

## Circuit Service for Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 – Revd Dr Ruth Midcalf

### **Called and Commissioned for Mission**

#### **Call to Worship.**

Welcome to worship today. We share in worship from our homes, some together through the wonders of technology; some in quiet, individual reflection; all united in the presence of God. We hear some words from 1 Chronicles 16:

“Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise...” (1 Chronicles 16: 23-25a (NIV)).

We sing to the Lord our first hymn, “O for a thousand tongues to sing”.

#### **[Hymn O for a thousand tongues to sing \(STF 364/ H and P 744\)](#)**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 O for a thousand tongues to sing<br>my great Redeemer's praise,<br>the glories of my God and King,<br>the triumphs of his grace !                 | 5 He speaks ; and, listening to his voice,<br>new life the dead receive ;<br>the mournful, broken hearts rejoice ;<br>the humble poor believe.  |
| 2 My gracious Master and my God,<br>assist me to proclaim,<br>to spread through all the earth abroad<br>the honours of your name.                   | 6 See all your sins on Jesus laid :<br>the Lamb of God was slain ;<br>his soul was once an offering made<br>that all may heaven gain.           |
| 3 Jesus — the name that charms our fears,<br>that bids our sorrows cease ;<br>'tis music in the sinner's ears,<br>'tis life, and health, and peace. | 7 In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,<br>shall feel, your sins forgiven,<br>anticipate your heaven below,<br>and own that love is heaven. |
| 4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,<br>he sets the prisoner free ;<br>his blood can make the foulest clean,<br>his blood availed for me.        | Charles Wesley (1707–1788)  |

We come before God in prayer. Let us pray.

Almighty God, we come before you in adoration this day. To you alone belong all the glory, all the honour, all the praise. We praise you Lord:

For your creativity – for the beauty of your creation, for nature, for giving us life.

For your generosity -for the many ways you bless us

For your faithfulness even when we wander away

For your love, shown most profoundly in the life, death, and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ,

We praise you, that with you, nothing is impossible.

We come this day, conscious of the things that we have said, done and thought that have hurt others, hurt us, and hurt you. We take a moment in silence as we bring these times in our own lives before the Lord who loves us.

SILENCE

Loving Lord, we bring these times before you and ask your forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

We say together the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father..."

### **Reflection/Children's Address: Church Keep-Fit**

I have to confess that before March 2020 I had never heard of Joe Wicks. I like to try and keep as fit as possible, and over the years have run (I use the term loosely) a half-marathon, joined a Zumba class and climbed a large mountain in Tanzania. I had never, however, entered the world of online workouts, the world that Joe Wicks inhabits with his YouTube channel, nor had I tuned into his TV programme.

In March 2020 Joe hit the headlines in a very positive way when he launched "PE with Joe" at the beginning of the first lockdown so that children having to stay at home rather than go to school could keep fit at home with parents, grandparents or carers. He did every school day until July and began them again at the start of this latest lockdown with a workout several times a week.

Keeping fit is of course important for us as individuals, but it is also important for us as a church. We need to do our exercises and we can do them by using a pattern that has been well-publicised in the church in recent years – looking up, looking down, looking in and looking out.

As individuals and as congregations we need to:

LOOK UP...to God, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, seeking God's will and purposes.

LOOK DOWN...to remain rooted – not planting our feet firmly so they are immovable but pulling through from our traditions, what is important and deepening in our relationship with Jesus.

LOOK IN...be prepared to reflect on our own relationship with Jesus and to encourage one another as we journey together.

LOOK OUT – to the world God has created, to serve others in God's church, our local community and care for God's world.

Let's keep this workout going, not just for lockdown but for all our lives!

### [Hymn Our God is a great big God \(STF 61\)](#)/One more step (H and P 746)

*Our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
and he holds us in his hands.*

*Our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
our God is a great big God,  
and he holds us in his hands.*

He's higher than a skyscraper,  
and he's deeper than a submarine.  
He's wider than the universe,  
and beyond my wildest dreams.  
And he's known me and he's loved me  
since before the world began.  
How wonderful to be a part  
of God's amazing plan!

Jo Hemming and Nigel Hemming

**Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8 –**

**Matthew 28: 16-20**

**Sermon -**

I love walking. At the moment, with restrictions on travelling further, the paths local to us are very well trodden and familiar. Returning from a two hour walk with a friend some months ago, I remember her saying 'How do you remember all that without a map'. Her comment reminded me of the time that whilst my car was in for repair, I was driving a hire car. I found myself in an unfamiliar place, the car did not have a GPS (something I have become over-reliant on) and the map I would normally have as back-up in my own car, was

still there, in my own car, in the garage. I stopped to ask for directions – or I may still have been there now!

As churches in the Circuit, we will be doing lots of thinking about MAP's in the coming months. Through the Circuit Strategy, each church has been asked to produce a MAP – a Mission Action Plan. It sounds grand, but it's just a tool for helping us to think through what God is calling us to do, where and how. It's an opportunity for us to review what we are doing and even lay some things down either to focus deeper on others or to pick up new things we believe God is leading us to. Just as we need to be prepared to ask for directions even if we do have maps at our disposal for our travelling, so we need to be prepared to ask for directions with our Mission Action Planning – if our plans are not grounded and founded in prayer, they will flounder.

Mission Action Planning. The last two words of that phrase – Action and Planning are relatively easy to define. But today through our Scripture readings I'd like us to think about mission. Shelves of books have been written about mission but today I'd like us to explore who's mission, why mission, and what mission?

