



WEST SUSSEX (COAST AND DOWNS)
METHODIST CIRCUIT

Worshipping Together

February 2022

Worshipping Together comprises an act of worship for the month, with a different set reading and reflection for each week, shared as a starting point for your own reflections. As you worship and draw closer to God, may God draw close to you, speak to you and journey with you beyond the words of these pages, strengthened by God's ever-present Spirit.

We invite you to use **Worshipping Together** at a time that suits you, in whatever way works for you, to spend time with God knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with others across the circuit family.

Please share these resources with others.

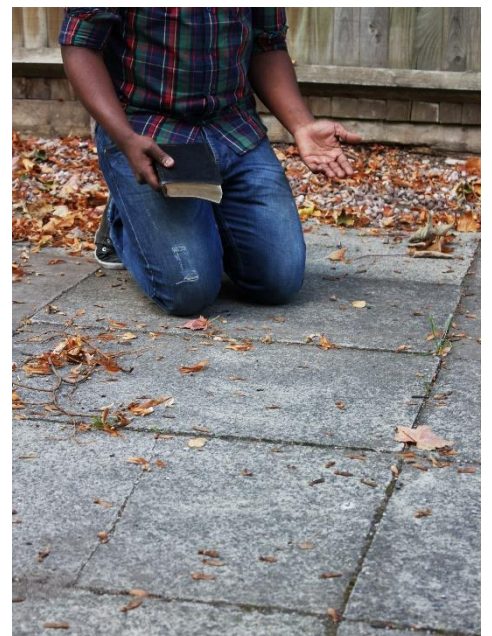
Also available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk

As you prepare to worship, you may like a period of quiet, or to light a candle. Become aware of God's already present presence.

GATHERING

Gathering Prayer¹

Our loving, heavenly Father,
we come because we must;
we come because we ought to;
we come because we need to;
we come because we long to;
we come because in you we have a joy
and a gladness we have never known before;
we come because you are the Lord. Amen.



¹ From 500 more Prayers for all occasions by David Clowes, page 12, No.6.

Sing: All my hope on God is founded²

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:

*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

2. Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth:

Psalm 46:1-3 (NRSVA)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
Though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Prayers of praise³

Eternal God, the source of all life,
great and wonderful are your works,
full of honour and majesty.

We come before you humbly,
for holy and awesome is your name and we are weak and sinful.
Yet we also come with confidence,
for you are gracious and merciful,
and you have shown us in Jesus a love which never ends.

You are our rock, our refuge,
our fortress strong to save.

Glory and praise be yours forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

3. Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified:

4. Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love:

5. So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song:



² Written by Michael Saward (b. 1932), Singing the Faith No.319

³ From 'Praying with the scriptures' by Neil Dixon, p24

Below are readings and reflections for each week of February.

These reflections are mere starting points, and you are encouraged to ponder and pray through and beyond what is written, as you listen and respond to God.

‘The crowd was pressing in’

Week beginning Sunday 6th February

Reading: Luke 5:1-11

The idea of being in a crowd pressing in on one another is one we will not have countenanced over the last couple years. But think back to the last time you crowded into a concert hall, rock concert, theatre or cinema. Bodies close together, all anticipating the experience you have come to witness. Your eagerness to hear and see leads you to adjust your head position to get the best view.

The crowd was not pressing in to get into the mosh pit. We are not told they were competing and tussling to get the best view. We are told they were pressing in because they were ‘eager to hear the word of God’ (v1).

What does your eagerness to hear the word of God lead you to do? How do you seek to listen to Jesus? Where has hearing from Jesus lead you to experience transformation?

In Jesus, his life, his words, his attitude and example, we meet and experience the goodness, grace and glory of God. Oh how eager we should be to encounter Jesus today! Whether in a crowd, where a few are gathered, or on our own - let us all position ourselves day by day to press in, and encounter Jesus.

Follow up: Take some time this week to read the rest of Luke 5. As you read, be eager to hear; how is God speaking to you day by day this week through these words of scripture?



'All in the crowd were trying to touch him'

Week beginning Sunday 13th February

Reading: Luke 6:17-26



Today's reading comes in two parts. Firstly, we hear of a crowd. They have come to Jesus to hear him, but also experience Christ's power by being healed of diseases and unclean spirits. The diseased and those suffering with unclean spirits lived to varying degrees, lives of isolation, away from the rest of society to avoid the risk of others being infected. We can no doubt relate to that sort of life in a much clearer way now than we would have a couple of years ago.

