

Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.
Sunday 30th August 2026. New yearnew paths.
Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship.

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Psalm 105

STF 51

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

all I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Prayers of adoration and confession

Creative and radiant God, your strong and sure light is never overcome by darkness. May it be so in this our time. Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, in your mercy and grace you surprisingly said to us, "You are the light of the world." May it be so in this our time. Spirit of light and love, kindle in us fresh urgency to love and serve the human family, to be amazed by creation and to care for it well, to pursue justice and offer mercy, to rejoice in receiving and sharing grace. In confidence and hope, we pray. **Amen.**

Hope Morgan Ward, UMC Council of Bishops

Forgive us for the times we allow evil to overcome us. Forgive us for the times we harbour grudges and bitterness in our hearts. We easily pray forgive us our sins, but forget the next important part, as we forgive those who sin against us. Help us to really embody those words. Forgive our slowness to do or say good things. Give us a heart that will not let evil get in the way of good deeds and good thoughts, that we might bring glory to your name. **Amen.**

Bible reading. Romans 12: 9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection

It's nearly new year! Not the one that comes on the first of January. It's a new year for the Methodist Church and it's a new period of time for young people going back to school, college or university. In many different ways September marks a new period of time. In the Ethiopian calendar, new year falls on the 11th of September it's known as 'Enkutatash', which translates as gift of jewels. What a lovely thought. I wonder what jewels we are going to be taking into this new church calendar? The celebration in Ethiopia is very similar to our celebrations. Visiting the family, special meals and it also marks the end of the rainy season and the flowering of yellow daisies. The daisies are very bright, eight petaled flowers that hold a cultural significance as a symbol of peace, hope and new beginnings.

Rosh Hashanah is celebrated at a similar time in the Jewish calendar and is also marked as the new year. The title means head of the year. It's a time for quiet reflection to atone for any wrongdoing throughout the year and to forgive others. A ram's horn is blown at the end of the two days of reflection to serve as a call to

inspire soul searching and growth for the year ahead. Special foods are shared, like pomegranate seeds in the hope of a year filled with good deeds.

Romans 12:9-21 offers a perfect blueprint for a church's new year. It bridges the gap between God's grace and our daily actions, calling us to genuine active love and peaceful living in our communities. It's a bit overwhelming and if you count you will find seventeen values to adopt in Christian living. We will just look at one or two today, but I wonder which one of the seventeen is your jewel for the head of this new period in time?

The last two verses are my choice, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' So don't be overcome, but seek to overcome. The verse doesn't suggest evil will be eradicated but it's power over you can be overcome with goodness. It's not a permission to repay evil with evil. That would just lower us to the level of evil and not overcome it with the all important qualities of goodness.

St Paul was writing to the church in Rome as it faced difficult times. He is believed to have written the book of Romans in AD 56/57 while he was in Corinth. Rome was under the rule of Emperor Nero. The third tyrannical ruler in just seventeen years. Emperor Caligula fortunately only ruled for four years. But they were four difficult years when his tyranny and egomania knew no bounds. He instituted a temple and priests in honour of his own divinity. He was notorious for his orgies in the imperial palace. He boasted of his avarice ways. Finally two of his bodyguards assassinated him.

However he was replaced by Emperor Claudius whose rule brought some relief. Though he did order all the Jews to leave Rome and history has recorded some hair raising stories about his reign.

None so vile and cruel as his successor who ruled at the time St Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. Nero ruled for fourteen years, until he took his own life aged just 32. Nero when you do the maths was just a young man, but of extraordinary cruelty. He arranged for the murder of his first wife, his aunt, and his own mother. He tried to poison his mother three times, unsuccessfully! He was married to three women and two men at different times, all in the space of fourteen years! One of his most cruel acts was to take a young boy and have him surgically transformed into a woman. He then made him go through a marriage ceremony and live with him as his wife.

The whole of Nero's short life was one of lewdness and cruelty. We probably remember from our history lessons how it's recorded that Nero played the fiddle while Rome burned. In AD 64 fourteen precincts of the city burned, only four escaped from being damaged. It's thought Nero started the fires and used the Christians as scapegoats. He wanted to build a grander city, so his building plan included arson. A vast number of Christians were arrested and not convicted of arson but accused of hatred for the human race. Their deaths were made into a cruel sport, subjecting them to being torn apart by wild animals.

What we have in Romans 12 are the words that God spoke to his people in Rome, through St Paul, after they had endured the excesses of Caligula, and while they were enduring the nightmare of Nero.

Knowing the evils that the Christians faced in Rome helps to see how powerfully these verses speak to us today. As I am writing this reflection we are in the excitement and camaraderie of World Cup fever, Wimbledon has been and gone and we have a long heatwave perfect for families on summer holidays. So what evil could we possibly be facing? Thankfully nothing like our review of life in first century Rome. But we only need to turn on the television or radio and listen to the news and there is the evidence of so much evil in the world. Open your local newspaper and evil is definitely in our own communities. The daily encounters with people can show us that evil is all around us. People seem, since the pandemic to be more angry and aggressive.

What is evil? Sin, and when you ask yourself what is in the middle of S I N? I am! Evil is all around us and inescapable. We know our own abilities to act or think in ways that are evil, sinful. We try to water it down and we might say in jest to someone, "your evil you are". It's hard to accept that we are sinful and capable of evil, whether by wilfulness or just ignorance. What is even harder is to acknowledge that God doesn't want us to be defined by our faults and failures, but by his all forgiving love. How could God forgive me, we might wonder? Especially after what I have done?

