

**Worship for 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)  
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

*Welcome to our service, wherever you are, whenever you are sharing, however you are feeling, it is good to have you with us. This is the start of a new Methodist year and we welcome in particular Reverend Dr Iain Ballard and his family who join us in South Warwickshire from Hull. We wish them every blessing here.*

*A special service to welcome Iain and the family will be held in the future*

*The hymns for today's service have been chosen by Barbara Greenwood. Trevor Pethick and Russell Blackwell (that's myself) lead prayers.*

*Michael Sharman and Audrey Simpson read the Bible and our new Superintendent minister Iain Ballard speaks to us.*

*If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on [swc.katetennyson@gmail.com](mailto:swc.katetennyson@gmail.com)*

THE PREPARATION

*Call to worship*

Come, then, let us worship and know our loving God, for Jesus says, where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.

Hymn: StF 34 – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

- O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**
- Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,  
high on his heart he will bear it for you,  
comfort your sorrows, and answer your prayerfulness,**

**showing the pathway your feet should pursue.**

- 3. Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness  
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;  
truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,  
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.**
- 4. These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,  
he will accept for the name that is dear;  
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,  
trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.**
- 5. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**

*Prayer of approach*

Receive us, gracious Lord, as we come with expectations and with fears; with joys, and with sorrows; with faith and with doubt. Receive us, challenge us; and grant us your peace.

*Prayer of adoration*

God of the vastness of all that is, of all peoples and communities, here we are, part of this on-line community; gathering to worship and adore you, marvelling at your love and care and your persistence with us. You are beyond our

imagining.

*Silence*

Again and again, we are engulfed in your vastness and love.

*Silence*

How can we do anything but praise you, again and again?

We praise you that you know and reach out to us. You speak to each one of us by name, in words of joy and peace. Praise be to you, now and always.

**Amen.**

*Prayer of confession*

Loving God, we humbly confess our mistakes and failures.

Forgive our weak love for you: butterfly minds in our worship, lack of attention to learning your will.

Forgive our failed relationships: missed opportunities to act your love, hurts we have caused to others because of things done or not done.

Forgive our 'me-first' thinking: the way we ignore your generous presence, our acting as though the rest of the world did not exist.

Forgive us another 'messed-up' week gone by. Help us to follow Jesus' example more closely in the week to come.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

**Amen**

*Declaration of forgiveness*

God, who is faithful and just, assures us of pardon and peace.

**Amen.**

Hymn: I stand amazed (How Marvellous) – Shane & Shane

**I stand amazed in the presence  
Of Jesus the Nazarene**

**And wonder how He could love me  
A sinner condemned, unclean**

**How marvellous, how wonderful  
And my song will ever be  
How marvellous, how wonderful  
Is my Saviour's love for me**

**He took my sins and my sorrows  
He made them his very own  
He bore the burden to Calvary  
He suffered and died for me**

**Oh, how marvellous, how wonderful  
And my song shall ever be  
How marvellous, how wonderful  
Is my Saviour's love**

**Forever I will sing Your praise  
Jesus, Risen King  
Oh my God I stand amazed that You loved me**

**When with ransomed in glory  
His face I at last shall see  
It will be my joy through the ages  
To sing of His love for me**

**How marvellous, how wonderful  
And my song shall ever be  
How marvellous, how wonderful  
Is my Saviour's love**

**How marvellous, how wonderful  
And my song shall ever be  
How marvellous, how wonderful  
Is my Saviour's love for me**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*Epistle*      *Romans 8:18-39*

(New International Version)

*Present suffering and future glory*

<sup>18</sup>I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be

revealed. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup>Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

<sup>26</sup>In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

<sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup>And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

#### *More than conquerors*

<sup>31</sup>What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who

died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:

‘For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Gospel*      *Luke 14:15-24*

(New International Version – UK)

#### *The parable of the great banquet*

<sup>15</sup>When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, ‘Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.’

<sup>16</sup>Jesus replied: ‘A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. <sup>17</sup>At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.”

<sup>18</sup>But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.”

<sup>19</sup>Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.”

<sup>20</sup>Still another said, “I have just got married, so I can’t come.”

<sup>21</sup>The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring

in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

<sup>22</sup>“Sir,” the servant said, “what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.”

<sup>23</sup>Then the master told his servant, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup>I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.””

### *Sermon*

Hello and welcome to our service today. – I’m glad that you’re here and have joined us for hymns, for prayers and to hear the word of God.

