

# A month of Sundays – October 2021



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

# Sunday 3rd October 2021

## Call to worship:

Take a moment to listen to the still small voice of God within the bustle of the day which has begun. Find a quiet place where you can enjoy precious moments of peace in God's presence. Sit quietly and listen to the sounds of the world around you, both outside and in the place where you are. Breathe slowly and rest in God's presence.....

The heavens declare your glory,  
the skies exalt your name,  
and though no anthems are sung,  
no sermons written or candles lit,  
within the beauty of dawn's breaking chorus,  
sun rising,  
stars at night,  
lies more theology  
than any hymn that we could sing.  
So we behold your glory and in our hearts  
join with the heavens in rejoicing.

## Opening Prayers:

Spend a moment or two to reflect on God's impact on your life. The things you say and do today will have an impact on all those you meet, it's unavoidable! How is that fact going to influence how you approach this day?

You have called us to be your people,  
to follow where you lead,  
be obedient to your word  
and bring your Good News  
wherever we might go.  
Forgive the impatience and lack of faith  
which causes us to stumble;  
when we prefer our way to yours.  
Draw us back into your arms,  
as prodigals to their Father  
and grant us patience and perseverance  
in our journeying with you.

## **Bible reading: Psalm 8**

### **Reflection (Denise Johnson)**

I was listening to Radio Lancashire this morning and they were discussing people's favourite seasons. Are you a fan of the Spring with all its new life and colour and change or a Summer lover embracing the warmth of the sun, bar b q's and light nights. Some love Winter, the fresh feel, the comfortable clothes and lavish food to warm the cockles. Many though seem to love the Autumn. Autumn is a time of settling in, starting new things (school, university, Methodist year). It is a time when plants begin to fade into the ground to recharge through the Winter. It is a time to draw the curtains earlier and battle with the leaves that fall onto the ground. Autumn is a time of colour, the leaves and the sunsets are magical at this time of year.

The Psalm for today is one which celebrates the wonderfulness of the world in which we live. A world which was lovingly created out of love by the God we worship and praise. It is a Psalm which celebrates abundance of life, a world teeming with all manner of creatures and plants: A beautiful world which we are a part of to enjoy and to care for.

We are all aware of the difficulties that our world faces as pollution increases, the atmosphere warms and land space diminishes. The images we see in newspapers or on screens are distressing and challenging and there can be a tendency to feel powerless. The Christian ethos speaks into this and suggests that the smallest of actions can make a difference (Parable of the Mustard Seed). If there is a small thing that you could change that will help, it really will. It might be a conscious decision to buy less plastic wrapped items, maybe compost waste food or encourage more wildlife into your garden. Maybe you could set yourself a small target of changing one thing by the end of this month. We all want to live in a beautiful world so let's be strengthened by the faith within us and make small steps to change the world. Amen.

### **Hymn STF 102 For the beauty of the Earth**

### **Prayers**

As Christians we believe that we are not only a part of God's Creation but have a responsibility of stewardship over this world

upon which we live. Governments and others might disagree but science and experience tell us that this world is being damaged through our neglect and selfishness.

Creator God, who placed this planet and all its resources into our care, encourage those who now remind us of our responsibilities, both to you and future generations, to do all that is necessary, whatever the cost, to save this world that we call home, so our children and theirs might not look back, both in shame and anger, at what we, in denial, have failed to do. Amen

## **Blessing**

May the love of the Father,  
the tenderness of the Son,  
and the presence of the Spirit,  
gladden your heart  
and bring peace to your soul,  
this day and all days.

# **Sunday 10th October 2021**

## **Homeless Sunday (World Homeless Day)**

**Hymn: I will speak out for those who have no voices (StF 702)**

## **Call to worship:**

Holy Lord, Hear us whilst we gather together in your name to celebrate in prayer during today. May we hold in our hearts those people around the world and in our local communities who have no place they can call home. Let us pray for families and those who live in insecure, or poor-quality accommodation and for anyone who feels abandoned and without safety. We pray for refugees and internally displaced people without a home as a result of conflict and war. May your love shine upon us and help us to prepare well in our faith and action in serving others particularly anyone who is without a home or shelter. Amen.

