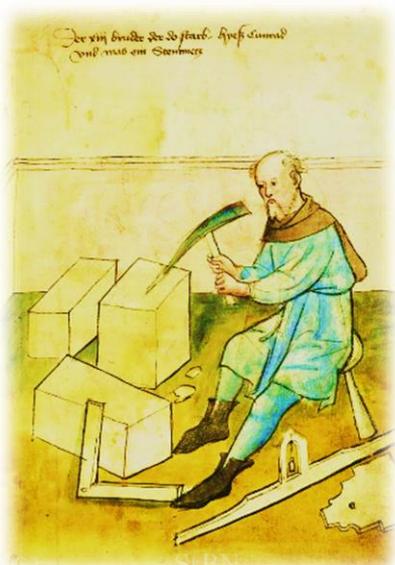


A reflective service -7th Sunday in Easter

ALDERSGATE SUNDAY

TEXT- 1 PETER 4:7-5:14



You can access worship songs online by clicking the links- please be aware you may need to skip adverts!

WE COME TO WORSHIP AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Though we be physically apart, we ARE one; we are the church of God, a gathered community, brought together in the bonds of peace, assembled today in thought and concern, in spirit, in love and in prayer. We offer up to the Lord, with thankfulness, the night that has now passed, and the day that lies open before us.

We hold a moment of silence as we prepare ourselves to receive God's word.

PRAYER OF ADORATION BASED ON A HYMN BY CHARLES WESLEY

I come to adore you Creator God, and seek to know you as my faithful, constant friend. Your love for me is without limit, as great as your power in all creation!

Lord Jesus, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last; in you I will put my trust, all the days of my life; shepherd me every step of the way, until the day when I am safely home with you.

Holy Spirit, I open my heart to you and praise you for your guidance and inspiration in all that has been. Keep me trusting in you for all that is yet to come.
Amen

HYMN

O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING

<https://youtu.be/wRYiGpx7J5Q>

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace !

Jesus — the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease ;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

He speaks ; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive ;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice ;
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
your loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your saviour come,
and leap, ye lame, for joy.

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

COLLECT PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE ON ALDERSGATE SUNDAY

God of immeasurable grace Your Spirit has from age to age, confirmed your work of salvation in the hearts of those who love you. Grant to all people a true spirit of worship, that renewed in their calling they might achieve the vision you have given to them. May we become your people, united and equipped to proclaim the good news of Salvation for all, by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit One God, now and for ever **Amen.** (author unknown)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

How we grumble, generous God, when the difficulties of today, like clouds in summer, obscure the constant light of your love.
How we grumble, patient God, when all that is to be, takes longer than we thought, and the journey seems so long.
How we grumble, loving God, when love is hard to bear, to give and to receive.
Free us from our grumbles, generous, patient, loving God, and let our hearts be filled with praise.
For you feed us in the desert place, and journey with us on our way.
Forgive us such a lack of vision, and heal our inner sight, that we may catch a glimpse of hope that lifts our hearts to love. Amen
(from *Roots a generous life*)

1 PETER 4:7-5:14 NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT)

⁷The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. ⁸Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

¹⁰God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. ¹¹Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

¹²Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

¹⁴If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God^[a] rests upon you.^[b] ¹⁵If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. ¹⁶But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! ¹⁷For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News? ¹⁸And also,

"If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?"^[c]

¹⁹So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.

⁵And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: ²Care for the flock

that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. ³ Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. ⁴ And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honour.

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”^[a]

⁶ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honour. ⁷ Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers^[a] all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

¹⁰ In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.

¹¹ All power to him forever! Amen.

¹² I have written and sent this short letter to you with the help of Silas,^[b] whom I commend to you as a faithful brother. My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God's grace for you. Stand firm in this grace.

¹³ Your sister church here in Babylon^[a] sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet each other with a kiss of

love. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ.

COMMENTARY

One of the things I really enjoy looking at is medieval Cathedral architecture. When I go inside I put my feet on the worn steps and imagine the pilgrims that have visited over the centuries, and I just have to place my hands on the stone pillars, and touch the marks made by the stonemasons hundreds of years ago. I cannot help but marvel at the tangible connection to the past as well as marvelling at the necessary precision work of the stonemasons whose craft has held up the most intricate and magnificent tracery and vaulting for hundreds of years.

The instruments of stonemasons have changed very little since ancient times; even today, stonemasons involved in conservation work use the “rule” or set square which their forebears used, an instrument vital in the cutting and shaping of stone- the key to that perfect stability.

The set square or “rule” has two arms, the vertical and the horizontal, as in the medieval illustration above, and when I read the text for today I saw a similar pattern emerging from the words of wisdom being offered. In truth there is so much in this text that a month could easily have been spent on this alone, so I will focus upon the “shape” of the passage and what that might say to us on Aldersgate Sunday!

