

FORTH VALLEY METHODIST CIRCUIT WEEKLY SERVICE

SUNDAY 21st FEBRUARY 2021



Call to worship:

Whether you are alone or with family – know that God is with you.
In silence and in busyness - know that God is with you.
His presence is all around – leading us, guiding us, protecting us.

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father lead us (StF 238)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHdcNmrW5cA>

1. Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee,
yet possessing every blessing
if our God our Father be.

2. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us,

thou didst feel its keenest woe;
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
through the desert thou didst go.

3. Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy;
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

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Prayer of adoration and confession:

Loving God, our Creator, we praise you for your love shown to each one of us, your children. We praise you for the beauty of creation – the calm waters, the rugged hills, the green grass, even the white crispness of snow, the bounty of stars – all speak of your power and majesty. Let us exalt your name in all the earth.

Loving God, you love us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, not just to be our Saviour but also our friend. As we make our confession – for our negative and impure thoughts; for our hasty and sometimes cruel words; for our actions which have caused pain, hurt, and upset – we rely on the shed blood of Jesus for our forgiveness. Lord, in your mercy forgive us and renew us in our Christian walk.

Hear the words of Jesus 'your sins are forgiven'. Thanks be to God. Amen

Lord's Prayer: Our Father...

Readings: [Genesis 9: 8-17](#), [1 Peter 3.18-22](#) and [Mark 1.9-15](#)

Links will take you to the Bible Gateway website www.biblegateway.com

Reflection:

Noah lived through a period of God's judgement. The flood. Evil was destroyed. The righteous Noah lived and prospered. And a covenant was made with him, for all creation. The sign of this covenant was a rainbow. It is a sign that God will keep his promise. It is a sign of assurance, of hope. Noah was saved from the flood waters. Water was significant for Jesus, too, as our gospel reading shows. Jesus enters the water to be baptised by John. A baptism of repentance. But Jesus didn't need to repent. So why be baptised? For Jesus baptism was a moment of identification. He was human as well as divine, so he had to identify with the people around him. It was also a moment of approval from God.

Baptism is a form of covenant. The symbol of this covenant, for Jesus, is a dove. Why a dove? There is an allusion here, again, to the story of Noah, when after the flood had receded a dove came back to the ark carrying an olive branch. At his baptism the Spirit descended on Jesus, empowering him for the journey to come. The Spirit is said to descend like a dove, which we often think of as a gentle bird. Often it is seen to mean gentleness and peace. However, those who breed doves will tell you that they can be fierce when threatened. In this case the Spirit is said to have 'driven' Jesus into the desert. After such a momentous event as his baptism, the testing begins. Committing yourself to where the Spirit leads often 'drives' you to require courage. The Spirit of God is often referred to as gentle, but the Spirit can lead us on ways that we do not want to go. But if the Spirit goes with us, we have nothing to fear.

When we live in fear or sorrow, we often describe the days as being dark. Lent is a journey from darkness to light with the lengthening days. Right at the outset, in the darkness, God promises to be with us. And whenever we find ourselves in the darkness, we need to remember that. What we have learned in the good times, still applies when we are facing even the darkest of days. What did he promise? – his presence, comforting yet challenging. God made a covenant with Noah. God made a covenant through Jesus Christ. God also makes a covenant with us today. The sign for that covenant is the water of baptism. Christian baptism is always administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. From its earliest days the Church has believed that this sacrament was commanded by Christ as the divinely appointed means of initiation into the Christian community.

Baptism shows the love of God for all people, displayed in the self-giving of Jesus Christ, and demonstrates that Christ has won for us through his death and resurrection. Baptism makes plain that, before and without any response on our part, Christ died for us. Water

speaks to us of being washed clean and of making a new beginning. When Christ was baptised, it marked a new beginning. His work could now begin. God's offer of new life, through baptism, invites us respond, challenges us to discipleship and call us to the life of faith in the church and in the world. Such a life is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus had been driven into the wilderness of temptation by the devil or human will, could he have withstood the trial? No, I believe he would have failed and given in to the pressures of temptation. That might seem like a shocking statement, but when God came to earth in the form of Jesus, he laid aside his majesty. He came like one of us. At his baptism he was formally recognised as God's Son and given the presence and power of the Spirit, so when he was tempted, he could withstand. Hard though it was for Jesus, the devil could not defeat the Spirit of God. And the Spirit never left him during his time on earth.

