

**Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit**  
**Sunday Worship Sheet – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024**

**Our worship for this week was written by Rev'd Rosemary Nunn. You may wish to have your Bible to hand. The hymns are at the back of the sheet. CCLI licence 556292**

**Opening Prayer**

Living God, we thank you that we can offer our worship to you wherever we are, aware that we join with worshippers from all around the world. We come to you as we are – feeling bruised, sad, joyful, contented, frustrated, accepting or countless other emotions – to praise you, our God, and to acknowledge your worth. May we feel you very close to us, and may we be ready to learn from you. **Amen.**

**StF 455. All my hope on God is founded**

**A short prayer of adoration**

Holy God, we are in awe of your power and your goodness. Your works are amazing, your love unrelenting. Your glory blazes through our lives. Your mercy surrounds us. Your grace astounds us. We worship and adore you. **Amen.**

**Bible reading:** Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

**Reflection.**

As a young child, one incident shocked me into beginning to think through what being part of the church – the community of Jesus' followers – was all about. Our neighbour reported that on her way to church that Sunday morning, she'd witnessed a cat being run over by a car. The distressed creature was badly injured, but she managed to gently move it, wrap it securely and put it in her own car, before phoning from a phone box to arrange for a local vet to see the cat immediately. She also phoned the priest to apologise for her absence at mass and was shocked when he told her to leave the cat in the car for now: her first priority was to attend mass. In his version of devout Catholicism, *nothing* was more important than partaking in the mass. I wondered as a child whether Jesus would have agreed with his priorities. Now I am inclined to think of his ruling as loveless legalism

Then I start remembering little incidents down the years within much-loved congregations in my own denomination and find myself echoing those questions still. I recall someone getting very hot under the collar about the teenage lad (the *only* teenage lad) who came to worship week after week wearing a baseball hat. My husband refused her request to ask him to remove it. There was someone who felt so strongly about the way the church should be laid out on Sunday mornings that he would visit the building very late on Saturday night to check that not the slightest hint of a curve had crept into his neat straight lines. No possibility of worshipping "in the round"! I remember overhearing a door steward saying that he intended to complain that when I was preaching at his church there were too often bits of paper with new hymns and songs to learn; and the backhanded compliment of being told elsewhere, "Well, at least you got the service in the right order".

I remember the church with a tiny communion area surrounded by choir pews for a non-existent choir. It really was extremely difficult to move about to serve bread and wine, but the minister who urged that the redundant choir pews be removed received hate mail.

I could go on! And so, doubtless, could you. Dare we ask ourselves, I wonder, whether we might perhaps feature in others' stories of clashing ideas? Of course we're all unique, so it's not surprising that we have our preferences. What CAN be surprising though, is just HOW STRONG those preferences can be and how different preferences can come to dominate church life, sometimes almost as though there is strong biblical support to support a particular view. People can be decidedly over-fond of human traditions.

In today's Gospel passage, Mark records an encounter between Jesus and a group of Pharisees and other religious experts who accuse Jesus' disciples of ignoring handed-down traditions such as eating without first performing the hand-washing ritual expected of devout Jewish people – not so much a Covid-style thorough soaping to avoid cross-infection as a ceremonial pouring of water over each hand. Mark notes that jugs and pots and pans were to be ritually cleaned, too.

Jesus is on a collision-course with these leaders and their rigid interpretations of handed-down religious traditions. He quotes the prophet Isaiah to rebuke them as hypocrites: "This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules." Jesus isn't condemning ritual handwashing or other religious traditions per se, but shines a spotlight on legalism, self-righteousness and exclusivism. These so readily accompany the zeal to follow rules and regulations, drawing us away from the lives of love for him and for others that he intends us to live. If we are to assist in development of God's kingdom here on earth, our practices must continually evolve rather than stick within familiar comfort zones.

Later in our Gospel reading, Jesus advises that we shift our focus to think about "what comes out of us" – not in the sense of juvenile lavatory humour, but in terms of what he elsewhere refers to as "fruit". Does our version of religious holiness – what goes into us - propel us towards hospitality, inclusion, freedom, deep and wide-ranging compassion? Does it lead other people to feel loved and welcomed? Does it free us up to be on the alert to act with and for God who is always doing new things? In other words, are we looking for a largely "outward" religion that is safe and easy, or a religion of the whole heart – the whole renewed heart – a religion whose fruit can liberate both ourselves and others?

September 1<sup>st</sup> marks the start of our Methodist year, and we have earmarked it as a day to think especially about our Circuit Mission aims, projects and life. It's clear that the words of Jesus we have thought about today apply not only to those Pharisees of long ago but to us, both as individuals and as Christian communities. Overuse of phrases like "the proper way", "the way we've always done it" (or even *where* we've always done it) can all too easily make a church community or group of communities inward-looking to such an extent that one of its primary purposes - to serve those beyond its walls – is pushed aside.

