

Rev Tim Perkins
March 17th 2021

“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” Ephesians 3: 17 – 18

Dear Friends,

Last week I reflected upon the theme from the Methodist Way of Life, “We will challenge injustice.” I wonder in what places and ways have you seen injustice in the last week? How have you responded to it? As Christians, one of the way in which we can appropriately respond to injustice is to show and speak of the love of God in Christ Jesus. And that leads us neatly into this week’s theme: “We will speak of the love of God.”

I hope those of you from Burley and Menston will forgive me, but due to work and time pressures, I want to share some of the thoughts I used in worship on Sunday. Hopefully, they are worth considering again!

I love the words from Ephesians 3, quoted above (and the surrounding verses). I think it is one of the best prayers ever written. Have you noticed that the dimensions of the love of God that Paul writes about form the shape of a cross, or perhaps the shape of God’s kiss of love for his creation? The breadth and length – that’s the horizontal – and the height and depth – that’s the vertical – of God’s love. It reaches down into the very depths of our hearts and lifts us up to the very heights of heaven. It reaches inwards to transform us from the inside out and it reaches outwards, through us, to offer transformation to the world. All through the love of Jesus shown through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the tomb. He gave himself in our place. He served us to the extent that he became the sacrifice for our brokenness and he calls us to serve others through self-giving love.

For us to speak authentically of the love of God, we must know it for ourselves, it must be our own lived experience. So, I wonder, what is your experience of the love of God? How would you describe it to someone else? Have there been moments or experiences in your life when you have felt particularly embraced or sustained by the love and presence of God? Can you identify them? Can you describe them?

Maybe you’ve had a moment where you’ve experienced a sudden realisation of God’s love not just for the world in general but for you in particular, a time when you have come to understand at a deeper level just what God has done for you through Jesus. Perhaps you’ve had that experience when you’ve been reading the Bible or listening to a sermon and it’s been as though God is speaking directly to you and you are captured in his gaze and become unaware of anything else going on around you?

Perhaps, you’ve been in an attitude of prayer and you’ve heard or felt God speak clearly to you or just sensed God’s presence enveloping you as you’ve sat in the stillness. Maybe you’ve had a moment when out for a walk in the countryside or gazing up at the night sky, or looking out over the crashing waves and you have been overwhelmed by the majesty and mystery of God expressed through the created world?

Maybe you can identify times when you have realised God's guiding hand directing your path even though you did not know it at the time, or perhaps God's guidance was abundantly clear to you and you've had a very real sense of what God was asking you to do or say in a given situation? It might be that your deepest and greatest experience of the love of God has been at one of the darkest moments of your life when you have felt alone or weighed down or far from God and yet a sense of peace and trust has filled your heart and mind. Or it could be that God has become very real in a tangible moment when he has asked you to leave your comfort zone and do something that has served to stretch your faith beyond where you thought it was possible for it to go?

Maybe, overtime, you've just come to understand and experience the love of God on a daily basis in an ever-deepening way as you've prayed or walked or read Scripture or worshipped or taken communion or listened to sermons. You've just soaked it in without any major moments. You've just continued on your daily journey understanding that in some way God accompanies you on it.

Each one of these descriptions of possible ways of experiencing God's love and presence are valid and true. And do you know how I know that? Because I have been in each of those places and moments myself at some point in my Christian experience.

In the depths of my being, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am someone who is loved, held by, and precious to God, the God who is the creator of all things, the God who through Jesus has sacrificed himself for me that I might know him and the eternal kind of life that he alone can give, and the God who is my closest friend and companion through all the changing scenes of life. I am loved, I am cherished, I am held, I am precious to the God of all things. And so are you! Whether you have shared any of those experiences of God that I have described or not. The cross that we so focus on in the season of Lent and Easter is the sign of God's love for you and the seal of God's kiss to you. It reminds us of the breadth and length, the height and depth to which God goes for each one of us, to find us, to save us, to hold us, to keep us in his love and in his presence.

