



North Kent Methodist Circuit

Circuit News and Preaching Plan



inside...

WORSHIP – THE QUESTION TO ASK?
JOE CARPENTER & SON
BEARSTED MARKS 200 YEARS
OF METHODISM

Issue Five
February 2018

Worship...

As Richard and I have been thinking through this issue's topic of **Worship**, we have had in mind both the worship we do as congregations and as individuals. There is a long Christian tradition of seeking to make everything we do an act of worship to our great and generous God. But when most of us think about worship, we think of what happens in our church on Sunday morning (or evening). Over recent years, that concept has been expanded to include prayer meetings, retreats, Messy Church, and many other mid-week activities. It's good to keep expanding our vision!

The crunch for congregational worship comes when we have disagreements about what should/should not be included in our worship. There is a fine balance to be struck between the comfort of our tradition and the challenge of experiencing new forms and styles. If it's all comfortable, we can get stuck in a meaningless rut. If it's all challenging, we can feel overwhelmed and alienated. I suspect that within our circuit we could find preferences for a very wide range of comfortable and challenging ways to worship. None will be perfect for all of us.

The real essence of worship is that our thoughts and actions are directed

towards God and God's will for each of us in our daily lives. Worship, then, is about being in God's presence and offering ourselves to God. Is our worship pleasing to God? Does it bring us closer to God? Does it bring us closer to each other? Does it inspire us to new thoughts and actions and commitments?

Our circuit is blessed with a large number of ministers and preachers who give us a wide variety of congregational worship experiences each week. In this issue, we are exploring a few of those and how they help us grow closer to God and each other.

Bonni-Belle

Worship – the question to ask?

Our relationship with God is why we are disciples. If we do not recognise a wonderful feeling of joy when we are in his presence then our whole lives are a darkened room. So often I encounter a question from people who may or may not be members of our church. The question is phrased something like this: I accept the teaching of Jesus about the sort of persons we should be, but am I a Christian if I do not believe in God?

I usually respond with another question: "Who is this God in whom you do not believe?" Inevitably we get into a very deep discussion. The point however is that the first ingredient of worship is a deep and loving belief in God. One which is unshakeable and to which we are prepared to commit ourselves wholeheartedly.

This belief and love of God is in our hearts, it dominates our thoughts, it colours every word we offer and it drives

every action and desire. It causes us to ask, "How can we know you, God? What would you have me do?" His reply is always "Put your faith in my son Jesus. Have his mind as your mind, live as one of his disciples. Follow him." This is how we know God's presence in our lives and how we feel his presence.

So how do we make others aware of the presence of God. They see it in our worship of him, in our daily lives, in the sort of person we become in Jesus, by our prayers, by our Bible study, by our reading, by our words, by our actions, but also when we come together as small groups as missional communities and together as congregations on Sundays.

Worship with zeal!

But what else do we need to enhance our worship? One word: zeal. A dictionary definition of zeal is "great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective".

Many years ago I was being trained to be a presenter of my company to clients. Having done a trial run I asked my trainer what was lacking. He replied "energy and enthusiasm". I responded with another question: "How do I put energy and enthusiasm into my talk?" He replied, "Well, you could try acting energetically and enthusiastically."

As a preacher I often feel a distinct lack of enthusiasm present in our worship. People avoid making eye contact, smiles are absent. Eyes can close, and the interaction between people sitting close by is not apparent.

Imagine a visitor wondering about faith coming into your worship – what would they think? We Local Preachers and Worship Leaders have much to do but if everyone would work with us, in their personal worship and in their community worship, then God will make himself known to one and all.

