

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
On-line Service for Sunday 8th August 2021

compiled by Joan Murray and Ashleigh Pritchard

Theme: Life without Limits

Call to worship:

When we journey with God, anything is possible;
When we walk closely with Jesus, anything is possible;
When we welcome the Holy Spirit, anything is possible.

Lord God, we come hungry and thirsty for your word,
With a desire to know your will.
Seeking you, believing and trusting,
so that we may never hunger and thirst again.

Amen

We continue to declare our dedication and commitment to God with our first hymn.

Hymn: **My eyes be open to your presence** Nick Haigh **StF 560**

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| 1. My eyes be open to your presence,
my ears to hear your call.
My heart be open to your love
and in your arms to fall.
My mind be open to your word,
my soul to heaven's cure,
that I be open to you, Lord,
this day and evermore. | My home be open in your name
for weary ones and poor,
that I be open to you, Lord,
this day and evermore. |
| 2. My life be open to your leading,
my hands to do your will.
My lips be open in your praise
and for your truth to tell. | 3. My door be open to the other
whenever we may meet.
My arms be open to the one
in whom I am complete.
My self be open to your world
and in it see your face,
that I be open to you, Lord,
held fast in your embrace. |

Prayers of Adoration, Confession & Thanksgiving from Ashleigh Pritchard

Creator God, we glimpse your beauty in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.
We sense your power in thunder crash, lightning flash and ocean's roar.
Creator God we praise you.

Precious Jesus, we see your love stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice, pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you.

Holy Spirit, we see your power in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice, comforting, guiding, calling.

When we make wrong assumptions about others and judge the way they live;
When we don't allow others to speak out and be the people you have called them to be;

When we cast judgements on particular communities or neighbourhoods that are different from ours;

Sometimes we belittle the talents you have blessed us with, saying we are “only” this, or “just” that. Our inability to believe and acknowledge our gifts and qualities that often lead us to shy away from supporting others. **Forgive us, Lord.**

We thank you for making us in your image; that we are all unique and have our own individual skills and talents, handpicked by you.

Thank you for your presence and support and guidance every minute of every day. Through good times and bad.

Father, we love you. Guide us to use our talents wisely and for the benefit of ourselves, our friends, family and community. With you, all things are possible.

Amen

Hymn: Father, we love you

Donna Adkins

StF 6

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| 1. Father, we love you,
we worship and adore you:
glorify your name in all the earth.
Glorify your name, glorify your name,
glorify your name, in all the earth. | Glorify your name, glorify your name,
glorify your name, in all the earth. |
| 2. Jesus, we love you,
we worship and adore you:
glorify your name in all the earth. | 3. Spirit, we love you,
we worship and adore you:
glorify your name in all the earth.
Glorify your name, glorify your name,
glorify your name, in all the earth. |

Message – part 1:

Have you ever felt at the point of giving up, or giving in to something? Have you ever asked yourself what it is that keeps you going? These are very direct questions, but it's important we sometimes stop and take time to be open and honest with ourselves.

Our Old Testament bible reading this morning is taken from 1 Kings 6:4-8 and as you read it, I would like you to take time to pause after each verse, imagine that you are there with Elijah and reflect on the following questions: ^{Roots}

V4; After a long day in the wilderness, how did Elijah Feel? Why do you think he felt like he did?

V5; What does a broom tree look like in your imagination? What about the Angel? Do you imagine Elijah saw the angel in a dream, or after he was woken up? How do you think he felt?

6; Imagine the smell of the fresh cake/bread? Was it warm or cold?

7; The angel touched Elijah again – what did that feel like?

8; Elijah had felt as if he couldn't go on, that he had nothing more to offer, but God gave him strength. What do you imagine that felt like?

Old Testament Reading: 1 Kings 19:4-8

New Revised Standard Version

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷ The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸ He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Newly triumphant over the priests of Baal and their champions, Ahaz and Jezebel, you would predict Elijah to be feeling heroic, eager and ambitious. Yet, here, in our opening verse, we find a fragile and feeble Elijah lying under a broom tree about to give up.

As Christians we all know only too well, that God has other ideas for us. For the prophet Elijah, it is to give him the energy for a 40 day journey. Another feeding in the desert with an ultimate goal – meeting God at Horeb.

There are similarities here to second Isaiah with the departure and apprehension of preparing for a journey and quite possibly, his word on preparation for what Jesus has to say about the bread of life. This brings us nicely onto our Gospel reading and Jesus speaking very directly about the 'bread of life' to the crowds of Capernaum.

