

Sunday 20th September 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

Loving God I know that you are with me in every moment of my life but as I set this special time aside, I pray that I might feel your presence.
[Pause].

I pray that you would send your Holy Spirit, that in the stillness I might hear your Word and be joined in fellowship with sisters and brothers who gather in your name this day.

Amen.

Hymn: Only By Grace Can We Enter (StF 565)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv72Q23llp0>

Only by grace can we enter,
only by grace can we stand;
not by our human endeavour,
but by the blood of the Lamb.
Into your presence you call us,
you call us to come.

Into your presence you draw us,
and now by your grace we come,
now by your grace we come.

Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand?

Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.

Lord, if you mark our transgressions,
who would stand?

Thanks to your grace we are cleansed
by the blood of the Lamb.

Only by grace can we enter ...

Gerrit Gustafson

Let us pray together

Gracious God, I praise you for who you are. For you are the Lord, the giver and sustainer of life whose nature is love. I thank you that even when I rebel against you, your unquenchable love seeks me out. I thank you that in Jesus, you made the first move and have rescued me. I pray that as your Word ministers to me, I might so open my heart to your grace that it might fill me, transform me and overflow into all my relationships and dealings with the world. Amen.

Today's Reading from the Old Testament

Exodus 16: 2-15

²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?'

⁸And Moses said, 'When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD.'

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining." ' ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God." ' '

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.'

Today's Gospel Reading:

Matthew 20: 1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the

labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." ¹³But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

Time to Reflect

All Christians talk about grace but it seems to me that as Methodists we talk about grace a lot! This unearned, love of God in Jesus Christ freely offered to all people is both the foundation and heart of our worship, the sacraments and our new life in Christ. It is this grace that is expressed in God's saving action toward us and nothing of our faith can ever be outside a response to God's grace.

In turning to Matthew 20 we reach Jesus' parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. The New Testament scholar Charles B. Cousar suggests that the best response a preacher can make to this text is to simply get out of the way of this challenging, perhaps even annoying picture of God's grace. Why annoying? This story is told to Jesus' disciples who have as Peter says "...left everything and followed [Jesus]" (Mt 11:27). It is to these that Jesus tells his story of workers who queue for their wage after a whole day toiling in the scorching sun. We can imagine their eyes popping when the latecomers receive a full day's wage for but one hour's work. If they have stumbled upon such generosity, what then will be

their reward? Imagine then the knot in their stomachs as they receive nothing but the exact same coin as their colleagues who had hardly broken sweat. What employer would be so foolish as to alienate such faithful workers?

This then is Jesus' answer to his faithful follower's enquiry about their reward. Confronted by the reality of God's grace all legalistic religion, all bargaining with God finds its end. The reward is the work itself for it is carried out in the presence of the master.

As we are confronted by this grace, so it poses a question. Is it enough for us to know that we labour in the presence and purpose of the God who loves us? As our story stands on the threshold of Holy Week in Matthew 21, are we content that we shall gather with last minute arrivals so that even a thief, in the last minutes of his life, finds a gracious promise of paradise?

In our frustration, may we recall with humility, the grace first shown to us.

Grace and peace.

A time of prayer

Loving God,
I pray that the world might know your grace. As I begin to inhabit a "new normal", I pray for wisdom for the leaders of the world that powerful nations might respond with that self-giving generosity that you bring to the world.

On this peace Sunday, I pray for all those who respond to your love by making the first move to call an end to conflict. I pray for those caught up in conflict, those who flinch at the sound of explosives or gunshot.

I pray for those slowly returning to collective worship as some places of worship reopen and for those who feel excluded from that worship.

I ask your blessing on those close to me that even in these distanced times that you would give me the opportunity to reflect that grace first shown to me.

I ask these prayers in the only way that I can; in the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name, grace and character of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Peace Sunday

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/seasons-and-themes/special-sundays/peace-sunday/>

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: "What Shall I do my God to love...?" (StF 436)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTM3OcP5V00>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

What shall I do my God to love,
my loving God to praise?
The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
and depth of sovereign grace?

Your sovereign grace to all extends,
immense and unconfined;
from age to age it never ends;
enfolds all humankind.

Throughout the world its breadth is known,
wide as infinity;
so wide it never passed by one,
or it had passed by me.

My trespass was grown up to heaven;
but, far above the skies,
in Christ abundantly forgiven,
I see your mercies rise.

The depth of all-redeeming love
what angel tongue can tell?
O may I to the utmost prove
the gift unspeakable!

Come quickly, gracious Lord, and take
possession of your own;
my longing heart vouchsafe to make
your everlasting throne.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

A prayer of blessing

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight ;
so may God grace you,
heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness
into the light.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949)

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