Methodist IC
The Ipswich Circuit of the Methodist Church of Great Britain
At the heart of the community

Printed Service for 15th November 2026
Prepared by Rev Steve Mann
'When the winds of life blow upon us'



Hymn: StF 440 Amazing Grace Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ab1wKVh_8Wc

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Hymn: StF 628 Faithful one, so unchanging Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqK-UnsRTFI

Faithful one, so unchanging,
Ageless one, you are my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you, again and again
I call out to you, again and again.

You are my rock in times of trouble
you lift me up when I fall down
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

Prayers

Gracious and loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; You are our creator; You are our saviour; You are our guide.

We come before you with hearts full of praise and thanksgiving. You are the faithful one, unchanging and everlasting. Through all the changing circumstances of life, you remain our rock and our place of peace. When everything around us seems uncertain, your love remains constant as an anchor in every storm.

We praise you for your amazing grace: a grace that seeks us when we are lost, opens our eyes when we are blind to your presence, and brings us home when we have wandered far from you.

We thank you that your grace is not simply something we experience once, at the beginning of our journey of faith, but something that accompanies us every step of the way. Through dangers, difficulties and disappointments, you have brought us to this point and you will continue to lead us onwards.

Yet we confess there are times when we behave as though we are navigating life's journey entirely on our own. We rely upon our own judgement, trust in our own strength and make decisions without stopping to seek your wisdom.

We confess that, when the storms come, we can become so preoccupied with the dangers around us that we lose sight of the fact that you are there with us. We allow fear to overwhelm faith, anxiety to displace hope and uncertainty to rob us of peace.

Forgive us when we have been blind to your presence or deaf to your guidance and when we have failed to be an anchor of support to others who are struggling.

Thank you that your grace meets us even there. Thank you that you do not abandon us when we stumble but your grace lifts us up and your love invites us to begin again.

May we never take your amazing grace for granted, but live each day with grateful hearts, trusting in your love and seeking to share it with others.

For that amazing grace; unfailing love and eternal faithfulness, we give you our thanks and praise.

Amen.

Reading: Acts 27:1-26

When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So, Paul warned them, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

Hymn: He will hold me fast Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzAU8otV9xk

When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast

Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He'll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Saviour loves me so
He will hold me fast

CCLI Song Number: 7016161 Authors/Writers: Ada R. Habershon (original words, 1906) and Matthew Merker (modern melody and additional/altered words, 2013) © 2013 Getty Music Publishing (BMI) / Matthew Merker Music (BMI); Capitol CMG Paragon (o/b/o Getty Music Publishing and Capitol CMG Paragon)

Message

The weather feels like it has turned recently. Whereas our Summer gradually transitioned into Autumn with a mix of good days and not quite so good days, now the dark evenings have set in and the wind has developed a real strong bite to it. Winter is very much on its way.



You may have seen this tree in the news recently. It's called the Bendy Tree. It's an elm tree on by the sea at Newcastle, County Down, in Northern Ireland. It's a tree that gets buffeted by the wind a lot. So much so that it has been bent by the wind into its present position.

Our lives can feel a lot like that. General circumstances or particular situations can feel like violent winds buffeting us and sometimes it can feel like we've been bent into a new shape altogether. Not that there's anything wrong with being bent into new shapes. Life is constantly doing that to us without our particularly noticing. We thrive in life precisely because of that ability to adapt. The bendy tree is now 150 years old - or so – and it's still here because its shape has changed. Had it remained proudly upright, it could well have been blown down years ago. Spiritually, it's a lesson to us. When we are undergoing life's storms it doesn't matter how we might feel they are affecting our shape and bend. The important thing is to remain rooted in God. That way we, too, will be able to bend with the wind and still thrive in the midst of anything that comes against us.

In the UK, the most violent storms are statistically likely to hit us in the November to February period, which we, of course, have now well and truly entered. Prior to that there is a shoulder period when the settled weather of Summer gives rise to more uncertainty.

That is just the same in Paul's world too. He is making his crossing of the Mediterranean just as the journey is becoming more hazardous. Through the Summer months things weren't too bad. Sea navigation always carried a risk but over the Summer, that risk was at its lowest. It was round about the middle of September that things became more difficult and more risky. After the 11th of November the advice was not to travel under any circumstances. Paul and his fellow shipmates, as we shall see, were on the shoulder - in that window of uncertainty and caution.

Paul's journey begins about five years prior to the events in our reading today. It is while he is in Ephesus that the Holy Spirit plants in his mind the idea that he should return to Jerusalem and then go on to Rome. In Jerusalem he is brought before the governor and held there by him. He escapes a carefully planned assassination attempt by local religious fanatics before appealing his case to the Roman Emperor in Rome, a right Paul had as a Roman citizen. He is then handed over to a centurion called Julius whose job it is to escort Paul and a group of other prisoners to Rome.

Because it is late in the sailing season, their boat stays close to the coastline and takes them up to Myra in present-day Turkey. From there the centurion transfers them on to a grain ship making its way from Alexandria in Egypt to Rome. Egypt was one of the major sources of grain for Rome and every Summer a huge convoy of ships made the journey across the Mediterranean from Alexandria to Italy. If conditions were favourable and the journey there and back went well, there was just time to make another crossing at the tail end of the Summer except that, because the weather was changing, taking the direct route was no longer advisable and so these later voyages would head up to Myra and then hug the northern coastline as much as possible. It was one of these ships onto which Paul and his party now transfer.