In our own lives baptism or confirmation is not the end of the journey – merely the beginning. Baptismal promises, made so long ago, can be forgotten, or we think they don't apply anymore. In the Methodist Church we have an annual Covenant Service during which people renew their covenant relationship with God. The emphasis of the whole service is on God's readiness to enfold us in his generous love, not dependant on our deserving. Our response, also in love, springs with penitent joy from thankful recognition of God's grace. As this takes place every year, it is a constant renewal of our commitment as Christians. Christian discipleship is not a safe haven for those who want to run from responsibility. Signing up to God's covenant engages one in the life of the world at a deeper level. God constantly challenges our understanding of his love in a world that seems beautiful and blessed, yet full of contradictions.

Peter, in his letter, is encouraging Jewish Christians, driven from Jerusalem and scattered through Asia Minor. He refers to the covenant instituted by Christ on the cross, by which sins are forgiven and righteous people are brought to God. Righteousness is not simply good behaviour. It is to enter a covenant relationship with God and be prepared to keep your side of it, just as God will keep his. Peter sees in the story of the flood a prefiguring of the baptismal water, where the one baptised becomes united to Christ. We realise that despite our human weakness, God constantly renews and revitalises his covenant by forgiving sins and offering a life based on his covenant of love.

Peter's main message here is that Christ's sufferings led to a victory which could be proclaimed in every part of the universe. In baptism, Peter argued, we pass through judgement to new life, just as Noah did.

To live this new life, to face temptation, and to go on living in the power of the Spirit, we need to be able to benefit from times of silence, prayer, and contemplation. Lent is a time when we are encouraged to engage in this aspect of our spiritual development.

May God bless us as we journey, with Jesus, towards the cross, and prepare us for the new life which resurrection offers. Amen

Hymn: O Jesus I have promised (StF 563)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laKT4scxct0>

1. O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
not wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

2. O let me feel you near me;
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me, and within;
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

3. O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)

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Prayer of Intercession:

Lord God, through Noah you gave us the rainbow as a sign that you would never separate yourself from us again – and through Christ you gave us the cross as a sign of your everlasting mercy and grace. In these signs we recognise and acknowledge your love and how that love is present today to sustain us and guide us through each day. Truly in you we live, and move, and have our being. By you alone do we receive the strength and hope we need for each day. We thank you, Lord and we promise as your covenant people, to follow in your ways. Help us, we pray to do so.

Loving God – you promise to your people a full and abundant life in Christ. Sometimes in that life you call us into the wilderness – into those places where we must rely totally upon you for our survival. At other times your Spirit drives us into those places, and each time we have entered those places we have been tempted and tested – tempted to turn back, tempted to give up before the testing is over. Help us Lord, should this be a time in our lives when we feel alone, a time in which we may feel oppressed by the forces of evil, help us to claim the blessings that you have prepared for us in the middle of the wilderness – your presence, your strength, your mercy and grace. Lead us on our journey and bring us safe through into newness of life.

Lord, you are our strength. When the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us again through your Son, Jesus Christ,

As we have prayed for ourselves, so too we pray for those you have placed upon our hearts and minds this day. Bless, heal, and strengthen all whom we hold before you now....
(silence)

We pray to you, O God, through Jesus, our Friend, Saviour and Lord, he who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, both now and forever. Amen.

Hymn: Will you come and follow me? (StF 673)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N12iq7Jddrk>

1. Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let My love be shown,
Will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you,
And you in Me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare,
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let Me answer prayer
In you and you in Me?

3. Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you and you in Me?

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through My sight and touch and sound
In you and you in Me?

5. Lord, Your summons echoes true
When You but call my name.
Let me turn and follow You
And never be the same.
In Your company I'll go
Where Your love and footsteps show;
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In You and You in me.

John Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

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Closing Prayer:

Be sure of this – God in with you.

He loves you; he protects you, and holds you.

Go, in the power of the Spirit to love and serve God wherever he may lead you.

And the blessing of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, remain with you and with those you love,
for this day and forever more. Amen.

With thanks to Anne Lochhead for preparing this week's order of service.