

Aug 2, 26 – last online service for BBP

Pre-service

We will walk with God – StF 484 [Porlarbreeze Remake Ai V2 Intro5 Us 16 9](#)

We are marching – StF 483 [We Are Marching in the Light of God \(Siyahamba\) \[with lyrics for congregations\]](#)

[You Shall Go Out with Joy \(Tune: Trees of the Field\) \[with lyrics for congregations\]](#)

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Intro and call to worship: GMT20260719-09075 from Start to 2.11, 2.32 to 8.03

PPT slide from 1.16-1.47

The world belongs to God,

The earth and all its people.

How good it is, how wonderful,

To live together in unity.

Love and faith come together,

Justice and peace join hands.

If Christ's disciples keep silent,

These stones would shout aloud.

Open our lips, O God,

And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

StF 462 Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world

[YG 85639 72014 WO EN tch VDN Vid Res 1920x1080](#)

Reflections on leaving and on living with others GMT20260719-09075 from 8.10 to 18.57

Genesis 32: 22-31

Because you came and sat amongst us [64 more voices because you came](#)

Confessions and forgiveness GMT20260719-09075 from 19.11 to 38.09

[When We are Living, We are in the Lord \(Singing the Faith 485 / StF 485\)](#)

Letting go litany GMT20260719-09075 from 38.20 to 42.46

PPT Slide from 38.36 to 39.39

Lord's Prayer -- PPT Slide from 39.40 to 40.21

Prayers of gratitude – PPT slide from 40.22 to 41.16

Psalm 121 (no slide)

The Blessing [YG 85639 72014 WO EN tch VDN Vid Res 1920x1080](#)

Over the past few weeks, I've had several farewell services and gatherings –
And it's been heart-warming to receive well wishes and prayers from so many!
As I prepare this last online service, I'm reminded again that the changes we face
Are not just me leaving and getting used to a new place
But those of you who are staying will also be getting used to a new reality.

I have an image in my head of many years ago when the pastor of our church in India
Retired and moved away.
He and his wife had lived in a cottage that I passed by every time I walked
From our house to the school where we worked.
The front window of their sitting room was right next to the foot path,
So for several years, I had grown accustomed to seeing their chairs and side table,
And sometimes waving to them as they were sitting in the space...
And then suddenly, one day we waved farewell to them,
As they and all their belongings were packed away in cars and trucks
That took them to their new place.
All that was left in the house was a lone shoe, which someone had left in the front window.

I remember walking past that house for many weeks after and seeing that shoe.
Where was its mate? Why was it left behind?
It seemed so lost and lonely, and sometimes seeing it actually brought a tear to my eye!
I realised that somehow I felt like that shoe as well –
Without the other bit that made me useful.
Somehow forgotten and left behind...

Eventually another family moved into the house,
And the house breathed again
And the left-behind shoe disappeared.

I lift up that story because it reminds me of how we are all interconnected.
And our frequent changes of ministers in the Methodist Church
Means we're often trying to redefine ourselves and our relationships
And our roles and purposes.

The service liturgy I've chosen for this service uses several elements
Of the Leaving Service from the Iona Community.
Many of you will know the Iona Community is a 'dispersed' community –
That is, only a few members of the Community actually live in Iona full time.
Most go back for a week or so each year,
But they live most of their lives in their homes,
Working out their purposes where they are, yet united by a common mission:
To meet people where they are and accompany them on their journey
With God.

The Iona Community also invites guests to be part of the community
On the Isle of Iona, usually for a week at a time.
During that week, the guests will live and eat together,
Do household chores together,
Worship and take walks together,
Enjoy guest speakers and Wee Sings and ceilidhs,
Sometimes just spend time on their own...

In the process, they, too, become part of Iona, and Iona become part of them.

On Friday mornings each week, there is a special Leaving Service in the Abbey,
With a liturgy that recognises the time they have spent together
And the relationships that have emerged,
And the Spirit and new resolves that will accompany each
After the parting.

It recognises that some will be moving on – and others staying.

That is also a part of what I want to mark with today's service –
I will be leaving, many of you will remain, and others will be coming to join us.

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In a moment, we'll be singing the song by John Bell (of Iona Community!)

Entitled, 'Come with me, come wander';

It speaks of how God keeps encouraging us to be on the move –

Not always physically, but in the sense of always being on the lookout

For where God is at work and needs us to jump on board

I hope you'll enjoy singing it with me.

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'Come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch,

And find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much."

And then that last line: "Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets."

I've moved house many times – 26, to be precise...

And I've learned the importance of leaving in peace.

I've often observed people who knew within themselves that it was time to move on,

But they didn't know how to do it well,

And so they felt they had to make a 'clean break'

By having a 'good reason' to leave...

And somehow, that 'good reason' was that they couldn't live with 'those people' anymore.

In a way, that's what we do when we leave home for the first time:

We recognise our circumstances have changed,

We are no longer, for instance, the child who needs nurture,

But the young adult who needs to leave the safety of the nest

And learn to fly on our own.