We all have our own story of the love of God at work in our lives and we all have that story to tell to others. Allow me to encourage you to reflect upon your own version of the story of God's love. Where have you perceived the glory and presence of God in your life? What has it looked like? What has it felt like? Maybe you could jot down some points in a journal to help you see it and make sense of it? Maybe you could write it out in the form of a testimony or witness statement? Maybe, if you are creative, you could express it in poetic form?

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Financial Giving & Gift Aid

We are grateful to everyone who has continued to make regular offerings to their church throughout the Covid Pandemic lockdowns. This has been particularly important during a time when other sources of income have largely dried up. As we approach the end of the tax year (5th April) churches will be preparing to claim Gift Aid on qualifying income. If you are planning to make an offering to your church it would be helpful if you could do so before 5th April. If you are a taxpayer and have not yet signed a Gift Aid declaration, please consider doing so; this is a vital source of income to all churches (at no extra cost to the giver) and we need to

maximise its value. Please contact your church treasurer or Gift Aid secretary for a declaration form.

Circuit CAP Debt Centre Easter Basket Appeal

We are putting together Easter Baskets for the families that we are working with. Each basket will include eggs for the children and some other goodies for the whole family to enjoy. Easter is an amazing time to share our faith and to show them the love of God. If you would like to purchase something to go in, you can either send me an email or give me a call.

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Resources for a Green Church Conference

Last week I wrote about the commitment from the Methodist Way of Life, “We will care for creation and all God’s gifts. One of the key words in our Circuit Planning for Growth policy is “Sustainable”. How seriously are we going to take these commitments?

If you think that the Climate Change Crisis really is an emergency, and that the Church has an important part to play in helping people transition to new ways of living more gently with God’s world, then sign up for the JPIT Yorkshire online conference on:

Climate Change Emergency: Resources for a Green Church

Saturday June 12th, 2021, 9.30am-3.00pm

Registration via sue.cutting1209@gmail.com

Inspiring keynote speakers to stimulate your imagination, develop your understanding of the Bible and reinvigorate your worship life. Engaging workshops with pioneers who are already bringing together faith and action for a better world. Topics covered include:

- Biblical Theology for a Green Church
- Climate change as an existential crisis
- Liturgy & Prayer for a Green Church
- COP26: what are we doing to campaign?
- Craftivism for COP26
- The Church as a Prophetic Community
- Green Church and Evangelism
- The God Plot – The city allotment and Green Church

Christian Aid & Yorkshire West Methodist District Vaccine Appeal

Yorkshire West Methodist District has partnered with Christian Aid to give people an opportunity to give thanks for their Covid-19 vaccine and help others in crisis across the world. Recognising the deep sense of relief and gratitude experienced by many people after being vaccinated, the two organisations have come together to enable people to pass the blessing on by making a donation to Christian Aid’s Coronavirus Appeal. Funds from the appeal are helping vulnerable communities around the world access soap, water, food and vital health information in the face of the pandemic. Many communities around the world face an uncertain wait for a vaccine as questions remain around the cost and timing of a global vaccine programme.

Revd Kerry Tankard, Chair of the District says, “The vaccine is bringing with it a deep sense of relief and hope for families across the UK and we saw that many people wanted to express their gratitude by reaching out to others. This is good news for us all and we genuinely give thanks for how fortunate we are. However, we are acutely aware that this good news is not being experienced equally across the world. While the pandemic affects all of us, it has highlighted the deep disparities in how communities and families are able to protect themselves both within our country and around the world. My hope is that people will give generously to the work of Christian Aid from a place of thanksgiving and a desire to see all people being able to live safely. Whether people can give just a few pounds or a much larger

sum, it will be an opportunity to share hope and love with our brothers and sisters across the world who do not have the benefits we have.”

You can donate to the Yorkshire West Methodist District's appeal by visiting <https://events.tapsimple.org/online/christian-aid/yorkshirewestvaccineappeal>