## **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, Today we meet in your name to give you thanks and praise. We pray for gift of hospitality and friendship for those who feel lost and abandoned in our society through poverty, homelessness and injustice. May your love be upon us O Lord as we see your saving help and strive to be builders of peace, safety and welcome in our communities. Amen

## **Bible reading: Micah 4:1-10 and Matthew 5:1-12**

### **Reflection (Simon Skidmore):**

A home is always more than just a roof and four walls. A home should be a place of safety and sanctuary, a place to relax, unwind, and escape the world outside. After all there's no place like home as the saying goes. As we know this sadly isn't true for everyone and indeed an increasing number of people within our society and communities. Not everyone has a safe place and a place that they can truly call their home. Anyone who visits any large town or city can see for themselves how much homelessness has increased in recent years. Why is this? Do we often stop often enough to reflect on the why?

At the start of the pandemic there was a concerted effort to move homeless people from the streets of the UK into temporary accommodation. This was done with great speed to minimize the risk of infection. Those living in homeless hostels also had to be found new accommodation to make social distancing a possibility. People began to ask why if we can support homeless people because of a pandemic, why cannot we support people who experience homelessness all the time? During the pandemic, homelessness changed dramatically. As lockdown began, thousands of rough sleepers were moved into self-contained accommodation. We discovered that it was possible to practically end rough sleeping overnight, if the political will was there and if people were willing to take practical action. There were also many great stories of those who had gone the extra mile to help people who were homeless. Lou Macari, the former Manchester United and Celtic Football player in the 1970's is one such example. He runs a homelessness support project where he lives in Stoke on Trent. Part of this project includes renting a large warehouse where he has also situated individual camping pods within the warehouse to

provide accommodation and shelter and an individual place for people to call home. <http://macari-foundation.co.uk/>

Jesus could identify with the homeless in His itinerant ministry. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus states that even animals have a place to call home, but He had nowhere to lay His head. He stayed in the homes of whoever would welcome Him and sometimes outside. He was born in a stable, spent time on the run in exile in Egypt, as a refugee and even spent His last night before His crucifixion outside in a garden. The apostle Paul was also at times in a homeless situation (1 Corinthians 4:11). The Bible does not shy away from the difficult and unpleasant reality that some people have experienced terrible setbacks and hardships in their lives, even to the point of becoming destitute. The Bible recognizes that poverty, social injustice, and homelessness are real problems that constantly plague society (Mark 14:7). The Bible teaches that we are to be radically different from the world in how we view and treat our neighbours. In fact, we should go out of our way to provide for the homeless and others in need, trusting God to reward us in His time. What can we do today to do more to change the situation of homelessness in the boundaries of our circuit within Preston Ribble? In the last few months, we've come to know that homelessness isn't inevitable. So my question is, what will you do to help end homelessness?

**Hymn: God of justice, Saviour to all by Tim Hughes (StF 699)**

### **Prayers:**

Lord Jesus, we pray for people during the start of autumn and those who face a life living on the streets. May you bless them and all who care for those who are homeless and try to change their situation. May we also pray for those who have become homeless due to addiction or because they have experienced poor mental health.

Lord God hear our prayer.

Lord of Mercy, we pray for those who give up their personal time in the service of others who are homeless and those who work within organisations and charities that work towards a more inclusive society with those on the margins. May you bless their work and strengthen them in the challenges they may face.

Lord God hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our communities. We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day, We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us again. Amen

## **Blessing**

Bless us and guide us Lord on World Homeless Sunday and may we be spurred into action to make a difference for those without a home or experience homelessness. May we prepare for your coming in love, in hope and expectation. We pray that we will come to know you deeper and have our faith renewed and restored through your word and the Holy Spirit. May you continue to fill us with good things and find a true place near to your feet. Amen.

**Hymn: STF Longing for light, we wait in darkness (StF 706)**

## **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

### **Call to worship**

Let us come together to be still,  
to be known, loved, and held by God our creator,  
to be thankful for all that God gives us,  
to be healed and restored,  
that in our worship today  
joy and gladness may refresh and renew us

### **Hymn BY FRED KAAAN**

Put peace into each other's hands  
and like a treasure hold it;  
protect it like a candle flame,  
with tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands  
with loving expectation;  
be gentle in your words and ways,  
in touch with God's creation.

