

“An expert in the Law tested him saying, ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22: 36 - 40)

Dear Friends,

Last week I wrote about the role that prayer plays in the life of a Christian and in living out our Methodist Way of Life. I wonder, what has your experience of prayer been like in this last week? Have you felt God’s presence or heard God’s voice? Have you seen a prayer answered in some way? Has it been easy or hard work? Have you been able to practise it as a way of resting in God’s presence or gazing into the face of Jesus? If not, don’t give up. Keep practising. Keep training. Search for resources to help you – reading the Psalms is a great place to start but you could also get hold of a daily devotions book or simply go for a walk and offer what you encounter to God in prayer.

The second commitment in the Methodist Way of Life flows from prayer and is often expressed through prayer. It says this: *“As far as we are able, with God’s help: We will worship with others regularly.”* An interesting idea in the context of our covid pandemic with our church buildings largely shut for communal worship!

Is it still possible to *“worship with others regularly?”*

I remember in the run up to Easter last year, my next-door neighbour asked me how I was getting on with my work and what it’s like for churches at this time, I replied, “The work is largely the same, it’s just the delivery methods have changed!” Of course, that is a simplification of the truth. Those of us who prepare and lead services have been challenged in all sorts of ways by this pandemic but we have responded with great creativity.

It has often been the case that the biggest leaps forward for civilised society have come out of a time of crisis and this pandemic has forced us to think and work differently. Doing so has perhaps enabled us to engage more, not less, people in acts of worship. We are no longer confined by the limitations of church buildings, their age, condition, or layout, for sharing in worship together. We are no longer restricted by set times and patterns and the need to be in a certain place at a certain time, to share in worship.

Of course there are many aspects of buildings and service patterns that we miss dearly and some that we will want to return to but if the pandemic has reminded us of anything as Christians, it is that we can worship God in any place at any time and we can be connected with others when we do, even though that may be through different media – printed word, recorded services, zoom worship, dial-a-prayer phone lines.

We should also acknowledge that the new ability to share in virtual worship has come as a Godsend for all those folk who, for a variety of reasons, do not find it easy to attend a physical worship service. Be it age, infirmity, some forms of mental health diagnoses, chronic illnesses, competing family needs, working patterns or shifts – there have been so many people that the church has largely forgotten about when it has focussed its time and resources on services in church buildings.

And of course, the virtual world enables those who can access it to benefit from and participate in acts of worship from pretty much anywhere. Physical location is only a constraint in as far as access to the internet is concerned. Personally, I have taken part in worship from Spring Harvest and Cliff College, Methodist Central Hall Westminster, Swan Bank Methodist Church in Stoke, Chroma Church in Leicester (where some of my extended family worship) as well as Canada, America and Australia via Youtube.

When John Wesley found that he was being restricted from preaching in other Ministers' parishes in his mission to share the Good News of God's love for all people, with all people, he once memorably said, "*The World is my Parish!*" We can now clearly see the truth of that statement. What opportunities it presents to us both for mission and for deepening our understanding and experience of forms of worship that until now, we may not have encountered!

Like prayer, worship, at its heart is an expression of relationship – our relationship with God and with one another. Our worship is a whole life expression of love for God. It is not restricted to just our lips, or just our minds, or just our hearts and it is certainly not restricted to an hour a week on a Sunday morning. Worship is an expression of life – life lived in the presence of God where every view, every action, every word spoken, heard or read, every thought that sits in our mind is experienced in the company of God and which can be brought as an act of praise, thanksgiving, confession or intercession – an opportunity to participate in the life of God in this created world. And when we view worship like that, then we come to view not just our next-door neighbour but each and every individual we encounter as a person whom God loves and longs to live life with. And so our worship of God becomes a conduit for other people to come into that life-transforming relationship with God and to grow that great cloud of witnesses who give glory to God in this life and the next.

With every blessing,

Rev Tim

Worship Resources

Our Circuit website has a page dedicated to providing resources to enable you to express worship to God either on your own or in the virtual company of others. Please see this link for further details:

[Wharfedale & Aireborough Worship at Home \(wandamethodists.org.uk\)](http://wandamethodists.org.uk)