

Jan 3, 2021 – Covenant/Confirmation – circuit online

Call to worship

Great is thy faithfulness – StF 51

- 1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*
- 2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Prayer – Methodist Worship Book, 282ff

Let us pray.

Glory to the Father, the God of love,
who created us;
who continually preserves and sustains us;
who has loved us with an everlasting love,
and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory
in the face of Jesus Christ.

Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour,
who, though he was rich,
yet for our sake became poor,
and was tested in every way as we are,
yet without sin;
who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,
and was obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross;
who was raised from the dead and is alive for ever,
and has opened the kingdom of heaven
to all who trust in him;
who is seated at God's right hand in glory,
and will come to be our judge.

Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us;
whose wisdom teaches us;
whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

Blessèd be God for ever.

To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be praise and glory for ever. **Amen.**

SILENCE

Collect

God of grace,
through the mediation of your Son,
you call us into a new covenant.
Help us therefore to draw near with faith
and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Deuteronomy 29: 10-15 (Bill Wallis)

You stand assembled today, all of you, before the LORD your God—
the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials,
all the men of Israel, your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp,
both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water—
to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, sworn by an oath,
which the LORD your God is making with you today;
in order that he may establish you today as his people,
and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors,
to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.
I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath,
not only with you who stand here with us today before the LORD our God,
but also with those who are not here with us today.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Laurel Townend)

The days are surely coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—
a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.
But 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.

Meditation – Rev Pickard

Each year we celebrate Covenant Sunday at the beginning of the year –

It's a bit like a New Year's celebration

An annual reminder, a kind of annual taking-stock

of where we are now and where God needs us to be.

At the beginning of this particular year

We're even more eager than usual to hope

this new year will be better than the past one!

In a time of unease and disruption,

A time when we feel we've been separated from loved ones for so long,

It's good to have our rituals, our ways of reconnecting with each other

Even if we can't do this in person.

Our rituals, such as Covenant Service, with familiar words and patterns

Remind us that there is a certain order to the world

Remind us that God is still our God

That we are still God's people,

Encouraged and entrusted to do what is Good and Right and True.

The fact that we're sharing in this Covenant Service from our own homes

Might bring it new meaning this year,

As the separations of what we do at home or work or worship are all erased.

For many of us, a single location is where all our life takes place.

We can no longer leave 'church things', like Covenant promises,

In a particular building on Sunday

But Covenant promises become part of our everyday life.

In the Jeremiah reading, God's promises are to be 'written on our hearts'

The Jewish people had the promises painted above the doors of their houses

To remind them of God's presence in their everyday lives:

That daily, ordinary lives are to be sacred;

The homes where we eat and sleep and wash and work

And play and read and watch tv and phone friends and send emails

Are to be the places where we encounter God at work with us

The places where God has work for each of us to do on behalf of God's kingdom.

Each year I'm drawn to the Deuteronomy text,

Particularly the part about God calling us to be in community

With "the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials,

all the men of Israel, your children, and your women..."

In the year we've just finished, when we haven't been able to 'stand together' with each other

Physically and in person,

We've learned other ways of being community:

Many of us have been particularly aware of the need to reach out

to those of our congregations who are particularly isolated during the pandemic,

and that has been important – for some it has even been life-saving,

recognising and meeting needs that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

We have learned to phone each other more regularly

Even as we've learned to zoom and chat to faces on screens.

We've recognised again that 'community' doesn't just happen by accident.

It takes intent; it takes effort.
The Deuteronomy text also goes on to widen that understanding of community
To include ‘the aliens who are in your camp,
both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water’.
I’ve often thought about how that has meant the people who perform services for us
That enable our daily lives to continue smoothly
Often with little awareness on our part that they are there...
At the beginning of the first Lockdown,
We were coming out on Thursdays to clap for the NHS staff,
And, in the process, some of us began to meet our neighbours...
But the Covenant readings today challenge us to think about
How we must continue to value the others who work on behalf of us all,
Often with very little thanks or even recognition.
Delivery drivers, staff who work at home or behind the scenes to keep things going.
Those who have continued to show up for work when most of us have stayed at home.
Teachers who are never sure whether they’ll be teaching in person or online...

