**NORTH KENT METHODIST CIRCUIT SERVICE VIA ZOOM SUNDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2020**

PRE-SERVICE SONGS

I believe it is important to prepare ourselves for Worship. Of course, our whole lives are an Act of Worship. I used to have this opportunity when driving to my local Church or travelling to preach somewhere. The songs I have chosen are more suitable for personal Worship rather than collective Worship but should help to prepare our hearts to worship and adore our living God.

KING OF KINGS, MAJESTY

THE POTTERS HAND

PEACE LIKE A RIVER

A FEW MOMENTS OF QUIET REFLECTION BEFORE WE BEGIN

ORDER OF SERVICE

WELCOME

Good morning everyone.

Thank you for inviting me into your homes this morning to lead your Worship. When Tony Graff led our Worship in September, he mentioned (tongue in cheek), folk coming to worship in their pyjamas. This reminded me of when nearly 20 years ago, Richard and I used to take the evening Service at ESP Ladies` open prison, where I was a Chaplain, and the ladies used to come down in their pyjamas. Whatever next! Nothing would surprise us.

So come as we are.

VIDEO CLIP

CALL TO WORSHIP based on Isaiah 43:19 This is rather a God-incidence as I had chosen it and then found out that it is on our membership cards for this year.

See, I am doing a new thing!

I am making a way in the wilderness

It is not an easy road we are travelling on, but these words bring hope;

Our God is the way maker.

HYMN Bless the Lord O my Soul (10,000 reasons)

Our world has faced unprecedented levels of disruption recently. We are challenged as we are in a time of uncertainty, restrictions, pain and grief, as a result of the prolonged effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. The coronavirus has reminded us of our fragility. We are not in control of the universe as much as we thought we were and we need each other more than we realise we did.

REV LANSFORD PENN-TIMITY WRITES:

For some the past 7 months have been a time of adventure, exploration, and a time when the Church realized that she can handle change and thrive in new ways of being Church. Whatever the year has brought into your lives, it is history now. What will the months ahead bring I wonder? PAUSE How can God`s people experience spiritual renewal together? PAUSE

When Isaiah spoke those words we have just heard, the people were in captivity, they were going through some tough times. In that difficult place and time, God`s words through the prophet Isaiah to his people were this `I am doing a new thing`.

We are in a tough place, feeling the burden of grief, pain and strain brought by this pandemic, but perhaps God is saying to us as well `I am doing a new thing`. Let us then connect to the new thing God is doing.

Let us hope and pray for a better, brighter future.

PRAYERS OF PRAISE, CONFESSION AND THANKS

PRAYER OF PRAISE

Almighty and sovereign God,

We join together once more to worship you

Yours is the hand that shaped the universe.

Yours is the power that guides and controls the nations.

Yours is the love that moves and works through all things.

Yours is the purpose that has called us here,

That has redeemed us from our sins,

That has opened the way to life,

That has been most perfectly and wonderfully revealed in Christ.

Mighty God,

We worship you.

We offer you our praise.

We bring you our joyful thanksgiving.

We acknowledge you as Lord and master of our lives.

Come amongst us this day with new power,

Inspire us with new vision,

Fill us with new hope,

And send us out in your service with new purpose.

So we may truly live and work for you and your kingdom,

In the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious and Holy God,

We confess that we have sinned

Against you and against our neighbour.

Your spirit gives light,

But we have preferred darkness;

Your spirit gives wisdom,

But we have been foolish;

Your spirit gives power,

But we have trusted in our own strength.

For the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son,

Forgive our sins,

And enable us by your spirit

To serve you in joyful obedience,

To the glory of your name.

Amen

Jesus came into the world to save sinners

Hear the words of Grace

Our sins are forgiven

Amen

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Gracious God,

We thank you that we can know you for ourselves

Through the living presence of your Holy Spirit.

We thank you that, by your Spirit,

You meet our innermost needs,

Filling us with joy, peace, hope and power.

We celebrate the way you are moving in our lives,

Deepening our faith, enriching our experience,

Strengthening our commitment and enlarging our vision.

Help us to open our lives more fully to the presence of your Spirit,

So that we may know you better

And be equipped more fully,

To the glory of your name.