Some have the idea they can only do that because of anger –

I *have* to leave because this situation is no longer tolerable.

I remember when one of our young adult sons had finished university

And was living at home again but sensing a need to move out.

He was usually quite easy to live with,

But over recent weeks, he had become more difficult –

Moody, withdrawn, lashing out at times.

Suddenly at one dinner time, he announced he was moving out the following week

To live with a friend in their flat in London.

Alfred and I were thrilled for him!

But he was afraid we'd be angry that he was challenging our home situation –

We assured him it was fine for him to move on.

We would miss him, but he had to live on his own now.

And so we gave him our blessing, and we helped him move on,
And we all grew a bit in our understanding of our relationship.

Today's scripture reading was in the lectionary,
And while it might seem a bit strange for this 'last' service,
I think it actually helps us consider our own situation of relationship
And the beginnings and endings which mark the same.

The story is about Jacob, the younger brother of Isaac and Rebecca,
Younger than his brother Esau by only a few minutes,
But that made all the difference in the ancient Hebrew society
Where the eldest son inherited all –
While the youngest was left to struggle.
Jacob's name means 'the Trickster', and indeed playing tricks seems to be the main way
That Jacob had made his way in the world!

We've heard the story about how Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright
With a bowl of porridge...
And the enmity that grew between them.
As the story progressed, Jacob had to move far away to find a wife
And his livelihood,
But he did, and he prospered... and at some point, he decided to go back home –
But, of course, that could be dangerous, because he hadn't left on good terms...
In the verses surrounding this scripture passage, we realise he was still very nervous
About how his meeting with his brother would go...
In any case, he packs up his livelihood and his family,
And they begin to move on... we pick up the story at the River Jabbok...

Genesis 32: 22-31

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children,
and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.
He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.
Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.
When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket;
and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.
Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.'
But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.'
So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.'
Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,
for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.'
Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.'
But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?'
And there he blessed him.
So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying,
'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'
The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Wrestling with God in the everyday business of life and ministry –
Facing up to the difficult questions of who we are
And who we are in relationship to God and others...
And wrestling hard with those realities – and sometimes finding ourselves wounded!
And yet, in the struggling we also find ourselves blessed.
And sometimes the blessings are seen most clearly through the limping.

Recently I read a book by Lamorna Ash which speaks of a huge granite sculpture
Of Jacob and the angel wrestling –
And how the sculpture almost seems to depict their wrestling
As an embrace...
The love that allows us to wrestle deeply within ourselves and our relationships.

Indeed, perhaps this passage reminds us that the blessings we receive
Come from the times when we face up directly
With the relationship challenges around us.
And sometimes, that involves confessing to ourselves and to God and to others
Where we have failed, where we need forgiveness, where we need to forgive.

There's a hymn entitled 'Because you came and sat beside us' by Shirley Erena Murray,
A Methodist/Presbyterian woman from New Zealand who died a few years ago.
Her hymn reminds us that God has shown us *in person* the importance of good relationships
And how forgiving and being forgiven are part of that –
We listen now as we consider any relationships that need mending.

Confessions and forgiveness

For the wounds we have caused others -- forgiveness
For the wounds others have inflicted upon us -- forgiveness
For the things we have done which we should not have done
And the things we have not done which we should have done – forgiveness
For the times we lost sight of your vision
Or ignored your dreaming within us –
For the times when we did not believe your promises to us
Forgive.

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I want to reflect a little more deeply on the relationships around us –
And the struggles they conceal – or reveal – about each of us.

I remember a dear saintly woman in one of my previous churches
Who said to me one day, “Bonni-Belle, I’ve realised everybody’s got their problems.”

I remember a friend who had spent some time in prison
where he’d gone through extensive peer-led rehabilitation
recognising that so many of their collective offences
had been caused by deep troubles that ran below the surface.

One day in their group therapy session, one made the comment:
“We were getting along OK until we got caught.”

A moment later another said quietly, “Actually, we were getting along,
But we weren’t OK. We were just keeping up the right appearances.
It took getting caught to make us work through all that.”

I’ve often shared the analogy of the church as a rock tumbler –
The kind that takes rough stones and rocks
And whirls them around with each other at high speed over long periods –
Until they finally have all their rough edges rubbed off
And they emerge as gems.
Sometimes we pretend like a church is a jewellery shop –
Where everything has to look bright and shiny and perfect all the time.
But the most effective churches are the ones where we’re allowed to go in rough –
And we’re allowed to rub against each other
Until we all become gems...

When I spoke of the rock tumbler idea with a colleague recently,
He mentioned that some ‘rocks’ were too soft to survive the tumbler...
Which made me think that we need to be aware of the vulnerabilities of each other...
Not pushing anyone further than they can safely go at that point.