Hymn: When, O God, our faith is tested Fred Kaan **StF 643**

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| 1. When, O God, our faith is tested
and our hope is undermined,
when our love of living shrivels
and we feel bereft and drained,
then we turn to you and cry
for your answer to our 'why?' | Souls distraught as if betrayed,
God of bleakness and abyss,
why have you forsaken us? |
| 2. With emotions taut to breaking,
hearts with hurt and havoc frayed,
reason by remorse diminished, | 3. As we question and accuse you
out of depths of being tried,
could it be, God! That in weakness
you yourself are crucified?
Are you with us in our grief?
Help us in our unbelief! |

New Testament Reading: John 6:35,45-51

New Revised Standard Version

³⁵ Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Message- part 2:

This service is very much asking you to look at, not only the feelings of others, your own feelings and perceptions of how you feel and who you think you are. Very often, we put unnecessary limits on our abilities and what we think we can achieve.

Many, many years ago I met a young lady in a client work meeting who was being trained up for a particular role in the company. Her stance and mannerisms were those of someone who thought they weren't worthy of being in the meeting. Wanting to make sure she felt included in the conversation I asked for her surname so that I could include her in the emailed report afterwards. She gave her name as 'only' Smith. "Please don't say only about your name", came from my lips before I had realised.

I spent many subsequent years working with this young lady. She's not so young any more, but she is currently one of the most successful senior claims executives in her current place of work. More importantly, her and I became and have remained very special friends.

A delicate and uncertain acceptance to attend a meeting that became the strong foundation of a great friendship and rewarding career. Elijah's lack of strength, but faith in God, became one of the influences of the strong foundations of a fruitful faith and writings in John.

Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke (the synoptic gospels), John goes right back to the beginning of Jesus birth. His link to God in the Old Testament, e.g. 'In the beginning' - Genesis 1 is very obvious. John also uses dualistic language to demonstrate contrasts. In this instance, eating manna in the wilderness represents death and bread of life; heaven - (death/life).

The New Testament is written at a time of the Roman Empire. Around 95% of the population would have been quite poor. As a result, particularly in cities, mortality rates would have been high and violence common. It would have been natural to describe themselves and a lot of those they mingled with as, 'only'. We hear it today... only a child; only a shelf stacker; only a cleaner...

This could well be one of the reasons the crowds were having difficulty in believing Jesus' plain speaking and they grumbled. The crowds claim to know Jesus. How can HE possibly be anything special?

Jesus makes reference to the history as predicted by the prophets, that God spoke to his people and led them to himself. The Jewish leaders listening were too busy being offended by Jesus' claim, or who he is, to hear what was really being said about selection, protection and resurrection. These leaders were overlooking two very vital elements; His true parentage and an unconditional acceptance of his lordship. They missed what their own scriptures had prophesied. "Stop grumbling" said Jesus; "Listen!"

Pain and disappointment must not stop us from committing completely to Jesus. Beyond whatever barriers come our way between us and Jesus, we must openly and honestly ask. Is what has happened, or is happening in the world, in my community, my family, or to me an excuse to reject Jesus? Or a proof and reason to rush to him?

Stop crumbing and listen! Accept, receive, believe and take to your heart Jesus' words to receive eternal life. With God, there are no limits and quite often the most unlikely of people are chosen to do God's work; Jonah, Noah, Timothy, Zacchaeus... I'll leave you to come up with more.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is working for you. Our Lord God is here to provide you with every morsel you will ever need for your spiritual life. No one is an 'only'. Challenge your expectations. You are important and capable of doing something amazing. Pick yourself up, do God's work and let the spiritual bread of heaven satisfy you. **With God, there are no limits. Amen**

Together in prayer: Jesus, you told your followers that whoever comes to you will never be hungry or thirsty. We still find today, those who are hungry and thirsty for bread and water and who also look for you. In a world full of misinformation and false assumptions, help us to live in response to your promises, and to show your love more clearly, that you may be found in us. **Amen**

Hymn: **Faithful One, so unchanging** Brian Doerksen **StF 628**

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.

You are my rock in times of trouble.
you lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm
your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

Prayers of Intercession & The Lord's Prayer: from Ashleigh Pritchard

Let us pray to the Lord, our refuge and stronghold.
For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious may be at peace and free from worry:
Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For all those isolated, hospitalised and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs, and care for them in their vulnerability:
Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For our homes and families, our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:
Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:
Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For ourselves,
That through you we have the confidence to use our blessings and gifts for the benefit
of ourselves, our friends and family and community;
Through you, we know we are capable;
Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come; Thy 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, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen**

Our journey Lord, is with you alone. Guide us, lead us and we will ever give to thee.

Hymn: Guide me Oh, Though Great Jehovah William Williams StF 465

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| 1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but though art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore;
feed me now and evermore. | strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield. |
| 2. Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through: | 3. When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee. |

Blessing: Roots

Lord Jesus, let us not settle for things that perish
But let us yearn for the day when all will know you.
Let us desire the peace which passes all understanding.
Let us be eager to follow you.
Let us long to share your love with all whom we meet as we travel on.
Amen