

Call to worship

When we are happy, or when we are full of sadness, **God welcomes us with love.**
When we are bewildered, or when we are full of questions, **God welcomes us with love.**
When we are joyful, or when we are full of wonder, **God welcomes us with love.**

In faith and hope, God dwells in our hearts and in our minds, as we take up the cross of Jesus and follow him.
This day and forever, Amen.

Hymn: STF 317 – At the Name of Jesus

1 At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

2 Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:

3 Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

4 In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power

Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

Prayer of Confession: -

Friends in Christ: Let us draw near to God our Father with a true heart to confess our sins, and ask him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us, that we might receive his grace:

Our help is in the name of the Lord. He made heaven and earth.

I said, I will confess my sins to the Lord. **Then he forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Almighty God, our maker and redeemer, we confess to you that by nature we are sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against you by thought, word, and deed.

Most merciful God,

you have given your only Son to die for us.

**Have mercy on us, and for his sake grant us forgiveness of all our sins. By your Holy Spirit increase our knowledge of you and your will,
and make us obedient to your word,
so that by your grace we may come to eternal life;**

Let us pause for a few moments to bring confessions of heart and of mind to God.

Our Almighty God, is just and merciful, in all things. He sent Jesus Christ to complete his work of Love, freedom and Hope in the world. So hear his mighty words of grace: **Your Sins are forgiven.** Amen.

Lords Prayer: -

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Readings:

Romans 4: 13 – 25:

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. ¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already^[a] as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith^[b] “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ²³ Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Mark 8: 31 – 38:

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[a] will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words^[b] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Sermon

Just imagine for a moment, dusty streets of the old town of Jerusalem, on a blazing hot day. You are in the crowd, with Roman soldiers lining the way, trying to hold you back, from the poor soul struggling to carry their own weight in the form of a cross. Then remember . . . Jesus Says **Take up your cross and follow me.** Suddenly that has new power as continue our Lenten journey this morning, so let's look at our readings from Romans and Mark and see where the spirit takes us...

Our reading from Romans sets the scene of the great people of inspiration from the Jewish world, as examples of people who have taken up their cross to inspire people of faith.

Who are the people that inspire you? For me it's the Athletes of the Olympics / Paralympics. Or from a Religious point of view people like Desmond Tutu, or St Cuthbert from the Northumbria Community of Lindis Farne. Those characters mentioned in Romans, are Abraham and Sarah. Both in their 90's, quite happy with their lot in life, just as they are a couple of faith, with no children. But God calls them to deny themselves as a couple, to take on the mantle of bearing a child, which would seed the people of Israel. **Quite a Task.**

How do we take the stories of who we are as a community, of our Forebears who worshipped here over the years, and the stories that may be created in the future. And use that past, present and future possibilities and energy to power our fellowship, worship and discipleship today?

Those are big questions not just for here, but the whole circuit! We are told in our readings that it is in faith, that hope rises. That is why I think we have seen an increase in people seeking and searching in faith over these last few years – because in the certainty of faith, people find HOPE – a hope that is ours to share with the world.

In our reading Paul declares that God's promise doesn't come from Law, Practice and Ritual, but through our faith in Jesus Christ, who lived, Died and rose again for us all. Hope rises through Worship. Hope rises through Prayer. Hope rises through Art. Hope rises through our relationships. Hope rises from being connected and in touch with God, through Scripture, through the Holy Spirit.

With God and Faith, anything is possible. Like Abraham we have to believe from the bottom of our hearts that we can be forefathers of a vibrant and lively, worshipping community here in the heart of our Circuit and beyond. When we say "yes" to God's grace, new energies are released that transform persons and communities. I know there are plans to restart or refresh many activities across the churches in our circuit, and much work is happening at our Westham Mission hub, where a new worshipping community is beginning to form. I look forward to popping in and seeing how you are doing in each of our Churches in the Circuit in the coming months.

The exciting thing to my mind is that we don't know where God will take us – in a few years time – who will be standing here, who will be sat where you are sat. How big are your dreams for this church. How big are plans for the future. What stories do you want to start, to paint, to be part of, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now let's reflect with you on our reading from Mark. And I want us to focus on that phrase from Jesus, to take up your cross and follow me. When we want to be able to share a concept or a story, we often conger up in our minds an image, which helps us to convey the item more strongly. So what is your image of the Cross or Christ. Why is it helpful, to allow you tell the story of the cross with those outside of the church?

Images of the Methodist Art Collection of Jesus and the Cross <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/browse-the-collection/> - find one that is helpful for you, it may be helpful for someone else. Take that image with you and share it.

First I think this is a call to be faithful, to be full of hope, to live lives worthy of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. To follow the pattern of Life that Jesus Set out. Which we symbolise in the cross. The images of Christ on the Cross are powerful. They symbolise on the one hand the brutality of humanity, as well as the fact the son of God died at the hand of Humans. But the end of his story – the resurrection, is the beginning of our story – where we are called to continue his mission, God's mission in the world.

As Methodists we are reminded that there is no Holiness, save Social holiness. This means that part of our mission is seeking out opportunities to fight for social justice, to change and challenge injustice. It also more simply means that we have to find ways of walking alongside people in their need. Helping them where

possible to change and transform the lives that prevent them from flourishing. But we also need to walk alongside one another in hope and fullness of God's glory.

Finally, it means that we have to be advocates for Christ in our increasingly secular world. We have to be prepared to say we are Christian. And it might mean, going to places, going to events, going to church stuff that we would rather not go. It might mean changing our priorities to put Christ and God back at the centre of our lives, where often we have put him on the back burner. And it means inviting people to be part of our community here, engaging in the range of activities, fellowship and food that we have on offer here. Frankly, it means loving ourselves, loving our neighbours and above ALL LOVING GOD! So let's walk this journey of life and faith together, carrying our cross, challenging injustice, praying for our communities and the world. And in faith, Hope will rise in this place, today and forever.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Let us offer our prayer with all God's people through Jesus Christ our Lord who ever lives to pray for us.

Lord hear us . . . Lord Graciously Hear us

Time of open prayer under each heading below:

We pray for the needs of the world . . .

We pray for the Church . . .

We pray for all in trouble or distress . . .

We pray for all who have gone before us, in faith . . .

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayer.

May what we ask in Jesus Christ your Son be done according to his word, who said:

'Ask, and you will receive, seek, and you will find, knock, and the door will be opened to you.'

To you, merciful God, through your Son, in the life-giving Spirit, be glory and praise for ever. **Amen.**

Hymn: STF 287 – When I survey the wondrous Cross

1 When I survey the wondrous cross,
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

3 See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4 His dying crimson, like a robe,
spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then am I dead to all the globe,
and all the globe is dead to me.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Blessing

Jesus calls us, to leave the past, **Jesus Calls us to Hope.**

Jesus calls us, to travel lightly, **Jesus calls us to faith.**

Jesus calls us, to risky living, **Jesus calls us to life.**

The Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you.

With those you Love, And those you are called to Love, In the name of Christ. Amen.