Richard Vincent

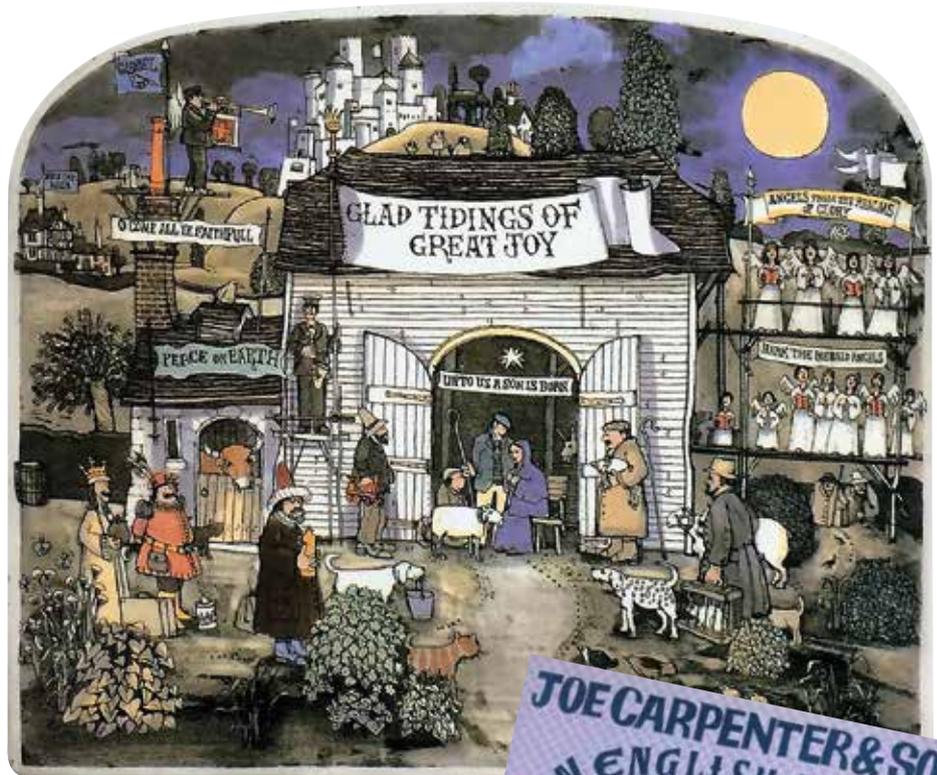
Joe Carpenter & Son

A postman named Gabriel sporting angel wings as he delivers his heavenly messages on a bicycle; a dancing camel named Humphrey; a bossy landlady at the Royal Star pub; King Herod spilling fag ash on his vest as he receives foreign guests enquiring of a royal birth – all these and more were the delightful characters encountered in Union Street's production of Joe Carpenter & Son: An English Nativity this past December.

The original script came from a book published by Graham Clarke which Bonni-Belle encountered some years ago when she first came to England. Moving to Maidstone, she was intrigued to find that the author/illustrator lived just a few miles away! The church stewards and worship team went to visit Graham one afternoon in his studio in early autumn and came away with performance rights and Graham's blessings to our own production.

The decision was made early on to limit this production to one day of rehearsals followed by a single Sunday performance. There were two goals: (1) provide the congregation with an opportunity to work together on an intergenerational project and (2) attract a local audience of those who might know Graham Clarke's work but not usually attend a church. Put another way, our goals were to (1) have fun, and (2) to tell the Nativity story in a way that would connect with normal life in Kent.

We're pleased to say we met our goals! Approximately 60 people were involved in either performance or production roles, including several from the margins of the congregation. Our rehearsals started at 9am on the Saturday and continued until about 3.30 in the afternoon. Prior to the rehearsal day, several had worked with others to produce basic costumes and props, programmes and fliers, refreshments, and rehearsal schedules. The Union Street congregation did five minute rehearsals of the final chorus on several preceding Sunday mornings, so we



could all sing along with "Peace be with you friend and brother, peace be yours and peace be mine". In the process, we all learned more about each other – including several hidden talents!

Another 60 were in the audience for the performance and happily joined us for tea and cakes afterwards. It was remarked that hearing the Nativity story as it might be set in Kent, with Kentish accents and costumes and props made us realise again: God in Jesus has come to live amongst us! That's Good News!

Bonni-Belle



No dissenters?

Bearsted Methodist Church celebrates 200 years of Methodism in the village

“There are now no dissenters; there were some who had an irregular meetinghouse, but they are gone.” So reported the Vicar of Thurnham to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1806.