## **A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

Lord, sometimes we have very set ideas about communities. The ones we belong to. The ones we aspire to. The ones we stay away from. Help us to see as you do: you love every member of every community. We are all one in you. Forgive us when we look down on others, or consider our way alone to be the right one. Help us to work together with you for good, putting ourselves aside and others always first. Amen.

God sees our hearts as we turn to him to seek forgiveness. He doesn't want us to fight for preference but to grow ever closer to him through pure and simple love. As we come to him, acknowledging that we don't always get it right, he freely and abundantly pardons us. Thank you, most gracious God. Amen.

### **Bible reading: Mark 10:35-45**

As Jesus continues to Jerusalem, the disciples are still struggling with what is happening. In this week's passage, the focus is on the question asked by the brothers, James and John. Once again, the disciples grasp the wrong end of the stick. Despite Jesus' words about the Son of Man and the coming of a new age, with new expectations, they ask a question almost as if they hadn't been listening or watching. The question (v.37) assumes that Jesus, as king, is going to Jerusalem to claim his throne. They are even confident in themselves and their relationship with Jesus (v.39). But even now, despite Jesus' predictions of what will happen, they simply fail to grasp just what sort of king Jesus will be (vv.39-40), which is a suffering servant.

Beavers have been locally extinct in the UK for many years but, recently, they have been reintroduced in just a few locations as an ecological experiment. Beavers work as a community, creating a lodge and dam that provides their family space and shelter. And in felling trees and making dams, they change the landscape, creating new wetland habitats for themselves, and for plants and other animals in the surrounding countryside. They bring new light and space and improve water quality. Of course, not everyone wants their land flooded or trees cut down, so they have their detractors

too. It will be interesting to see how the experiment works out in years to come.

Leaving aside those ecological arguments and details, the broad description of beavers at work might be a helpful analogy for the gathered church. The church provides a place for a family, a community, to gather and shelter. Church members are called to serve and transform their local neighbourhood, flooding the area with God's unconditional love, bringing the light of Christ into people's lives, and improving the quality of those lives.

Jesus was not only one who served others but suffered for others: "How do we respond to the idea of being a suffering servant?" 'Who are the suffering servants in our world today?

## **Prayers of intercession**

Lord, we pray for those who have given their lives to serve – whether on far-off mission fields or just around the corner, pouring out love and compassion on those you have placed in their care and in their lives; may they know your strength, especially when they are weary or overwhelmed. Be their refuge, O God, and give them all they need for each day.

Lord, we pray for those who, in their vocations and workplaces, are in a position of caring for others in tangible ways – looking after the sick and the lonely, providing housing or advice, being at the other end of a phone, transporting those who cannot get around easily. We thank you for them and ask your blessing on them. May they be provided with the resources to do their jobs well. And we pray that those who are in supervisory positions might have wisdom and awareness of the needs of those who work for them.

Lord, we pray for all of us here, that you may lead us in our own service of others, reminding us of the deep motivation of Christ's love, and giving us a heart for your world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# Sunday 24th October 2021

## Call to worship

The Lord is my light, my light and salvation.  
In God I trust. Let us come together in worship,  
opening our lives to God's renewing grace.

## Opening Prayer

All seeing God, you are so far beyond our understanding,  
yet you want to meet with us. You call us into your presence,  
as the crowd called the blind man to come to Jesus.  
We come to you now, mighty Lord, gathered expectantly,  
ready to worship and learn from you. May we have eyes open to  
see you and hearts willing to be seen by you. Amen.

## Bible reading

Mark 10: 46-52

## Reflection (Karen Le Mouton)

Do you see, what I see, is a line from the Christmas song which is often played featuring Bing Crosby. It suggests that we need to pay attention to the fact that we don't all see things in the same way. One of my tutors at theological college, Professor John Hull was blind and wrote a book called *On sight and Insight* (1997). While a professor and when his children were young, he became blind. For John, blindness was a journey into a different world. The blind person is both independent and dependent. The blind person (often) has a heightened sense of the world around them because it is more difficult and dangerous. These things can be difficult for those who are not blind to appreciate. I wonder how do you see the relationship between sight and insight?