And they begin to lose time. Luke notes that they have passed the Day of Atonement, which means they are well into October. They slowly work their way across to Crete where they put into a harbour called Fair Havens. They then have a dilemma. Do they stay there for the winter, recognising that the risks of the journey increase with every additional day? Or do they attempt to sail on, about an extra 40 miles, to a place called Phoenix, which offers a much better and safer harbour? Paul advises they should stay but the centurion is swayed by the owner and the captain of the ship who want to press on. This will prove to be a disastrous decision.

At first all seems well. A gentle wind strikes up, enough to encourage them to make that short hop over to Phoenix but, as soon as they are out at sea, the wind changes. A massive wind blows them Southward beyond Cauda, an island that represents the Southernmost part of Europe. They are being driven towards Africa and are fearful of the notorious sand banks off the Libya coast. Furthermore, several days go by without them being able to see the sun or the stars – things they would have used for their navigation. That meant that they were at the mercy of the storm and had absolutely no idea where they were.

The Greek word for a wind of that magnitude – hurricane or typhoon force – is based upon the Greek god Typhon who was a monstrous storm-and-fire giant that Zeus was said to have trapped beneath Mount Etna. It was believed that in his ongoing struggle and rage, he stirred up violent weather and earthquakes. So, when you got hit by the kind of wind that Paul's ship did, the belief in people's minds was that Typhon was behind it.

But, of course, their predicament wasn't just down to the wind but to having made the wrong decision to set sail. Belatedly, they try to do all they can, humanly speaking, to get back on track. They haul in the life boat. They lash ropes around the ship. They let down the sea anchor to slow the ship down. They throw the ship's equipment and some of the cargo overboard. Nothing makes a difference. Finally, they all accept that, humanly speaking, their situation is hopeless.

There's a line in the hymn we're going to sing later that says:
No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand.
That proves to be the case here. Paul has a dream in which it is revealed to him that there is hope after all. The dream told him that it was the Holy Spirit sending him on to Rome and, therefore, to Rome he and his fellow passengers would go. The situation might have seemed hopeless to all those on board that ship but they needed to know that nothing they might perceive as supernatural nor anything humanly planned or mis-planned could stand in the way of the Holy Spirit. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand

It's a lesson for us. We started by saying that in the midst of the storm, however much we might feel bent into a different shape, we need to stay rooted in God. If we do that, we said, we will stay healthy and even thrive. I want to finish by bookending this end of the sermon with a second conviction, that even as we are doing our best to stay rooted, God is holding us in his hands. *No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand.*

In amongst that hurricane strength wind that Paul's ship faced was the gentle but irresistible wind of the Holy Spirit. What God wanted to happen was not going to be thwarted. I remember preaching on one of the first Sundays of COVID. I said then and I still stand by it that COVID was not going to kill me. What I meant by that and went on to explain was that I would only die if God had decided it was my time. If it was not my time then nothing could thwart God's purpose for me. Nothing could pluck me from his hand. It might say COVID on my death certificate but it would only have happened because God had allowed it to happen.

As we go through life's storms, always cling on to the fact that the gentle wind of the Holy Spirit is in the midst of your volent winds just as he was for Paul. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck you from His hand. Or, to finish with the words of another hymn:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?

Prayers of Intercession
(using the response … Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hand.**)

Loving God,

We thank you that, whatever storms life may bring, we are never beyond the reach of your love. When the winds of life threaten to overwhelm us, help us to remain rooted in you. When circumstances bend us into unfamiliar shapes, give us the strength and flexibility to adapt without losing sight of who we are in you.

We pray for those who are experiencing storms in their personal lives and for those who feel battered by circumstances beyond their control. May they discover they are not alone and that your loving hands are holding them fast.

Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hands.**

We pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down by events in the world around them.

We remember those affected by the rising cost of living; those facing grief or debilitating ill health; those living in countries torn apart by war and conflict; and those caught up in natural disasters.

Where people feel lost and without direction, bring hope. Where human efforts seem inadequate, raise up people of compassion, courage and wisdom. Where there seems no way forward, open up new possibilities for peace and restoration.

Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hands.**

We pray for those who are navigating difficult decisions or uncertain futures and for those who have reached a crossroads in life and are unsure which direction to take. We also remember those who have made decisions they now regret, and those who are having to live with the consequences of decisions made by others.

Give wisdom to those who are in such situations. Help us not to be so preoccupied with pressing on that we fail to recognise when we should pause, reconsider or change direction. May we learn to listen for your gentle prompting amid the many competing voices around us.

Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hands.**

We pray for your Church throughout the world. In a world that is changing so rapidly, help us not to be afraid of being reshaped by the winds of change. Keep us firmly rooted in the good news of Jesus Christ, but give us the courage to adapt, to learn and to discover new ways of sharing your love. Help us to distinguish between those things that are fundamental to our faith and those things that we simply cling to because they are familiar.

We pray for churches facing decline, uncertainty or division. We pray for ministers and church leaders who carry heavy responsibilities, and for those seeking to find new ways of serving their communities. May your Holy Spirit be the gentle but irresistible wind that guides your Church into the future you have prepared for it.

Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hands.**

And finally, loving God, we pray for ourselves.

We cannot know what lies ahead of us. There will be calm days and there will be storms. There will be times when life seems to be moving in the direction we hoped, and times when we feel ourselves being blown completely off course.

When that happens, remind us of the bendy tree, which has survived because it has learned to bend without losing its roots. Help us to remain rooted in your love, flexible in our attitudes and resilient in our faith.

And above all, remind us that we are held securely in your hands. Whatever powers may seem to threaten us, whatever plans may go wrong, whatever storms may rage around us, nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.

May we live with that confidence, that peace and that hope, today and always.

Lord, in the midst of the storm**, hold us in your hands. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your 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 who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: StF 351 In Christ Alone Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljlsOQ269I4

In Christ alone, my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave, He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand