will celebrate
the Son of God who loved us
and gave us life.

We'll shout your praise, O King,
you give us joy nothing else can bring,
we'll give to you our offering
in celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate,
celebrate,
celebrate and sing,

celebrate and sing to the King.
Come on and celebrate,
celebrate,
celebrate and sing,
Celebrate and sing to the King.

Patricia Morgan and Dave Bankhead

Blessing:

May the God of heaven and earth bless us and keep us;
may his face shine upon us that we might know God's peace and live in
ways that reflect his love,
now and always.
Amen

*Original material by Rev Liz Singleton
Prayers & Blessing and ideas for reflection Roger L Walton
Covenant Prayer MWB ©TMCP*

Sunday 21st January 2024 – Ordinary 3

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge

A Gathering Prayer:

Lord, sometimes the only reward we have for responding to your call is to know that it is what you will. Give us courage and strength to do the harder things, and may we find joy in serving you in all things.

Amen.

Hymn: I Want To Walk With Jesus Christ

I Want To Walk With Jesus Christ,
All The Days I Live Of This Life On Earth;
To Give To Him Complete Control
Of Body And Of Soul.

*Follow Him, Follow Him,
Yield Your Life To Him –
He Has Conquered Death,
He Is King Of Kings;
Accept The Joy Which He Gives To Those
Who Yield Their Lives To Him.*

I Want To Learn To Speak To Him,
To Pray To Him, Confess My Sin,
To Open My Life And Let Him In,
For Joy Will Then Be Mine.

Follow Him, Follow Him ...

I Want To Learn To Speak Of Him –
My Life Must Show That He Lives In Me;
My Deeds, My Thoughts, My Words Must Speak
All Of His Love For Me.

Follow Him, Follow Him....

I Want To Learn To Read His Word,
For This Is How I Know The Way
To Live My Life As Pleases Him,
In Holiness And Joy.

Follow Him, Follow Him ...

O Holy Spirit Of The Lord,
Enter Now Into This Heart Of Mine;
Take Full Control Of My Selfish Will
And Make Me Wholly Thine!

*Follow Him, Follow Him,
Yield Your Life To Him –
He Has Conquered Death,
He Is King Of Kings;
Accept The Joy Which He Gives To Those
Who Yield Their Lives To Him.*

A Prayer of Adoration:

God of the weak and the strong, you turn reluctance into resilience, for you are faithful. **Amen.**

You turn listening into learning, for you are wise. **Amen.**

You turn diffidence into daring, for you are gracious. **Amen.**

You turn failure into fruitfulness, for you are gracious. **Amen.**

You turn obstacles into opportunities, for you are creative. **Amen.**

You turn never into now, for you are timeless, and we worship you. **Amen.**

A Prayer of Confession and an Assurance of Forgiveness

A Prayer of Confession

Response after each phrase:

Enrich our vision and soften our hearts, we pray.

God of all, forgive us when we are slow to see you at work in other cultures, in other communities: **Enrich our vision ...**

forgive us when we limit your mercy to those we approve of, who we think are worth it: **Enrich our vision ...**

forgive us when we are reluctant to go beyond our comfort zone to share your gospel of love: **Enrich our vision ...**

forgive us when we are resentful when you bless those we disapprove of:

Enrich our vision ...

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Faithful God, as you forgave Jonah for his reluctance, so you forgive us.
As you forgave the people of Nineveh when they turned from all that was wrong, so you forgive us.

We receive that forgiveness now and pray that your continuing grace will strengthen, guide and surround us through every temptation and every challenge. **Amen.**

Hymn: Take My Life and Let It Be (StF 566)

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love'
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold
Not a mite would I withhold
Take my intellect and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine
It shall be no longer mine
Take my heart, it is thine own
It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store

Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

Old Testament Reading: Jonah 3: 1 – 5, 10

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

3 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Psalm 62: 5 – 12

Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

⁷ My salvation and my honour depend on God^[a];
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

⁹ Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.

If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.

¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

¹¹ One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:

“Power belongs to you, God,
¹² and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”;
and, “You reward everyone
according to what they have done.”

Mark 1: 14 – 20

Jesus Announces the Good News

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Hymn: Lord, You Have Come To The Seashore (StF 558)

Lord, you have come to the seashore,
Neither searching for the rich or the wise,
Desiring only that I should follow.

*O Lord, with your eyes set upon me,
Gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for I have found by the water,
At your side I will seek other shores.*

Lord, see my goods, my possessions;
In my boat you find no power, now wealth.
Will you accept then, my nets and my labour?

Lord, take my hands, and direct them.
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
Returning love for the love you gave me.

