

TORRIDGE METHODIST CIRCUIT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2022 - Issue 126

Welcome to Edition Number 126

Contact e-mail address is newsletter@torridgemethodistcircuit.org.uk or bucklanddave1953@btinternet.com

Any comments or items you wish to share, please contact the editor, Dave Watson by e-mail; phone 01237 451437 or to 6 Greenings Road, Buckland Brewer, Bideford, EX39 5LU.

Circuit Contact details: -

Superintendent Minister – Rev Rob Blackhall – 01805 628041 – robertjblackhall@gmail.com

Minister – Rev Andrew Vidamour – 01237 478453 – vidamour@mybroadbandmail.com

Lay Pastoral Assistant – Frank Watson – 07446 157329 -: pastoral.torridgecircuit@outlook.com

Circuit Administrator – Sarah Richards – 01237 472649 – sarahrichards185@gmail.com

Circuit Safeguarding Officer – Jacqui Watson – safeguarding@torridgemethodistcircuit.org.uk

As well as the Circuit Facebook page – **Torrige Methodist Circuit**, we have a private Facebook Group where we care share thoughts, prayers & other material on **Torrige Methodist Circuit Group**. If you wish to join please push the Join button & I can add you.

Please pray for our Ministers, Rob Blackhall & Andrew Vidamour, for Frank Watson & Sarah Richards and all involved in the varied life of the Circuit; for those connected to the various Chapels & the communities in which they live & work.

CIRCUIT ZOOM SERVICES

The Circuit Services continue to take place weekly on Zoom using the Services that are printed in the Circuit Newsletter. The Services are on Sunday Evenings starting at 6.30pm – but the ‘doors will be open’ at about 6.15pm. The contact/entry details will be send out during the preceding week & the Service can be accessed via a computer/laptop with camera/microphone, I Pad/Phone or using a ‘normal’ phone. Even if you have a device with camera/microphone & do not wish to be seen – you can join in without the camera on.

If you do not receive an email or want further information – please contact Sarah Richards, Circuit Administrator on 01237 472649 or sarahrichards185@gmail.com

FROM REV ROB BLACKHALL – SUPERINTENDENT MINISTER

Dear Friends,

Hello and Good-bye, well for a little while.

On Monday 9th May I will be starting my sabbatical. This is a three-month gift given by the Church to its ministers. It is a “period of release from the ordinary duties of the appointment, in addition to normal holidays, for the purpose of pursuing an approved programme of study, research, work or experience”.

A sabbatical takes place ever seventh year; although this is only the second one, I have had. Due to my commitments as a school Chaplain, especially in relation to wretched examinations (please pray for our young people as they enter this stressful time of the year), I only had a five-week sabbatical in 2013. Then I walked the Pembrokeshire Coast path and lived with the monks on Caldey Island for a week.

The concept of sabbatical of course is a Biblical one. On the seventh day, God rested.

I recently found some helpful pointers to a sabbatical
5 truths about Sabbath, and sabbatical

1. A Sabbath is not a reward for hard work
2. A sabbath is a reminder that our work will remain incomplete
3. A sabbath is a day that moves us from production to presence
4. Sabbath reminds us that we are not God
5. Sabbath points us to the deeper rest we need, found in Christ.

Of course, and rightly, you might add that is nothing to do with being a minister; and I would totally agree. We spend too much time dashing around; trying to keep our Chapels going, and doing all the things that need doing. Do we spend enough time with God?

I am hoping to re-introduce an idea I had hoped to do two years ago the pandemic arrived – that of setting aside a morning or afternoon each month simply to be. (See Time for God).

That is for the future. What of now? What am I going to be doing?

My sabbatical is going to have three elements

- Body
- Mind
- Spirit
-

Body – I shall do some walking. We live in a fantastic part of God's creation. There are parts of the Coast al path I, and the dogs, will explore.

Mind. I know this sounds daft, but I need to learn to read again. I have not done enough reading over the last few years; and I have increasingly found it difficult to sit down and read the material I need to sustain and active and full-time ministry. In the past two years I have read too many government Covid reports and not enough Theology. I aim to start with sports books to get my going, read something weightier, the first volume of Barrack Obama's memoirs; before turning to some of the unread material on my book shelves. I had intended had my sabbatical taken place two years ago to complete a piece of work by Amos Cresswell on the Acts of the Apostles. I may even start that.

Spirit – I will go and retreat and find some time to simply be with God. The walking will help that. I ask for your prayers and support.

Can I also ask for your prayers for Andrew Vidamour who will be acting as Superintendent in my absence and also for the Leadership team who will be covering other roles.

I hope to return refreshed and ready for the next, and last phase, of my ministry among you.

Have a good summer.

God Bless - Rob

ARRANGEMENTS FOR ROB BLACKHALL'S SABBATICAL

Superintendent: Andrew Vidamour will be acting Superintendent of the Torridge Circuit and will chair Circuit Meeting on Thursday 16th June

LP: Tuesday 21st June

- Pastoral: There are good pastoral networks in all the Chapels; but in emergency Andrew Vidamour and Frank Watson can be contacted.
- Administrator: Day to day management and support of the Administrator falls to the support group and the Leadership group.
- Lay Pastoral Ass: Day to day management and support of the Administrator falls to the Leadership group.
- Safeguarding: All enquires to Jacqui Watson and to the acting Superintendent
- Complaints: To acting superintendent
- Invitation Comm: RB will chair

TIME FOR GOD

We all spend too much time dashing around – too much time doing the endless jobs that need doing. But when do we take time to be with God? Isn't there a time for just stopping and taking time to "be"?

As a staff we are concerned that there is always things to do in our Chapels and for our Chapels – property to be checked and forms to be filled, money to be counted. All that is part of our stewardship and the responsibility we take on, even if it seems a bit onerous at times.

But time to stop and stare, time to reflect, time to be with God?

Of course, there is, but this will not happen unless we are intentional about it.

So, we are suggesting that once a month at least one of us will go to a particular Chapel and spend the morning/afternoon there. There will be no set agenda, no formal part, but just an opportunity to take time. Maybe read a book (and it does not have to be a Christian book), maybe pray, maybe talk, maybe sit in silence – whatever is helpful and appropriate.

And if people want to join us, then please feel free, but there is no compulsion.

What do you think?

Rob Blackhall

DATES

Tuesday 3rd 2pm leadership meeting

Saturday 7th 10am District Synod – Tavistock

Sunday 8th 3pm Service of Thanksgiving and Renewal at Alwington
There will be no zoom service that week.

Saturday 21st 10am ADVANCED SAFEGURDING TRAINING MODULE
Buckland Brewer Village Hall

Thursday 26th ASCENSION DAY - 7pm Circuit Prayer Meeting

THERE WILL BE NO NEWSLETTER IN AUGUST

Circuit Meeting

The Circuit Meeting voted for the enclosed as a way forward for our circuit next year. This is about Mission – how can we spend less time on administration and more being the people of God in this place.

I commend it to you.

GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE 2022/23

The Governing body of the Methodist Church is the annual Conference.