Picture this in your mind's eye: outside a tube station a young man is playing the violin. He is passed by people rushing by with endless places to be and things to do, trains to catch. Only a couple of people stop and listen for a short time. But there is a young girl who stops and listens intently until her parents soon pull her away. She is reluctant to leave and looks back as they tug her on their way. In front of the player is a hat with a few small coins. This is a true event.

The previous night, the same virtuoso violinist had played to a packed audience at a London venue, using a priceless Stradivarius. Those attending in the audience had paid at least £50 for a seat, many much more. Yet the music played at the tube station, was the same. The young player had wanted everyone to hear his music, with no barriers or restrictions. However, many of those passing by only saw a young busker playing for his tea.

Now picture another busy street in another place and another time, with a blind man sitting beside the road. This will be a unique moment, though the blind man does not yet know it. He recognises that a rabbi is passing and, with what you might call, God-given insight, he understands who this rabbi truly is. Before that moment is lost, the man does the only thing he can, he calls out in faith. The rabbi hears and asks to see the man.

It's as if time stands still when Jesus asks, 'What do you want me to do for you?' There is that hushed moment of stillness. Everyone is waiting, watching, not knowing that the answer will change not only the blind man but the whole community. 'Teacher, let me see again.' Jesus' heart must have sung as he restored the man to his rightful place in the community with new purpose. Immediately, Bartimaeus makes his decision and follows Jesus. Consider was this blind faith or true insight?

I wonder, do we make time in our lives for such moments? Or are we always 'No time to stop and stare'? No time to see with God's eyes and wonder? To consider what looking through another's eyes might mean for them? No time to listen, as Jesus did, for the heartfelt cry of your own or another's heart?

Remember that little girl at the station? It makes me wonder did she take away from that moment a desire to play the violin? If so, did she pursue that calling? Who knows? But God uses such moments if we but stop and stare; vocations are made in such brief and unique moments, yet they can also be missed, the opportunity to have our eyes opened by God is lost. In the same way, how often do we assume that what we see is all there is to someone, without stopping and making time to build a relationship to see them as they are? May we ask God to give us insight – his sight into what we see around us each day. Let us see others through God's eyes

of grace, love and compassion and may they encounter God in us.  
May we have eyes to see, ears to hear and faith to respond.

Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus,  
to reach out and touch him, and say that I love him.  
Open my ears, Lord, and help me to listen.  
Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.  
(Songs of Fellowship 443)

## **Prayers**

God, we pray for all those sitting in darkness,  
those who feel that they have little to offer,  
those who cannot see light – not even a pinprick of light –  
in the night that they currently endure.

We ask for the candle in their hearts to be relit,  
and for those around them to be inspired to help them,  
to intervene and intercede on their behalf.

Have mercy on us, O God, have mercy on your world.

We pray for those who are unsure of the way ahead,  
who struggle to discern the right thing to do.

Give them insight and wisdom,  
that they may perceive the right course of action  
and understand what is needed.

Have mercy on us, O God, have mercy on your world.

We pray for those who have been hindered  
by unhelpful or untrue expectations,  
asking that you would untangle the muddle  
that they find themselves in,  
and allowing them to see your truth and grace.  
Have mercy on us, O God, have mercy on your world.

We ask in the name of the living Christ. Amen.

Conclude your prayers with The Lord's Prayer.

## **Blessing**

Lord, may we look out into your world  
with your eyes, listen with your ears,  
and speak and love in your name.  
May we speak and love in your name.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.

## **Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021**

### **Opening words:**

Let there be love shared among us, let there be love in our eyes  
May now your love sweep this nation, cause us O Lord to arise.  
Give us a fresh understanding of brotherly love that is real.  
Let there be love shared among us, let there be love.

### **Prayers:**

O God of heaven and earth,  
in you we live and breathe and move.

**We praise you and adore you.**

In you we think and speak and act.

**We praise you and adore you.**

In you we grow in love and hope.

**We praise you and adore you.**

O God of heaven and earth,  
accept our prayer of praise.

Giver of all,  
we thank you for your mercy, for your strength,  
for all your blessings in our lives.  
Thank you for calling us to live in community,  
and for all the opportunities we have  
to form relationships with others.  
Thank you for sending us your Son  
and for giving us your transforming Spirit.  
Help us to take the time to recall your love for us,  
and to express our gratitude for all you have given us.  
Thank you, O God.