It seems like a very long time ago that we visited the circuit and had conversations about stationing - an awful lot has happened since December, and this is certainly a different start to that which I had envisioned. However we are here, and want to give our thanks to those who have made us feel welcome. Those whose work has been seen or who have spoken to us, those who’ve worked in the background, making sure that things are ready for us to arrive.

For Paul, for the early Church and certainly for early Methodism, newcomers into the Christian Community would introduce themselves through the giving of testimony. And so today, I offer my testimony in place of a sermon; as a way of introducing myself to you, the South Warwickshire Circuit, and of course to those beyond the Circuit who join us for worship.

I was born in Stoke on Trent, and grew up in the town next door, Newcastle under Lyme. My father was a coal miner and my mother a retired teacher. They were church attenders and so from my earliest memories, I have known of God and don’t remember a time when God wasn’t, in some form, present. Though there are times when we often feel alone or away from God, God was always there somewhere. It is us

unable to see, rather than God not being present.

When I was three, I asked, ‘Can I go to Sunday School?’ and the parish church had a rule that you had to be five, so my neighbours offered to take me to the local Methodist church – the Ebenezer; and within a couple of years, our whole family was there, such was the welcome.

One of my earliest memories is preaching – which may seem slightly strange. But I have this memory of lining my teds and my sister’s dolls up on the sofa in my parent’s front room and standing in front of them and preaching. Telling them that God loved them, just as much as he loved us.

At the age of fourteen, I felt a call to local preaching – preaching within the Methodist context. No longer to teddy bears, but to people in churches and was given a note. A few months later, I was invited to take part in a service for the teenagers of the Circuit. I remember the days beforehand watching a short piece of video from Forrest Gump and writing a short address. I was the third person to speak – there were 2 ministers speaking before me – and I remember about to stand up to say what I thought I was meant to say and I felt God saying, ‘actually, I want you to say something completely different to what you have written.’ My notes were left on the pew I was sitting on and I stood, and I preached. And I will never forget, that what I preached was that God has a vision, a plan, for each and every one of us. We can choose to follow that, or we can choose to go our own way, but that doesn’t prevent God from having a view of what our lives could be. And as I preached, I had a vision, there was me looking back at me, and the me looking back was in a dog collar. From that day on, I felt a call to ordained ministry. I went to see a local minister and outed my calling and was given a piece of advice: ‘Run as fast as you can until you can’t run any more.’

And so having always wanted to be a doctor, I got my head down, continued studying and went to medical school.

It was an absolute privilege to spend over ten years serving in medicine. But every so often, God would remind me of my call to something different. To ordained ministry. And one particular year, as I travelled from Stoke to Birmingham on the M6, which most mornings looked more like a car park, I felt God remind me again that my life wasn't to be spent this way. I had chosen medicine because I had wanted to save lives. I remember God opening my eyes to a truth I had not seen before – doctors don't save lives. Don't get me wrong, if you are sick, if you are unwell, please do go and see a doctor, but doctors don't actually save our lives. I realised that every single one of my patients was still going to die. Some before they came to the hospital, some in spite of our best efforts, some because of the things we did – every treatment has risks and side effects – and some we will make better, and they will die another day – maybe a week, a month, a year, a decade, a century in the future, but they will still die. And I felt God saying, but there is good news, and I want you to take this good news – this news of eternal life - and a life that's not just life after death, but a life that is true life in this life. Jesus said, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

And so I candidated for ministry. That is a time of giving your testimony many times and in the middle of that, one of my colleagues, who remains a dear friend, spoke to me about the monetary difference. How much pay would be lost by my giving up medicine and practising ministry. And I turned and simply said, 'but in this job, I don't get to give people the best news of all and that news is that they are loved by God'.

If we hear the words of Paul, we realise that nothing can separate us from the love of God. It doesn't matter where we are, where we have been, who we are, what we've done, nothing in the whole of eternity can separate us from the love of God.

Maybe this is the first time you've heard that. Maybe, you've come across this video and you've just sat down to watch because there was nothing better to do. I hope those words – That nothing can separate you from the love of God – find a way through the armour and straight to your heart; because it's the best news I could give you. It is the life saving news – that you are loved by an eternal God.

Maybe you have heard those words before – maybe you are watching this because this is some form of replacement for what we would have thought of as gathered worship, but maybe you've forgotten – maybe time, events, work, church, maybe things have got in the way of you knowing that you are loved by God. And I invite you to read those words afresh, to set time aside and to study them, and, I hope, to come back to the realisation that you are loved. And for that to feel like the very first time you heard it, the very first moment that you heard that you are a child of God.

Maybe you're living in that knowledge - that nothing separates us from God, and if you are, may those words strengthen you on your journey, may they encourage you, that even in these difficult times, we the church, have a message to take out.