Lord, as I drift on the waters,
Be the resting-place of my restless heart,
My life's companion, my friend and refuge.

Cesareo Gabarain (1926-1991)
Translated by Robert C. Trupia

Thoughts ‘One Day I’ll Know How Far I’ll Go.’

The Walt Disney film *Moana* is a musical action adventure film, based on a legend from a Polynesian Island. It is the story of an adventurous teenager who is inspired to leave the safety and security of her Island, to go on a daring journey to save her people. In doing so she helps the islanders rediscover their destiny as an exploring, adventurous people. Moana's poignant song shows how she thinks deeply about what is expected of her on the island, and yet feels that she must follow the urgent 'call' of the sea. Here are some of the lines from the song;

See the line where the sky meets the sea?

It calls me
And no one knows
How far it goes...
See the light as it shines on the sea?
It's blinding but no one knows
How deep it goes...
What's beyond that line?
Will I cross that line?
One day I'll know
How far I'll go...

In our Christian life, there's always an element of not knowing where the call of God will lead us – it's in the future, after all. Little did Andrew, Peter, James and John know what the future would be as they answered Jesus' call to follow him. They trusted him, and saw the person who called them for who he was – at least some of the time! The Iona song 'O where are you going and can I come with you' (from *Heaven Shall not Wait*)

shows this sense of uncertainty and the trust necessary to follow Jesus. The answer to the question is:

I'm going on a journey and welcome companions...
Just join me in travelling and learn all I know.

So how far will we go in answering the call of God? Are we prepared to do difficult things or live with some uncertainty? Will we expect a reward or thanks for what we do? Or is it reward enough to know we are answering God's call? The 'Prayer for Generosity' (attributed to Ignatius Loyola) suggests the idea of labouring and not asking for 'any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will'.

If you were able to join in the Circuit Covenant Service words similar to those of Ignatius of Loyola may have been shared:

I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
Wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure;
When there is work for me and when there is none;
When I am troubled and when I am at peace.
Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded;
When I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;
When I have all things and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you,
As and where you choose.
Glorious and blessed God,
Father Son and Holy spirit,
You are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
Be fulfilled In heaven. **Amen.**

This theme is particularly poignant for me as later this year I will 'Sit down' from full-time Methodist Ministry. Where God will continue to lead me as I enter Supernumerary ministry and what that will look like are yet to be revealed. Exciting and daunting in equal measure. But I have been truly blessed in the Presbyterian Ministry to which He called me for many years and which I accepted, trained for and entered in 2002, my life could not have been more blessed or more fulfilled in any other way. I am truly

grateful to all who I have shared in Ministry with, other Ministers and each of God's people – You. Thank you.

Back to Moana, just a moment. We have one big advantage over her, of course, We can know and trust the One who is calling us. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession:

God of the past and of the future,
we bring to you in prayer those people and places on our hearts today:

We remember the parts of the world
where people are being killed, oppressed and displaced.
In places like Gaza and Ukraine and other places which have fallen out of
Newspaper and TV headlines.

May those in power leave behind violence and follow your call to peace.
Amen.

Lord Jesus, you called fisherman as they worked,
so we pray for fisherman today as they struggle to make a living.
We pray for all those who work to bring food to our table
as they struggle with the complexities of legislation and the challenges of
extreme weather.
And may those who exploit or abuse leave behind cruelty and follow your
call to compassion.
Amen.

We pray for all young people caught up in and trapped by gang violence,
for those who have been stabbed or shot and for their families,
for those who live in fear of being attacked,
for those who have been imprisoned, who have committed murder – and
for their families,
for all those who carry weapons.
Help them to leave behind despair and to follow your call to hope.
Amen.

We pray for one another,
for our church families, our communities, and our loved ones,
for those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of each day,
for those adapting to new ways of living,
for those who are ill,
for those close to death,

for those who are grieving.
Help us all to leave behind all that separates us from you and from one another
and to follow your call to trust and to love –
in Jesus' name. **Amen.** *This prayer was originally published in 2021.*

Hymn: I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky (StF663)

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry,
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright,
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night/
I will go, Lord,
If you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Fill their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Blessing

May the blessing of God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with you now and with all whom you love and cherish,

in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**

Sunday 28th January 2024 – Ordinary 4

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Call to Worship:

God of all truth and all wisdom,
of all authority and all power,
we come together as Your people,
to reflect on the words of Your prophets,
to be inspired by the words and actions of Your Son, Jesus,
to be challenged by the spirit of Your laws,
to discern Your will for us individually and as Churches,
to offer You our prayers and praises,
and to grow closer in fellowship with You and one another.
In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Hymn: Sing Of The Lord's Goodness (StF 65)

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
Come to Him and bless His name.
Mercy He has shown us, His love is for ever,
Faithful to the end of days.