CIRCUIT

CIRCUIT MEETING – Principle Meeting responsible for the affairs of the Circuit and the development of Circuit Policy. 4 Meetings a year. Sept, November, March, June

Policy, Finance, Property, Safeguarding, GDPR

SO 510 Superintendent, Presbyters, Circuit Stewards, Secretary, LP Secretary, from each Church one Steward and Treasurer. Representatives elected by the Church Councils, ensuring representation from all CC and Societies. Additional persons as the CM may desire.

The Following are sub-committees of the CM.

Leadership Meeting –
9 meetings

Circuit Safeguarding – 2
meetings. Training and
supporting local Churches.
Team to support our work.

Local
Preachers
4 meetings

Graveyards – 2 meetings.
Representatives from CM
and CC and Local
societies with graveyard

Treasurer's Meeting
– as required

CHURCH COUNCILS

5 Church Councils

Bideford

Northam

South of Torrington (Black Torrington, Lake, Milton Damerel, Thornhillhead, Langtree, Sheepwash))

Torrington (Torrington, Alverdiscott)

West Torridge (Alwington, Buckland Brewer, Littleham, Parkham)

CHURCH COUNCILS.

Generally three times a year – Autumn, Spring (before CM), May/June

The Church Council has authority and oversight over the whole area of the ministry of the Church and its property. Mission, Worship, Pastoral, Finance, Property, Safeguarding, Data Protection.

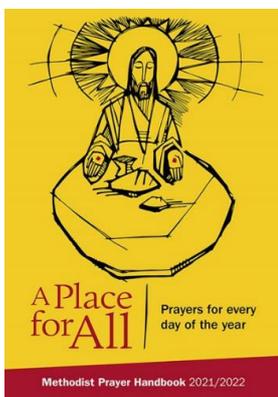
SO 610 Superintendent, Presbyters, a Circuit Steward, Secretary, Stewards, Treasurer. In Churches less than 50 – all members of the Church willing to stand, ensuring representation from each society.

At Torrington, between 6 and 15 representatives elected annually from the General Church Meeting, ensuring representation from each society, ensuring all aspects of Church life are covered.

LOCAL SOCIETY
MISSION, SERVICE AND WORSHIP
COMMITTEE

PASTORAL COMMITTEE Twice a
year

CIRCUIT STAFF: Superintendent, Presbyter, Lay Pastoral Assistant, Family and Young People's worker, Administrator, Local Lay Pastors.



PRAYER

The Methodist Prayer Diary for this year is a rich resource for use in our own and Church Prayer life. Copies are available from the Methodist Publishing House.

Daily reflections and questions to ponder may be found at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/>

Also, you can find a pray of the day at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/prayer-of-the-day/>

BIDEFORD CHURCH ANNIVERSARY - Saturday 18th June at 3pm Preacher: Revd Graham Thompson

This will be a circuit event & will be Graham's last appointment in the District. As a week later he will be inducted as the President of the Methodist Conference.

This will be a good opportunity to celebrate our work in Bideford, but also to Wish Graham and Alison all the best as they leave the District and pray for them in Graham's year as President.

FROM REVD ANDREW VIDAMOUR

Dear Friends,

I enjoy detective stories, and one I read was 'The Last Sherlock Holmes Story' by Michael Dibdin. This is told from the point of view of Dr Watson, Holmes' ally in detection, and it has a semi-documentary flavour with a surprise ending.

In the original Sherlock Holmes stories, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Holmes' arch-enemy is the master criminal Professor Moriarty, and often there is a battle of wits between the two, with Moriarty finally being killed after a duel with Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls in the Alps. In Watson's retelling of the story, however, Moriarty is the 'alter ego' of Holmes, who effectively has a split personality and carries out the murders attributed to Jack the Ripper (alias Moriarty) in Victorian London. And the conclusion of the story is that, after a meeting with Watson at the Reichenbach Falls, Holmes throws himself off that great height, falling to his death.

At the heart of this story is the insight that, in the hearts and minds of each of us, if in a less extreme form than with Holmes here, there is a conflict between what we know to be right and creative, and what (subconsciously at least) we know to be evil and destructive. And sometimes we get confused between these two aspects of ourselves, as St Paul describes: 'The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will...' (Romans 7: 19).

Now this is partly psychology and morality, but there is also a spiritual dimension here – an aspect of our lives and ourselves which goes beyond purely cause-and-effect (and which calls us to use terms such as 'sin' and 'grace'). This is a matter of mysterious depth, and Paul resorts to some very powerful language to describe it: he talks about 'principalities and powers', for example, recognising that sometimes we are swept along by forces outside ourselves in the choices we make and the actions we take.

And this is true socially, politically and economically as well, as we remember in Christian Aid Week (this year from 15th-21st May). Sadly, as we are all too well aware, there are huge forces in our world which cause violence, division and exploitation in and between peoples and countries, and these 'principalities and powers' may seem overwhelming in their strength.

Christian Aid Week, however, is a chance to recall and celebrate those victories for radical sharing and peace-making the Holy Spirit makes possible, and to pray that these and other signs of hope may grow and flourish.

And we pray these gifts of healing in Christ, too, for ourselves with our own complex and sometimes divided souls and personalities.

Andrew Vidamour

'Thy Kingdom Come':

'Saturday 28th May from 10am-noon at **Alwington Parish Church**: Prayer Event, partly led, partly open – please feel free to stay for all or part of the time. We pray for the coming of God's Kingdom, which touches on every aspect of our lives and our world, and we pray for the renewal of the Holy Spirit as we look to the season of Pentecost.'

South West Awake as part of 'Thy Kingdom Come'

As part of 'Thy Kingdom Come', the global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus. There is an event on Saturday 4th June starting at 10.30am, called 'South West Awake' which is aiming to form a chain of prayer and praise around the South West using the Coast Path. If you feel you like to join in this wave of prayer, please do feel free to visit the website, <https://www.southwestawake.com/> and sign up for one of the vacant locations.

INFORMATION ON CIRCUIT ARCHIVES

A small team recently sorted out a large amount of archive material from across the Circuit. Several boxes of documents have been taken for deposit at the North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple, but much material has also had to be destroyed.

In order to help with the management of historical documents, please note the following guidelines from the Methodist Church Retention Schedule for local Church documents.

Church Council and related Minutes: Keep for current year + 5 years, then archive.

Annual Accounts: Keep for current Connexional year + 6 years, then archive.

Cash books and financial statements: Keep for current Connexional year + 6 years, then destroy.

Accounts of reporting organisations: Keep for current Connexional year + 6 years, then archive if not found in Church accounts.

Rent ledgers: Keep for current Connexional year + 6 years, then destroy.

Gift Aid Declarations: Keep for current Connexional year + 6 years, then destroy.

Schedule B returns: Destroy 2 years after audit.

Church Membership and Adherents lists: Permanent retention, with superceded copy to Archive.

Insurance policies: Retain for 40 years, then destroy.

Claims correspondence: destroy 3 years after last action.

Property agreements and leases: Archive 6 years after end of agreement.

