



# The Methodist Church

## United Stockport Circuit (Manchester and Stockport District)

A Message from the Superintendent Minister

May 27th 2020

Dear Friends,

First of all I want to thank all of you who responded so warmly to my last letter. It is very heartening to know there is so much positivity and openness and creativity out there. Please have my reassurance that along with my colleagues we are thinking a lot about the future; both the immediate future and what things might look like when we are finally able to re-open our church buildings, but also the longer term. From the 1<sup>st</sup> September we will be joined by our friends in the Romiley circuit, to form a larger circuit, more or less co-terminus with the Borough of Stockport, and although this will bring many challenges, it will also result in many blessings as God's Spirit works through us to make the love of God a tangible reality in the lives of the people of Stockport.

On the subject of God's Spirit, as I write, we are approaching the festival of Pentecost, when we recall the moment when God's power (which had been promised by Jesus) actually came upon the disciples; it's the moment after which the disciples and followers of Jesus began their travels and journeys to share their stories and their faith with others. It was the moment after which they realised once and for all that from there on in, it was up to them, but it was also the moment that they realised they would never be alone, that in spite of his being taken from their sight, Christ would be with them always. While the disciples were busy looking up to Heaven for God's power, God's power came and found them. And it was a creative power, not a destructive power. A power of sharing, of partnership, of humility. A power which called them to communicate with one another. A power which called them, and continues to call us to take part in the ministry of Christ, not only to ensure that there IS a legacy and that all that Christ lived and died for was not in vain, but a power of grace which means that **we are** Christ's legacy, his body, not stuck in the past in Galilee or Jerusalem, but a body which is alive here and now, in this place and time, a body into which everyone is invited and in which all are made welcome. Do take a look at Acts Chapter 2. It offers a wonderful vision of a world in which difference and justice is celebrated. First of all, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples as tongues of fire and people from all sorts of different places are strangely able to understand each other, even though they are speaking different languages. When Peter addresses the crowd which gather as a result of this apparent mayhem, talking about Jesus and his life and ministry and death and resurrection, many people (about 3000!) found themselves changed and were baptised and began to follow the teachings of the apostles which involved gathering together, living simply, and redistributing resources to those in need. Not only does the Holy Spirit have the power to transform hearts and the lives of individuals, it can turn the normal order of things upside down.

In recent days there has been much conversation in the media about whether or not the NHS should insist that health care workers from overseas pay fees in order to access NHS services themselves. This was originally the government's policy, but an outcry from the public and many MPs lead to a change in this proposal. In the past, the many low paid ancillary workers in the health service and other key sectors have been virtually invisible. Poorly paid, and often the subject of cries directed towards those who are perceived to come into the UK and 'taken jobs which should be available to British workers'. Of course, this has never really been the case. The health service and other public services have long been dependent upon labour from overseas, and have been stronger for it, and it is my hope and prayer that one of the positive things which may emerge from the Corona virus pandemic is a re-ordering of public perception about who and what is important. Society is only ever enriched by cultural diversity. The lesson of Pentecost is that God values people, no matter who they are, where they are from or where they live. A society in which we seek to surround ourselves with those who look and think exactly like we do, and which believes that it has a monopoly on God's grace and goodness, is a society which has more in common with that which tried to build a tower towards heaven in Babel – which God destroyed – than it does with the somewhat chaotic yet vibrant scene in Jerusalem at Pentecost, which was born of God's Spirit.

After the events at Pentecost, the early Christians began to understand the very nature of God as being diverse – a God who exists and acts in a whole variety of ways. They didn't at that point name it as the Holy Trinity, that came later, yet as we read the accounts of the early church what becomes clear is their

increasing sense of God as One, yet who dwells in mystery beyond us, in grace within us, and in love between us.

And this three-in-one still can still resonate with us today. Not as an abstract doctrine, but as a way of understanding the fullness of God's presence in our lives and in the world, throughout history and into the future. Wherever we find ourselves at any particular moment in time, God can meet us there. If we are feeling confused in our life of faith, doubtful or angry at how things are turning out, then God dwells quietly, listening to our questions, speaking silently into our sense of hopelessness, unconditionally waiting and steadfastly reaching out to us for as long as it takes. If we find ourselves needing to rest in prayer, strong in our faith and seeking direction, discerning what God is willing for our life, then God nudges and prods and whispers, occasionally speaking loudly, using the lives and voices of others to help us on our journey. If we feel called to reveal God's love in the world, to speak and act in the name of God's eternal justice, then God is there too, leading us on as we tread in the footsteps of Jesus. God as Creator, God as Saviour and God as Spirit live and move in a holy dance which is as dynamic as it is mysterious. There are two hymns I love to sing at this time of year, one ancient, one modern, and I will write the words here to accompany you in your own reflections. May God continue to bless you at this time, as we look towards the future and hold tight to our hopes of being able to gather again in God's name.

Come down, O Love divine,  
Seek thou this soul of mine,  
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;  
O Comforter, draw near,  
Within my heart appear,  
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,  
Till earthly passions turn  
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;  
And let thy glorious light  
Shine ever on my sight,  
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity  
Mine outward vesture be,  
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;  
True lowliness of heart,  
Which takes the humbler part,  
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong,  
With which the soul will long,  
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
For none can guess its grace,  
Till Love create a place  
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Bianco de Siena (d. 1434)  
*Singing the Faith* no. 372

**Refrain:** *Send down the fire of your justice,  
Send down the rains of your love;  
Come, send down the Spirit,  
breathe life in your people, and we shall be  
people of God.*

Call us to be your compassion,  
Teach us the song of your love;  
Give us hearts that sing, give us deeds that ring,  
Make us ring with the song of your love.