*Refrain: Come then, all you nations,
Sing of Your Lord's goodness,
Melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
Praise Him with your music,
Worship Him and bless His name.*

Power He has wielded, honour is His garment,
Risen from the snares of death,
His word He has spoken, one bread He has broken,
New life He now gives to all.

Refrain:

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;

Solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
Splendour of the living God.

Refrain:

Praise Him with your singing, praise Him with the trumpet,
Praise God with the lute and harp;
Praise Him with the cymbals, praise Him with your dancing,
Praise God till the end of days.

Refrain:

Ernest Sands (b.1949)

Prayers of Praise and Confession:

Living God, we praise You for the people You have called to speak
Your words of power to us and to our world – words of life and of
opportunity and risk, of comfort and challenge, of wisdom
and clarity. Help us to step out to the rhythm of their beat, the beat
of justice, of compassion, of reverence for You, so that we might
grow in wisdom and confidence, and sing our life's story to the
music of your gospel. In Jesus' name.

God of all ages,
in You is found all wisdom, all wonder, all love.
Lord Jesus,
in You is found all healing, all truth, all goodness.
Holy Spirit,
in You is found all power, all cleansing, all enabling.
And so, as one and as many, we lift our hearts to You
in awe, in reverence and in humility.

God of truth, we bring to You those times when we have used
cheap words to avoid costly action.

Forgive us and grant us your spirit of strength.

We bring to You those times when we have hidden behind the
letter of the law to avoid the challenge of the spirit of the law.

Forgive us and grant us your spirit of discernment.

We bring to You those times when we have disrespected the
authority of those You have called to show us a new way.

Forgive us and grant us your spirit of wisdom. Amen.

You may like to join in the Lord's Prayer here..... Our Father, who art in heaven Amen.

Introduction:

Moses, speaking to the people, says that one day God will send another prophet like him. This prophet will speak God's words with God's full authority, such that anyone who refuses to listen will be held accountable by God. The people are also warned against listening to false prophets. An authentic prophet's words will prove to be true.

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to Him. For this is what you asked of the Lord Your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor hear this great fire any more, or we will die."

The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I will command Him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a prophet as 'one who speaks for God'. That's a very tall order! Sometimes, it's hard to speak for ourselves, let alone for someone else, and it's not surprising that sometimes, things go wrong. Through Moses, God promises to raise up a prophet who would continue to bring His Word. One who would: follow God's initiative and speak what God would reveal; would follow God's model; would speak God's message and carry God's authority. Here we see it fulfilled in the life of Moses, but there is one to come who will be like no other prophet.

Introduction:

People are astounded by the authority with which Jesus teaches. In the passage from Deuteronomy, we heard of a prophet into whose mouth God put His words. Both of these readings encourage us to consider the authority of those who seek to influence us.

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:21–28

JESUS DRIVES OUT AN EVIL SPIRIT

‘ They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law.

Just then, a man in their synagogue, who was possessed of an evil spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet”, Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other. “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He gives even orders to evil spirits and they obey Him.” News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.’

Hymn: The Prophets’ Voice Comes Down The Years (StF162)

Alternate Tune: either Forest Green – ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ or Noel ‘It Came Upon The Midnight Clear’

The prophets’ voice comes down the years

To teach and to inspire,

To show the nature of our God

In words and deeds and fire;

Not to disclose some rigid plan

That God has set in stone,

But to renew the promises

The saints have always known.

The prophets’ voice speaks of the past –

The actions that reveal

The way God used the people then

This broken world to heal;

And then translates the things gone by

In ways that we find new

So we can judge the world we know

By standards ever true.

The prophets’ voice holds up a glass

In which to see our day;

Events which scan the globe around

And things we do and say.
It calls us to repent and turn
From things that tear life down,
To choose the path that Jesus chose
And share His work and crown.

Alan Hinton

Reflection:

A High School teacher had injured his back and had to wear a plaster cast around the upper part of his body. It was made to measure and, under his shirt, wasn't noticeable at all. On the first day of a new term, he still had the cast on. He looked at his class profile and realised he had been assigned the toughest pupils in the school.

He walked into a rowdy, noisy classroom. All the pupils were talking and laughing and acted as if he wasn't there. The teacher walked over and opened the window as wide as possible and then started working at his desk. Several times, a strong wind blew his tie up onto his face. Finally, he reached over, picked up a stapler and stapled the tie to his chest in three places and then continued working.

The class immediately fell silent. They were shocked into silence, and, strangely, the teacher had no problems with discipline for the whole of the year!