Jesus, being the Son of God and life of love he is, listens to them, shares with them and brings them healing and wholeness - and the opportunity to live as part of the community again.

In the second part of the reading, Jesus is speaking to his disciples, though it is possible from Luke's ambiguity that the crowd was still around them. To the disciples Jesus shares the Lukan version of The Beatitudes we discover in Matthew's gospel (Matt ch5).

There right after a crowd of the excluded and isolated in the towns and villages have been around them, Jesus declares what would probably have seemed to be back to front and upside-down. The poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated, the excluded and the cast out because of the Son of Man - are all blessed.

But, Jesus goes on; the rich, the satisfied, the laughing – their satisfaction will not hold. They will hunger and be in need again.

The 'Jesus Manifesto' - as this code has sometimes been titled - turns worldly expectations, exclusions, and divisions upside down and says don't look to the world for satisfaction – look to me. May we all seek to touch, not the temptations of the world which will not satisfy, but the generous and unconditional love and grace of Christ.

Follow up: Look to Jesus this week – and in worship and prayer seek to be satisfied through the blessing and love of Jesus.

Loving those it is hard to love

Week beginning Sunday 20th February

Read: Luke 6:27-38

*I feel it in my fingers
I feel it in my toes
Love that's all around me
And so the feeling grows⁴*



Love is a word we use often, and in varying ways. We might say we love our spouses, children, parents, family, friends, colleagues – but would likely describe that love in different ways.

The word we find in scripture translated as ‘love’ can one of a number of expressions of love:

- Eros – intimate love and/or sexual passion
- Philia – affectionate love within friendships and community
- Storge – love within family relationships
- Philautia – self-love, caring for ones own well-being
- Xenia – love shown through hospitality to strangers
- Agape – unconditional love – of God for his people.

It is this agape love that we find in these verses in Luke’s gospel where Jesus says to his disciples to love, not only those it is easy to love, but those it is really, really, hard to love.

Why? Because this is what God is like. Loving, generous, merciful and kind.

The more we live a life of agape love, the more we discover about the character of God – who is gracious, kind and merciful. And the more we inhabit the character of God in our lives, the more holy, and whole we become. For in living a life of love, we experience more of God’s unconditional love for us and all the world.

Follow Up: Show love to others this week.

Think of what you’d really like someone to do for you, and do it for them.

⁴ ‘Love is all around by the Troggs, 1967.

Dazzled by Jesus: a reflection through the eyes of Peter

Week beginning Sunday 27th February

Read: Luke 9:28-36

I saw Jesus. I knew it was him, but he looked different: his face a ball of white light, his clothes so dazzlingly white that it hurt my eyes to look at them and I shielded them with my arm (dreams can seem so real sometimes).

Then I saw the other figures, two of them, and they were talking to him. It seems strange, but I knew straight away who they were: Moses and Elijah. They were all in white, all three of them enveloped in this amazing light, brighter than the sun.

And they were talking with Jesus, like they knew him already, like it was something they did everyday. But it was more than that: Jesus was at the centre of the three; he was the greatest of them. I thought a lot about that later: imagine it, the Jesus we'd walked with, eaten with, spent so much time with: greater than the greatest of our prophets.

And suddenly I realized I wasn't dreaming, that this was real. It felt like somehow I'd slipped into another world. And I was terrified. Typically for me, I started gabbling, blurting out anything that came into my head, trying to make the situation seem normal: some nonsense about building shelters for them, James told me afterwards.

Then it got scarier: we were caught up in the cloud, James and John and I. My heart was pounding so hard in my chest I thought it was going to burst and I was quaking all over. If I was going to die, to be struck down because I was unworthy to be in the presence of God himself, I wanted it to happen quickly. And painlessly.

Instead we heard a voice: it seemed all around us, loud and booming, yet it also spoke quietly as a whisper into our ears: 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.' I fell at Jesus' feet and when I got up, the cloud had gone and we were alone with him.

He didn't give us any explanation: just told us not to say anything to the others, to anyone, until he was raised from the dead. We didn't understand what he meant then – it only made sense a long time afterwards.

