



Opening Prayer

May the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our minds be acceptable to you,
O Lord, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

Hymn: StF 660 Called by Christ to be disciples <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fl0N6umzc>

Called by Christ to be disciples
Every day in every place
We are not to hide as hermits
But to spread the way of grace;
Citizens of heaven's kingdom,
Though this world is where we
live,
As we serve a faithful Master,
Faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways,
Many callings we pursue:
May we use our gifts and talents
Always, Lord, to honour you;
So in government or commerce,
College, hospice, farm or home,
Whether volunteer or earning,
May we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us,
Urging us to compromise;
Still obedience is our watchword-
Make us strong and make us
wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
Made a precious offering,
As our daily lives are fashioned
In submission to our King.

Martin Leckebusch (b1962)

Prayer of adoration: Loving God, wherever we are, wherever we go, you are there. You created the world to be our home and our place of journeying. Your glory shines through the world and yet far transcends it. Loving God, we praise you, Creator of the World.

Loving God, wherever we are, wherever we go, you are there. You sent your only Son to be our guide, our companion, and our saviour. Your love shines through his life. Your love has conquered death. Loving God, we praise you, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Loving God, wherever we are, wherever we go, you are there. You have sent your Holy Spirit to warm our hearts, to challenge and encourage us. Your power shines through your people. Your power unites them in love. Loving God, we praise you, Giver of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Bible Readings Hebrews 11: 29 – 12:2 and Luke 12: 49-56

Reflection:

The Ipswich Methodist Circuit is currently in the process of seeking a new minister to join our staff team, the process is slow, and the new minister will come into post in September 2023 when my colleague Rev Andrew Sankey retires. We are currently at a stage where we are writing a profile, to outline what the role looks like, and what kind of minister might fit well into the role. The process involves consultation with Churches to try to understand what their expectations are of their new minister. This is a process I have been involved in both as a minister and as a lay person before that over many years and I always find it quite challenging. Churches always seem to be looking out for the perfect minister, and ministers are looking out for the perfect appointment. Compromise is always essential, and the process always leaves me wondering if the perfect minister, or appointment even exist.

Whilst on holiday recently, we were walking around the shops in Bude and at one point we were confronted by a young couple, the young woman had very obviously had cosmetic surgery on her lips, which I felt was very sad because the result appeared to me to have had the opposite effect to what I guess she had intended to achieve, my guess is that there was nothing wrong with the face God had gifted to her. The problem is, that throughout history, human being appear to have been searching for perfection "if we can just get the right minister, the church will be great" or "if I just lose a few pounds I will look so much better" or my body will be so much more appealing with some body art" or "if only I can find the right partner, my life will be perfect" you get the idea. The fairy story writers at one point finished their story with "and they all lived happily ever after" and I guess that most of us optimistically hope for the perfect life.

I remember talking with a grieving father soon after his only daughter had died in a tragic road collision, she had only been in her late twenties, and he was understandably distraught. Not a Christian himself, he turned to me and asked, "and where was your God when she needed him?" I confess that I didn't know what to say, the truth was that his daughter was cutting a corner on her motorbike at speed when she collided with a car travelling in the opposite direction, she had made a serious error of judgement and paid the ultimate price, but he didn't need to hear that.

He was a nice, kind, good man, and certainly hadn't done anything to justify feeling such pain, and I was faced with the age-old question "why do bad things happen to good people?" this single question has taxed me for many years.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is writing to a group of disciples who are finding life difficult and as we look back on the lives of the early disciples, we are excited by all the wonderful things they witnessed and experienced, but we also recognise the pains they felt and the suffering they endured. The letter reminds them that God had done amazing things in history and delivered faithful people from horrendous experiences.

I used to love watching the John Sullivan TV Series, Only Fools and Horses, John Sullivan had a wonderful gift of taking his audience to the verge of tears, and then suddenly, without warning he would inject a hilarious situation and in a single episode, he took take his audience from the deepest drama to the very best comedy time and time again. In my opinion, the man was a genius. The best comedy writers seemed to have grasped the fact that life is mix of highs and lows.

Jesus knows that his words and his works will bring great joy to some and great pain to others, it will split families, challenge people's belief patterns and was never meant to be easy. One of the prerequisites for the new minister is that they must be good Biblical preachers, and I wonder what this means. I studied the Bible at degree level and learned a huge amount, I read commentaries and preach several times most Sundays. My preparation is prayerful and considered and I am never quite sure if I make the grade. The problem will always be one of interpretation, which involves understanding the context into which the particular part of the Bible speaks and at the best, all most of us can do is study the Word and try to understand what it means to us today.

To Ponder:

- Do you think that the perfect life exists? Can perfection be achieved on earth? Or is it the reserve of heaven?
- Why do you think that bad things happen to good people? Where do you see God in the most challenging of situations?
- Do the words Jesus speak in the Luke reading challenge you? Have you experienced conflict in trying to understand what some scripture readings are trying to tell you? Who do you turn to if you don't understand?

Please don't simply remain confused, I will always do my best to help and I'm sure that I speak for my colleagues.

A time of prayer -

The world is God's temple. Let us pray for the world:

- for the powerful, that they may know that the world belongs not to them but to the God of love and justice;
- for the powerless, that they may know that God is alongside them in their hunger, fear and suffering.

The church is God's temple. Let us pray for the church:

- for its leaders, that they may guide their people and the world to worship in word and deed;
- for the different denominations, that in unity they may come to know and worship the one, undivided God.

We are God's temple. Let us pray for ourselves:

- for churches meeting in buildings, that they and we may become sanctuaries for the lonely, the worried and the sad, peoples of love and hope;
- for each one of us, that our lives may be hymns of worship to the eternal God, sung in confidence and joy. In the name of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer *Our Father*

Hymn 564StF O Thou who camest from above <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ6pmSEzJ5A>

O Thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart
kindle a flame of sacred love
upon the mean altar of my heart.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make my sacrifice complete.

Prayers of offering and a blessing: Generous God, Out of love you created all that is; Out of love you created humankind; Out of love you save us from the consequences of our sin. Out of love, we offer you ourselves and all that we have. Accept them and us, in the name of the second Adam, your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**