Firstly, then “Whose mission?” When we as a church talk about mission, it's critical, I believe that we remember who's mission it is. Mission, as it says on our Methodist Church website, “is about living out God's love in the world”. At the centre of that 8-word phrase is GOD. In our Old Testament reading Isaiah has a vision. All is not well in Judah. From the second verse of the first chapter of Isaiah we are drawn to the fact that the people have rebelled against God. In the vision Isaiah finds himself in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies. As the vision continues, Isaiah knows that he is in the presence of God, and the heavenly council – the seraphim. He stands and cries out to God – recognising the rebellion of the nation and his own part within it – “Woe to me” he cries “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips”. Isaiah receives God's forgiveness as one of the seraphim touches his lips with a live coal. It is at this point that God asks the heavenly council a question – “Who shall we send and who will go for us?”. This isn't actually a question voiced directly to Isaiah – but it is a question Isaiah hears – and Isaiah responds to the call – “Here am I. Send me!”. Isaiah is told to go – to go and fulfil his role in God's mission. The same was true of Moses, Abram, Samuel...and many more. And it is the same for us today. We often talk about our mission or the church's mission – but it is always God's mission. As individuals and as the

Church, we must always be seeking God's will and joining in with God's mission even when, and perhaps especially when, it means setting aside our own agendas. Tim Dearborn writes 'The Church of God does not have a mission in the world' . . . it is more accurate to say that 'The God of mission has a church in the world'. Whose mission is it – it's Gods.

But why mission? As a child I remember the odd occasion when I had obviously asked the question "Why?", a little too persistently and the response came back 'Because I said so, because it's important'. Why mission? Because it is our commission as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is part of the very last message Matthew records Jesus giving to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. Having called the disciples three years or so before, with all the authority of heaven and earth that has been given to him, Jesus commissions them – "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. As the Church we are the body of Christ. Our task is to continue to deepen in our relationship with Jesus and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to do it all, not in our strength but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Whose mission – is it. It is God's. Why mission? Because it is our calling through worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. And that partly answers the third of the three questions I posed at the start of this sermon. What mission? Several decades ago, the Anglican Communion published a document containing the Five Marks of Mission. The first – to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and the second, as in our reading from Matthew's Gospel – to teach, baptise and nurture new believers. The third is to respond to human need by loving service. To fulfil our calling as disciples of Jesus – to fulfil God's mission – includes caring for our neighbour and serving others. This links with the fourth mark of mission – to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation. Loving service involves recognising injustice at work and working for change, striving for barriers to be broken down and peace to reign, in the name of the Prince of Peace. Finally, the fifth mark of mission is to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. By grace we are called and commissioned for God's mission in God's world. We are called to be good stewards of God's creation and our newly formed Eco-Circuit team will be

helping us in the months to come to think about how, as individuals and congregations, we can each continue to fulfil this part of our calling.

Friends, as we work together in God's service, for the extension of God's kingdom, as we put together plans, as we share ideas, may we listen always for God's voice in the words, and in the silence, in the expected and unexpected. May God, by the Holy Spirit direct all our thoughts, words and actions and may we respond to God's call with the words "Here am I. Send me!" AMEN

### **Hymn There is a redeemer (STF338)/Jesus the name high over all (H and P 264)**

1 There is a Redeemer,  
Jesus, God's own Son,  
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,  
for giving us your Son,  
and leaving your Spirit  
till the work on earth is done.*

2 Jesus my Redeemer,  
name above all names,  
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
O for sinners slain.

3 When I stand in glory  
I will see his face,  
and there I'll serve my King for ever  
in that holy place.

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946)

v. 3 Keith Green (1953–1982)

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Loving Lord, we thank you for your world, which you created and which, by your grace, you continue to sustain. Help us to be good stewards of the amazing planet we live on and to take positive action for the benefit of all. We pray for all areas of your world where there is need, praying Lord for an end to this Covid-19 pandemic that has impacted almost every part of your world. We thank you for all those who have developed and administered the vaccine. We pray for all those working in the NHS at this time, that you will continue to sustain them as they carry out their work in such difficult circumstances.

Loving Lord we thank you for your church, the body of Christ. We pray for all the congregations in our Circuit and in our local community. May we grow in our love of you, deepen in our discipleship and be transformed and changed for your glory and to fulfil your purposes. May your church be a beacon of light and a body of hope.

Loving Lord we pray for all in any kind of need at this time. We pray for those are the victims of systems and structures that promote injustice and inequality. Guide us that we may take positive action to bring justice for all. We pray for those who have no work and those who find no fulfilment in the work they have. We pray for all who are unwell this day and for those who care for them. We pray for those who are dying and those alongside them. We bring before you in the quietness of our hearts any known to us who are in need.

SILENCE

Lord, we pray that you will be present to all in need, bringing healing, peace, joy, and hope.

Loving Lord, we pray for ourselves. Show us how we may share the Good News of Jesus. Empower us by your Spirit that in new and familiar ways, we may share and show your love.

We ask these prayers in and through the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. AMEN.

### [Hymn Lord your \(thy\) church on earth is seeking \(STF410/H and P774\)](#)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking<br/>your renewal from above ;<br/>teach us all the art of speaking<br/>with the accent of your love.<br/>We would heed your great commission :<br/>sending us to every place —<br/>preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,<br/>serve with love and share my grace.</p>                 | <p>3 In the streets of every city<br/>where the bruised and lonely dwell,<br/>let us show the Saviour's pity,<br/>let us of his mercy tell.<br/>In all lands and with all races<br/>let us serve, and seek to bring<br/>all the world to render praises,<br/>Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.</p> |
| <p>2 Freedom give to those in bondage,<br/>lift the burdens caused by sin.<br/>Give new hope, new strength and courage<br/>grant release from fears within :<br/>light for darkness ; joy for sorrow ;<br/>love for hatred ; peace for strife.<br/>These and countless blessings follow<br/>as the Spirit gives new life.</p> | <p>Hugh Sherlock (1905–1998)</p>   |

We close with the words of the Grace. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.