Amen.

Transition Richard to Eddie

HYMN Holy Spirit we welcome you

Transition Eddie to Richard

OT READING Ezekiel 37 : 1-14 N.I.V RV

Ezekiel 37:1-14

New International Version

**The Valley of Dry Bones**

***37****The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.****2****He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry.****3****He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”*

*I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”*

***4****Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!****5****This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel37%3A1-14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-21403a)*] enter you, and you will come to life.****6****I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”*

***7****So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone.****8****I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.*

***9****Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”****10****So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.*

***11****Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’****12****Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.****13****Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.****14****I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”*

***Transition Richard to Eddie***

SERMON 1

Today is Bible Sunday and I am mindful of how many people throughout the world do not have a Bible. My father-in-law was Chairman of the British and Foreign Bible Society for South East Asia in the 60s. He was responsible with his team of translating and distributing Bibles.

I went on a mission trip to Rwanda about 15 years ago. There was so much need and I couldn`t decide how to best help them. I witnessed extreme poverty, no medical facilities, insufficient housing etc. but I decided that the most worthwhile gift I could give them were Bibles. I managed to send out 150 translations on my return home.

We recently returned from the trip of a lifetime just before lockdown some 7 months ago. We had witnessed a great Methodist revival in the Churches of Northern Myanmar. We were inspired by their Worship, their Class System, the number of young people in the Churches and so many other things. We were raring to go!

Then lockdown came, what to do? No taking of Services for either of us, no Emmaus or Bible Study Groups, no Huddles, no Spiritual Directees for me. What was to become of us? Would we be like dry bones in the Ezekiel passage? PAUSE

SO after a lot of Prayer, reflection and talking together we decided to do something about it. We decided to keep the Sabbath holy, a thing we had never really done as we were normally preaching or doing a Church duty and then home to cook lunch and gardening etc. We now feel truly blessed to listen to the Radio Kent 8 a .m. Service, then the NKMC Service, then the MCHW Service and sometimes the Service from St. John`s Church, Yeovil, where we married. All this from our comfortable lounge and then we spend much time discussing the Services. Perhaps a walk in the glorious countryside later. Just resting and being in God`s presence.

What a great thing modern technology is. We do all our groups via zoom and most folk prefer it, particularly those who are hard of hearing. I have managed to do my Spiritual Direction via zoom and facetime. We also decided to start reading the Bible together daily in addition to my usual Study of the Lectionary. One of my Directees commented that she hoped we didn`t reach Revelation before lockdown finished. I wonder!?

We have grown in our Christian faith and closeness to God in this time and feel truly blessed. How great is our God?

Back to our passage from Ezekiel. We can learn many meaningful things from this inspiring passage of Scripture.

The book of Ezekiel was written by the prophet of the same name, which means `God will strengthen`. He was a Hebrew from the tribe of Levi and he prophesied between the years of 600 and 570 BC and was a contemporary of the prophet, Daniel.

Ezekiel is addressing the particular question ` Can these dry bones live`? - that is could a desiccated, dismembered and denuded Judah be restored?

At that time, the Babylonians had devastated Judah in 586BC, the Temple had been destroyed and most of the people had been exiled to Babylon. Many concluded that there was no future for God`s people. They said ` we have become old dry bones – all hope is gone. Our nation is finished (verse 11) The questions was whether God would perform a miracle for the dry bones, which were Israel, and raise them to new life.

The prophet answered this question with a resounding YES. God would return his people to life with an outpouring of his Spirit in response to the prophet`s word. He promised that in the future he would give his people life by his Spirit and would transform them into a new creation.

What God wants us to learn from this story is that NOTHING is too hard for Him. What may appear hopeless and dead to you and me is a field full of possibilities for the Lord. It is a message that he can revive his people and turn them into a mighty army to serve the Him.

Ezekiel also speaks to us individually. No matter how dried up and worthless we may feel, or how sinful we perceive ourselves to be, God can restore us to life through his Word and Spirit. These dry bones represent people. If a person does not have Jesus, his bones are bleached, white and dry. Spiritually speaking, he has no life.