Lord God, we confess that we struggle to love others.  
Sometimes we don't even recognise who our neighbour is,  
never mind knowing how to love them.

We confess that we don't always realise  
that to show love to others,  
first we have to learn to love ourselves.  
Sometimes we haven't a clue how to do that.

We may have an ideal in our head of what love is,  
then get cross with ourselves when we fall short.

We confess that we have the idea that love is  
this great dramatic gesture or action,  
when sometimes it can be as small as a touch of a fingertip.  
Encourage us in your ways, O Lord. Amen.

The God of all heaven and earth  
looks upon us now with love.  
He wraps us tightly in his arms.  
His love pardons us, enfolds us,  
gives us courage to accept that our sins are forgiven,  
and we can go into the world to reveal his love.  
Praise be to God. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

**Hymn 102: For the beauty of the earth**

**Reading: Mark 12: 28 – 34**

**Reflection** (by Rev Janet)

Here in the North West of England, we live near to Blackpool. There are many things associated with Blackpool – the Tower, the Golden Mile, donkeys on the beach, ballroom dancing, and the “little stick of Blackpool Rock!” That rock comes in many different colours and flavours, although I personally think you can't beat the traditional pink and white. But what all sticks of rock have in common is that wherever you cut the rock, it shows the name of the place you have been – it has Blackpool written all the way through it. The stick of rock is full of Blackpool. In the Bible story we heard today, Jesus opens his heart and it is full of love. Jesus has love written all the way through.

Imagine (if you can) a stick of rock from Jesus. It might say, ‘Love God, love others’, all the way through. This is the heart of Jesus’ work and mission. And wherever you break into his story, it will say the same. From cradle to cross and beyond, Jesus’ life is full of love for God and for each other. As Christians, our challenge is to take some of this for ourselves, to love Jesus so much that we can't stop wanting to be like him, being so filled with His love that we just can't stop doing it: loving God, and loving others.

Or think of it like breathing. When we are fit and well we never need to say to ourselves, 'Oh, I must remember to breathe'. We don't. For most people, most of the time, it just happens. It's just an automatic part of our lives. We all breathe, all the time!. Loving should be like that. Loving God, loving one another, should be as natural and uncomplicated and inevitable and unstoppable as breathing.

If someone or something stops us from breathing, we know what the consequences will be. We should treat the consequences of not loving God, or not loving other people, as being just as serious. Because our spiritual health is important too, and our eternal life is even more important than our life on earth.

Of course, sadly, there are moments when people do struggle for breath – as we know only too well after a year and a half of covid pandemic – and when that happens, we do all we can to help those people with medication and oxygen. If we see someone who has stopped breathing, we try to save them by giving them “The kiss of life”. If only we could be as keen to help people who have stopped loving others or who don't know how to.

We can be people who commit ourselves always and everywhere to loving God, ourselves and others. People who show the love and grace of Jesus in everything we do and say. We can lead by example. That's why we have been given life, placed in this world, and that's what God calls us to do. To love others and to pray for them. So:

Let us pray:

When you called your people to hear you, loving God,  
you told them that you are one.

May we be one in our love for you,  
in all that we are together.

Teach us, great God, to love  
with our heart and soul, our mind and strength.

Patient Saviour, the temptations are many,  
and the pathways of love are hard going.

May we love you with determination;  
let us not turn aside or grow weary.

Teach us, great God, to love  
with our heart and soul, our mind and strength.

Our neighbours are many, their lives are diverse;  
help us to hear them and learn from them,  
to love them as you love us.

We pray now for the people we know who are in need of your love  
and ours.

Teach us, great God, to love  
with our heart and soul, our mind and strength.  
May love be our journey, our goal and our lifestyle.

May love be our hope and our deepest desire,  
that we may grow closer and give you the glory.

Teach us, great God, to love  
with our heart and soul, our mind and strength.

Amen

**Hymn 503: Love divine, all loves excelling.**

### **Blessing:**

May the word of God dwell in our hearts,  
in our minds and in our actions,  
every day of our lives.

And let us pray for one another, saying together:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now, every day and evermore.  
Amen.**