

==ORDER OF SERVICE==
August 7th 2022 – Bonni-Belle Pickard

Call to worship and intro – BBP

God beyond all dreams – StF 496

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Htrmq0g_Nk

Prayer -- BBP

Psalm 139 – David Hitch reading

O God, you search me, and you know me – StF 728

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_ErLmtR0VI&t=183s

Interview with Krysia and Margaret (recorded)

Empty, Broken, Here I Stand, Kyrie Eleison – StF421

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdl3F5N_Wdc&t=159s

Talk about making our churches accessible --

Torch Trust – Sight Loss Friendly Churches -

Prayer of intercession – written by David Rees

Let us build a house – StF 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhPnjA7wsIY&t=6s>

Benediction -- BBP

Welcome to the worship service of the N Kent Methodist Circuit.
My name is Bonni-Belle Pickard, and I'm the superintendent of this circuit.

Today we gather to worship the God who knows and cares for each of us –
Whatever our limitations, whatever our circumstances, whatever our struggles.

Our worship today will focus on some of the struggles we face
With bodies that aren't quite what others consider 'normal',
And yet these are the bodies God has given us to live in and with –
So we look for the blessings in our circumstances.

I don't mean to say that our struggles are always joyful!
Our scriptures, particularly the Psalms, are full of laments,
Taking God to task for allowing us to be in situations
Which seem rather unfair.

But our God is also one who creates and celebrates in diversity –
So that what we might call 'normal' is just one of the varieties!
And our God is the Creator who loves all that has been created,
And challenges us to do the same.

And so we worship today the boundless diversity of who God is
And who God has made us to be....

[Sing: God beyond all dreams]

Prayer –

God who sees beyond the darkness and the light,
God who hears beyond the silence and the screaming,
God who knows our names yet forgives and forgets our shortcomings,
Be with us today.

God who exists beyond the scope of the cosmos
Yet knows our innermost thoughts,
God who made us each unique yet calls us to be one,
God whose heart is full of compassion
And yearns for us, made in God's own image,
To have our own hearts overflowing with love as well,
Come and be with us. Amen.

Interview with Margaret Bowerman and Krysia Waldock

Briefly describe your condition and how it affects your ability to function in a church setting.

Are there 'hidden' parts of your condition that others might not readily recognise?

Jesus asks: 'What do you want me to do for you?'

What would make the church setting easier for you to manage?

How does your condition make you more aware of God's presence?

What would you like other church folk to know about your experience with God?

Meditation

“As each has received a gift, [so each should] use it to serve one another,
As good stewards of God’s varied grace.” 1 Peter 4:10

I came across this quote recently, when I was looking for resources for this service –

Over the past year or so, several of my online services
Have focused on how we in the church can better reflect God’s inclusive nature:

In preparing these – on a wide variety of topics,

From how we deal with those with dementia,
Or situations of homelessness and poverty
Or racism and immigration issues...

Generally considering how best we can include all God’s people and their needs

Into the community of care that we know as the Church.

This is not just an exercise in how we can be yet another provider of social care,

But it speaks to our Christian faith –

Our understanding that God has made each of us unique

That God loves each of us in our uniqueness

And that God desires for us to model that inclusive love and respect and care

in our Church and in our daily lives:

Valuing each other’s uniqueness

Protecting each other’s vulnerabilities

Celebrating our diversity.

How our hearts can be full of God’s compassion...

This verse about each of us having a gift that we can use ‘to serve one another’

Leads us to look more deeply at ourselves and each other

To better understand what gifts God has given us.

I say that today, because in talking and thinking about ‘disability’,

It’s too easy to focus on what we might think of being ‘wrong’ with us,

Rather than focusing on who each of us are and what we have to contribute.

In that sense, it’s probably more helpful to talk about our ‘diversity’.

Even then, when we talked about what makes us 'diverse',
Our human tendency is to think of 'different' as threatening or even
'evil'.

Perhaps we could even say that is part of our 'original sin' as humans –
To think of our own selves as 'normal'
And everyone else's difference as a threat.
But Jesus showed us that God thinks differently.