James, John and I didn't talk about it much among ourselves. I think we were all trying to work out what it meant, but we couldn't quite get there. I only knew that I'd had my confirmation: this man Jesus, my friend and teacher, he was the Christ, the Son of God: he'd come at last!

Follow Up: How do you see Jesus today?

RESPONDING

Prayers of Intercession

Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of your constant love, constant presence, constant peace, we pray.

We pray for friends, neighbours, loved ones near and far.
To the grieving may they know your comfort.
To the worried may they be certain of your peace.
To the uncertain, assure them of your constant grace.
To the hurting, pour out your healing.
To the broken, restore them by your love.



We pray for our communities.

In places of conflict and division bring your healing reconciliation.

At times of loss, manifest your comfort and peace.

Where injustice, oppression and abuse occurs, may your righteous justice reign, and may all know themselves loved by you, cherished by you, made in your image and of great worth, dignity and respect.

We pray for this world.

Littered with conflict, polluted by greed, earths resources abused.

Lead us to a better way.

A way where we, and all human kind can care more attentively to the world, more aware of how our actions make an impact on the wider world.

We pray for the hungry, the sick, the desperate, the broken, the refugee.

May all be led to hope, and may we your church respond in hospitality, generosity and your revolutionary, unconditional love.

In your loving, holy, generous and almighty name. **Amen**

Sing: As the deer⁵

1. As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.

You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.*

*You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.*

2. I want you more than gold or silver,
only you can satisfy.

You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.

3. You're my friend and you are my brother,
even though you are a king.

I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything

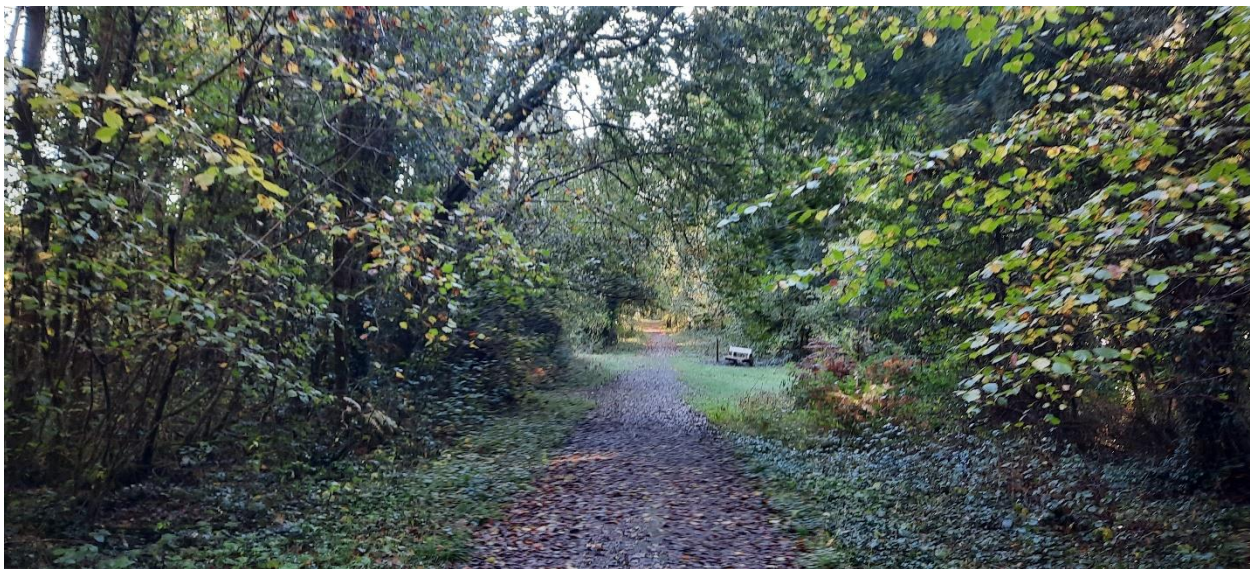
Closing Prayer⁶

Lord we commit ourselves to being open to you,
and to your word for us today.

We commit ourselves to live faithfully
according to the Word we have received.

We commit ourselves to share your word of grace and, by your Holy Spirit,
to be living witnesses to the one who opened our hearts to you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Acknowledgements

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⁵ As the Deer by Martin J. Nystrom (b. 1956) © 1983 Restoration Music Ltd / Sovereign Music UK. Singing the Faith No. 544

⁶ From 500 More Prayers for all occasions, David Clowes, p303