When God`s people speak the truth, it is going to cause a rattling. Things are going to happen. Sometimes it brings revival. At other times it causes opposition or persecution.

In verse 10, Ezekiel says ` So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet – a great army. God gives us spiritual life and as we come to the Lord, He breathes into us the breath of life. Zechariah 4:6 says ` Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit.`

Ezekiel 37 : 1 -14 is a wonderful vision of hope. It is an amazing message that God`s word and His Spirit can bring life to any situation and to any person, no matter how utterly dead and hopeless things may seem.

As a Church, God can revive us and make us an army of Spirit filled people who will expand His Kingdom. However, we need to understand that even if our Churches are shut and in lockdown, the buildings we gather in to worship God is not the Church, but we as individuals according to 1 Peter 2 :5. ` And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. What`s more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God`.

We, as Christians, are the only religion that carries our Temples around with us, so lockdown cannot prevent our continued Worship to our loving God, as we heartily join in the singing of the hymns, songs and prayers in our various homes, as we unite together and connect to worship our God every Sunday. What the devil meant for bad, God, in His enabling spiritual powers, has turned these online Services into good, by making them so successful, with the addition of a whole new community joining us.

IN CONCLUSION

Ezekiel tell us that God would give his people in the future, life by his Spirit and would transform them into a new creation, a new Spirit filled Israel. This new people of God would be raised to their feet as a mighty army that would serve the Lord. THAT IS US TODAY!

HYMN An army of ordinary people

***Transition to Richard***

NT READING Acts 2 : 14-21 N.I.V. RV

Acts 2:14-21

New International Version

***Peter Addresses the Crowd***

***14****Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.****15****These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!****16****No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

***17****“‘In the last days, God says,
    I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
    your young men will see visions,
    your old men will dream dreams.****18****Even on my servants, both men and women,
    I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
    and they will prophesy.****19****I will show wonders in the heavens above
    and signs on the earth below,
    blood and fire and billows of smoke.****20****The sun will be turned to darkness
    and the moon to blood
    before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.****21****And everyone who calls
    on the name of the Lord will be saved.’[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts2%3A14-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26971a)*]*

***Transition to Eddie***

SERMON 2

A number of years ago, I attended a Christian Listeners` Course at Larkfield which was run by Marie-Anne Kent, whom I think many of you will remember. I remember one session well when we were asked to close our eyes and think for a few minutes about where we would sit in Church and why. I had great difficulty in doing this. Then I had this Vision that I was out the front of the Church on the street, in my case Union Street, and was drawing many people inside from the streets. It was a wonderful vision but sadly hasn`t happened. We will hear more later about dreams and visions.

The passage we heard is the first of about 30 speeches in Acts and one of the most important, standing as it does at the very inception of the Church. It is unlikely that it is a word for word record of what was said but it should be regarded as Luke`s own summary.

The prophet Joel had preached about 800 years earlier. Joel prophesied to the people of Judah and Jerusalem in the midst of a catastrophe that threatened their very existence which is rather like the situation we find ourselves in today. On the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Peter declared that Joel`s prophecy was being fulfilled, signalling that the last days had arrived. Joel 2:28 is one of the greatest statements in the Bible. This is how God ignites kingdom life in His people. He pours out His Spirit on them and they are never the same again. When God promises to pour out His Spirit, it is more than a trickle. It is more like a flood into the human heart. We cannot do this ourselves and nor can the Church. This is God doing only what He can do. We must each go individually to God for this outpouring, and He will come to us with the power of His Spirit. Unless, that happens we will never be changed – we will be like dry bones. When that does happen, we will never be the same again.

 When the Holy Spirit came upon the early disciples, they began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them, declaring the Lord`s greatness, but all heard them speaking in their own language. Some scoffing onlookers thought they were drunk, but Peter said that was impossible since it was only 9 a.m.. Peter then gave them the words of the prophet Joel.

We cannot understand Joel 2 and Acts 2 apart from God`s great purpose to empower his people with the Spirit so they will take the gospel to the ends of the earth. God never pours out his Spirit simply for the purpose of entertaining us or to cause strange emotional manifestations. Those things may happen on occasions. God pours out his Spirit so that we will be bold witnesses for Christ starting where we are and going `to the ends of the earth`.