As we heard in Psalm 139, God has carefully knit each of us together
In our mothers' wombs –
That we are each wonderfully and fearfully made.
We heard in our conversations with Margaret and Krysia
That sometimes the different ways we are made – each still 'wonderful'
in some way.
But that might mean that we experience life – including life in the church –
differently.
For some of us, that 'difference' is referred to in terms of 'disability'

With any term that starts from a negative perspective – as in *DIS ability*
It's often helpful to try to think of it from a positive perspective –
Perhaps as a 'different' ability.

And yet, the term 'disability' is with us, even in law, as in:
"The Equality Act 2010 defines a person with disability
as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which is
substantial
and has a long-term adverse effect on his or her ability
to carry out normal day-to-day activities"

That's the definition used in the Methodist Equality, Diversity, and
Inclusion toolkit –
And it's interesting to see that it speaks of 'normal' activities...
There again, it's useful to consider what is 'normal' and who decides what
'normal' is!

In our discussion with Krysia, she referred to things being done in the
'traditional' way
As I've travelled from country to country, circuit to circuit, church to
church,
I noticed that every place has its own 'traditions'! Its own
'normal'.

Perhaps the essential question for us is to consider who our traditions, our 'normal',

Include... And who is excluded...

Surely we hear frequently from those who can't hear what the preacher's saying!

Or understand the 'accent'...

We hear from those who struggle to kneel at the communion rail...

Or getting up from chairs without arms –

All legitimate complaints recognizing our bodies are not all the same!

Sometimes our 'disabilities' are from growing older

and our senses not quite responding as they used to

Our hands not able to hold the heavy hymn books

Our eyes not able to see the screen...

Or perhaps we've found ourselves temporarily 'disabled'

By an illness or accident –

Or perhaps we've had a bereavement or a traumatic experience or just extra stress

That has disabled our usual ability to 'be ourselves'...

Those become disabilities that exclude us from full participation –

And can they give us an insight into conditions that others have long struggled with –

It's a bit sobering to realise that perhaps those who struggle most are not with us

Simply because the struggle was too hard...

If so, that realization can be a *gift* for us...

If I asked you to list the various types of disability or impairments,

You might come up with loss of vision or hearing.

Margaret has pointed out that a large percentage of us wear glasses...

Without which we wouldn't be able to live a 'normal' life...

But not all impairments can be 'corrected', but we can find ways to accommodate them.

Margaret reminded us of limitations to being able to move around easily.

Krysia helped us understand a bit more about our varying neurological conditions.

Many of us are becoming more aware of learning difficulties such as dyslexia

As we realise these conditions might be more common than we

previously knew.

Mental health problems are also becoming more readily known about

And accepted as common in our daily lives.

We're also reminded that often it's not the impairments that are disabling

But the environment that is set up without various needs in mind –

Or with attitudes from 'able-bodied' persons that the disability doesn't really matter.

It does matter. Each person matters to God,

And God seeks for us all to be in community with each other,

So each person must matter to us as well.

And since many of 'disabling' conditions are 'invisible',

We need to continue to educate ourselves

In order to be aware of the different ways each of us experience life...

Now sometimes our eagerness to be 'aware' can lead us to jump to conclusions:

Some of you will know that my husband, Alfred, and I sometimes provide 'boarding'

For Guide Dogs in training –

That is, while the dogs are being trained to serve as Guide Dogs for persons with sight loss,

They live with us in our home.

They go to 'doggy school' in the daytime,

And stay with us at night and on the weekends.

There are specific protocols for how the dogs are to be fed and cared for,

Even how they are to be walked...

When they are out, they have to be identifiable with the Guide Dog logos, etc.

One day, while walking our guide dog in training,

I realized that the workmen down the street

were suddenly jumping out of the way as the dog and I approached –

I thought this was a bit peculiar,

But as I got closer, I realized they thought I was blind
and they wanted to give me plenty of room!

I was grateful for their consideration, even if it was misinformed...

It got me thinking more about how we make assumptions about the needs of others...

I've also learned from my brother-in-law -- who's been in a wheelchair for 40 years

After breaking his back in an accident --
I've learned that it's usually best to ask a disabled person what kind of help they need

Rather than just assume.

Indeed, if being aware is the starting point, then finding out how to respond is next.

