

SUNDAY 16th August 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship video A psalm of thanks Psalm 100

Praise Song

Opening Prayer

O T reading Isaiah 45 :20-24a

Video 'Resilient'

Anthem I'll go in the strength of the Lord (30/6/19)

Scripture Reading Acts 15: 1- 21

Sermon

Prayers

Hymn MP 473 My hope is built on nothing less (31/3/19)

Blessing

Welcome & Announcements Guidelines for Our Return to Church

- We are returning to our Church Hall on the 23rd August 2020, with limited seating, catering for around 55. If you intend coming that morning, we would ask you to reply to Colin by email (colin.milligan@irishmethodist.org) by Wednesday morning, so that we have an idea of how many seats will be occupied. Also let us know how many is in your group.

- If you have been shielding or have any health issues we would advise you not to attend for the first few weeks.
- Entrance to the service will be via Mill Street ONLY.
- We would ask were possible that you use the public car park in Mill Street. Only one side of the Church car park will be in use for those who have mobility difficulties.
- **Doors will not open before 10.20am**
- At the back doors you be asked to sanitize your hands & have your face mask on. This is a compulsory requirement.
- You will then be directed via the one-way system up the corridor. Maintaining social distancing at all times.
- At the desk you will be required to give your name, address & phone number. This is for contact & trace purposes.
- A steward will then escort you to a seat in the main hall.
- As you enter the main hall there will be a basket for your offering. Colin will give thanks for this during the service.
- We would ask you to remain in your seat at the end of the service until a steward directs you to leave the building by the back doors of the hall.
- Should you require to use the toilet during the service, please use the back door of the hall and the toilet at the entrance door. Returning via the one-way system.
- If you feel that you may need a drink during the service please bring a bottle of water with you, as the kitchen is strictly out of bounds.
- **If you haven't already viewed it there is a short video on the Church website showing the layout.**

- These guidelines are for everyone's safety and comfort in these strange days.

Call to worship psalm 100

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

² Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

³ Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his^(c);
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵ For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Praise Song

Jesus, be the centre

Be my source, be my light; Jesus

Jesus, be the centre

Be my hope, be my song; Jesus

Be the fire in my heart. Be the wind in these sails

Be the reason that I live; Jesus, Jesus

Jesus, be my vision

Be my path, be my guide; Jesus

Be the fire in my heart. Be the wind in these sails

Be the reason that I live; Jesus, Jesus

Be the fire in my heart. Be the wind in these sails

Be the reason that I live; Jesus, Jesus X 3

Opening Prayer *For the Lord is good & his love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Heavenly Father we come to worship You now with gladness, we come knowing that You are the creator of the universe; the One who made us... the One who gives us life; the One who even calls us the sheep of Your pasture.... God we marvel at Your life giving goodness today & at Your faithfulness which continues through all generations.... We praise You that You have been with us in the past, that You are present with us now & that You promise to continue faithfully with us whatever may come in the future...

Lord great is thy faithfulness O God my Father.... And great is Your mercy to us that You would freely give us Your Only Son... Jesus who is the centre... our hope...our song...

Gracious generous God we worship You now in the quiet... And as we do so we also take a moment to confess to our faithful God... our times of unfaithfulness.... in thoughtwordor deeds.

Lord once more touch us with the assurance of your generous forgiveness & help us to continue to worship You now....

Be the fire in our hearts... be the wind in our sails... be the reason that we live... Jesus....Jesus.

We will now hear our Old Testament Reading.

Old Testament Reading Isaiah 45:20-24a

"Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. ²¹ Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD?

And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me. ²² "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. ²³ By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. ²⁴ They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.'"

Video - Resilient

Anthem *I'll go in the strength of the Lord*

I'll go in the strength of the Lord,
In paths he has marked for my feet;
I'll follow the light of his word,
Nor shrink from the dangers I meet,
His presence my steps shall attend,
His fullness my wants shall supply;
On him, till my journey shall end,
My unwavering faith shall rely.

Chorus

*I'll go, I'll go in the strength,
I'll go in the strength of the Lord
I'll go, I'll go in the strength,
I'll go in the strength of the Lord.*

I'll go in the strength of the Lord
To work he appoints me to do;
In joy which his smile doth afford
My soul shall her vigour renew.
His wisdom shall guard me from harm.
His power my sufficiency prove;
I'll trust his omnipotent arm,
And prove his unchangeable love.

Chorus-

I'll go in the strength of the Lord
To conflicts which faith will require,
His grace as my shield and reward,
My courage and zeal shall inspire.
Since he gives the word of command.
To meet and encounter the foe,
With his sword of truth in my hand.
To suffer and triumph I'll go.