Quinquennial Inspection Reports: retain while property is owned by the Church.

Records of building schemes: Archive 5 years after last action.

Accident reporting sheets or book – for adults: Keep from date of incident for 3 years, then destroy.

Accident reporting sheets – for children: Keep until date when the child attains the age of 21 plus 3 years, then destroy.

Most Safeguarding records: Retain for 75 years after the conclusion of the matter.

General Correspondence: Destroy 1 year after conclusion of matter.

There may be exceptions to these guidelines, but at least this is a framework. For other documents, and with any general queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. Likewise, please let me or Dave Watson have any historical documents even if you are not sure whether or not they need to be archived.

Andrew Vidamour

SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

Online Training Programme 2022

For all face-face dates please contact your District Safeguarding Officer or in the case of the Foundation course the Circuit Safeguarding Officer (Jacqui Watson)

Jacqui would like to know if anyone books onto the Foundation Courses & when you have completed it – please let her have sight of your certificate for her records.

Please book via Eventbrite – Follow the online instructions

ONLINE: Foundation Module – Creating Safer Space

Thursday 12th May 2022 at 9:30am

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/methodist-foundation-module-safeguarding-creating-space-registration-159103937159>

Monday 20th June at 7pm - <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/288402759417>

Advanced Module

The Advanced course is being delivered Online and Onsite across the region.

From Jacqui Watson – Circuit Safeguarding Officer

Some people within the circuit will be invited to the event below, the training mentioned is the advanced module and is specific to certain roles within the church family. I include the details in this newsletter so that we might have some prayer support from homes around the circuit as the training can be quite emotional and bring things and events from ones past into present time. The circuit already have a pastor team that will be onsite to support participants as required.

The details for the actual training is as follows, it is being delivered face to face by a district trainer based in Exeter, Julian Albrow, some of you might remember him from when he lead the foundation/refresher at Alverdiscott a few years ago.

The training will take place at **Buckland Brewer Hall, EX39 5HY** on Saturday 21st May from 10am – 4pm. Please bring a pack lunch, drinks will be provided.

If you were not able to attend the 2 preparation sessions & intend to attend the Day on Saturday 21st May please contact Jacqui Watson to receive a copy of the Preparation Book to work through it at home.

If you wish to undertake the Course Online, please contact Jacqui Watson.

Online Advanced is to be booked through your Circuit Safeguarding Officer, the course is an e:learning exercise through an online platform which delegates progress through at their own speed. On registration, delegates will be given the booking link to sign off your learning journey at the relevant gathered session.

The next gathered session is below - **note you cannot attend a gathered session until you have completed all of the online modules;**

Monday 16th May – Advanced Zoom Gathered Session – 7pm

Wednesday 22nd June – Signing Off/ Gathered Session on Zoom at 9:30am

BIBLE MONTH – 30 Days with Isaiah

This Year the Bible Month will look at Isaiah during June.

There are some events regarding Bible Month which are being planned during June.

These are hopefully Hybrid Meetings at **Buckland Brewer** on Wednesdays at 2pm on 1st, 8th, 15th & 22nd June.

There are resources available on the Bible Month page of the Methodist Church Website & Dave Watson has some printed booklets available.

WEEKLY SERVICES TO USE ON ITS OWN OR WITH THE ZOOM SERVICE

CIRCUIT ZOOM SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 1st MAY

Call to Worship: Come, let us enter the presence of the One who sits on the heavenly throne. Let us join with every creature in heaven and earth, and add our voices to the choir of angels, worshipping and praising our Creator, the One Most Holy. **Amen.**

Hymn: 'How shall I sing that majesty' (8 HAP/53 STF)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

Living God, the God of our ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, eternal glory is yours and you are worthy of all praise.

*In grace and love you gave your Son to be our Saviour, to die on the Cross and to be raised again by you. To you, seated on the throne of your heavenly majesty, and to the Lamb, who takes away the world's sin, be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever. **Amen.***

Be gracious to us, loving God, and listen to our prayer. Forgive us for the many times when our deeds have belied our words. Like Peter, we have boasted our allegiance and then denied our Lord.

We have failed in humble service, we have failed in trust and obedience, we have failed in love and forgiveness.

(Silent confession)

*As your Son forgave Peter and called him to shepherd his sheep, graciously forgive and renew us and recall us to your service. We ask it in his name. **Amen.***

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm 30 (808 STF)

Hymn: 'From heaven you came' (272 STF)

Bible Reading: Acts 9: 1-6

Bible Reading: John 21: 1-19

Hymn: 'Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire' (469 HAP/155 STF)

Sermon:

I remember a list of 'signs of transcendence', hints that the world of the senses, or the world of 'getting and spending', are not the only realities, and not the ultimate ones either: that greater mysteries and revelations are often breaking through to point us to a fuller and richer sense of life. A sense of humour was one of these signs of transcendence, as was the gift of altruism (self-giving in the service of others, even at personal cost), and I think we could add symbols and myths, as well as music, among others, here, too.

But another was 'penny-dropping moments', points of sudden awareness and insight, which we might call 'Eureka moments', remembering Archimedes' point of mathematical revelation. Our two New Testament readings offer us examples of such realisations.

First there was Peter who had returned to Galilee with his friends after the events of Holy Week and Good Friday, perhaps resigned to a lifetime of fishing there from now on. And into his complex emotions of grief and guilt, fatigue and uncertainty (and maybe fear), comes a sudden inrush of hope and renewal as the Risen Jesus appears on the lakeside, welcoming his friends and cooking them breakfast (what else but fish? Especially as a fish was a sign of belonging for the Early Church).

And then Jesus shared that simple but classic and crucial conversation with Peter, one of the cornerstones of the Church. Peter has, just a short time previously, let Jesus down, at least in his own eyes, by refusing to acknowledge his friendship with Jesus, there in the shadows of the High Priest's courtyard. And perhaps that, almost as much even as the death of Jesus, seemed the end of the road to and for Peter.

How could he come back from this, even if Jesus wanted and called him to do so? What future did a disloyal disciple have in the working out of Jesus' Great Commission? And yet here is the Good Shepherd clearly offering Peter a new start, not in the form of a direct confession and absolution, but in a relational and pastoral way: 'Do you love me?', Jesus asks, and it is as if Peter's replies in the affirmative form both a bedrock and an energy for his future life's purpose as Jesus responds: 'Then feed my lambs, tend my sheep'.

This was indeed a penny-dropping moment of grace: Peter knew then, perhaps for the first time, the reality of Easter: that God's love is eternal not only in breaking the bonds of death but also in giving hope in the here and now, a hope based on God's radical acceptance of each one of us, quickened by repentance, so that new beginnings become not only possible but likely.

And such, of course, was also the experience of Saul of Tarsus, changed overnight into Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ, by sudden revelation and the grace of God.

Have you known any such penny-dropping moments? If so, be thankful. If not, recall too the testimony to God's love and the Easter hope in the steady Christian witness of millions of saints over the years, a few known to you, the vast majority unknown.

But all given the same simple but far-reaching challenge Jesus gave to Peter: 'Feed my lambs, tend my sheep'. Amen.

Silence

Hymn: 'Teach me, my God and King' (803 HAP/668 STF)

Prayers of Intercession:

Holy God, we pray for those who are charged to care for the welfare of nations: for the United Nations Organisation; for governments and leaders; for all who vote at elections.

We pray especially today for....

We pray that, working together, the peoples of the world may bring an age of peace, when each person and each society feels secure in a world where justice, wisdom and compassion reign.

*Lord, we love you: **Help us to care for your world.***

Merciful God, we pray for those who are charged to care for the needy: for those who feed and minister to the hungry in this country and around the world; for those who help and counsel those who are struggling to cope; for all those who raise money to pay for caring work.

We pray especially today for....

We pray that in our search for a fairer sharing of the earth's wealth we may be granted the vision of an age without hunger and want.

*Lord, we love you: **Help us to care for your world.***

Gracious God, we pray for those who are charged to care for the sick and dying, and others in need: for those who nurse relatives or friends at home; for all who serve in different ways in hospitals, hospices and care homes; for hospital chaplains and visitors.

We pray especially today for....

We pray that as we seek to give comfort and hope to those who suffer in body, mind or spirit, we may learn that health and wholeness, our complete salvation, is to be found in our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

*Lord, we love you: **Help us to care for your world.***

God of compassion, we pray for those who are charged to care for the Church: for ministers and leaders; for stewards, preachers and teachers; for all those engaged in pastoral work, visiting the sick, being with the bereaved, listening to those who are troubled, anxious or depressed.

We pray especially today for....

We pray that in our service together we may be obedient Disciples of Christ, fulfilling his charge to Peter by tending and feeding his sheep.

*Lord, we love you: **Help us to care for your world.***

*In the name of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. **Amen.***

Hymn: 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' (611 STF)

The Blessing: *Christ our friend, you ask for our love in spite of our betrayal. Give us courage to embrace forgiveness, know you again, and trust ourselves in you.*

*And to that end, the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest and remain with us and with all people, now and always. **Amen.***

HAP: Hymns and Psalms - STF: Singing the Faith

ZOOM SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 22nd MAY 2022

Call to Worship: Let us be glad and sing for joy, lifting praises to our gracious God whose light shines upon us in Christ. **Amen.**

Hymn: King of Glory, King of Peace' (499 HAP/56 STF)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession:

We hear the promise of Jesus: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. We pray for the fulfilment of that promise.

Loving God, we come to you in praise, for the Heir of your majesty is the friend who shared our weakness, and his rising from the dead has made us heirs with him. As we gather in him to worship you, we know that our prayer is heard, that your Spirit has new truth to quicken us with joy.

Let him declare to us the inward truths of Jesus: the words of Jesus, to echo in our conscience; the face of Jesus, to look into our heart; the wounds of Jesus, to bring us forgiveness; the life of Jesus to strengthen our service.

*In the Name of Jesus, we come to you in adoration. **Amen.***

Gracious God, it is more than the wonder of your being, it is more than our smallness, that hides your presence from us; for we have disobeyed you and have failed in care for our neighbours. We have been discontented with you, dissatisfied with the limits of our life, quick to demand and slow to trust.

*For the sake of your Son, whom you have made for us the way to peace, renew to us now your pardon, most merciful God. **Amen.***

*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. Hear then Christ's word of grace to us: Your sins are forgiven. **Amen. Thanks be to God.***

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm 67 (855 HAP)

Hymn: 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind' (673 HAP/495 STF)

Bible Reading: Acts 16: 9-15

Bible Reading: Revelation 21: 10 and 21: 22-22:5

Hymn: 'Powerful in making us wise to salvation' (479 HAP/160 STF)

Sermon:

This is the Sunday before Ascension Day, and appropriately the controlling lesson speaks of the glory of God. On Thursday next, and in the days afterwards leading up to Pentecost, we reflect on the glory of God revealed in the Risen Christ now restored to the Father in the life of heaven, and at the same time we await the promised Holy Spirit.

And our reading from Revelation presents the eternal glory of God's rule in dazzling and moving language, drawing on several strands of imagery from elsewhere in the Bible. We may note, for example, the parallel between the visionary writer of Revelation being carried away by the Spirit of

God to a great and lofty mountain for their vision, and Moses being shown the Promised Land by God from Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:4), and Ezekiel having a vision of a restored Temple in Jerusalem from a mountain (Ezekiel 40:1-2). And we may note, too, Elijah's hearing God's 'still, small voice' on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 19:11-12), and Jesus' Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (e.g. Luke 9: 18-36)

All these are visions of God's glory glimpsed from literal high points in the created order: mountains are so often symbols of God's truth and love. But the vision here has a timeless and eternal quality: the glory of God, not the sun or moon, gives the new Jerusalem the light and energy it needs, and the river flowing through it is no less than 'the river of life', while it is the very 'tree of life' we see on the banks of the river, taking us right back to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9).

This is a great picture of harmony and fulfilment for humanity (and all creation): 'the leaves of the trees' are for 'the healing of the nations', while the servants of God live in worship, joy and peace. Like the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, all this is inspiring and comforting, but it can so easily become merely a haven of refuge from the troubles of the world. Sometimes we need this, but we are also called to share in God's work of saving the world, in Christ.

So our Acts reading reminds us of God's call to offer the Good News of Jesus in word and action, even at personal risk and cost. And Paul's adventure in going to Macedonia bears fruit: Lydia and her household are baptised, reminding us again of that 'river of life' God offers us. How might you be called to reflect the glory of God in new and familiar ways? **Amen.**

Silence

Hymn: 'Make me a channel of your peace' (776 HAP/707 STF) / 'Longing for light' (706 STF)

Prayers of Intercession:

In the power of the Spirit, God of Love, we come, bringing a world in need of renewal. Hear us as we pray and let your Spirit breathe on us.

Holy Spirit, breathe your renewing strength on all who struggle with hardships and difficulties. People in war-torn areas of the world: people maimed, disabled, made homeless or bereaved as a result of war. People in areas of the world where food and water are scarce, where people suffer disease and illness as a result of poor sanitation and lack of cleanliness. People who are tortured and abused for their religious faith or political commitment.

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe on them and us, bringing your strength.

Holy Spirit, breathe your renewing courage on all who struggle with hardships and difficulties. People who are physically ill. People who care for a loved one who is sick or dying. People who are suffering in the mind the terrors and torments of internal distress. People who are suffering spiritually.

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe on them and us, bringing your courage.

Holy Spirit, breathe your renewing love on all who struggle with hardships and difficulties. People who are facing hard decisions. People who are consumed by guilt and remorse over their actions. People who are convinced they are unlovable and unworthy.

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe on them and us, bringing your love.