What Moses wished for,

What Joel predicted,

What Peter explained,

Is now available to every believer.

In 1 Corinthians 12 : 4-11 , Paul tells us how every member of the Body of Christ has been given some spiritual gift that is an evidence of the Spirit`s working in their lives. All the gifts are intended to build up the members of the Christian community. Not everyone has the same gift or all of the gifts but all are given for the common good.

When I was on Retreat last year and wondering what God had in mind for my life, I was encouraged by the Retreat leaders to make a list of gifts that I felt I had been given. I divided my life into decades and found this was a most fruitful experience. For the first almost 4 decades I didn`t know the Lord but I was fortunate to have been given gifts by my parents - strong moral values ( I had a Victorian granny living with us for 25 years), a sense of always striving to do my best, to help and encourage others and many other things. So often we undertake jobs in our Churches because there is no-one else to do them, but is this a valid reason for doing something which you are not suited to? PAUSE I think over the last 20 years I have done every role and made a right mess of some of them. If I had only listened to God. Imagine how we could build our Churches up if we all used our Spiritual gifts. PAUSE

DR. RAY PRITCHARD SAYS THIS:

The Holy Spirit does not discriminate. We are the ones who discriminate. We have our little groups and we tend to stay in those groups. We hang out with people who are like us in one way or another. We tend to associate with those who think like us, act like us, talk like us, walk like us etc. We divide ourselves by age, race, language, culture, housing, ethnic origin etc. We divide and then we divide again.

God isn`t like that. He is no respecter of persons. He doesn`t discriminate on the basis of sex `your sons and daughters will prophesy`. He doesn`t discriminate on the basis of age: `your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions`. He doesn`t discriminate on the basis of social class ` even on my servants ...I will pour out my Spirit`

God will be friends with anyone who wants to be friends with him. And when it comes to pouring out his Spirit, he doesn`t favour the rich or the famous. He is perfectly willing to pour out his spirit on the poorest of the poor. God doesn’t have favourites.

 The fact that young people get turned off by the Church is a good sign that the Holy Spirit is at work. It is a good thing when they come to Church, look around, and then say `We could do better than this`. That`s part of the vision that God gives to every new generation. They understand that the Church belongs to the people, not to the leaders, and that the true work of ministry belongs to the people themselves.

God also says that old men will dream dreams. They dream because their work on earth is almost done, and because they aren`t afraid to die, they are now free to dream big dreams of what God might do after they are gone. As men and women pass their 70th year and move towards 75 then 80 then 85, they are increasingly freed of the earthly burdens they carried for so many decades. That freedom gives birth to big dreams from the Lord. It is good to be around old men and women who dream dreams because they keep others from settling into the rut of mediocrity.

If you want to find the real action in the Church today, you need to go out to the generational edges – to the young and to the old. They have visions and dreams of what God wants to do through his Church.

So what visions and dreams do Richard and I, the oldies have? We have adopted the MWOL and this is our calling as Methodists. We attended a Webinar recently and sadly only 1 other from North Kent was there. We need to live out our Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism and be accountable to one another and to God. We are using the MWOL in our small groups and in our lives.

Another vehicle for Church revival is the Walk to Emmaus which trains us to be leaders and empowers us to take on new responsibilities in the Church. We have seen this so many times in our Circuit. People in their 70s becoming Street Pastors, taking on the role of Stewards, helping with children and young people and I could go on. This Walk empowers and affirms people. I went on my Walk over 12 years ago and it is the most wonderful 72 hour experience I have ever had and we have had over 30 of our Circuit go on this Walk- not a physical one of course! There are both Ladies` and Mens` Walks next year.

 We need the energy of the young and the faith of the old if the Church is to be all God wants it to be in the 21st century. These dreams and visions of Joel 2 and Acts 2 are not given by God simply for our personal enjoyment or in order to make us feel closer to God. In the Bible, God gave dreams and visions at crucial moments in history in order to advance his cause on earth. The dreams and visions we need today are not about how to be successful in our world of materialism, but how we can shake the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. We want a world where truth, justice and peace prevail and it is our duty to uphold these kingdom values in our community and wider world. When God`s Spirit is poured out, the result will be a Church filled with passion, enthusiasm and enormous spiritual power. God will ignite kingdom passion in every heart.