Chorus

New Testament Reading Acts 15:1-21

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch & were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' ² *This brought Paul & Barnabas into sharp dispute & debate with them. So Paul & Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles & elders about this question.* ³ *The church sent them on their way, & as they travelled through Phoenicia & Samaria, they told how the*

Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church & the apostles & elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. ⁵ Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up & said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised & required to keep the law of Moses.'

⁶ The apostles & elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up & addressed them: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles should hear from my lips the message of the gospel & believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us & them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.'

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas & Paul telling about the signs & wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. 'Brothers,' he said, 'listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, & I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my

name, says the Lord, who does these things"¹⁸ things known from long ago

¹⁹ 'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.'

SERMON Do you remember where you were when the news broke about Princess Diana's death..? Or do you remember watching for the first time those harrowing pictures of the 2 planes flying into those towers in New York? Or on a lighter note can you remember hearing these words spoken for the first time... " *That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.*" Yes whether it's a terrible tragedy or someone walking on the moon for the first time there are defining moments in history, watershed moments, times that stand out in peoples' memories often providing something of a transition from a time before... towards a time after.....

Of course the greatest of all these defining moments happened just over 2000 years ago on a small hillside just outside the walls of Jerusalem....& it carried on a few days later in a garden when women went to a tomb & found it empty...Yes the most important watershed for all human existence occurred, unlooked for, when God sent His only Son; & Jesus willing went to the cross to die for our sins & then rose again to offer forgiveness & hope to this

world. There can be no greater watershed in world history than that.... But if we are looking for the 2nd most defining moment in the life of the early Church then there is certainly a good case to be made that it is this morning's passage taken from Acts chapter 15.

To remind us a little of the background running up to this first historic Church council meeting... we would have to go back to chapter 10 & the chapters that follow it....there we would find that God was working on the apostle Peter to help him understand through a vision & then a dramatic meeting with a Gentile centurion called Cornelius that the good news about Jesus was for anyone....Following that in chapters 13 & 14 we are told about Paul & Barnabas being sent out by the Holy Spirit (13:4) on the first missionary journey to both Jews & Gentiles in Cyprus & Turkey... This is an exciting defining period in the life of the early Church, for now the gospel message is going beyond the expected borders of the Jewish community.... it is being shared with people who are very different, people who don't look or think or see the world in the same way...

But not everyone in the early Christian community is happy with these new developments & this movement of the gospel message outwards leads to ongoing disputes that aren't just about who the gospel is for.... but maybe more about what the gospel really is...so we see in verse 5 of our passage that *'some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up & said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised & required to keep the law of*

Moses.' In other words, that's fine that you have shared told these Gentiles about Jesus being the saviour... & we are happy that they seem to be accepting that...BUT... you know they really have to become Jews like us now.... they have to keep the Mosaic rules ...they will have to become like us if they are going to become part of our family.....

And what Peter, Paul, Barnabas & finally James are saying in this passage to the rest of the believers is... No any Gentile turning to trust in Jesus doesn't have to become a Jew like us to become part of the Church family.... they don't have to try & keep all the Mosaic rules & regulations ...but they do very much have to set themselves apart from their sinful old lives. So some of ways they will do this is by abstain(ing) from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

Yes these new Gentile believers must follow Jesus & their lives must show this, but they don't have to try & keep all the regulations that Jews do because the gospel isn't one of grace & regulations... It's just grace ...a grace that is as Isaiah says in our Old Testament passage for everyone...*to the ends of the earth...* but a grace that if it's received properly will lead to a changed life... a life on bowed knee before our Lord...

Yes the council of Jerusalem recorded here in Chapter 15 of Acts... was a watershed moment in the life of the early Church... Or perhaps we should say a watershed period, because when we read Paul's letters we discover that though the council made

their decision here, it didn't mean that everyone accepted or followed that decision & this led Paul to write many letters against this grace & regulations understanding of the gospel (we see it particularly in the letter to the Galatians). So, yes we should read all these chapters in Acts as a time when the Church was challenged, changing & growing... it was a watershed period when in big ways & in smaller ways... people who we have heard off like Peter, Paul & Barnabas...& many more who we have never heard off... These early believers were day by day seeking to follow Jesus ...looking beyond the old stereotypes & seeking & holding firm to the core of the gospel message about Jesus... They also allowed God to guide them into sharing this life changing message in old & new ways... & they looked for changed lives ...but that didn't mean that they expected new Christians to become exactly like them... Yes the book of Acts was written during a time of great transition... a watershed period.... & I have to ask myself if we are also, probably in a smaller way, in one of those times?

