

# Worship @ Home

Christchurch Hitchin and Pirton  
Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020 – Aldersgate Sunday

*Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid*

*Technology: Tony Edmonds*

*Music: Lisa and Jeremy Morgan*

*Reader: Janet Tackley*



*'A world ablaze' mandala by Daisy Barnes*

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## **Call to worship**

Glory to God in the highest.  
Glory to God all around us.  
Glory to God in the unexpected places.  
Glory to God within me.  
Glory, glory, glory.  
All cry Glory. Amen.

## **Sing of the Lord's Goodness (StF 65)**

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,  
come to him and bless his name.  
mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,  
faithful to the end of days.

*Come then all you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness,  
melodies of praise and thanks to God.*

*Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music,  
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,  
risen from the snares of death.  
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,  
new life he now gives to all.

*Come then all you nations.....*

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,  
Spirit of our God most high;  
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,  
splendour of the living God.

*Come then all you nations.....*

Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,  
praise God with the lute and harp;  
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,  
praise God till the end of days.

*Come then all you nations.....*

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### **Prayers**

God of majesty and might,  
your glory shines throughout the universe:  
from the highest heaven to the deepest sea;  
in all the creatures you have made;  
in the seasons that shape our living.  
Your glory shines through who you are  
and through what you do.  
The power of your glory  
touches your creation and exalts it.  
To you we offer our worship;  
to you we offer our praise;  
before you we come in adoration.  
Amen.

*I invite you to get comfortable.*

*You may want to light a candle. (Val – own visual focus)*

*Or find some other visual focus – a flower, a glass of water, the light through the window.*

*I invite you to reflect on these questions in the presence of God.*

Where have I seen God's glory this week?

In creation?

In activity?

In other people?

How do I react to God's glory?

How do I want to react?

How do I feel about being in the midst of the glory of God?

How can I help that glory shine through?

Lord of all glory, we come before you  
seeking your wisdom,  
that we may glorify you through our thinking;  
seeking your love,  
that we may glorify you through our feelings;  
seeking your strength,  
that we may glorify you at all times;  
seeking your perseverance,  
that we may glorify you in all places.

Show us how to live,  
that our lives shine with your glory,  
and those who encounter us may know you  
and that you are at work in your world.  
Amen.

### **Acts 1: 6-14**

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

### **Reflection**

*Revd Val Reid*

*In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans.*

*About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.*

*I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

Those of us who were brought up in the Methodist tradition will be very familiar with these words from John Wesley's journal.

It happened in 1738, when Wesley was in his mid 30s.

John Wesley was a strange man!

Clearly very charismatic, a mesmerising preacher.

But also a bit OCD – he got his nickname of 'methodist' when he was a student, and founded a group called the Holy Club, which specialised in making detailed timetables for prayer, study and good works.

I'm sure we were all part of that sort of club at uni!

He was ordained as an Anglican priest, and spent some time in the new colonies in America as a chaplain – not very successfully.

He came home rather disillusioned with his calling and his ability to lead the kind of life God asked of him.

And so he went – rather unwillingly – to a bible study evening.

We've all been there!

And – out of the blue – quite unexpectedly – found his heart strangely warmed.  
Like Paul on the road to Damascus, he suddenly had a personal encounter with Christ.  
He understood that faith wasn't about rules and timetables and performance statistics.  
It was about allowing God into your life.  
It was about being open to where the Spirit might lead.  
Even if it turned your world upside down.

Aldersgate has become a bit of a milestone for Methodists.  
But actually, it was just a small part of a life long journey for John Wesley.  
A journey that began in the kitchen of the rectory at Epworth, where his mother Susannah led prayers and Bible studies which were much more popular than his father's sermons.  
And she kept on doing it, even when the Bishop told her to stop.  
I like to think John inherited a bit of his feisty mother's DNA.

And that journey continued long after his heart was strangely warmed.  
The following year his friend John Whitefield invited him to join in with his ministry of preaching in the open air.  
Whitefield had caused a bit of a stir when he began preaching to large crowds of miners just outside Bristol.  
One rather alarmed London Journalist wrote:  
*But if one Man, like the Rev. Mr. Whitefield should have it in his Power, by his Preaching, to detain 5 or 6 thousands of the Vulgar from their daily Labour, what a Loss, in a little Time, may this bring to the Publick!*

Wesley refused to help, on the grounds that open-air preaching was simply wrong.  
He wrote this in his journal:  
*In the evening I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday, having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.*

But seeing the need – and Whitefield's success – he had a go.  
In his journal he wrote that he '*consented to be more vile*'!!  
And the rest is history.  
This was the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century evangelical revival.  
Wesley travelled all round the country on horseback, preaching in the open air.  
Thousands had their hearts strangely warmed – and Methodist societies were founded throughout the UK.  
The Anglican church didn't really approve of this, and Wesley became a bit of a pariah in church circles.  
But he believed that this calling was of God – and he persisted.