We WANT to be part of that. We don`t want to be left on the sidelines watching the action on the field. In the midst of trouble, moral decline, and our current pandemic God still says `I will pour out my Spirit in the last days`.

HYMN O breath of life come sweeping through us.

***Transition to Richard***

*PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION RV*

*We are called to respond to the gospel of Gods love in Christ and to live out our discipleship in Worship and Mission.*

*Lets now pray for all people everywhere according to their need.*

***Let us Pray***

***Gracious God we pray for the Body of Christ*** *throughout the world. For all your people united together in Church and who come together this day to celebrate your Love and to claim your Kingdom right now.*

*We pray for our Ministers to know of our love for them and to know the inspiration of your Spirit as they serve you in this new situation.*

*We pray for the fulfilment of our Mission to bring your Love to every person we meet and to prepare the people of these times for the glory of your Kingdom here on earth.*

*Our Gracious God -* ***May you be praised for ever and ever***

***Gracious God we pray for the Nations of the world*** *and especially for their leaders in these times of the pandemic which is causing upset to people far and wide.*

*We pray for our Political Leaders and for the Leaders of the civil service and all who serve the Nation for the Good of your people.*

*We pray they may be all blessed with the Wisdom and decision making ability of King Solomon and that from these times of sadness and deprivation may the seeds of prosperity and health, justice and peace, freedom and prosperity for all people be sown.*

*Our Gracious God -* ***May you be praised for ever and ever***

***Gracious God We pray for those we know and Love.*** *We pray for our local communities, our families and friends, for our neighbours.*

*We pray for all who suffer, for the sick, for those who our mourning the loss of a loved one, for those without faith, for those who serve those in need.*

*We pray by name those we hold dear in these difficult times in a moment of silence.*

***Silence***

*We pray you will give them comfort and healing in their hearts and minds and spirit. Give them courage and hope in the days ahead and bring them the joy of your salvation.*

*Gracious God We remember in silence those who have died, those we know and love and those who have died for the faith of Christ.*

***Silence***

*We commend all people to your unfailing love,*

*That in them your will be fulfilled, and we rejoice at the faithful witness of your Saints throughout history praying that we may share with them in your eternal kingdom.*

*Our Gracious God -* ***May you be praised for ever and ever***

***Gracious God – May we be a blessing within and beyond your Church for the transformation of the world – accept these prayers for the sake of your Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ. AMEN***

***Normally we would offer our Gifts to God now, so let us do that.***

*We give in many ways but in these strange times we are able to make gifts of money through our Banks and these gifts are vitally important right now, if you have been unable to find ways of giving and you feel the call to do so please contact a Minister or Steward or a friend as soon as you can, for we know the Lord uses these gifts to support our Ministers and to further the work of the Kingdom in this time. We also use our own personal gifts and skills in many ways to serve people who are in need and we offer these to God too.*

***Let us pray***

*Gracious God - We pray you will accept these gifts made in your Love*

*We pray you will encourage us to practise hospitality and generosity, that you will give us the courage to challenge injustice wherever we see it, that you will give us your spirit to empower us to speak of the Love of God to whoever we meet or communicate with.*

*Lord breathe on these dry bones that we may live again in your name.*

*We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,* ***Amen***

***Now we say the Lords Prayer together in whichever language you choose, and whichever is your preferred version. I will be using the traditional words.***

*LORDS PRAYER RV*

*Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that 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.*

***Transition to Eddie***

HYMN O Thou who camest from above

CLOSING PRAYER EV

Loving Lord,

Help us to be open each day

To the prompting of your Holy Spirit

That we may think, speak and work for you

Using the gifts you have so generously bestowed on us

To share your love with all

who we come into contact with.

In Jesus` name. Amen

BLESSING

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you;

Let him lead you each day into the quiet places

Of your heart, where he will speak with you;

Know that he loves you and watches over you,

That he listens to you in gentle understanding,

That he is with you always,

Wherever you are and however you may feel.

And the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Be ours for ever and ever.

Amen.

SHARE THE GRACE TOGETHER