Wesley referred to his early preachers as extraordinary messengers not that the people were extraordinary, but that the message was extraordinary: the message of the love of God. But deeper than just being loved by God, God has shown his love for us. You see even when we think there is nothing so bad that separates us from the love of God, equally there is nothing

good that we have done that could have caused God to love us, as Nicodemus learns when he meets Jesus. God's love for us doesn't depend on our good works, but comes directly from God, through his Son, whose life, ministry, death and resurrection brings the good news, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

All those years ago, I wanted to study medicine because I wanted to save lives. I don't get to save lives – they have already been saved. God has already acted to bring about salvation of the whole world, of all people, regardless of race, of gender, of colour, of sexuality, - God has already acted for all people. And so whilst I don't get to save lives, I have this wonderful, wonderful role of being able to encourage, of being able to teach, of leading and most importantly of bringing that message of hope that nothing can separate us from the love of God; that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him won't perish but have eternal life.

But I believe the taking out of that message, the being an extraordinary messenger, isn't simply for those of us ordained into ministry in the church, but is a role for every single person in the church. Each of us, every single one of us is called to live our lives in the knowledge that nothing separates us and that we are loved. And in the living of our lives to take that message of love to all whom we meet – not that we save their lives, but that we get to point out that their lives have already been saved.

During our service today, we will have a hymn, 'Come sinners to the gospel feast' – it is an old Methodist hymn, but it has these words, and I hope that as you hear them, they strike the cords of your heart:

See him set forth before your eyes;  
behold the bleeding sacrifice!  
His offered benefits embrace,

and freely now be saved by grace.

This is the time; no more delay!  
This is the Lord's accepted day;  
come in, this moment, at his call,  
and live for him who died for all.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 401 – Come, sinners, to the gospel feast

- 1. Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,  
Let every soul be Jesu's guest;  
you need not one be left behind,  
for God has called all humankind.**
- 2. Sent by my Lord, on you I call,  
the invitation is to all;  
come, all the world and witness how  
all things in Christ are ready now.**
- 3. Come, all you souls by sin oppressed,  
you restless wanderers after rest,  
you poor, and maimed, and sick, and blind,  
in Christ a hearty welcome find.**
- 4. His love is mighty to compel;  
his conquering love to consent to feel;  
yield to his love's resistless power,  
and fight against your God no more.**
- 5. See him set forth before your eyes;  
behold the bleeding sacrifice!  
His offered benefits embrace,  
and freely now be saved by grace.**
- 6. This is the time; no more delay!  
This is the Lord's accepted day;  
come in, this moment, at his call,  
and live for him who died for all.**

Welcome to Iain

Hello Iain,  
I am delighted to welcome you to South Warwickshire as my colleague and Superintendent, even if only for one year. I look forward to supporting you, working with you,

hopefully laughing and maybe crying with you, as we continue to navigate this strange Covid-coloured world. May you know God's richest blessings in this new stage in your ministry.  
(Rev Barbara Greenwood)

Olive and I add our words of welcome to you Iain, Sarah, Miriam and Joel. The transition into a new circuit, new town, new home, new job and new schools is never easy but unique circumstances this year make it an even greater challenge! We hope all goes well as you turn the manse into your home, and your study/office will become a place for retreat, reflection, prayer, preparation and where you will be given inspiration and ideas by God's Holy Spirit. For you Iain this also includes taking the role and responsibility of superintendent. I always resist the phrase "stepping up to superintendency" or any thing that implies this is a promotion. Rather it is a recognition by the church that you have the gifts, skills and calling to fill this particular role in the body of Christ. I hope you will find that in South Warwickshire you can flourish as team leader for the ordained, trainee and lay staff alongside the lay volunteers who oversee and enable God's mission and ministry in this delightful part of the country. These are good churches to be part of, though I confess its some years since I attended one or two of them! There is a warmth and enthusiasm waiting for you and a desire to care for and support you as sisters and brothers in Jesus in what will hopefully become the family's spiritual home. There is a welcome waiting from the District. I have had 27 years serving in this district and enjoyed its diversity and good collegiality. The circuit is eager to welcome you too. You have already had more input than is usual for an incoming super partly as an active part of the staff and circuit WhatsApp groups and I assume I am not the only one to have had phone conversations with you. This unusual situation has been created by the pandemic but

hopefully is a positive aiding your transition. Part of the circuit where Olive and I live is rural where farming is still a significant part of the local economy and community. We hope you will get time and opportunity to get in tune with the rhythms of the seasons and spend quality time out-doors. I don't know whether you are gardeners(?) but hope you will experience growth and fruit in the circuit and churches. South Warwickshire is a fertile place where hard work will be rewarded. By the way – do you like courgettes and marrows – I have loads to give away...  
(Rev Richard Wilde)

