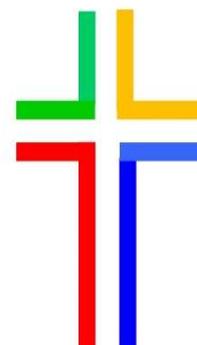


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 6 September



Today is the beginning of a new Methodist year when we can look back to the past twelve months, take stock of where we are at the present time and look ahead with confidence in the strength of God, to do His work. The last few months have been strange and challenging but we go forward in the power of the Almighty to press on with whatever tasks lie ahead for us to do.

PRAYER

Lord, we come to You as people who are ready to learn.

Young and old, we all need to know more about what it means to follow Jesus.

You have so much to teach us, through the bible, through Your world, through those around us.

READING FOR TODAY Matthew 18:15-20 (NIV-UK)

¹⁵ 'If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

REFLECTION

There is one question that should never be asked at a church meeting - 'What colour shall we have it?' Let's face it, a meeting will never be united on this question! We have our 2 annual church meetings about the nuts and bolts of life, handling the accounts, looking after the building what to do in the future: very necessary meetings at which as a community we manage our life as we decide what we hold in common and how we live in those circumstances.

Community is at the heart of all today's lectionary readings (Ezekiel 33:1-1; Romans 13:8-14 are the readings not reproduced on this sheet). What do we see shared in them and do we share the same things? What can biblical community living teach us?

Remember that the bible never recommends solitary Christianity. It can be done, but it's harder; the bible always sees God's people in community.

Matthew reminds us that when two or three are gathered together, Jesus is there and when they agree what to ask for then the Father in heaven is more likely to listen. There is power in the group. It is said that the power of a group is greater than the sum of the individuals.

If we are bound together by the shared narrative of Jesus, and by love, then the further in we go the closer we ought to get to the love of God.

Help us to have open minds and hearts, So that we may grow in understanding, and through learning more from You, become more like Jesus, In whose name we pray. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer.

¹⁸ 'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be[Ⓜ] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[Ⓜ] loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

Is our church like that? Are we like that? Do people find that the further they're drawn in, the closer they come to the love of God? It's no use being mission minded if people come in but then, sadly, draw away because they see too much, too close.

Paul in Romans 13:11 says wake up! Put on the armour of light, live honourably, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He lived at a time when people believed that Jesus would return soon. This sense of urgency is something we all need, as we don't know when Jesus will return either. We do this together. We can show people Jesus – by putting him on, as individuals, as a church community. We need to be people of purpose; a community of purpose.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

As we come to the Lord in prayer, we all have different people and situations that we will need to pray for let's focus our thoughts in this present time of anxiety.

We remember all who mourn in our circuit, communities and world-wide,
Those who are anxious and cannot see a way ahead, including young people about to return to school,
Those working in our hospitals, care homes and the community to overcome the virus,
People who have lost their jobs,
Leaders of nations having to make right decisions,
The people of Beirut who are still dealing with the explosion and its aftermaths,
Refugees risking their lives crossing seas to seek asylum,
Ourselves, our families, friends and communities.
Lord, these and all our individual prayers we offer in the name Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

HYMN H&P 753, StF 608

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;

concentred all, through Jesus' name,
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Charles Wesley 1707-1788

BLESSING

Today, we have remembered
How Jesus is amongst us.
As we go, help us to remember
That by Your Spirit You are with us everywhere
we go. And the Blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.

"Even in its weakened state, the Church may be still too big rather than too small to be an effective instrument of God's will. Jesus never founded a mass movement and showed no interest in building larger and stronger churches. His constant preoccupation was with the Kingly rule of God, whose working unit is two or three gathered in His name. His parables teach that it is by small scale operations the Kingdom spreads, seed growing secretly underground or yeast fermenting imperceptibly in a lump of dough"

Revd Dr Colin Morris, Methodist Minister, writer, broadcaster and head of religious programmes at BBC.