In the power of the Spirit, Father God, and in the name of Jesus, send your Holy Spirit into this needy world and renew us with strength, courage and love. **Amen.**

Hymn: 'For the healing of the nations' (402 HAP/696 STF)

The Blessing: *God of love enfold us; God of comfort, heal us; God of joy uplift us; God of hope renew us; God of peace refill us time and time again.
And to that end the blessing of God Almighty be with us and all people, now and always. Amen.*

HAP: Hymns and Psalms - STF: Singing the Faith

CIRCUIT ZOOM SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 29TH MAY 2022

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (Sunday in Ascensiontide)

Call to Worship: Our Lord has returned to his throne in heaven. He is seen no more on earth. Yet he lives and is with us now and for all eternity. We are in the presence of our ascended Lord. We celebrate the mystery of our glorious King.

Hymn: **We sing the praise of Jesus** (*StF 315*)

Prayer of Adoration: Mighty God, transcending your world yet dwelling within it, we worship you. Caring Father, showing us in Jesus your face of love, we worship you. We have no words with which to praise your great and glorious Name, only silence. Yet silence is not enough. Lift us, hearts, minds and wills, into the joy of your divine presence, that seeing you as you are, we may worship you as we ought; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession: Loving Father, we confess how much we have failed you and each other. You have given us tasks to do – but we have not done them. You have taught us to love one another – but our love has been cold. You have bidden us hope – but we have despaired. You have shown us the humility of Christ – but we have been proud. You have given to those in need – but we have ignored them. You have called us to trust – but we have not listened.

And yet we still have hope, and our hope is in Jesus. By his incarnation and sharing of our lot, forgive us our sins. By his death on Calvary's Cross, which was for us, forgive us our sins. By his rising again and his pleading for us in heaven, forgive us our sins. Make us anew, in the image of the living Christ, to your praise and glory. **Amen.**

Hymn: **All heaven declares** (*StF 293*)

Preface to Epistle: The writer calls for unity within the church, and identifies the ascended Christ as the source of the various gifts within the life of the Christian community. These gifts are to be used to equip God's people for their ministry, with the ultimate aim that all may grow in Christ.

Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-16

Preface to The Gospel: Luke closes his Gospel with the charge, given by the risen Christ to his disciples, that they should witness to his fulfilment

of the Jewish scriptures. They are to preach repentance and forgiveness through out the world, thus continuing the ministry of Jesus himself. The Gospel ends, as it began, in Jerusalem with the people waiting for the kingdom of God.

The Gospel: **Luke 24:44-53**

Hymn: **One is the body and one is the Head** (*StF 688*)

Sermon:

Hymn: **There is a Redeemer** (*StF 338*)

Prayers of Intercession: Rejoicing in the glorious Ascension, let us pray to the Lord.

Make your Church a messenger of the gospel that has been revealed, and a witness to all nations of Christ, the highly exalted . . . Keep all Christian people open to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.

Now let all nations know that Christ is ascended in glory . . . Bless the missionaries and teachers who work to make him known . . . As his humanity is taken up into heaven, may the perfect image of God be restored to all humankind.

As we look up to heaven in adoration, let us turn our eyes also towards the needs that lie around us . . . Make us bearers of your word to those who share our lives, witnesses to our community of the divine glory.

Have mercy on those who cannot see beyond the clouds of sorrow and pain that cover them, and those whose vision is darkened by guilt without relief . . . Grant them the knowledge of Christ who has borne our suffering and made atonement for sin, to fill them with his light.

We pray for the departed who have followed where Christ has led and been lifted up to be with him in heaven . . . We pray that he will receive us to himself when he shall come again.

May our prayers be accepted through Christ, risen, ascended, glorified.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Looking for the coming of his kingdom, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: **Our Father . . .**

Hymn: **Jesus is King** (*StF 327*)

The Blessing: The Spirit of truth lead you into all truth, give you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and strengthen you to proclaim the word and works of God; and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

BIDEFORD AND NORTHAM NEW YEAR BIBLE STUDY

At the home of Diana Yendall in Northam or at Gillian Allin's home in Northam
The Study is weekly on Tuesdays at 2pm & will be Led by Julia Spencer
Further details from Julia on 01237 425361

We Welcome fresh people to our group where we learn from each other!

Tuesday May 3 rd	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Resurrection
Tuesday May 10 th	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Ascension
Tuesday May 17 th	Julia	at 2pm at Gillian's Home - Pentecost
Tuesday May 24 th	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Trinity
Tuesday May 31 st	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Intro to Isaiah
Tuesday June 7 th	Diana	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Isaiah WEEK 1
Tuesday June 14 th	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Isaiah WEEK 2
Tuesday June 21 st	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Isaiah WEEK 3
Tuesday June 28 th	Julia	at 2pm at Diana's Home - Isaiah WEEK 4

ISRAEL 2022

Peter Whatton will be leading a **tour of the Holy Land** from 17th to 25th October. Peter and his late wife, Ann, lived in Jerusalem and worked at the Garden Tomb for a number of spells. So, Peter knows the country well, and his local knowledge makes the tour all the more special. To visit places where Jesus lived and taught, and where some of the Old Testament stories played out is an indescribable experience. Guests can be assured of excellent accommodation, exciting cuisine catering for all tastes, and comfortable, air-conditioned coach travel through this fascinating country.

Contact Peter direct, or Judy Ross (01237 477 710) if you are interested.

ALWINGTON METHODIST CHURCH

'On Sunday 8th May at 3pm, there will be a **Service of Thanksgiving for the Life and Witness of Alwington Methodist Church at Alwington Chapel**. This will be followed shortly afterwards by a **Service of Renewal and Rededication at Alwington Parish Church** and then refreshments in the Old Schoolroom there.

This will be an opportunity to reflect on and give thanks for the many years of faithful Christian worship and service in the present Alwington Chapel and in another Methodist building prior to that. It will also be a chance to consider the future as the Alwington Society continues to worship and witness in new ways, and to support the Alwington friends in this as a Circuit.

Hopefully, some friends from around the Circuit will be able to attend this significant occasion.'

BUCKLAND BREWER

We Live Stream Services on the Buckland Brewer Methodist Church You-Tube Channel on the 3rd & 4th Sunday in the Month & the 5th Sunday if there is one.

The Weekly '**Time Together**' **Toddler Group** continues at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church** with both Methodist & Anglican volunteers being present. We meet on Monday's from 9.30am to about 12noon, The cost is £1.50 per family & the numbers have been steadily increasing – families do not just come from Buckland but from neighbouring communities – they often come as friendship groups – so if anyone is aware of any Babies & Toddlers, who with their parents, grandparents or carers are looking for a 'chilled out' session of play & chat with tea/coffee/biscuits – just point them in the direction of Buckland Chapel – Dave Watson 07484 223515 or bucklanddave1953@btinternet.com

The **Wednesday Weekly Coffee Morning** also continues at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church** from 10am-12noon – this is for **ALL** but especially for those who have moved into the parish/village since lockdown or anyone who would like to meet others in the community over a mug of tea/coffee with Tradecraft Biscuits & possibly Cake!! – details from Dave Watson (see above)

The **Monthly ‘Mini Market’** has resumed, raising funds for Community Groups in Buckland – the Next One is on Saturday 14th May at the **Methodist Chapel** from 10am-1pm – Refreshments are available for Chapel Funds

On Thursday 12th May there is an Introductory Session of **TODDLERS’ TUNE TIME** at **Buckland Brewer Methodist Church** from 9.30am-10.15am – This is a **FREE SESSION** of Music Makers to see if there is a need for this to be on a more regular basis – if so the cost will be £2 – This is for ALL 0-5 year olds.