There has also been the question of how we might ‘reach out’ to our communities
When our buildings are shut.
Certainly our buildings are important for ‘us’,
And, to some extent, for what they mean to our communities
But perhaps the pandemic has made us more aware that we can’t just rely
On our bricks and mortar to be ‘the Christian presence’.
The Jeremiah reading reminds us that God’s covenant
needs to be ‘written on our hearts.’
The Romans reading, which we’ll hear later,
Speaks of offering up our physical bodies as a ‘living sacrifice.’
Indeed, in times when these scriptures were written,
The emphasis was not on gathered worship in a building
As much as it was on how we each lived our lives wherever we were.

Over the past 9-10 months, I’ve had several calls through phone or email
with folks who were previously connected with the church
but haven’t darkened its doors for years or decades.
They’ve called because some how they still wanted to be in touch,
For some, because the pandemic has made them realise
they needed to reconnect with a worshipping/fellowshipping community –
In some cases the pandemic had removed the previous excuse of
‘going to church right now just isn’t convenient’
They have perhaps felt God moving in their lives
And they wanted to be part of that community again.
I wonder if we who are ‘in the community’ have felt the same urge to reconnect?
If not, why?
If so, what have we done about it?
Might this year’s Covenant remind us of our responsibility to reach out?

Our Methodist Connexion is encouraging us to personally consider
What’s now known as the ‘Methodist Way of Life’ –
A simple set of questions that we are to engage with on a regular basis:
Questions about how Worship: when and how we have recently felt close to –

Or far away from – God...
Questions about Learning and Caring: how we've practiced generosity,
Or how we're taking care of ourself in difficult times...
Questions about Service: caring for creation, addressing injustice,
using our financial resources wisely
Questions about Evangelism: how we find opportunities – even in lockdown! –
To share our faith with others....
In all these areas, many have noted that God has been at work during this pandemic—
And often in ways that perhaps we were too busy previously to notice...

Often, it's in our times of gathering together – in whatever ways we can,
That we can remind each other of how God is at work.
The Methodist Way of Life indeed encourages us to regularly meet with others
To support each other, to hold each other accountable...
During the past year, many such groups have popped up around the circuit –
Prayer groups, study groups, discussion groups – online or phone or post.
If you haven't found or joined one of these yet,
ask your minister for suggestions of what might work for you.

In closing this meditation today, I want to share a 'pandemic blessing'
That's come to Union Street in the shape of a person
Who took it upon herself to reach out –
She was new to Maidstone, having moved in to a flat near Union Street for work
at the beginning of the first lockdown... not knowing anyone in the town!
As she passed by the church on her way to her new job,
She noted it was a Methodist church,
And she took it upon herself to find a way to be in touch.
Amy has since been a regular attender at our online services
And the After-Church Chats,
and has even gone through a Membership Class on zoom.
Amy and I have never met in person, but she will be confirmed as a Methodist
Later in this morning's service.
If you had told me this story a year ago, I might not have believed you,
But God is bigger than our understandings of how things must be
And braver than our comfortable habits
And ever willing to lead us on to new and daring ways
To be a people in Covenant with Godself, with our congregations,
With all those in our communities.

As we each separately and all together – as a circuit! – join in the Covenant today,
We each must consider again: To what is God calling each of us?
What God-given talents and gifts are we to use for God's work?
What new ways of working and being and connecting are we to use?
What new things is God doing in our midst?
How best might we share that with others?

As we've seen time and again: Our God is not limited by a pandemic:
Our God is alive and well and working in our midst:
Our God has work for us to do as well.
Working together, Good will continue to triumph over Evil.
The Covenant, and our part in it, is as essential as ever.

Covenant Intro and Confessions – MW 285-6

Let us pray.

God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sins.

For the sin that has made us slow to learn from Christ,
reluctant to follow him,
and afraid to bear the cross:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has caused the poverty of our worship,
the formality and selfishness of our prayers,
our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace,
and our hesitating witness for Christ:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gifts,
evade our responsibilities,
and fail to be good stewards of your creation:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

For the sin that has made us unwilling to overcome evil with good,
tolerant of injustice,
quick to condemn,
and selfish in sharing your love with others:

Lord, have mercy,
Lord, forgive.

Silence

**Have mercy on me, O God,
in your constant love;
in the fullness of your mercy
blot out my offences.
Wash away all my guilt,
and cleanse me from my sin.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Give me the joy of your help again
and strengthen me with a willing spirit.**

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just,
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Therefore to all who truly repent
this is his gracious word:
'Your sins are forgiven'.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters,
By the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God –
what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Colours Of Day-- StF 167

- 1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we meet.
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

- 2 Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.