His self-satisfaction was short lived for by 1818 the Methodists in the village had raised sufficient funds to build a small chapel on a plot of land in what became known as Chapel Lane. No trace of that chapel remains; it was poorly built and by the 1870s barely usable. In 1877 the chapel trustees took the opportunity to acquire land at the junction of Ware Street with Hog Hill and the following year the chapel in which we still worship was opened.

This year we will celebrate having maintained a Methodist presence in the village for 200 years. The focus of our celebrations will be events to be held in May and June including a Flower Festival and a HymnFest as well as an exhibition reflecting on our heritage in the village. Our Church Anniversary will be a special occasion; the Rev David Gilman has accepted an invitation to lead our worship.

While anniversaries are properly a time for celebrating the past, we are confident that God has a future for us in Bearsted. As part of our looking forward the Church Council has agreed to a programme of refurbishment of the premises. We are going to replace the worn out chairs in the church, upgrade the lighting throughout the whole of the church buildings and install new signage outside the premises. This is Project 200.



Project 200 will refurbish and refresh the internal facilities of the church and ancillary rooms and modernise a key aspect of our visual external communication. Underpinning the Project is our belief that while it is good for the church to celebrate its history it is more important to make a statement about looking forward to our continued involvement in proclaiming the word of God in the village and offering a place for worship, social engagement and action.

The church premises are well maintained and in good condition both internally and externally. Project 200 will build on the work undertaken in recent years which has seen improved access for people

with disabilities, the installation of central heating throughout the premises and the upgrade of the audio visual facilities by the acquisition of a modern sound system and data projection equipment.

Fundraising for the project is going well, but as part of our ongoing fundraising we have arranged a Quiz Night which will be held on 10 February 2018 (teams of eight welcome!) and there will be the opportunity to enter a Hymn Quiz later in the spring.

We look forward to seeing many of you at one or more of the events we have planned.

Roger Byard

A Meditation on Creeds

What is a Creed?
Does it replace Mystery?
What is my Mystery?
What is my Creed?

If I say “I believe,” do I believe?
What do I believe?
What does it mean to believe?
Is it to belong?

“*God sets the lonely in families.*”
(PS 68:6)

He’s given me a family.
Is it to receive?

“*Delight yourself in the Lord and he will
give you the desire of your heart.*”
(PS 37:4)

Is He the desire of my heart?

Is God my Father?
I am a child.
Am I His child?

Is Jesus my Saviour?
I need a Saviour.
Save me.

What is the Holy Spirit?
I need a Comforter.
I need a Guide.
I need the Truth

I don’t believe my need.
I know my need

Exploring the Need for a Creed

While in training as a local preacher on the pilot programme of the new Worship: Leading and Preaching course, we students were invited to consider the use of creeds and to break off into groups to develop and write our own creed. For me, this proved quite challenging as it required a change in mindset, from reciting a fixed set of received tenets to examining what I actually believed and trying to express that in a clear and concise way.

I have been through some dark and traumatic life experiences which enabled me somehow to find and connect with God within those experiences. For that I’m grateful because I experienced the

reality of God and that reality has been fundamental in my spiritual growth and in allowing and accepting further challenges. Also, since beginning my journey towards local preaching, I have done a lot of reading which has challenged the foundations of my faith in quite profound ways. At first, I found this quite disturbing because it felt as if my faith hadn’t been based on anything solid and was easily undermined. However, I have since learned to welcome this kind of challenge as it seems to me that a faith which can’t be challenged is no faith at all. If faith is to be solid and worth something, then it will survive the challenge and grow.

Examples of this kind of challenge are the scholarly essays within Laymon, C.M. (ed) (1971) covering things as diverse as how the various texts of the Bible came to be written and brought together into a canon and questioning whether it is valid to call it the word of God. Other challenges have come from reading the works of Geza Vermes, searching for the historical Jesus and exploring the development of the early church, or James Tabor (2012), who argues that Christianity as we know it is entirely the invention of the apostle Paul in opposition to the Jerusalem apostles. These things have shaken my preconceptions, or at least have allowed me to question and reappraise the basic ideas or illusions I hold. Jamieson (2007) describes this as the difference between a pre-critical and post-critical faith, where ‘pre-critical’ would be the unquestioned acceptance of ideas, assumptions and practices and ‘post-critical’ describes a faith that has been tested (Wesley would say ‘proved’), the difference being as striking as that between a caterpillar and a butterfly, hence the title of his book, *Chrysalis*.