THEY WERE STUNNED BY HIS AUTHORITY

A similar thing happened on the day that Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum and started speaking. All those gathered were stunned into silence as Jesus began to teach for He was different from their usual teachers.

JESUS TAUGHT WITH AUTHORITY

Jesus spoke with an authority they did not recognise and they were spellbound. He held their attention and they listened as He spoke about the work He, God's Son, had come to do. They had never heard anyone speak with such power and authority.

For one man, this was to be a life-changing event. His voice must have cut the air as he cried out! Clearly, his illness caused him great distress. Mark gives a detailed description of it. At that time, very little was understood about any kind of mental condition and all would have been attributed to evil spirits. In any event, Jesus knew how to respond to the man. Everyone

was awestruck by the power in His words. The man became calm and was healed.

No-one had ever heard any teacher speak with such power and authority before. He wasn't arrogant or proud, He presented Himself in a way that set Him apart. He never made a grand entrance, but before long, you felt His presence and were drawn to Him. There were no gimmicks or false promises. Why? Because His words rang true. They sprang from His heart and resonated with power and authenticity. It was as if He had a direct line to God – and that is what amazed His listeners. Jesus was truly concerned about everyone who came to hear Him. He wanted them to understand, to know, to learn about God's love and forgiveness. His concern was such that He risked Himself and shared Himself with everyone He met.

The other truly amazing thing was that Jesus not only spoke with authority, He lived by what he spoke. The authority of His teaching extended to the authority of His actions. As the story shows us, He backed up His words with deeds – even giving Himself up on the Cross for our sins and eternal life. And it is to this amazing Son of God that we are called to place our trust, our faith, our lives – to live by His teaching and to live it out by our actions. As we approach Lent, we will discover more of what it means to live by word and action. May we all learn to discern His voice – in every aspect of our lives, in good times and in times of trial and testing, and be ready and willing to act on what we discover. **Amen.**

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to hear Your voice, not just in the Word of Scripture,
But in moments of prayer, times of fellowship, the beauty of nature and the events of life.
Help us in all the uncertainties of this world, all its relativism and conundrums,
To hear You speaking, and in Your message of love and compassion to recognise the word of life,
Humble, yet of true authority. **Amen.**

Hymn: God Has Spoken – By His Prophets (StF 157)

God has spoken – by His prophets,
Spoken His unchanging word;
Each from age to age proclaiming

God, the One, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
One firm anchor holding fast,
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.

God has spoken – by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
Brightness of the Father's glory,
With the Father, ever One;
Spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.

God is speaking – by His Spirit,
Speaking to our hearts again,
In the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
One sure faith is standing fast;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

George Wallace Briggs (1875 – 1959)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God of our impressionable world,
we pray for the leaders of the nations,
that they would be wise, just and compassionate
as they exercise their authority.
We remember especially those in power in countries where there is war,
violence and terrorism,
praying for all leaders as they discern the way forward
amid the difficult social and economic challenges we face today.
May Your truth be known,
and Your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of life,
for those whose relationships are at breaking point.
We pray for those who are suffering from depression,

and for their families and friends.

We pray too for those whose lives are blighted by anxiety and stress.

We pray for the health services and charities trying to support them.

May Your truth be known,

and Your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray for Your Church – around the world and in our own community,
we pray for creative ways to serve and to share,

for courage and integrity as we listen and pray,

for urgency and daring as we respond to the needs around us.

May Your truth be known,

and Your love be shared in Jesus' name.

We pray, in a moment of silence,

for all those on our hearts

and for all those who have no one to name them in prayer.

May Your truth be known,

and Your love be shared in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus Christ Is Waiting (StF 251)

Jesus Christ is waiting,

Waiting in the streets;

No one is His neighbour,

All alone He eats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,

I am lonely too:

Make me, friend or stranger,

Fit to wait on You.

Jesus Christ is raging,

Raging in the streets,

Where injustice spirals

And real hope retreats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,

I am angry too:

In the Kingdom's causes

Let me rage with You.

Jesus Christ is healing,

Healing in the streets,

Curing those who suffer,

Touching those He greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too:
Let my care be active,
Healing, just like You.

Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too:
Where good conquers evil
Let me dance with You.

Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
“Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.”
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me;
I will follow You.

John L Bell (b. 1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

Blessing:

Lord, like Your first disciples
You send us out as sheep among wolves.
Teach us to be wise as serpents
as well as innocent as doves.
Remind us that Your peace comes with us
and Your hand is there to guide and encourage. **Amen.**

Prayers adapted from *‘Roots For Churches’*

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648 e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.