

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit
Sunday Worship Sheet September 11th 2022

Our worship for this week was written by the Rev'd Nick Sissons. You may wish to have your Bible to hand. Please note the hymns are now at the back of the sheet for ease of printing.
CCLI licence 556292

The text for today: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Call to worship: As we gather for worship with Christians across the world we take a few moments to ponder some well-known words from today's Psalm before we offer up, as a prayer or preparation, the familiar words of the Collect for Purity: *'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.'* (Psalm 51.10)

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

STF 495 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Opening Prayers: O Lord our God, in the midst of the busy and often noisy lives that we lead, speak to us today with your still small voice, as we turn once more to you. We acknowledge before you that we have wandered from your path on so many occasions and that you alone are able to save us from ourselves. We also acknowledge that we desire to follow you freely and with our whole hearts and to serve you with pure lives. So we ask you to drown out the voices of all that tempts us away from following you and fill us once again with that deep hush, that is the peace that you alone can give.

In our time of worship we pray that, as we sense your presence with us, so our anxieties and fears may be calmed and your Spirit may show us how our ordered lives might become a better witness to your mercy and love. Show us through the life of your Son how we can return to you, whatever it is we may have done or been in the past, and remind us of your overflowing grace and the rejoicing that there is in heaven whenever our lives display true repentance.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus, Friend of Sinners, and we say the words that he taught us to use when we pray to you: **Our Father.....**

Introduction to the reading: I invite you now to read two of the set lectionary readings for this Sunday. The link between them is quite obvious. In the reading from Timothy, Paul speaks about his former sinful life and of how God's mercy has transformed him and of how this transformation allows his life now to bear witness to God's loving kindness. In the gospel reading Jesus tells two parables in response to those who accuse him of spending too much time in the company of sinful people. After you have read these two readings we shall praise

God for his life-giving words to us by using Walter Smith's much-loved hymn, which echoes the final sentence of the passage from Timothy: To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Epistle Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-10

STF 55 Immortal Invisible God only wise

The Collect for today:

Persistently forgiving God,
we are a stiff-necked and stubborn people, who try your patience;
yet, instead of giving us up for lost, you seek us out until we return to you.
Break our wilfulness and bring us back from our wanderings;
bend our pride and create in us pure and faithful hearts,
which rejoice in your forgiveness made known through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

A Short reflection

One of the meditative activities I remember being asked to do when I was training to be a minister was to write my own obituary. It's a very interesting exercise to do, because it forces you to ask yourself what it is you want people to remember about you after you have died. And by doing that it gets you to think about what your priorities are now whilst you are still alive and, if necessary, what things you need to change about your life so that you are more likely to achieve those priorities.

Long ago I took the funeral service of a ministerial colleague of mine and I well remember that his son, who was giving the eulogy, seemed to keep returning to the fact that his father had left an awful lot of books behind in his study. Perhaps the son was unconsciously beginning to fret over what he was going to do with them all. But I also remember that it got me thinking to myself, when I go, the last thing I want them to say about me is: "He had a lot of books." What a terrible legacy to leave behind you!

In contrast, our gospel reading today offers us a possible line from Jesus' own obituary, of which we could all be rightly proud: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." In that simple sentence is summed up everything that Jesus stood for and believed in, as well as all that our faith is grounded upon, and early on in a new Methodist Church Year it is good to reflect again on this text which gets to the heart of what we are all about.

The fact that this personal reflection on Jesus' priorities comes from a hostile source should make us pay all the more attention to it. It was clearly not something the early Christians wanted to hush up; rather they wore it as a badge of honour, because it was this fact about Jesus that attracted to him and his movement all kinds of people that the world had ignored, pushed aside or squeezed out, but who now found purpose and meaning. 'Sinners' as you are probably aware was a technical term in Jesus' day to refer to people whose status, livelihood, health, background or whatever, had set them outside of respectable religious

society and meant that they couldn't function fully as a part of the community. It was not the catch-all theological category that it had soon become by the time the letter to Timothy was written.