How do we do this? We really don't want to be interviewing every person

As they come through the front door

To find out what their disability might be and what help they need...

We've been advised that perhaps some of those already in our congregation with disabilities

Might be the best ones to conduct our church accessibility audits

Steps, handrails, signage, lighting, etc...

Practical ways their 'disability' can be a gift to our congregation and others.

There are also some charities that can help us to make our churches

Places of welcome for persons with all sorts of abilities....

'Through the Roof' is a charity that helps churches better understand how to accommodate

Physical disabilities.

The name 'Through the Roof' comes from the story about Jesus' friends

Lowering their paralysed friend down 'through the roof'

To where Jesus was so that he could be healed.

Recently I've found a charity which help persons with sight loss, especially in the church.

The charity is called Torch Trust, and they provide a wide variety of helpful tools and advice:

Churches can become 'Sight Loss Friendly Churches'!

The Torch Trust reminds us that 'sight loss' doesn't necessarily mean 'blind',

And that 20% of us will experience sight loss during our lifetime,

The charity has also found that nearly half of blind or partially sighted persons

Feel 'moderately' or 'completely' cut off from people and things around them.

For a Church, that means that our 'community' is not whole!

To better understand what developing sight loss might be like,

The charity suggests some activities to help the 'normal' folk understand:

Cover your eyeglasses with cling film: can you read the screen or the hymnbook?

Try filling communion glasses with your eyes covered

Try counting the collection with your eyes covered

And yet, there are so many things that people with sight loss CAN do –

They can often ‘hear’ things in our voices that others might miss.

They have often learned much patience

And there is so much more they can do if we take the time and effort to do small things –

To help with the things that cause those with sight loss to struggle,

The Torch Trust translates the Bible and many books into Braille

Or VERY Large Print (30pt+ !)

This include the Alpha and York courses

And our hymnbook, *Singing the Faith*, is available in braille.

It will translate other books into large print and braille if requested

The Torch Trust provides a Bible Player on a USB stick for audio

It gives advice on pastoral care and use of technology

Including making notice sheets accessible to persons with sight loss.

Maybe your church is already doing this –

If so – or if you’d like to start doing these things –

Your church can become an official Sight Loss Friendly Church,

And the Torch Trust also has ways to signpost this

so that outsiders so that they know your church is Sight Loss Friendly.

As I was putting together this service,

I realized that I haven’t been proactive enough in seeking out the gifts

Of those in my congregation whose bodies are experiencing things differently.

I confess that my thoughts have usually gone to asking the ‘normal’ ones...

So this time, I tried to think of how others could contribute.

David Rees is a long-time and faithful member of Union Street

Who has had sight loss for most of his life.

I asked David if he would prepare the prayers of intercession for us.

He agreed, and he wrote a lovely prayer –

But he insisted that he NOT be the one to deliver, to speak, the prayer –

He pointed out that, for the disabled person,

It's better to hear the words coming from a 'normal' person –
It gives the prayer more emphasis, because it shows the 'normal' one
has heard...

I don't know that I'm 'normal'!, but I am grateful for David's insight:

That his prayer is his gift, but it might be too easy to disregard his prayer

If we think of it only as the prayer of a disabled person –

Indeed, it is a deep prayer that needs to be valued and shared by us all:

Intercessions – written by David Rees

Our Father God, we are living in troubled times
when wars, floods, drought and fire
are causing so much pain and change to people's lives.
We pray for people's understanding for those who are suffering
mentally and physically in any way.
So often we don't think before speaking with and trying to help disabled
people.
Because of lack of thought, disabled people are often made to feel inferior.
Communication is so important.

We thank you Lord for so much progress in technology
which enables many disabled people to take part in day to day living.
Dear Lord, help us all to accept whatever situations we find ourselves in
and to offer a loving hand to all.
So often Lord we are too busy with our own lives
to remember other people's situations and difficulties.
We thank you that you never forget,
and we pray that all may be assured of your constant love and strength.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
They will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory.
Now and forever, Amen.

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Our final hymn is one that Margaret Bowerman has chosen:

‘Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live’
And let this ‘house’ be not just our churches but all the places where we find
ourselves

Living with all God’s children.

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May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us ALL, now and forever. Amen,