Call us to learn of your mercy,  
Teach us the way of your peace;  
Give us hearts that feel, give us hands that heal,  
Make us walk in the way of your peace.

Call us to answer oppression,  
Teach us the fire of your truth;  
Give us righteous souls, til your justice rolls,  
Make us burn with the fire of your truth.

Call us to witness your Kingdom,  
Give us the presence of Christ;  
May your holy light, keep us shining bright,  
Ever shine with presence of Christ

Marty Haugen (b. 1950)  
*Singing the Faith* no. 413

And please remember as always:

**In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of God's spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another.**

- 1. When we feel lonely let us know that in Christ we are never alone.**
- 2. When we feel isolated may we be reminded that within the worldwide Body of Christ we are always connected.**
- 3. When we need a hug help us to feel the warmth of God's embrace**
- 4. When we are compelled to keep our distance, may we be drawn close to each other within the Spirit of Companionship that flows from God and which moves through and between each one of us.**

With love and blessings, **Rev Cathy.**

## NOTICES

### Worship

**Forthcoming services are:**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 3pm A Celebration of Pentecost**

**Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 7pm A Service to recognise and celebrate the work of 'All We Can'.**

*(All We Can is an international development and emergency relief organisation. Focusing on those in greatest need, it is inspired by Christian principles, and is an integral part of the Methodist family. All We Can helps find solutions to poverty by engaging with local people and organisations in some of the world's poorest communities to end the suffering caused by inequality and injustice.)*

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June 3pm**

You can join all our services via Zoom with a video link and see and hear everything and everyone else who is participating, or you can join just with audio, *or you can telephone in.*

Login details for *all forthcoming services* are as follows:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87212246881?pwd=VXpyMzRYV21UZ1ZoYlkw2R4dmV1QT09>

**Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881**

**Password: 974333**

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### ***Circuit Prayer***

In addition, every **Sunday morning at 11am** – when we would all normally be in worship in church – we are encouraged to pray the following prayer. This way we stay connected in a very really and tangible way.

**God of Love and Life,**

**We pray to you this morning for the life the United Stockport Methodist Circuit, for our sisters and brothers who belong to:**

*(pausing briefly to reflect after each name)*

**Christ Church Methodist /URC Davenport Methodist Church Dialstone Lane Methodist Church  
Edgeley Community Church Hazel Grove Methodist Church Heaton Mersey Methodist Church  
Heaton Moor United Church St. Johns Methodist Church Tiviot Dale Methodist Church  
Trinity Methodist Church Windlehurst Methodist Church**

In this time of isolation and separation may we feel the unity of your spirit in the bonds of peace and love which connect us to one another. We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. We ask that this time of crisis might pass and that those who suffer might find comfort and strength within the knowledge of your grace, revealed through the kindness and compassion of the people of God. Eternal God, though the self-offering of your Son you have filled our lives with your presence. Help us in our sufferings and trials. Fill us with hope and strengthen us in our weakness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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### **A Good Society Beyond Covid-19 – Join a Conversation with local MPs on Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am.**

Dialstone Lane Church have, over a few years, hosted a series of events involving local Members of Parliament focussed on the subject of 'What Makes a Good Society?' At the last gathering, just prior to the December General Election, a commitment was made to invite those elected as MPs to come back and talk about what they are doing about building a good society. Although nothing like the current situation was anticipated, there will be a Zoom version of the Good Society conversation on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am. Two of the local MPs – William Wragg (Hazel Grove constituency) and Navendu Mishra (Stockport) have committed to taking part and we are just waiting to hear from Mary Robinson (Cheadle). The focus will be on how to build a good

society here in Stockport, within and after the Covid 19 crisis. We will ask the MPs what they have been doing over recent months and some of the positive things they have seen – and their principal concerns. Then we will put your questions to them.

**If you would like to join in, please contact Andy Stoker ([andy.stoker@btinternet.com](mailto:andy.stoker@btinternet.com)) to get the zoom link for the gathering or for more details, or join our Facebook group**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2267212173588534/?ref=share>

You will then be invited to:

- Send in your questions for the MPs – questions will be taken in advance, with follow-up via the Zoom “Chat” facility
- Tell us what signs you have seen of a “Good Society” in the current situation, and
- What are your major concerns – for yourself and others?

### **Financial Giving**

Please remember to maintain your financial giving to the church as much as you are able. If you already pay by Direct Debit then that will continue as normal. If you use envelopes, please fill them each week and put them to one side to bring to church when we are able to meet again. If you put in cash, please also put this to one side, or keep a note of what you would have given and offer it when you come back to church. If you would like to set up a direct debit at this time please let me, or one of the other ministers know. An remember to Gift Aid if you can. It is really important that we maintain our income as much as possible – we will lose income from our regular users, yet our normal church expenses will continue much as always. So to be assured of our regular congregational giving is very important. Having said that, we recognise that the current situation may well impact some of you financially in a very challenging way and it is not our intention to make life more difficult for you. If your resources need to be diverted at this time, then we also understand that. ***Thanks to all who have already switched to Direct Debit.***