

East Durham Methodist Circuit:
Online Service for 7th February 2021

compiled by Rev Alf Waite and Bill Naylor

Theme: United together for the world

Call to worship:

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Let us unite to worship our faithful God.

Hymn: **With gladness we worship George Rawson **StF 17 / H&P 19****

1. With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices, how blessed to bring!
The old thankful story shall seek Thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God!

2. Renewed by Thy Spirit, redeemed by Thy Son,
Thy children would bless Thee for all Thou hast done:
O Father, returning to love and to light,
Our spirits are yearning to praise Thee aright.

3. Thy right would we give Thee, true homage Thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through:
With all Thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we glorify Thee.

4. We join with the angels, and so there is giv'n,
From earth, Alleluia, in answer to Heav'n.
Amen! Be Thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

Prayers of adoration and thanksgiving:

Lord of Heaven and Earth, I look around me at the works Thy hand has made. And sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee: "How great, how great Thou art".

How lucky am I to have chosen You to be my God! May I always be at one with You the great "I AM", the one and only true God who has the whole world under His control and yet is a personal and loving God, who knows me individually and who laid down His life for me.

And this week, as we give thanks for the inspiration of Captain Tom, in remembering him, we give our thanks to the countless unsung heroes, paid and unpaid, who reflect Your love for us in their lives and works.

We give thanks that You are the God who will never be defeated, that Your light shines through and will overcome the darkness.

Silence

Until that day comes we, Your people all over the world will say **The Lord's Prayer** in unity together:

**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**

Old Testament Reading:

Psalm 133

New International Version

¹ How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Meditation:

Bread For Life

Bill Naylor

I love Bread. I mean, who doesn't? There's nothing quite like it is there, particularly when fresh baked!

I remember doing a survey of a big old multi-floored Co-op bakery somewhere in the Black Country. It had several floors and the bread, at various stages of its production, went between the floors on conveyors, but the smell in there was just marvellous - it permeated the whole building.

Give us this day our daily bread is part of the Lord's Prayer - and don't forget my all-time favourite hymn... "Bread of heaven..." "Feed me till I want no more! Want no more... Feed me..."

Sorry about that - back in the room...

You only need four main ingredients to make bread: flour, water, salt and yeast although some recipes add a little bit of butter too, and perhaps some sugar. Taken singly, the ingredients don't add up to much but together, in unity, they are wonderful.

Think about what that says about ordinary folks like us... but in unity with God.. well... we can become something else!

So why not give it a go and get mixing?

First combine the flour with some salt and the yeast. **"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened."** (Matt 13: 31-33)

And now for the messy bit! Stir in the water. I hate getting my fingers all clagged up - but in life, you have to get stuck in and get your hands dirty don't you?

So having done that we can get busy kneading and stretching the dough and when that's done, we can cover the bowl and set it aside for a few hours and wait for the magic to happen!



Wow - just look at that - it's twice as big as it was when we left it - so now it's all ready to go in the oven!!



And hey presto, 30 minutes later:



Several things occurred to me about this:

We - the flour - are of little use and doomed to be thrown out unless we're mixed with the water of God the Father, the salt of God the Son and the yeast of God's Holy Spirit. If the water, salt and yeast are missing, flour has limited value with the risk of it becoming a home in your cupboard for weevils. Flour when stored in bulk silos can actually explode!

Secondly, mixed with the other ingredients the flour can never go back to being just... well... flour! The water starts the change, the salt adds flavour but with the yeast of the Spirit, like the dough, we are transformed.

And finally, with the yeast, the dough proves, grows and is ready for baking. Like the bread, we are made ready to serve - just like the original disciples after Pentecost.

Our God does not override us as human beings, or our freewill. Unity with Him - or not - is a choice. We have to choose to be unified with Him.

Now... let's get cracking with the soup...

Hymn: Break Thou the bread of life Mary Lathbury & Alexander Groves **StF 153/H&P 467**

1. Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!

2. Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me,
As Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee;
Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;
And I shall find my peace, my all in all.

3. Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,
Thy holy Word the truth that saveth me;
Give me to eat and live with Thee above;
Teach me to love Thy truth, for Thou art love.

4. Oh, send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,
That He may touch my eyes, and make me see:
Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,
And in Thy Book revealed I see the Lord.

New Testament Reading: **John 17 vs 15-26** New International Version

Jesus prays for His disciples:

¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

... and then for all believers:

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - ²³ I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Message:

I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
John 17:15-26.

Have you ever had any regrets? It is hard to live life and not have any, hopefully only small ones. I wish that I had had my hair cut before lockdown. I have been caught out twice now. So, I have to get used to looking like the Wildman of Boneo. I also wish I had gone shopping for clothes as mine are wearing out.

One regret I hope that I do not have is that I get to the end of my life and have failed to be a part of desiring, working and in some measure becoming part of the answer to Jesus' prayer from John 17. He prayed that his followers would be one as the relationship within the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one: united. The Trinity is hard to explain but we know it as one God in three Persons. That same closeness was Jesus' prayer for all His followers including us. And when I say 'Us' I mean every generation since He prayed it. Leslie Newbiggin says, “Children of one father should live as one family.”

According to John 17 unity is **Supernatural, Tangible and Evangelical**. It takes a **Supernatural** power to put aside differences for the good of the Kingdom of God. That power is the Holy Spirit of God as poured out at the first Pentecost.

There are, and have been, many divisions in the church. They can be over the smallest of things or beliefs or the way we govern the life of the church. George Whitfield and John Wesley belonged to the same religious club at university, the Holy Club but they differed over the way they understood salvation. Whitfield believing it was for the chosen and Wesley believing that everyone had the opportunity for salvation through faith in Jesus. They did not talk for a while until Wesley offered Whitfield his hand saying, "If your heart is as my heart give me your hand." They may have believed different things but their love for Jesus drew them together.