As I reflect on my 25 years of ministry in the British Methodist Church,
I realise that the kind of ministry that has lasted the longest
Is that which I’ve done with folks on the margins...
With those who might be considered ‘soft’ or vulnerable –
Which, sadly, our society often targets for the most attack, or the most neglect...
Folks on the margin – often with immigrant groups –
Here in N Kent, it’s been the Chinese coming from Hong Kong;
In my previous circuit, it was the Koreans.
Before that it was the youth group which consisted almost entirely
Of teenage lads of African descent.
Before that, it was a Sri Lankan couple
who had attended the church for 40 years,
But no one in the congregation had taken the trouble to learn their names.
It’s been persons with physical or mental disabilities.
It’s been gay or transgendered persons.
It’s been those who were desperately poor or even homeless.
There was an Iranian man with mental health problems that caused him to hallucinate.
I realised over the years of meeting with him that he’d been trafficked into the UK.

It took many years of patiently hearing his outlandish stories of paranoia
And gently trying to steer him back to reality
While still letting him know he was a valuable person
That finally led him to realise for himself that he needed help –
Which he finally got – and which changed him into a vibrant person.
There was a young Ghanaian woman who struggled enormously with her mental health –
And after many years – indeed, at least a decade – of keeping in touch,
She was finally able to get the help she needed –
Because she knew somebody believed in here.

Sometimes the ones who are ‘different’ than ourselves are the hardest to be around.
Sometimes the ones who are like us are hard to be around
Because they remind us of the difficult parts of ourselves...
Sometimes we’re repelled by the ‘noise’ and bluster of the loud ones –
Who perhaps haven’t learned to be gentle
because they haven’t been loved in a gentle way.
Sometimes we overlooked those who are quiet and keep to themselves,
Sometimes because they haven’t yet found their voice –
Or no one has stopped to listen carefully to what they’re not saying.

We can think of the apostle Paul, who, by several accounts,
was not very easy to get on with in person!
And yet he peppers his letters heavily with admonitions about loving each other.
And he ends nearly all his letters with words about grace and peace...
He ends his second letter to the Corinthians with these words:
“Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.
Put things in order, listen to my appeal,
Agree with one another, live in peace,
And the God of love and peace will be with you.
...The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

Is it any surprise that this comes at the *end* of Paul’s letter?
Or that he’s often writing back to churches with which he’s been in relationship,
Reflecting on how to reconcile those relationships?

I spoke a few moments ago about working with those on the margins –
But, even those many of us might find ourselves not so much ‘on the margins’
And maybe even a bit resentful of those ‘on the margins’
who seem to be getting preferential treatment!
Sometimes that can be a prompt to reconsider: ‘Why do I think I’m entitled to this?’
Of course, none of us really like to struggle –
And the easiest response is to find someone to blame...
As I mentioned earlier, my older friend who reminded me,
“Everybody’s got their problems”
Perhaps God is asking us to think more deeply about
what God needs us to do with our struggles – how we need to heal.

I remember when I was training for ordained ministry,
I was required to go for counselling on a weekly basis – for three full years!

I remember thinking at the beginning – when I didn't know it would be three years –
what possibly could I talk about with a counsellor?
I felt I was doing pretty well with life –
I'd been through a lot, but I'd coped with a lot –
And so I figured I could cope with more.
But those weekly sessions became very important for helping me sort out
Both what I was coping with – and *how* I was coping.
The Christian counsellor I was seeing rarely gave any advice.
Instead, he allowed long periods of silence to sit in the room with us.
At first, I didn't know what to say when the silence descended.
Gradually, I learned to listen – with him – to what was not being said –
And to have the courage to explore those silent parts,
To bring them out into a safe space and look at them again.
To recognise past hurts.
To eventually forgive things that I didn't know needed forgiveness.
That time and space and gentle accompaniment through those wounds
Allowed me the space and better awareness of the wounds of others
And what might be needed to accompany them through the dark places as well.

That, to me, is the essence of healing – and an important part of what is called 'salvation'.
That word, 'Salvation', essentially means healing.
And since 'everybody's got their problems', everybody needs healing.
That's what God calls to be and do with and for each other and ourselves.

As I prepare to leave N Kent, my prayer is that each of you will find that healing,
That peace within yourself that allows you to love yourself
And love others – and love the God who has loved each of us from the beginning.

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The Letting Go

As Columba laid down his books and the security of the monastery,
So we lay down what is past and look to the future.
As Brigid, with a cross of rushes, comforted a stranger,
So we take into daily life signs of wholeness and healing.
As Patrick travelled ever on, as Margaret built community,
So we reach beyond ourselves, to share the love of others and touch a wider world.
As Jesus taught us, we say... Lord's Prayer...

Prayers of gratitude

For this circuit, for the church communities that have nurtured us,
For these online services which have nurtured us,
We thank you, Living God.
For what we have shared together and for the life we share with others,
We thank you, Living God.
For the paths that lie before us now, with our futures in your hands,
We thank you, Living God.
For the reassurance that reminds us that wherever we go, you are already ahead of us,
And yet you travel with us.

Psalm 121

Assurance of God's Protection

A Song of Ascents.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.