The creeds which we have inherited from the early Church attempt to put into a concise form of words that which they had learned to believe. Some such as the Apostles’ Creed are models of brevity, laying out accepted common beliefs, while others like the Nicene Creed are more involved and address technical questions arising from differing views about Christ’s

incarnation. So creeds differ in their purpose, construction and use, from counteracting heresy and laying out the basic doctrines of our collective faith, to a liturgy for use in worship or as a teaching aid in catechism.

With these things in mind, it was difficult to write something new which hasn’t already been expressed somewhere else. I attempted to simply write the things I believe – not the unquestioned things, but the things I have come to view as being true.

I’ve included my original creed, written during the study group, raw, incomplete and unrefined, which I then worked up into a meditation, subsequently submitting it as a piece of coursework.

My creed

I believe in God above. The Father, the creator, over all, in all and through all.

I believe in God with us, Jesus Christ, his Son; author and perfecter of our faith, who willingly sacrificed himself for us and was raised on the third day to the right hand of God. Who, for his obedience, God has put all things under his feet.

I believe in God within. The Holy Spirit, who was with God in the beginning, sent by the Father and the Son. The comforter, reminder, teacher and guide who leads us into all truth. Who knows the mind of God and makes it known to us and by his work transforms us and makes us holy.

I believe God sets the lonely in families and has given us the blessing and sacrament of the Church to fulfil his promises in the world and to make his great name known among the nations.

Mystery... I believe in God, the beginning and end of all that is; Creator, Spirit and Saviour. Revealed in Jesus Christ.

Ian Sturt

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Disciples who can make disciples

Over the weekend of 27 to 29 October, 19 disciples of Jesus from around the Circuit came together to discern whether Jesus was calling each of us to travel together on a journey of discipling. Well, the Lord spoke unto us with clarity and 14 of us have responded to his call to show our zeal for his mission for us. Four decided not to go further at this time after listening and praying about what is right for them. We are grateful they came and saw for themselves. God bless them in their own journey.

So what is the call? It's to become disciples who can be catalysts to others – "to become disciples who can make disciples". This for us was a most important understanding of the call of Jesus. Many of us like to think we are already disciples of Jesus. How can we define that name? John Wesley put it like this:

"(having) the mind that was in Christ; the image of God stamped upon the heart; inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God; and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Amazing words that on first reading seem unachievable! But read them again and again and they become something to desire, a clear goal for my personal life in Christ. But...and it's a big but... Jesus asked for more: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). As Bonni-Belle has told me on occasions, that's a big challenge, but we can start with the UK and North Kent and the area where we live and our church and our families and friends and even ourselves. You see, it's not just heart and mind but our voices and our actions too. It's the whole life of a disciple. Many of us may not yet be ready for all that it means but we have heard his call which is worth repeating: "to become disciples who can make disciples". We will only see this happen if we intentionally dedicate ourselves to the John Wesley description of what being a disciple of Jesus is. It will be

Christ who will bring the Glory of God to be visible in the fruit that will be a consequence of this work.

The North Kent Circuit starts a new journey

You, the members of the Methodist Church in North Kent, have invested £15,000 so far in year one of this Methodist Missional Community Training and Development Initiative. We, those of us engaged in the training huddles,

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations"

(Matt 28:19)

are committed to making sure that you are able to see and know that your trust in us is bearing fruit. We expect to see fruit in two ways. The first is through an ever-increasing number of disciples who can make disciples and the second is in the number of Methodist Missional Communities which are led by a small number of "disciples who can make disciples." You will see we are reporting on two New Missional Communities elsewhere in this newsletter. Many of us are Local Preachers and Worship Leaders who care passionately about the Kingdom of Heaven right here in our circuit of churches.