On Saturday 14th & Sunday 15th May – **ANNUAL PLANT SALE on Village Green** from 10am-3pm – raising funds for Parish & Methodist Churches; Churchyard & Hall.

On Sunday 15th May – **SAFARI LUNCH** starting with Starter & Main Course in Buckland Brewer Hall; desserts in the Methodist Church & Tea/Coffee Biscuits & Cheese in the Parish Church – Cost £10 per adult & £5 for primary age children – Further Details & booking with Betty on 01237 451132

FROM JACQUI WATSON

As a fundraiser for All We Can I knitted some corsages (20) these proved popular with the people of Buckland Brewer which meant I was able to pay them £230 pounds. I also agreed to gift aid which gave another £57.50 - we will also be paying in another £69 from the Community Shops Easter draw.



PARKHAM METHODIST CHURCH

Donkeys Lead the Way

Martha and Sophie were a great attraction for the Parkham Palm Sunday Breakfast. After a break due to Covid they were back to lead a group of young people and adults around the village. We made a detour so that we could sing a song to Rev Madeline (who was ill and couldn't join us). Here we also heard an adapted reading about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. After this we walked to the other end of the village and stopped for another song and this time we heard a little poem as imagined thoughts from the donkey who carried Jesus. We were delighted that some neighbours came out from their homes to see what was happening. Craig, our guitar man was our accompanist for the morning and the children had musical things to bang and shake so hopefully we were able to make a joyful song to the Lord! Our bacon baps eaten earlier sustained us on our walk round and the children were able to collect the items of craft that they had made earlier in the morning.

If you have a child staying with you and would like at any time to join us, Sunday Breakfast is from – 10 to 11.30 on the second Sunday of the month (except November) – there's craft for the young people, food and time to talk informally about all things small and big.

ALVERDISCOTT CHAPEL

Coffee Mornings

Our next Coffee Morning, on Thursday 5 May from 10.00am until noon, will be for the RNLI - again! Last month we had a very low attendance for some reason and have decided to try again. Please do come along and enjoy a coffee, or tea, and a good old chat. All are welcome, hope to see you there.

Gardening Club

From now on we shall be reverting to the last Monday of each month (except Bank Holidays) for our meetings at 2.30pm in the chapel schoolroom. Our next meetings will be on 30 May and 27 June. Everyone is welcome and the cost is just £1.00.

Arts and Crafts Club

Meetings are now in full swing. We meet on the second Tuesday of each month at the chapel schoolroom from 10.00am until 1.00pm. Tea, Coffee and light refreshments are provided. All are welcome, so why not bring along your craft/hobby and enjoy a pleasant morning with friends. The cost is just £1.00. Next meeting will be on 10 May.

NORTHAM CHORAL

Northam Choral accompanied by Hartland Orchestra will be performing Handels Messiah at Westward Ho! Baptist Church on Saturday May 7th at 7.30pm. Tickets £10 available on the door. Please come and support us.

THANK YOU FROM BELLA RICHARDS

By the time you read this, I will have hopefully completed my 15,000ft Tandem Skydive to raise funds and awareness for the Charity Devon Mind and I would like to thank everyone for their support, thoughts, and prayers.

This year I turned 18-years-old and wanted to mark my special birthday so asked my parents for a Skydive. This was my first birthday without my Uncle Evan who sadly died last year, and I decided to use my Skydive as a way to ensure he was part of my birthday celebrations and remembered through a charity close to my heart.

My charity is Devon Mind, and they provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness, and promote understanding of mental health. 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health difficulty at some point in their lives – whether that be depression, anxiety, stress, or any other challenge. Devon Mind will support anyone who needs help, but can only do this with the generosity of fundraisers and donors.

I am really lucky to have the support, understanding and love of my family but I still can get anxious at times and know that I need to have strategies in place for when that happens. The world that we live in is busy and the expectations are high so I try to ensure that I follow simple regimes when I can in my life – eating healthily, getting enough sleep, allowing relaxation time, and ensuring time away from mobiles and gadgets, to name a few. I searched up a verse to help remind us about how to deal with anxiety:

Philippians 4:6-7 - New International Version

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Good and Bad Theology – and Why They Matter by Richard Clutterbuck.

It's fifty years since I first 'caught' theology. In 1972 I failed some university exams, dropped out of my biology course and began the journey that would lead to ordained ministry and a lifetime as a student and teacher of theology. I can still remember the buzz from first reading John Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology*. I settled on systematic theology and Christian doctrine as my main areas of study and teaching. In other words, I've been interested in reflecting on the main affirmations of Christian faith, the ways we hand these on from generation to generation and the connections we can make between different affirmations and the world we live in.

This means that I see things rather differently from Andrew Pratt (*The illogicality of faith, March 28th*). He worries that an over-emphasis on creeds and faith-as-affirmation has blunted

Christianity as a way of living out the lordship of Christ in the world. I think I see what he means, but from my perspective, creeds and doctrines do matter, not least because they have a profound effect on the way we understand the world and act within it. Bad theology is one element in the perversion of human behaviour, prompting and underpinning evil deeds with divine sanction. By contrast, good theology, sound Christian doctrine, helps to underwrite a way of life that models itself on Christ. Two contemporary examples illustrate this.

The first is very close to home. In an essay in *The Guardian*^[i], to mark the recent Netflix documentary on Jimmy Savile, Mark Lawson wrote about Savile's distorted theology of salvation and its part in his horrendous catalogue of sexual abuse. Savile, a life-long committed Roman Catholic, believed in a God who judges us according to the balance of our behavioural accounts. We are admitted to heaven if our tally of good deeds is longer than our list of sins. His frantic charity work, fund-raising, sponsored runs and cycle rides, were all part of a desperate attempt to compensate for the abusive actions that he knew were wrong. He really seemed to believe that he could earn his place in heaven by – as it were – bribing God to ignore the many sins he had committed. Repentance, mercy and grace do not seem to have been part of his theological vocabulary.

The second example is even more current. Several observers have noted that Vladimir Putin's hostility towards Ukraine is at least partly driven by a theology and spirituality that legitimises aggression. According to the Religious Information Service of Ukraine^[ii], this theology combines a belief in the divine inspiration and vocation of the Russian nation with a Manichaean mindset, setting a virtuous, godly Russia in opposition to the dark and evil West. While there may be an element of political expediency in Putin's religiosity, it does seem that this mystical nationalism is a genuine conviction. Once again, bad theology is linked in with disastrously immoral and destructive action.

Now, I don't want to argue that believing in the traditional creeds will guarantee a life of righteousness and responsibility – there are far too many counter-examples for me to do that. But they are part of the story of faith, which is always a combination of belief and action. Last Saturday – Easter Eve – I joined the congregation in my local parish church for the Easter vigil. As part of the service we re-affirmed our baptismal vows, confessing our faith in the words of the historic creeds, and at the same time we renounced evil and promised to follow Christ.

Let me briefly mention two authors who can help us see the relevance of doctrinal affirmations. The first is the American theologian, Ellen Charry. In *By the Renewing of Your Minds* ^[iii] (one of my all-time favourite books on doctrine) she takes examples of doctrinal controversy and developments in each stage of Christian history, from the New Testament to the present. In each

case (for example, the trinitarian theology of St Augustine) she shows how doctrine is presented in order to promote a vision of the Christian life, not simply as a form of abstract speculation.

My other example is a contemporary British Methodist theologian, David Clough. Clough (a fellow contributor to *Theology Everywhere*) has made the focus of his work the Christian approach to non-human creation, particularly animals. In *On Animals*^[iv], he takes some of the central affirmations of Christian doctrine, creation, reconciliation and redemption, and helps us see how they can direct our attitudes and behaviour towards animals.

So, let's not abandon the creeds, or water down the key affirmation of Christian faith. Instead, let's make sure that we don't separate doctrine from discipleship. They really do belong together.

[i] *The Guardian*, April 1st, 2022.

[ii] https://risu.ua/en/russian-world-20-and-putins-spirituality_n126473 , accessed 16-04-22.

[iii] Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds, The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine*, New York, Oxford, 1997.

[iv] *On Animals: Systematic Theology: Volume I*: London, T&T Clark, 2012

Richard is a Research Fellow with Wesley House, Cambridge, and editor of the journal *Holiness*. A British Methodist presbyter he studied theology in Birmingham and Dublin before being sent to Tonga to teach in Sia'atoutai Theological College. He has been superintendent minister in a north London Circuit and principal of theological training institutions in Britain and Ireland. Richard has an academic interest in Christian doctrine and is the author of the Grove book, *Doctrine and Change*. He's a persistent allotment gardener, a fair-weather cyclist and a keen choral singer.

Every Monday, a short article is posted which brings some theology to bear on an issue or topic. This offers some theological reflection people can read quickly to start their week, ponder on and contribute to as the week goes on. It is a way of flexing and using our theological muscles to keep them fit, as well as an opportunity for those contributing to offer new ways of thinking about a topic or looking at an issue theologically perhaps for the first time.

The *Theology Everywhere* website is made available by the Methodist Church as one of the actions being taken to create a learning church. Contributors are from varied backgrounds; many but not all are Methodist. The views expressed are the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the position of the Methodist Church.

WALKING WITH MICAH

Our Calling as Methodists means we long for God's justice in the world. Around the globe and in their own local communities, Methodists are working for justice through responding to needs and campaigning for change.

The prophet Micah reminded people that the worship God wants is for us to act justly, to love as God loves, and to walk humbly with God. Justice-seeking has always been integral to our relationship with God.

The **Walking with Micah: Methodist Principles for Social Justice** project will help the Methodist Church in Britain to focus on our principles and priorities for justice and through that increase our ability to seek God's justice, as a Church and in our own Christian lives.

This two-year project will involve Drawing on our Methodist heritage of challenging injustice and learning from the insights and challenges of others within and beyond the Christian faith.

Consulting widely within the Methodist Church and listening to what matters to Methodist people at this time.

Working with others to resource individuals, churches and leaders, to speak and act for justice both individually and in the name of the Methodist Church in Britain.

The following extract is taken from the Methodist Church 2021 Policy & Procedures on Domestic Violence

THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING AROUND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Methodist Church's theological reflections begin with the belief that God wants human beings to flourish and grow in loving relationship with one another and with God. God does not intend people to perpetrate or suffer from domestic abuse and God works with us to end the damage and harm it does. As the Methodist Church continues to develop its theological thinking, not least through listening to those who have experienced abuse, its members are encouraged to reflect on how theological resources may be used for the sake of those caught up in domestic abuse.

Misappropriation of theology

The Methodist Church recognises that sometimes theology has been used as a tool to justify domestic abuse. This is an abhorrence and contrary to God's love and grace. Members of the Methodist Church are encouraged to be aware of the tactics that abusers use to justify their behaviour, and the ways in which theological thinking has been misappropriated.

Survivors have spoken of various aspects of theology where distorted thinking has contributed to domestic abuse, especially the abuse of women. These include:

Submission: The idea that wives should submit to their husbands is often drawn from a narrow, literal interpretation of Ephesians 5:22 ("Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord", NRSV), without reference to the context in which the verse was written or to the preceding verse (which speaks of being 'subject' to one another). This verse is part of other material in the New Testament, the 'household codes' (Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1 and 1 Peter 3:1-7), which closely resemble codes for social behaviour from non-Christian philosophies of the period when these texts were written. The standards referred to were part of the culture in which the New Testament writers lived. It can be argued, however, that this material is used in the New Testament to enshrine a standard that demands a greater responsibility for care by the powerful in society than would have been demanded outside the Church. They can therefore be interpreted as requiring more of Christians in terms of love and respect, responsibility and care, than is expected by wider society. The idea of 'submission', in this context, is something that is freely chosen within mutual, equal relationships of care. In contrast, if submission is demanded then there is control and abuse.

Head or 'headship': Particular passages in the New Testament (including, for example, Ephesians 5:23 – "For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church, the body of which he is the Saviour", NRSV) have shaped notions of male 'headship' in relationships, which have sometimes then been misused to justify domination, control and abuse by a husband/male partner over a wife/female partner. Christ's 'headship', however, is from his self-emptying of all but love, and the model is one of loving service. Significantly, the Methodist Church has not required, or perhaps even deemed it appropriate, for women to promise to 'obey' their husbands in the marriage services it has produced since 1932.

Divorce and marriage vows: Marriage is a gift of God. The Methodist Church's understanding of marriage emphasises mutuality, self-giving and commitment to growth for oneself and the other, in the image of the self-giving, desire and delight of God. The marriage vows include a promise of life-long commitment, but the insistence that permanence, rather than mutual delight and joy, is the foremost aim of marriage, has caused much damage.

The marriage promises can be broken in many ways, but an insistence on permanence over the safety and wellbeing of one of the partners cannot be right within a Christian theology of marriage. An abusive, controlling partner, who does not love and cherish, is actually the one who breaks the marriage vows. A survivor who is divorced from their abusive partner is not responsible for the breaking of a marriage covenant. Abuse within a marriage is an act of will, a choice. The Church has significant work to do to support survivors of domestic abuse, including when they feel the deep hurt and guilt of a broken marriage.

Self-sacrifice, suffering and guilt: The idea of bearing suffering as Jesus did, even to death on the cross, is deeply embedded in Christian thinking and patterns of discipleship, but it has sometimes been misused by perpetrators, compounding the trauma experienced by survivors. Christ's suffering and human suffering are radically different. It is not healthy or life-giving Christian theology to say that people must suffer because Christ suffered, or to imply that suffering is good in and of itself. In contexts of abuse, coercion and control, suffering can never be understood as redemptive. This is very different from contexts where there is proper self-affirmation, self-esteem and alternative choices, when someone may be willing to accept, and have the resources to bear, the suffering that can be a part of challenging violence and injustice and working for peace. Suffering should never be used as a justification for abuse. Survivors should be encouraged to see themselves as valuable to God and loved, and not to feel guilty for leaving an abusive partner.

Repentance and forgiveness: Forgiveness, repentance and new life in Christ are central to the gospel, but some simplistic understandings, or misunderstandings, of forgiveness have prompted actions and statements that have caused further harm and damage to those who have experienced abuse. For example, the idea that forgiveness involves forgetting persists, but a new start does not mean that the past is forgotten and there are no consequences. Indeed, forgiveness may well mean that offenders have a greater sense of obligation than before, as they are encouraged to recognise and take responsibility for the damage, profound harm and trauma that resulted from their actions. Repentance does not mean that someone is wholly reformed, previous patterns of behaviour have been left behind, or there is no risk of reoffending. Through God's grace there is the possibility of change for all, but for trust to be re-established, change has to be demonstrated in the context of a community that exercises discipline and demands accountability. Safeguarding processes are part of this.

Forgiveness is also sometimes spoken of in terms that give inappropriate emphasis to the relationship between two individuals. Forgiveness is a gift of God. It is not a right and cannot be earned. We cannot, therefore, expect another to forgive. When survivors have been told to forgive the person who abused them, further damage has been caused. Forgiveness is primarily about God's mercy and not human action. Whether or not someone is able to forgive is secondary to the willingness to trust in the healing and liberating process of God's love at work in their lives.

This is a challenging read and especially raises issues around Forgiveness that probably requires further discussion, thought & prayer. Dave Watson

We notice God in Scripture, and the world

We are to be alert to the presence of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit everywhere – in nature, in family, in work, in books, in films, in leisure, in our local community and in world events. God is present and at work everywhere. We are learning to recognise and respond to the Divine.

A woman and her friend were in downtown New York. It was during the rush hour and the streets were filled with people. Cars were honking their horns, taxicabs were squealing around the corners, sirens were wailing and the sounds of the city were almost deafening.

Suddenly, the woman said, "I hear a cricket".

Her friend said, "What, you must be crazy. You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all this noise!"

"No, I'm sure of it," the woman said. "I heard a cricket." She listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to where some shrubs were growing on a piece of waste land. She looked into the bushes, beneath the branches, and sure enough, he located a small cricket.

Her friend was amazed. "That's incredible," he said. "You must have superhuman ears!"

"No," said the woman. "My ears are no different from yours. It all depends on what you're listening for."

"Yes, that's true," her friend replied. "It depends on what is really important to you. Here, let me show you."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins and dropped them on the sidewalk. Then, with the noise of the crowd still blaring in their ears, they noticed every head within twenty feet turn and look to see if the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs.

"See what I mean?" asked the woman. "It all depends on what's important to you."

PRAYER PROPS

There are many ways of using resources and modern technology to pray in new ways. Here are just a few:

Text prayer groups. People commit themselves to pray at a particular time and text each other as a reminder; or one of the group texts the others with a prayer or Bible text for reflection.

People commit themselves to pray at a particular time and text each other as a reminder; or one of the group texts the others with a prayer or Bible text for reflection.

Set up an e-mail group and send each other prayer ideas and requests.

Use images to stimulate prayer, e.g. postcards, or images from magazines can be scattered around a room and people can choose one that inspires or moves them. Have a time of quiet to pray about issues that the images bring up and then invite those who feel able to talk about the experience.

Magnet magazine is an excellent source of striking images that can stimulate reflection and prayer.

Create presentations use PowerPoint slides to combine music and images that might lead people into prayer. This is a great way of offering intercessions in worship. Use images that reflect the news and the world around us.

Set up a Prayer Board at church, low enough for children to reach. Encourage people to pin prayers onto the board. Why not have a different theme each week? Shape your note paper to reflect your theme, e.g. hand shapes for thanksgiving; fish shapes for prayers about mission; leaf shapes for creation. Have plenty of pens and pencils available for people to use.

The following is the Plan for May

HC= Holy Communion
MC= Methodist Church
Café= Café Worship
T = Transport

PC= At Parish Church
C& F= Coffee and Fellowship
SB=Sunday Breakfast

Post codes of Chapels

Alverdiscott – EX31 3PT
Bideford (High Street) – EX39 2AN
Buckland Brewer – EX39 5LP
Littleham – EX39 5HW
Northam – EX39 1BS
Shebbear – EX21 5SJ
Thornhillhead – EX39 5NT

Alwington – EX39 5BU
Black Torrington – EX21 5QF
Langtree – EX38 8NF
Milton Damerel – EX22 7DJ
Parkham – EX39 5PG
Sheepwash – EX21 5NA
Torrington – EX38 8AL

LECTIONARY READINGS FOR MAY

May 1 Third Sunday of Easter Acts 9:1-6, (7-20); Ps. 30; Rev. 5:11-14; Jn. 21:1-19

May 8 Fourth Sunday of Easter Acts 9:36-43; Ps. 23; Rev. 7:9-17; Jn. 10:22-30

May 15 Fifth Sunday of Easter Acts 11:1-18; Ps. 148; Rev. 21:1-6; Jn. 13:31-35

May 22nd Sixth Sunday of Easter Acts 16:9-15; Ps. 67; Rev. 21:10, 22-22:5; Jn. 14:23-29
or Jn. 5:1-9

May 26th ASCENSION DAY Acts 1:1-11; Ps. 47 or Ps. 93; Eph. 1:15-23; Lk. 24:44-53

May 29th Seventh Sunday of Easter Acts 16:16-34; Ps. 97; Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; Jn. 17:20-26

	May 1	May 8	May 15	May 22	May 29
	Easter 3	Easter 4	Easter 5	Easter 6	Easter 7
Circuit Zoom	6.30pm Vidamour		6.30pm Potter Easter Offering	6.30pm Vidamour	6.30pm F Watson
Alverdiscott 11am 5pm	Bate		Price	LA Explore	
Alwington		Vidamour @3pm			
Bideford 10.30am	Spencer T	Burgon	Vidamour HC	Potter	Withall
Black Torrington Friday 3pm		Vidamour on 6th		Hall-Tomkin on 20th	
Buckland Brewer 10am (PC) 10am (MC)	HC (9.30am)	Withall	Anglican preacher	Spencer T	Bate
Clovelly					
Langtree 11am	D Watson	Parish Church	Macbeth		LA
Littleham 10.30am	Vidamour HC		Harris		
Milton Damerel 11am			Burgon AAW	Café Worship	
Northam 10.30am 4pm	Harris Messy Church	Potter	F Watson	Ley	Vidamour HC
Parkham 11am		Sunday Breakfast	Ley United	Vidamour HC	United – 10.30am@Parish Church
Shebbear 10.30am	PC	C&F		Harris HC	
Sheepwash 11am	Withall				
Thornhillhead 11am				Dawe	
Torrington 10.30pm	Price	Blackhall HC	Bate	Sheriff	Hall-Tomkin