So today is Aldersgate Sunday.  
What might John Wesley's experience nearly 300 years ago have to say to us today?

Well, on Wednesday I took part in a national seminar on ritual responses to the COVID-19 pandemic for clergy and rabbis.  
We talked about the way churches and synagogues had to develop online worship in the space of a few days after lockdown.  
Someone said: who knew faith communities could be so flexible?  
Most of the time we can't even move a pew because it's always been there.  
We can't change the order of our services because we've always done it this way!  
But suddenly – everything is changing.

Because we need to be a community.  
We need to worship.

I think this is what happened to John Wesley in that field outside Bristol.  
And I think it happens to all of us if we are genuinely open to the work of the Spirit.  
Things can change – in the most surprising ways!

Thursday was Ascension Day, when Jesus said a final goodbye to his disciples.  
They'd got used to his post-resurrection appearances, meals together, conversations, explanations.  
And suddenly he wasn't going to be there any more.  
A friend wrote on her Facebook page this week that from then on, Jesus was going to be working from home!  
But this massive change opened up a space for the disciples to be transformed.  
Next week is Pentecost – and we'll reflect then on just what the birthday of the church looked and felt like.

But as my Chinese friends at King's Cross used to remind me, the two Chinese characters that make up the word  
'Crisis' – *wei ji* – mean  
DANGER and OPPORTUNITY.

# 危機

John Wesley knew that.  
And we are discovering that today.  
In the olden days, on a normal Sunday, fewer than 6% of the UK  
population attend a religious service.  
Since Lockdown, 25% of people have found their way to online worship.  
How are we going to change – as individuals and as a church community – in response to all we have learned in the  
last few weeks?  
The trustee group have met twice in the last two weeks to start thinking and talking and praying about this.  
It would be tempting to breathe a sigh of relief and go back to how things used to be.  
But I believe this crisis is an opportunity.  
To open up.  
To listen to God.  
To do things differently.  
Perhaps to consent to be more vile.  
And to find our hearts too can be strangely warmed.  
Who knows where we will end up?  
Amen.

***How small a spark has lit a living fire! (StF 408 – tune StF 186 Tell out my soul)***

How small a spark has lit a living fire!  
how small a flame has warmed a bitter world!  
how great a heart was moved to hope, to dare  
and bring the faith out in the open air!

No boundary sign will stand against this faith,  
no wall restrain this preaching of the Word:  
the Good News travels on, it rides the road  
and draws to unity the realm of God.

The single note becomes a song of praise,  
the single voice grows to a swelling choir  
and born in song, new stories now are sung  
of freedom, chains unbound and loosened tongue.

Thank God for all who listened and believed,  
who still are by the Spirit set on fire --  
our hearts be warmed again, for Christ will wait  
on beach, in upper room, or Aldersgate.

Shirley Erena Murray  
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### ***Prayers for ourselves and others***

John Wesley was a man filled with the Holy Spirit.  
He did amazing things.  
We have a lot to learn from him.  
But he wasn't always a comfortable person to be around.  
He wasn't great at personal relationships!

God seems to like to work with difficult people – think of some of those awkward characters in the bible who nevertheless became channels of God's spirit.

Let us pray.  
In our prayers this morning, I invite you to bring yourself to God.  
The person you are.  
Not the person you might be or could be if you were different.  
Your whole self – loved and chosen by God.  
Your praying self.

Spend a short time of silence looking back over the last 24 hours...

Think of one occasion where you did something good, something holy.

Give thanks.

Think of one occasion when you wished you had done something differently.

Say sorry.

Think of one person who needs to know the loving presence of God in tough times.

Hold them in the light.

Think of one person who might feel their heart strangely warmed today!

Pray for them fervently.

Spirit of fire, warm us with your everlasting love.  
Spirit of wind, blow away hurtful words that damage relationships.  
Spirit of breeze, carry away our fears.  
Spirit of the still, small voice, restore our peace with your calming breath.  
Spirit of the living God, speak to us in words we can understand.  
Amen.

*I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.  
Use whichever version you are familiar with.  
Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.  
Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.

### **Blessing**

Go into the world to show God's glory,  
And may you always know God's blessing  
And God's peace.  
Amen.

### **And can it be (StF 345)**

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race:

'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

*Charles Wesley*

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