- 3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

Confirmation of Amy Evans – MW 97

THE DECLARATION

Sisters and brothers,
by grace,
through the sign and seal of Baptism,
and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
we become God's people, the Church.
In Confirmation we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit
that we may remain in Christ for ever
as his faithful servants and witnesses.

Let us pray.

Living God,
may all who are baptized into Christ
be sustained by the Holy Spirit,
that through lives of faith and love
your grace may be known
and your name honoured;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE REQUEST FOR CONFIRMATION

The minister says

Amy
at your Baptism into Christ,
God offered you the gifts of his grace
and has constantly been at work in your life.
In this moment
God offers to strengthen you by his Spirit
and invites you to respond.

Answer: I thank God, and ask to be confirmed.

Amy personal testimony

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

The minister says to the candidate

Do you turn away from evil and all that denies God?

Answer: By the grace of God, I do.

Do you turn to God,
trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,
and in the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide?

Answer: By the grace of God, I do.

The minister says to everyone

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son?

**I believe in Jesus Christ,
God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again,
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

THE CONFIRMATION

The minister says:

By your power and grace, Lord,
strengthen this your servant,
that she may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.
Increase in ther your gifts of grace,
and fill her with your Holy Spirit:
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding;
the Spirit of discernment and inner strength;
the Spirit of knowledge, holiness, and awe.

Lord, confirm your servant Amy by your Holy Spirit
that she may continue yours for ever. Amen.

THE RECEPTION AND WELCOME

The minister says

Amy
we receive and welcome you
as a member of the Methodist Church,
and of the church in this place.

Welcome by Laurel Townend (Senior Steward, Union Street)

THE PROMISES OF THOSE NEWLY-CONFIRMED

The minister says to those newly-confirmed:

Amy
I ask you now to respond to God's love and grace
by making these promises.

Will you commit yourself to the Christian life of worship and service, and be open to the
renewing power of God?

Answer: With God's help I will.

Will you seek the strength of God's Spirit as you accept the cost of following Jesus Christ in
your daily life?

Answer: With God's help I will.

Will you witness, by word and deed, to the good news of God in Christ, and so bring glory to
God?

Answer: With God's help I will.

THE PROMISE OF THE PEOPLE

The minister says to the people:

Members of the body of Christ, we rejoice that these, our sisters, has been confirmed.

Will you so maintain the Church's life of worship and service that shemay grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord?

With God's help we will.

PRESENTATION

The minister says:

Let us pray.

**Generous God,
touch us again
with the fire of your Spirit
and renew in us all
the grace of our Baptism;
that we may profess the one true faith
and live in love and unity
with all who are baptized into Christ. Amen.**

Come, let us use the Grace Divine – StF 549 (MW 287)

- 1 Come, let us use the grace divine,
and all, with one accord,
in a perpetual covenant join
ourselves to Christ the Lord:
- 2 Give up ourselves, through Jesu's power,
his name to glorify;
and promise, in this sacred hour,
for God to live and die.
- 3 The covenant we this moment make
be ever kept in mind:
we will no more our God forsake,
or cast his words behind.
- 4 We never will throw off his fear
who hears our solemn vow;
and if thou art well pleased to hear,
come down, and meet us now.
- 5 To each the covenant blood apply,
which takes our sins away;
and register our names on high,
and keep us to that day.

Covenant Prayer – MW 287-9

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
let us again accept our place within this covenant
which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples.

This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit,
we accept God's purpose for us,
and the call to love and serve God
in all our life and work.

Christ has many services to be done:
some are easy, others are difficult;
some bring honour, others bring reproach;
some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests,
others are contrary to both;
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves;
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.
Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore let us make this covenant of God our own.
Let us give ourselves to him,
trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God,
in your faithful and enduring love
you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ.
In obedience we hear and accept your commands;
in love we seek to do your perfect will;
with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.
We are no longer our own but yours.

**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 bless'ed 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.**

Intercessions – MW 290-1

As we have entered this covenant not for ourselves alone, but as God's servants and witnesses, let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church:
make us all one, that the world may believe.

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world:
establish justice and peace among all people.

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief or trouble:
deliver them from their distress.

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory:
bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray in silence for our own needs and for those of others . . .

Silence

Lord our God,
you have helped us by your grace
to make these prayers,
and you have promised through Christ our Lord
that when two or three agree in his name
you will grant what they ask.
Answer now your servants' prayers
according to their needs;
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.

O Thou Who Camest – StF 564

- 1 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!
- 2 There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.
- 3 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 --
- 4 Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

Benediction

The blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon *you/us* and remain with *you/us* for ever. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.