

Rev Tim Perkins  
March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021

***“How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” Psalm 104: 24***

Dear Friends,

I wonder if you have managed to find any small ways in the last week to be a help to someone else, and in so doing, to express your service to Jesus?

As we continue to reflect upon the Methodist Way of Life commitments, we come now to focus our service on the “care for creation and all God’s gifts.” This is the theme that our Chair of District, Rev Kerry Tankard preached on this last Sunday for the recorded service from Burley. I would encourage you, if you are able, to listen to what Kerry had to say via Burley’s Youtube channel: [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](#) or by searching on youtube for Burley Methodist Church Online.

What I would like to share with you now on this theme is a passage taken from the NIV Student Bible reflecting upon the words quoted above from Psalm 104:

“In 1962 biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book tracing the effects of pesticides – DDT in particular. Until then, DDT had been treated like a wonder chemical, sprayed almost at random to kill pests. Carson showed how it worked its way up the food chain, killing larger animals – like songbirds. If no birds were left to sing, we would have an ominously *Silent Spring*.

Until then, ecology had been a word known only to specialists. Thanks to Carson’s book, ordinary people began to take an interest in ecology – in the delicate balance of nature, in which each creature is intertwined with every other. People began looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint; they recycled more; many started eating organic and locally grown food. In short, the ecology movement – once confined to the fringes of society – became a mainstream phenomenon.

Ecology was new, but its ideas were old. You could have learned its basic principles from Psalm 104. It shows appreciation for every aspect of nature, even creatures like wild goats, lions and the ‘Leviathan,’ the crocodile or sea monster. The Israelites, as herders and farmers, had no romantic idealization of the outdoors. Nobody who herds sheep thinks of them as soft and fluffy pets. But to the poet who wrote Psalm 104, creatures that are of no ‘use’ to anyone still have intrinsic worth – especially to God.

The author saw how the world fits together, everything in its proper sphere. At night wild animals hunt; at daybreak humans go out to work. The rain falls, nourishing crops for people and grass for cattle, but also watering the forest to provide a place for birds to nest.

The intertwining of nature is not, for the Psalmist, like a complex machine. Things fit together because an intimate, personal God watches over his creation. Animals eat on schedule not just because their habitat contains adequate food but because God gives them their food ‘at the proper time.’ Every breath of life depends on God’s will. So do the weather, the winds and

clouds, the water supply, the very stability of the earth. The Psalmist doesn't just marvel over the complexity and beauty of nature, in it he sees the work of God.

When modern people think of ecology, they get preoccupied with the fear of overcrowding and of poisoning the planet with landfills, oil spills and toxic chemicals. The Psalms show no such fear, for overcrowding and pollution were not major problems in that pre-industrial civilization. Yet interestingly enough, this Psalm ends with a wish that God would clean up the earth – cleanse it of sinners, who mar its perfection by their rejection of God's will. The beauty of the earth, made by God, calls out for purity – purity of the heart.”

We Christians hold that as sinners ourselves we are cleansed by God's redeeming love shown through Jesus Christ. We are called then into partnership with the Spirit of God to work for the renewal of all things. I was intrigued to hear Kerry quote one version of Gen. 1: 28 that reads, 'God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; replenish the earth and subdue it.' Often that verse gets translated as "fill the earth..." but to replenish it brings, I think, a very helpful concept. Rather than our materialistic way of life which has led to the depletion of the world's natural resources and habitats, how can we live and work to replenish them? How can we use new technologies to reverse the old technologies that have had and continue to have such a detrimental impact both on our physical habitats and on our climate?

The Methodist Way of Life resources suggest the following simple ideas as places to start:

- Grow in your love of creation: Go for walks. Grow some herbs on your window ledge, know by name the trees, plants and wildlife in your area. Plant trees to mark special events.
- Support creation with your financial decisions: Let ecological considerations affect your spending and living. Buy local produce, try to shop organically, consider animal welfare and fair trade. Reduce water and energy use, find alternative transport to cars.
- Lobby for change where you can: Write letters to your MP supporting recycling, green transport, renewable energy initiatives. Joining local ecological groups can help in discovering what action you can take. There are many more resources online.

One thing I would like to challenge you, your church and our whole Circuit to consider is signing up to the eco-church awards scheme run by the charity A Rocha UK. The awards scheme is run in partnership with the Methodist Church, Christian Aid and Tearfund, amongst others. I know that Burley and Menston churches are already registered and have both received awards for the work they have done so far. To find out more about this please visit: [Eco Church - An A Rocha UK Project](#)

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

### **Worship**

You will be aware of the decision the Circuit Staff Team took in early January to suspend in-person worship in our church buildings. At the time we took that decision we committed to review at the end of January and then again after the Government released its guidance on a roadmap out of lockdown. The Circuit Leadership Team has now reviewed the position in light of the Government guidance.

There are a number of key considerations we have reflected upon including:

- The proposed lifting on March 29<sup>th</sup> of the legal requirement to stay at home.
- The guidance that those who are shielding or clinically vulnerable should continue to remain at home until the end of March.
- The slow progression in the increased numbers of people allowed to attend weddings over the next few months, from 0 to 6, to 15, to 30, to unlimited, between now and the end of June.

- The willingness of preachers to make themselves available for in-person worship in church buildings.
- The pastoral and missional work of our congregations and the needs of our communities.

In light of all this the CLT have agreed that where local church councils feel a strong and particular need to re-start in-person worship in church buildings, they may do so from Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March subject to the availability of preachers willing to lead such services and the continued implementation of robust risk assessments and strict adherence to social-distancing requirements. As has been the case right through the pandemic, where it is possible for services to be held online, local church councils should give serious consideration to this and whether agreeing to meet in person or not, should also consider how to continue supporting those who do not feel able to return to in-person worship at this time. As church councils or local leadership teams meet to make decisions they will be communicated to you by your Minister or Stewards.

### **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 (5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Please pray for...**

- Our District Synod as it meets on Saturday to discuss and vote on the recommendations from the "God in Love Unites Us," report.
- Our Circuit Meeting as it meets on Monday evening to make decisions, amongst other things, about the number and location of manses and a new model for Circuit Lay Support Staff.