There is the **vertical**, that points “upwards” towards God, the “being,” which concerns the inner spiritual life, and then there is the **horizontal** dimension, the “doing” or the “outwards” part of living, which includes

others, the communal place inhabited in society.

The wisdom in this letter really is full of gems and offers a perfect set-square (or rule of the life) for any disciple throughout the ages, including us.

THE VERTICAL (the being) A disciple is to embody an attitude that promotes prayer, to have a spiritual alertness and see things for what they really are, standing firm in faith with fellow believers. Prayer is the work of the church, and it is not surprising that people have turned to prayer in difficult times to sustain themselves.

THE HORIZONTAL (the doing) Disciples are to have the marks of following Christ, evident in their lives, through their deep love for others. They are to share hospitality and their God-given gifts to serve one another—part of their commitment to stewardship. Yes, there would be trials, but the bonds of fellowship and their faithfulness to God, through prayer, would strengthen them in their faith. And strengthen them it must have done, for Christianity spread to all corners of the earth.

As I reflected upon these two aspects, I was drawn back to the Dominican sisters, who taught me as a child, and the way in which they lived, balanced between the upwards and the outwards, between the being and doing, between the spiritual and the social, worshiping and serving, living to the rule of a cruciform-shaped life, and it was that same “rule” that I discovered in Methodism and which made me stay!

I have a book on my shelf with one dog-ear in it, at the place which sums up for me, Wesley’s great understanding of the upwards and outwards aspects of life. He

responds to a man who comes to him in a spiritual crisis and asks Wesley why he preaches

“Pray, what would you do with them? Whither would you lead them? What religion do you preach? What is it good for?”

Wesley replies; *“You ask, what would I do with them? I would make them virtuous and happy, easy in themselves, and useful to others. Whither would I lead them? To heaven, to God the judge, the lover of all, and to Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant. What religion do I preach? The religion of love. The law of kindness brought to light by the gospel. What is this good for? To make all who receive it enjoy God and themselves, to make them like God, lovers of all, contented in their lives, and crying out at their death, in calm assurance, “O grave where is thy victory! Thanks be to God, who giveth me victory, through my Lord Jesus Christ.”*

In Methodism today, we can only glimpse the “shadows” of the format of rules that the early Methodists lived by. The societies, bands and classes bound the people together in a supportive community, much as those addressed in 1 Peter came together, with a clear emphasis on the upwards and outwards. They met together, very much as the early church did. They studied together, prayed together, offered testimony to one another, confessed to one another, watched over one another in love, and responded to the social needs of the community.

The two-fold rule, offered strength in the early days of Methodism, and there grew a strong and effective Evangelistic movement. The strength of this movement can be evidenced not only through the

number of chapels built in this country, but also in the enormous books that are housed in Westminster Central Hall in London, that record the names of many Methodists that contributed to the building of that place. These people in the bands and classes, are recorded not just in English, but in Chinese too and many other languages and are a testament to the strength of a church that embodied a cruciform shaped life.

It is a model that is embodied by many of the churches that are flourishing today, and in the new monastic communities that are becoming so popular, yet it something that is absent in our own churches. It has been recognised that this part of our heritage is something vital that we need to reclaim if we are to grow.

So on this Aldersgate Sunday, I commend to you the stonemasons “rule” – the horizontal and vertical, the upwards and the outwards. the doing and the being. May we be earnest and disciplined in our prayer, love one another deeply and be blessed indeed.

INTERCESSIONS

We pause to pray for those who have lost hope or afraid

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for all those who mourn

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for those in our streets, our communities, our community groups and those working to support our communities and health needs

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for those in our educational settings and who live in fear of returning to school and work.

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for the needs of others known only unto us.

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for those who shepherd your people and who lead following your example

Lord we lift them to you

We pause to pray for ourselves that we may be inspired in our faith

Lord kindle the fire of your love within us

THE LORD’S PRAYER

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 that 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.

HYMN

BEST OF ALL IS GOD IS WITH US

This hymn was written to commemorate Wesley’s conversion experience

https://youtu.be/IRhmUMQE_T0

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Repeat Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

**THE BLESSING –WRITTEN AND SUNG FOR
THE UNITED KINGDOM IN THESE TIMES**

<https://youtu.be/PUtil3mNj5U>

The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His Face toward you
And give you peace
As we receive, we agree, amen
May His favour be upon you
And a thousand generations
And your family and your children
And their children, and their children
May His presence go before you
And behind you, and beside you
All around you, and within you
He is with you,
He is with you

SOME RESOURCES TO LOOK AT THAT MAY BE
OF INTEREST

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/disc-new-resurrecting-the-classes-180610.pdf>

<https://theologyeverywhere.org/2017/07/03/a-methodist-rule-of-life/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/>



WESLEY'S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE

"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 warm'd. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for Salvation: And an Assurance was given to me, That He had taken away my Sins, even mine, and saved me from the Law of Sin and Death."