

Saturday, 21 March 2020


The **Methodist Church**
in the Upper Calder Valley

Waiting and Praying Together

Dear Everyone,

Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land

I am sure that we are all aware of the strangeness of our current situation, not least because the media keep reminding us that we are living in strange and unusual times. We are unused to having our movements and activities so regulated by the Government and, if we are venturing out and about, the quietness of the roads and the emptiness of the shops remind us that we are living in a very different way. We have become accustomed to our freedom of movement and our freedom to worship, and we only really appreciate that now that it is taken away from us.

The title above is a reference to Psalm 137. It is a psalm that was written whilst the Israelites were in Exile in Babylon, and is a lament for all that they are missing. Towards the end of the psalm, the writer describes how they are asked by their Babylonian neighbours to sing some of their religious songs, but instead of singing they reply "We hang our harps on the willows, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" I don't want to say that we are in exile, for we are not, we are still in our homes surrounded by beloved things, but there may be a temptation for us to say "We cannot worship, we cannot be a community if we cannot go to church" and thereby hang our harps on the willows.



We CAN and we WILL continue to be a community, in new and different ways. We can telephone, email, WhatsApp, or Skype one another, and find ways to connect with one another we wouldn't usually try. My sister and I have just discovered WhatsApp and I have just been surprised by a Skype call from my parents who have just taught themselves how to use it. They are very pleased with themselves! So we can keep in touch, and learn new ways to do this. This newsletter is designed to connect us and to share ideas and thoughts and even jokes! I intend to send it out once or twice a week, depending on inspiration and demand, and would welcome contributions from others. I'm hoping to include thoughts for prayer, ideas for how to pass the time whilst we are in lockdown and competitions to which you can reply.

We CAN and we WILL continue to worship together spiritually even if we can't do it physically. Each week I shall be preparing and sending out worship material that can be used at home. We could all agree that at 10.15 or 10.30, depending on the normal start time of your local church, we will sit down and read through the act of worship, and pray. Or you may want to commit with a group of friends to sitting and watching a particular

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television programme such as *Songs of Praise*, so that you know that at that moment you are participating in a form of worship together. Val and I are also sitting down to pray at 7pm each evening. We light a candle and put it in the window to shine God's light out into the world, and let our neighbours know that we are praying for them. Several of our Facebook friends have said that they will join with us in that. Another way to let our friends and neighbours know that we are praying for them is by printing out this poster that has been prepared by the Methodist team in Westminster, and displaying it in our windows.

So, let us not 'hang our harps on the willows' but continue to sing of the love and care of God, even in these strange times.

Kathie Heathcoat

Be assured the
Methodist people
are praying for the
world at this time



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Suggestions for Passing the Time

- 1) How many unfinished projects do you have? Make a list of those you intend to get finished whilst you have all this spare time on your hands! How many can you get ticked off before next week?



Val has made a start on the garden and cleared the overgrown shrubs on the terrace - we have made three trips to the tip in the last 24 hours!



- 2) Keep a diary or journal reflecting on how different

life is at the moment, and how it is changing the way we do things. In years to come this outbreak will become an area of serious historical study, and historians love journals as primary sources of evidence, and it may help people in the future to understand the impact this has had on our lives.

- 3) Write a letter to someone, a physical letter, not an email, and send it. Take time to plan what you are going to say, give them news that will make them smile, or write a letter to children, telling them of some of the changes that have happened in your lifetime, or stories of their parents when they were children. It will be something for them to treasure.
- 4) When you wash your hands, don't sing *Happy Birthday*, find a hymn to sing so that it stays in your head all day and focusses your mind on the words.
- 5) Think of some suggestions for inclusion in the next newsletter!

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Worship for Mothering Sunday



Many churches will have been preparing for worship tomorrow by trying to find daffodils for sale and putting them into posies for distribution at the end of the service. Some churches have found daffodils and have managed to either deliver them to the homes of members or leave them on the church doorstep for people to help themselves. For those who haven't received them, perhaps these pictures of the daffodils in West View Park, Halifax, will help to remind us not only of the coming of Spring and the regeneration of the earth, but also that we worship God who continually works to give us healing and new life, however dark the times may feel.

Living God,
in the darkest times,
may we look for the glimpses of your light;
in the uncertain times,
may we hold fast to our faith in your love;
and in the lonely times,
may we remember that you are always with us.

Say or sing the words of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty the King of Creation" StF 88 or HP 16.

- Reflect on what you have said or sung – how easy is it to proclaim God as the King of Creation at the moment?
- Hold onto the image of God speeding to help us like a mother and spreading the wings of grace over us.

Read Psalm 34: 11-20

This is the set psalm for Mothering Sunday, probably because it seems to set out what a mother should teach her children. The Church is often referred to as a mother, this psalm could challenge us to consider whether we are teaching our communities about the way of God through our actions.

If things get difficult or challenging this week, hold on to verse 18 – "The Lord is close to those whose courage is broken; he saves those whose spirit is crushed."

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*Read John 19: 25-27, Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross.
This will be the focus and theme of our prayers.*

Living God,

we come to you in bewilderment and confusion,
unsure of the way forward,
longing for certainty,
or a chance to turn back time.

Look on us with the love with which you looked on your mother.
Show us how to care for each other
as you showed John how to care for Mary.

Living God,

we are aware of the devastating effect of this virus
even though the numbers have ceased to mean anything
and we feel saturated by the media coverage.

May we not be as indifferent as the soldiers
but pray for the whole world,
the world for which you suffered and died,
remembering especially.....

Living God,

You had compassion on your mother
as she stood in grief and despair,
so we pray for those who have been bereaved....
that they may feel covered by the wings of your grace;
and for those working so hard to tend and care for us....
that they may feel you close in their exhaustion;
for those whose livelihoods have been threatened...
that they may feel your strength raising their broken spirits;
and those who have found new ways to show your love...
giving thanks for their determination and creativity.

Living God,

hear our prayers
for strength, compassion and courage,
so that we can continue to shine with your love
and be your presence on earth,
In Jesus' name, we pray. AMEN

The Lord's Prayer

We share the Grace:

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore, AMEN