One of my heroes in the faith is John Wimber, who was pastor of the Vineyard movement which championed the Healing Ministry of the Holy Spirit. He was heavily criticised by Rev Dr Clifford Hill who had a prophetic ministry like that of the Old Testament. Their relationship was not good. Towards the end of his life Wimber had a number of health issues, a damaged heart, sinus cancer and a stroke brought on by a heavy work schedules and excess weight. On hearing of John Wimber's health issues, Clifford Hill felt the need to be reconciled to him before he died, and he travelled to meet him and was reconciled.

God stirred Whitfield and Wesley, Wimber and Hill to reconcile though they were opposed to each other's ministry. It was the Word of God and the Spirit of God that enabled that to happen. It does not come naturally to put aside strong differences. Jesus prays for God to sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. We need the Spirit of God to lead us into unity with our brothers and sisters.

The results of unity are **Tangible**, it can be seen.¹ John 1:7a says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light we have fellowship with one another." They said of the early disciples see how they love one another and it attracted other people to become Christians. With all the different expressions of Church that there are it is important that we do not just accept the lowest common denominators or compromise on the truth of God's word. The church is the Body of Christ in the world. The visible revelation of the unseen Father. It is to show the love of God in the world and for the world.

The strap line of Willow Creek Church is that "the church is the Hope of the world" - that hope comes from Christians working together. The unity of the church all over the world is bringing about transformation: in individual lives, in towns and cities, in the environment.

In Papua New Guinea there was a village near the sea that relied on the fishing industry for its prosperity. The pollution of the sea with plastics destroyed the industry. With the sea emptied of fish, no one had work. The churches in the town got together prayed and worked to clean the sea of the plastic. The fish population returned, and the village prospered again.

On every continent around the world churches are uniting under the banner of Movement Day answering the prayer of Jesus. Churches are praying for their neighbourhoods, working to clean up their streets whether of rubbish, drugs or violence.

Lastly Unity is **Evangelical**, it shares the Good News of Jesus. "Then the world will know that you sent me" Jesus said. The way we live the good news of Jesus in our communities can either confirm or contradict the truth we speak about Jesus. It is not enough to just 'nod our heads' in agreement to this prayer of Jesus for unity and then live with each other as if we have the opposite opinion or that it does not matter. It needs to be seen physically, in our relationships both in our own church and between churches so that it speaks volumes of the love of God for all people.

Seeing Christians of different churches working together is the best witness the church has. In this prayer Jesus does not pray for judgement of the world. He didn't come to judge the world but rather to enable the world to believe and be saved.

The church has always been just been one generation from extinction - it still is today and always will be. It has relied on every generation living and sharing Jesus and His saving grace. Do you want to be part of the work of Jesus today? Then seek unity! Unity with all who seek to follow Jesus today, using all that you have and all that you are, as the bride and groom say to each other in their wedding service, to spread the Good News.

The beauty of the unity Jesus is praying for does not rely only on our own effort or strength but more upon our willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work through our words and actions.

Amen

Hymn: Lord of the church Don Richard Francisco (Tune: The Londonderry Air)

1. Lord of the church, we pray for our renewing:
Christ over all, our undivided aim;
Fire of the Spirit, burn for our enduing,
wind of the Spirit, fan the living flame!
We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing,
the will that lacks the courage to be free,
the weary labours, all but unavailing,
to bring us nearer what a church should be.

2. Lord of the church, we seek a Father's blessing,
a true repentance and a faith restored,
a swift obedience and a new possessing,
filled with the Holy Spirit of the Lord!
We turn to Christ from all our restless striving,
unnumbered voices with a single prayer –
the living water for our souls' reviving,
in Christ to live, and love and serve and care.

3. Lord of the church, we long for our uniting,
true to one calling, by one vision stirred;
one cross proclaiming and one creed reciting,
one in the truth of Jesus and his word!
So lead us on; till toil and trouble ended,
one church triumphant one new song shall sing,
to praise his glory, risen and ascended,
Christ over all, the everlasting King!

Intercessions:

O God our heavenly Father, you created us in your image and likeness. So, we sing your praise for the gift of all the differences there are: of culture, expressions of church, traditions and ethnicities that make up your world. Grant us the courage always to stand against injustice and hatred based on race, class, gender, religion, and fear of those who are not like ourselves.

Response: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Merciful Jesus, you have prayed that we are to be one in you. Teach us to use this gift in the world so that believers of every country may be able to listen to each other and live in peace.

Response: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Jesus, you came into the world and shared fully in our humanity. You know the hardships of life for people who suffer in so many ways. May the Spirit of compassion move us to share our time, life and goods with all those in need.

Response: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Holy Spirit, you hear the fury of your wounded creation and the cries of those already suffering through this pandemic, through all kinds of sickness, violence, hatred, divisions, misuse of power and wealth. Also through the effects of climate change. Guide us toward new behaviours. May we learn to live in harmony as part of your creation.

Response: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

In the name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen

Hymn: Guide me, O thou great Redeemer William Williams **StF 465 / H&P 437**

1. Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

2. Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through;
strong Deliverer,
be thou still my Strength and Shield.

3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
bear me through the swelling current,
land me safe on Canaan's side;
songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

Blessing: by Barack Obama

" Lord protect my family and me. Forgive me my sins and help me guard against pride and despair. Give me the wisdom to do what is right and just. And make me an instrument of Your will."

Choose unity with God this week and every week.

Amen