And this is important for us to remember, because what we as Christ's followers have most to offer to people today is the invitation to belong; and the most urgent message we have to share is that everyone is loved. People not brought up in churches will not understand or care about theological categories, but they will understand and appreciate what it feels like not to be left out, or cold-shouldered, or ignored or dismissed. Many of us have been thinking about what our churches can do as the colder weather approaches, in the knowledge that so many people in our cities and towns and villages are going to find it impossible to heat their homes this winter. Can we not open up our buildings and give a literally warm welcome to everyone who needs us and by so doing express in very practical ways the love of God, that we have seen and celebrate in Jesus?

It's no surprise to me that it was the fact that Jesus ate with sinners that most annoyed the religious leaders of his time. Because sharing food or drink is one of those beautiful and powerful human activities that allows us to express our closeness and affinity with other people in something other than words. So this year of all years, let's invite in, if we can, those who need warmth, a hot drink, some food and some loving company and see who God brings to us and see where God leads us.

After all, many scholars think that Luke got it wrong when he thought these parables of Jesus were about repentance. Did the lost sheep or the lost coin repent? Not in any obvious way at all. Isn't it rather the case that these two parables are about God's overwhelming love for every single individual, whether they've repented or not? Isn't this what we see in the reckless foolishness of the shepherd who abandoned the ninety-nine to find the one, and the ridiculousness of the woman who took so much trouble to find her coin and then wasted it by throwing a party to celebrate its discovery? That, I believe, is the kind of love we too are asked to speak about, celebrate, and most especially, demonstrate in the way we love our neighbours in need. **Amen.**

A Closing Prayer

Father God, who, when we were still far off, met us in your Son and brought us home, help us never to ignore all those who are still wandering and struggling through life; whom society has abandoned, who are looking around them for help and hope and healing, As we love you with our whole being so may we, in your name, willingly love all those you give to us and share with them your love and compassion. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

STF 323 I will sing the wondrous story

Blessing Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us, who know his love, and with those who need his love, this week and forevermore. Amen

STF 55 Immortal Invisible God only wise

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
 in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
 most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of
 Days,
 almighty, victorious, thy great name we
 praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
 nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in
 might —
 thy justice like mountains high soaring
 above
 thy clouds which are fountains of goodness
 and love.

3 To all life thou givest, to both great and
 small ;
 in all life thou livest, the true life of all ;
 we blossom and flourish as leaves on the
 tree,
 and wither and perish ; but naught changeth
 thee.

4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
 thine angels adore thee, all veiling their
 sight ;
 all praise we would render : O help us to see
 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

5 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
 in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
 most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of
 Days,
 almighty, victorious, thy great name we
 praise.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)

STF 495 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind
 forgive our foolish ways ;
 reclothe us in our rightful mind ;
 in purer lives thy service find,
 in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
 beside the Syrian sea
 the gracious calling of the Lord,
 let us, like them, without a word
 rise up and follow thee.

3 O sabbath rest by Galilee !
 O calm of hills above,
 where Jesus knelt to share with thee
 the silence of eternity,
 interpreted by love !

4 With that deep hush subduing all
 our words and works that drown
 the tender whisper of thy call,

as noiseless let thy blessing fall
 as fell thy manna down.

5 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
 till all our strivings cease ;
 take from our souls the strain and stress,
 and let our ordered lives confess
 the beauty of thy peace.

6 Breathe through the heats of our desire
 thy coolness and thy balm ;
 let sense be dumb, let flesh retire ;
 speak through the earthquake, wind, and
 fire,

O still small voice of calm !

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892)

STF 323 I will sing the wondrous story

1 I will sing the wondrous story
 of the Christ who died for me,
 how he left the realms of glory
 for the cross on Calvary :
*Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
 of the Christ who died for me,
 sing it with his saints in glory,
 gathered by the crystal sea.*

2 I was lost ; but Jesus found me,
 found the sheep that went astray,
 raised me up, and gently led me
 back into the narrow way :

3 Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
 bruised was I from many a fall ;
 hope was gone, and shame distressed me ;
 but his love has pardoned all :

4 Days of darkness still come o'er me ;
 sorrow's paths I often tread ;
 but the Saviour still is with me,
 by his hand I'm safely led :

5 He will keep me till the river
 rolls its waters at my feet ;
 then he'll bear me safely over,
 where the loved ones I shall meet :

Francis Harold Rowley (1854–1952)