Recent innovative ideas for meeting and ministering beyond our existing walls and for others to come in and use our buildings in new ways suggest that this is not the case either in the Bangor and Holyhead Circuit as a whole or in its 5 churches as separate entities. With one church meeting with new people in different locations on Sundays, another dreaming new dreams with ecumenical partners and turning those dreams into action, with ever-evolving work with children and new work with older people, with food for the hungry, and plans in the pipeline for engagement with the outdoor community, the Circuit cannot be described as sitting back and resting on its laurels. What's needed is not only people to make these things happen (some of them employed to do so), but also those who will show interest, support, enthuse, encourage and pray – a body of people looking not to “keep the show on the road just as it's always been”, but to erupt in that love-fuelled active faith which is the fruit of a heart in sync with God.

### **A personal prayer of confession**

Lord, forgive the way I fool myself into believing my preferences are sanctioned by your word. Forgive the times I judge others because they don't do things the way I think they should.

Cleanse my heart, my thoughts and speech of all that defiles your image within me.

Help me day by day to grow more in your likeness. **Amen**

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### **Hymn from STF+ website. When our views are varied and emotions strong.**

### **Prayers for ourselves and others**

God of integrity and compassion,  
we pray for those whose homes look lovely from the outside, but inside are places of anger and violence;

for people who look cheerful on the outside but inside are depressed and in turmoil;  
for churches that look beautiful from outside, but are full of disillusionment and division;  
for those offering what appears to be a bargain but is actually exploitative and destructive;  
for places where animals appear to offer entertainment and fun, but are really locations of cruelty and captivity.

We pray that our world may reflect your beauty on the outside and your love on the inside.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. **Amen**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **StF 681. Community of Christ, who make the Cross your own**

### **Blessing**

May our worship nourish us through the week ahead. And may God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, inspire joy in our hearts, compassion in our words, and integrity in our lives, now and always. May we know God's blessing in our lives and may we be a blessing in the lives of others. **Amen.**

## Hymn 455

- 1 All my hope on God is founded ;  
he doth still my trust renew.  
Me through change and chance he guideth,  
only good and only true.  
God unknown,  
he alone  
calls my heart to be his own.
- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,  
sword and crown betray our trust ;  
what with care and toil we fashion,  
tower and temple, fall to dust.  
But God's power,  
hour by hour,  
is my temple and my tower.
- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,  
deep his wisdom passing thought ;  
splendour, light, and life attend him,  
beauty springeth out of naught.  
Evermore  
from his store  
new-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver  
bounteous gifts on us bestow ;  
his desire our soul delighteth,  
pleasure leads us where we go.  
Love doth stand  
at his hand ;  
joy doth wait on his command.
- 5 Still from earth to God eternal  
sacrifice of praise be done,  
high above all praises praising  
for the gift of Christ his Son.  
Christ doth call  
one and all  
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (*alt.*)

*based on* Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

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Words Edition, number 455 .

**Hymn** Suggested tune. Evelyns (StF 317ii. At the  
name of Jesus)

When our views are varied  
and emotions strong,  
when belief feels threatened,  
claiming others wrong;  
show us how to listen  
and to not accuse,  
open and respectful  
to each other's views.

If we let division  
distract from Christ's reign,  
we neglect our calling  
to aid those in pain:  
Justice must speak louder  
than our claims to right;  
love must be our essence,  
living in the light.

God, forgive your people  
in our broken state;  
we your church have fostered  
prejudice and hate.  
Let us embrace difference  
in our unity;  
for the church is richer  
with diversity.

Through a dim-lit mirror,  
partial truth we know  
and as we discover,  
grace and love must grow.  
Let God's truth shine brighter  
into every place  
till we know completely  
and see face to face.  
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### Hymn 681

- 1       Community of Christ,  
          who make the Cross your own,  
          live out your creed and risk your life  
for God alone :  
the God who wears your face,  
          to whom all worlds belong,  
          whose children are of every race  
          and every song.
- 2       Community of Christ,  
          look past the Church's door  
          and see the refugee, the hungry,  
and the poor.  
Take hands with the oppressed,  
          the jobless in your street,  
          take towel and water, that you wash  
          your neighbour's feet.
- 3       Community of Christ,  
          through whom the word must sound —  
          cry out for justice and for peace  
the whole world round :  
disarm the powers that war  
          and all that can destroy,  
          turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish  
          into joy.
- 4       When menace melts away,  
          so shall God's will be done,  
          the climate of the world be peace  
and Christ its Sun ;  
our currency be love  
          and kindness our law,  
          our food and faith be shared as one  
          for evermore.

Shirley Erena Murray (*b.* 1931)