A warm welcome, Iain, from the circuit stewards. We're delighted to have you come to lead the South Warwickshire Circuit. We hope that Sarah, Miriam and Joel will also soon feel at home in Kenilworth, and hopefully enjoy the potatoes that Peter planted for you! May your time here be richly blessed.  
(Janet Mee, Trevor Pethick, Miranda Tarrant)

Good Morning Iain, and welcome to the Birmingham District, to the South Warwickshire Circuit and to Kenilworth Methodist Church. Welcome also to Sarah, to Miriam and to Joel. These are very strange and difficult times, and no doubt worship in the coming months and years will develop into something quite different from anything any of us has experienced in the past. We will also face the challenge of finding new ways to serve in, and witness to, our local community. We look forward to working with you, exploring together, new ideas and new ways to express our faith and to praise and glorify our Lord and Saviour. We hope that all of you will enjoy your time here in Kenilworth and we commit ourselves to supporting you in our thoughts and prayers.  
(Sent from the stewards at Kenilworth)

*Other welcomes will follow*

THE RESPONSE

Hymn: Rescuer (Good News) – Rend Collective

He's our rescuer  
He's our rescuer  
We are free from sin forever more  
Oh how sweet the sound  
Oh how grace abounds  
We will praise the lord, our rescuer

There is good news for the captive  
Good news for the shamed  
There is good news for the one who walked  
away  
There is good news for the doubter  
The one religion failed  
For the good lord has come to seek and save

He's our rescuer (hey)  
He's our rescuer (hey)  
We are free from sin forever more  
Oh how sweet the sound (hey)  
Oh how grace abounds (hey)  
We will praise the lord, our rescuer

He is beauty for the blind man  
Riches for the poor  
He is friendship for the one the world ignores  
He is pasture for the weary  
Rest for those who strive  
For the good lord is the way, the truth, the life  
Yes, the good lord is the way, the truth and life  
(hey)

He's our rescuer (hey)  
He's our rescuer (hey)  
We are free from sin forever more  
Oh how sweet the sound (hey)  
Oh how grace abounds (hey)  
We will praise the lord, our rescuer

So come and be chainless  
Come and be fearless  
Come to the foot of Calvary  
For there is redemption

**For every affliction  
Here at the foot of Calvary**

**So come and be chainless (come and be  
chainless)  
Come and be fearless (come and be fearless)  
Come to the foot of Calvary  
'Cause there is redemption (oh)  
For every affliction (affliction)  
Here at the foot of Calvary**

**Oh, he's our rescuer (hey)  
He's our rescuer (hey) (oh yeha)  
We are free from sin forever more (we are free)  
Oh how sweet the sound (hey) (oh)  
Oh how grace abounds (hey)  
We will praise the lord, our rescuer  
We will praise the lord, our rescuer**

*Prayers of intercession*

Eternal, ever-living God,  
We pray for those who this day need our prayers

Those we see around us

Those we have left at home

Family and friends near and far

Strangers and communities we will never meet  
or know

But whose peril we hear of and see on our  
screens

Those whose life is ebbing away  
Consumed by old age, frailty or neglect

Those who grieve deeply for lives and loves lost

Those who cause grief and chaos in society  
And who live seemingly with different values  
from ours,

For them and their victims and families

Those who are forgotten, unnoticed, unloved,  
unmissed.

We pray for all children starting back at school  
Many of whom have not had schooling for nearly



six months

We pray for them and their teachers as they seek to stay safe.

We pray also for Iain Ballard, as he starts a new chapter of his ministry here in South Warwickshire, and for Sarah and their children, Miriam and Joel

That they may be led by your Spirit, encouraged in faith and enfolded in your love.

Loving God, in your abundant mercy  
Hear these and all our prayers.

**Amen.**

*The Lord's Prayer*

We join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us as we say:

**Our Father**

**Who art in heaven**

**Hallowed be thy name**

**Thy kingdom come**

**Thy 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 thine is the kingdom**

**The power and the glory**

**For ever and ever**

**Amen.**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 503 - Love divine, all loves excelling

- 1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;**

**visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.**

- 2. Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.**
- 3. Finish then thy new creation,  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation,  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise!**

*Prayer & blessing*

Thank you for joining with us in worship today.

As we bless each other with the words of the Grace let us hold in our minds all those who have shared this act of worship.

**May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
The love of God  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
Be with us all  
Now and for ever.  
Amen.**