God in Christ is at work in us all and we shall reap the harvest. Praise the Lord!

We are already working on the second year of the Learning Community which will require further funding from the membership and this will be the subject of a submission to the Circuit Meeting next year. Please continue to pray for us and if you feel again the call, then please make yourself known to us,

Richard Vincent



Another parable for today from the garden...

A gardener planted potatoes in his vegetable patch. They grew well and produced a good harvest which was good for the winter months. He tried to find all the potatoes, even the small ones that were left in the ground. Then he allowed the ground to rest over the winter and prepared to plant his new crop of vegetables. As the season progressed, he noticed that a lot of potatoes were growing where the new plants were. He couldn't pull them out or dig them up or he would have damaged the new crop, so he left them where they were. They grew together.

The new crop was harvested in due course and the potatoes were left until they were ready to dig up. When he lifted them, he discovered that they had grown where potatoes had been left in the soil. They had been small but the crop which emerged from the ground was amazing. Some of tubers were the largest potatoes he had even grown: enough to feed three or four people from one tuber. There were three baskets full. He still wished he could have got all the small potatoes out of the ground!

Those who have ears to hear let them hear...

Vic Downs

Maidstone does...

“Can Methodists do Messy?”

It's a question I've heard from time to time. The congregations at Union Street, Bearsted, and Tonbridge Road have all been trying their hand at Messy Church endeavours recently, and the answer is “YES!”

Union Street has been doing Messy Church for a few years now, attracting a good number of primary school-age children for afternoons of crafts and stories and fun during the school holidays. In the traditional Messy Church pattern, the sessions are centred on a theme, usually a Bible story or festival. Church members contribute their time and effort – and food! In the summer months, the activities can take place on the front lawn; in the colder months, the church halls are ringing with laughter and chatter.

Last year, Union Street decided to try a Messy Breakfast on the first Saturday of each month, providing a cooked breakfast along with intergenerational craft opportunities. After some months, we realised that our Messy Breakfasts were particularly attracting men, either older men without families or younger dads who only saw their children on the weekend and needed a place to go. We've been working on how best to meet the special needs of these and to include them in our church community.

This year Union Street is going a step further in trying to connect the people



who attend Messy Church and Messy Breakfast with our Sunday morning congregation. In our trial, we're having a Messy Sunday once a month, combining a cooked breakfast with a service that includes activities aimed at intergenerational engagement. So far we've had a Pet Service which included dogs, guinea pigs, and a snake; a Messy Moses service complete with Lego characters in a sandy 'desert' depicting Moses' journey; a service on 'how to prepare for the coming chaos/Christmas' which kick-started our congregation's preparations for preparing and presenting Graham Clarke's Joe Carpenter & Son: An English Nativity, and a Christingle service! In each of these, we've found ourselves with a few new faces in our

midst and learning more about how God works with us in our 'messiness'.

Bearsted had its debut Messy Christmas in December after several months of considering how best to establish links between the congregation and the children of the village. Parcelling out the various jobs and roles amongst the congregation and distributing leaflets through doors and at the schools resulted in a warm and friendly afternoon, much enjoyed by all. Some Messy Churches are noisy affairs; Bearsted's was gentle and cosy. Our members and the children enjoyed special conversations while playing with toys, cutting and sticking crafts, and then sitting at tables to enjoy shepherd's pie and Angel Delight. The children also listened carefully to stories being told. Hugs all around when it was time to leave!

Tonbridge Road also had its first Messy Christmas this year with several local children and their families showing up on a cold Saturday afternoon. Plenty of warmth and activity greeted them with crafts adapted from the long-running Brigades that continue weekly at the church and a 'chocolate' version of the Christmas Nativity story! All in all, the Methodist churches in Maidstone have found "Messy" to be a valuable tool for reconnecting with our community.

Bonni-Belle



Missional Community Report

What is a Missional Community?

Well, we describe it as a group of five or six disciples who together with their friends and families build a community of 12 to 50 people in which they can be Methodists on Mission. The theme of the community will be set by the disciples themselves and they will see it as their calling to make disciples of all nations. The hub of the community is the disciples and their families and through their example, worship and love for their fellow humans will lead people of peace to know Jesus Christ for themselves.