While the number of Christians in the world is higher today than it's ever been, we know that most Churches in the western world have for many years been experiencing a decline in people attending worship services... There are, no doubt, many reasons for this, only God knows all that's going on. However I can't help but wonder if one of the reasons why some people have been deserting Church is because we have often tended to do things the way we feel they have always been done...? Now before you think I am pointing the finger let me say that I am one of those

who always feels most comfortable having certain things the way I am used to.... I'm not someone who is always filled with new ideas & bursting to do this because someone else is doing it... No my preference is to slow very gradual change... BUT I have to wonder if over these past months God has caught up with me & with others & perhaps with you & said with a loving but firm voice.. Actually I'm in control of the rate of change in our world & Church & I'm afraid whether you like it or not for the sake of others I'm about to put My foot down on the change accelerator!

Yes over these past months much has changed & it will continue to in the days ahead.... For next week of course we plan to open our Church building for the first time for worship since March. And I'm excited, nervous & a bit saddened all in equal measures... For our service won't be able to be what it was... we will not be singing.... we will gather in the hall not the Church proper... we will be encouraging people to wear masks & indeed there will be those who won't be ready to join with us yet... And in the midst of this it will be as I've said before very tempting to focus on what we have lost & look back at how things 'used to be'. This is understandable reaction & we shouldn't feel guilty if that's where we are... BUT I want to challenge myself & us all not to remain in that place.... But to fix our gaze forwards on Jesus....

Of course there are many things that we will have to work out over these next weeks & when we what we think might be the answers to some things we might just find that circumstances

change again & we have to adapt once more.... You see the bad news is that whether we like it or not we are in a time of transition.... A time when we are faced with change on an epic scale.... In our Churches but also in our world... & yes I'll be honest that makes me nervous!

But listen there is good news too... For in the midst of all that is going on, in the midst of the disruptions to the programs & plans that we are accustomed to there are many opportunities for the gospel to be shared... We must remember this & indeed ask God to help us see those opportunities & show us how we fit into them through prayer, giving & action....

And as we do that.... we also ask God to give us His help to do what those early believers did at the Council in Jerusalem; namely hold tight to what is of foundational importance ...the gospel of God's grace available to all through trusting His Son Jesus... And hold loose to those things that are not foundational to the gospel... those things that have grown up over time, those traditions & ways of doing things that might be useful to us... BUT less useful to others....

I know I'm giving away my age now by saying that I was just 2 months old when Neil Armstrong uttered those famous words but in this period of transition let's not forget that as important as that first moon walk was.... there was a walk of far greater eternal importance ...one that began with a step out of a tomb just outside Jerusalem... Yes amidst the changes we follow the

One who really opened up a new way to a new hope for all humanity.

Prayers As we look to walk forward together in the days ahead so now we pray for God to clearly direct us as He did those early Christians....

Lord be the wind in our sails...directing us down Your ways... Help us through Your Spirit see with clarity, care compassionately & act courageously for Your glory & for the good of all people.

Help us hold firmly to the truth of the gospel yet also be brave enough to explore new ways of sharing the good news & building up each other in faith.... In this time of great change help us to adapt but also stay faithful to our one true hope in Jesus...

And so let us pray for our others..... We continue to remember those affected by the terrible blast in Beirut.... those who lost loved ones, those who have been injured & those who have lost homes & livelihoods.

We also continue to pray for those facing fresh outbreaks of Cronovirus wherever they may be in our world & pray for those making important decisions & all who care for others including- health care professionals & residential care staff. We pray too for the general public- Lord help us all to remember to heed the latest advice so that we keep everyone safe...

We also take time now to pray for those who have received exam results or are due to receive them in the days ahead. Heavenly Father please draw particularly close to those who have been disappointed & help them to know your guidance & help as they see the way forward.... Lord remind all who may be deeply disappointed that they are loved by You & others ...& give them hope we pray.

We also remember teachers, parents & especially pupils in the days ahead as schools will soon be reopening to most pupils. Lord we ask that you would again keep people safe & help everyone to feel secure as our society seeks to return to a greater degree of normalcy. So let us remember now those who need our prayers...

Timothy Harte, Percy, Dorothy, Shirley , Nan , Tina Donaldson - Jerry & Jean McHaffie- baby Rosie - Bernie, Margaret , Lou , Marta & we particularly remember young **Daniel Kidson** as he faces 3 more chemo sessions before his operation in September.

Lord bring your healing & your hope we pray...

And we finish with the Lords prayer...

Hymn My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

2. When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

3. His oath, His covenant, and blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When every earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

4. When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne!
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

And lets us finish our service as we share the words of the grace together... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ & the love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forevermore.
Amen