Here's an idea that might help you understand. Take a pristine bank note from your wallet or purse. Crumple it up, hard with these new polymer notes. Roll it in some muck. Do you still want it? It hasn't lost its value and it can be made clean. If it's too damaged the bank will exchange it for a new note. That's how God deals with our lives. When we come to him with all our sinful deeds and confess he doesn't let us be defined by the evil we have endured. So long as we are prepared to let go of the bitterness and anger that only lets that evil overcome us time and time again.

This whole passage begins and ends with the theme of evil, 'hate what is evil' and 'Do not be overcome by evil'. What causes us to be overcome with evil and what does that look like? There's a saying that we are what we eat. I think the same can be applied to whatever we take into ourselves, what we engage in and fill our minds with. I know people who for example, were so obsessed with watching every item of news about

the Palestine/Israel war. When it became all encompassing to them, their lives became miserable and fearful. The evil that they craved to see, became the evil that overwhelmed their peace, it became an unnatural obsession. The evil that they absorbed robbed them of their peace of mind. They couldn't even think about how they might actively do something positive to help those suffering in this awful situation. The evil had so overcome them that they became trapped in misery.

Or what of the young person who came from a loving supportive family, he's doing well at school but his peer group encouraged him to experiment with alcohol and drugs and gradually his life became very dark. His education suffered, he became withdrawn and anti social even with his loving family. What is that but to be overcome by evil.

Or think of the aspiring person at their first job. The culture is brutal. It is a dog eat dog world. It is a devour or be devoured environment. Pride fills the air. Cynicism is rife. Understanding and compassion are rarely to be found, and over time a hardness, a growing cynicism creeps into his heart. What is that but to be overcome by evil?

We can site our own experiences of how evil has encroached upon us and overcome us. The person who wronged us, the false accusations made against us, the abusive way we have been hurt, physically, emotionally, mentally and even spiritually. I still find it hard to remember my grandmother's funeral and our family being barred from taking communion at her requiem mass as we were Protestants. I have since had wonderful experiences with the Roman Catholic Church and even experienced the joy of an Easter celebration.

Evil is all around and it can so easily overcome us. St Paul tells the Christian's in Rome that the evil that they have faced does not have to define them. That message is just as true for us. The evils of the culture you live in does not need to shape you. You can overcome the evil that has been done to you and you can overcome the evil's around you.

What a message of hope for a new beginning. As Christians we are not defined by the evil we have endured or the evil around us. St Paul wrote earlier in this letter to the Romans, an important message that underlines the whole letter and is our message of hope. Romans 8:39 'nothing will be able to separate us from love of God, that is ours in Christ Jesus.'

Remember how Jesus was abused, criticised, abandoned by his friends and suffered unimaginable violence. None of us has experienced the evil Jesus faced, but he did not let it overcome him. He overcame evil with good.

We need to hold fast to this jewel of our faith. To ask God to help us not to be defined by the evil we have suffered. Nor to be defined and shaped by the evil that is all around our world. To find ways to overcome evil with good. This is a message of hope and peace. Evil did not overcome Jesus and he is with us and will keep us from being overcome, if only we turn to him.

STF 504

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,

that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting -
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for all who will be making new beginnings in the coming days. For children and young people in education. We pray they will settle well into their new classes and find joy and friendship in learning. We pray for all involved in education. Give them strength, patience and inspiration as they guide their pupils.

Let us pray for those who will be moving into new areas and ministries within the life of the church. We pray for the congregation's that will receive them, that together they might find ways to be your light in the communities they serve.

Let us pray for all who are struggling with the evil that surrounds them. We think of the innocent caught up in so many wars around the world. We long for an end to all violence and a peace that will overcome all hatred. We pray for those who are suffering the evils of abuse whether physically emotionally or mentally. Help them to not be defined by the wrongs inflicted on them but to find the strength to rise above their troubles.

Let us pray for the situation's and people who have caught our attention this week. Especially those who are suffering or struggling with some great worries. Give them the strength they need and the peace to endure. Let us pray for ourselves that we might not be overcome by evil but overcome it with goodness. Show us in the days ahead, ways that we can make a difference for the gospels sake. **Amen**

Let us say the Lord's Prayer.

Hymn From the singing the faith website, **Suggested tune:** "Bunessan" (StF 136: Morning has broken)

"Listen, my people, here is my challenge:
Can you be loving as I love you?
Those who offend you, hurt or ill-treat you,
Like you God's children, they're precious too!"

Do you mean us, Lord? Can it be done, Lord?
Self-giving love that looks for no gain?
If you'll stay close we'll give it a try, Lord,
Showing your mercy, sharing your pain.

"Listen, my people, here is my challenge:
Can you forgive as I forgive you?
Those who have failed you, pained or betrayed you,
Do not condemn, you've all done it too."

Do you mean us, Lord? Can it be done, Lord?
You will repay, so leave it to you?
Help us to trust and let you be judge, Lord.
As you forgive, may we forgive too.

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The Blessing

Let our faith in you, O Lord, be ever stronger, our life with you ever deeper, our praying ever more awake to your glory, our hold on you ever firmer and our love for you ever increasing. **Amen**

William Bramwell, Methodist itinerant preacher (1759-1818)

May the love of the Father, the tenderness of the Son, and the presence of the Spirit, gladden your heart and bring peace to your soul, this day and always, **Amen.**

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