We already have across the Circuit many Methodist Communities and if you are a part of one please make yourself known to me as we want to be able to help you to share your success and your difficulties.

I know that around the Circuit there are quite a few people who did Huddle with Simon Curry and if you are someone who has already done Huddle then we would like to know you too.

My email is
richard.vincent1@btinternet.com.

Ebbsfleet

As you know we are starting to create a Missional Community to work across the Ebbsfleet and Swanscombe area of our Circuit. Bart Woodhouse is leading the community and together with people from Swanscombe, the Beacon and the Revd Dr Gary Watt the serious work is beginning. Bart is leading the community in continuous prayer and at every opportunity is calling on others to join him in prayer for this new community. I know he is listening to the Lord for direction and power. Please join with us in praying as powerfully and as often as you can. Bart knows that it will be through prayer that Jesus's power will be felt and his love made known to the new Ebbsfleet Community. If you want to be involved please contact Bart or the Circuit Office.

Lower Stoke

John Stunell and Trish Robb along with the Revd Kan Yu have started a new

Missional Community around our little village church building in Lower Stoke. They have called together people from the Diocese of Rochester, RBLI, Carers First, wHoo Cares, Medway Health Walks, Medway Neurological Network and Medway Dementia Action Alliance and they are starting a Drop In Café which will initially be open once a month to serve the people who live in the area.

Who knows where it will lead, but we are not afraid to fail. Trish, John and friends are pushing the boat out in order to go fishing. When they put down their nets who will be surprised if the catch is amazing. And there is always the other side of the boat if it's needed.

John and Trish, we are all praying for you and if you need anything please call us. That's what the "Connexion" is here for. If you want to know more please contact John or Trish through the Circuit Office.

The wonder of Walking to Emmaus with Jesus

Eddie Vincent is the Leader of a Missional Community that runs at weekends called "Walk to Emmaus". The Missional Community is made up of 12 people living all over the South East of England. They work together just to arrange the weekends. 23 Methodists from our Circuit have been on a weekend. Each weekend always has a team of three ordained ministers, nearly always Methodist, who lead us spiritually and a number of lay people who also play a part in the weekends. Just a few days ago I wrote the following for our Walk to Emmaus Community News Letter:

"I was pondering on the South-East Walk to Emmaus database just before Christmas and wondering what I was missing, when Jesus interrupted my thoughts. He said to me, "Richard, look how many names you have on the database." I looked and saw 345 names, I have no idea over what time span they had completed the Walk to Emmaus nor can I say it is a complete list because I am sure that over the years some will have not been recorded and some will have been taken off.

However, we know that 345 Christian folk at least have experienced the love of Jesus Christ over the three days of an Emmaus Weekend and that their lives will have changed irrevocably as a result of knowing that love. I began to wonder what the impact has been on the world. You cannot release almost 350 people into the world without the world noticing.

You see, Jesus is so powerful, he works without us even knowing. Just through the weekends that we organise, he changes lives and the world. How great is our God. Sometimes when we feel we are pushing water uphill, when the mess that can sometimes seem to be our own community is bearing down on us – praise Jesus for his great power and his marvellous love.

That's what we celebrate and every time we walk together it's the beginning of a new phase, a time of peace, love and freedom. Let's celebrate in true Methodist fashion and tell the world of his wonderful love for us.

Want to know more: contact Eddie Vincent through the Circuit Office.

In Conclusion

We want this Missional Community Report to be a regular feature of our News Letter. We want every Methodist Missional Community in Kent to share their hearts with us in the Connexion. Together we are strong. Being alone is difficult and stressful. Please tell us who you are and what you are doing in the name of Jesus. Together in the name of Jesus Christ we can make a difference.

Richard Vincent

For the next issue:

For the Summer 2018 issue of Circuit News, we will be focussing on the work with Children and Young People in our circuit. If you've got stories or challenges to share with us, please send them to the Circuit Office by 28 March, remembering to include your contact details.