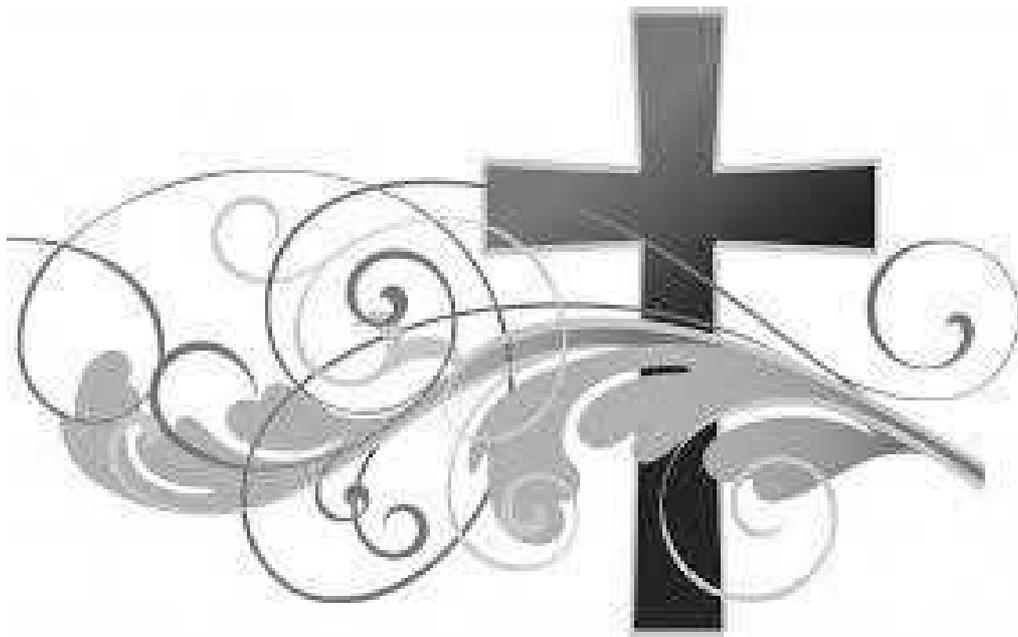


Worship for a month of Sundays January 2021



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Covenant Service

Sunday 3rd January 2021

Call to worship (*Singing the Faith 51*)

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail now; as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be. Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.

Opening Prayer

Glory to the Father, the God of love, who created us; who continually preserves and sustains us; who has loved us with an everlasting love, and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour, who, though he was rich, yet for our sake became poor, and was tested in every way as we are, yet without sin; who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross; who was raised from the dead and is alive for ever, and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in him; who is seated at God's right hand in glory, and will come to be our judge.

Glory to the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, by whom we are born into the family of God, and made members of the body of Christ; whose witness confirms us; whose wisdom teaches us; whose power enables us; who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

Blessèd be God for ever. To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.

God of grace, through the mediation of your Son, you call us into a new covenant. Help us therefore to draw near with faith and join ourselves in a perpetual covenant with you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings: Exodus 24.3-11 (from the Law); Jeremiah 31.31-34 (from the Prophets); Romans 12.1-2 (from the Epistles); John 15.1-10 (from the Gospel).

Reflection

The Covenant Service goes back to John Wesley's time. He wanted a form of worship which would help people open themselves to God more fully. The aim of the service is to help people hear God's offer and God's challenge; to provide space for God to prompt and for people to respond. Yet, more than this, for the Covenant Service is not just a one-to-one transaction between individuals and God, it is an act of the whole faith community.

Both the Covenant Prayer and Service are regarded as jewels of Methodism and one of the most distinctive contributions of Methodism to the liturgy of the Church in general. Other churches are now discovering it and making use of it in their worshipping life.

What God offers through the Covenant is a loving relationship. It is not a business contract set up between God and humanity for the provision of certain goods and services. Rather, it is the means of grace by which we accept the relationship God offers and then seek to sustain it.

The focal point of the service is the

Covenant Prayer:

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
wherever you may place me,
in all that I do and in all that I may endure;
when there is work for me and when there is none;
when I am troubled and when I am at peace.
Your will be done when I am valued
and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;
when I have all things, and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all I have and am
to serve you, as and where you choose.*

*Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.*

*May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth,
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.'*

This prayer embraces the whole of life, in all its parts. Most people find it quite tough to say this and really mean it. It is uncomfortable and challenging. It asks questions of our faith and demands that we examine our relationship with God.

The Covenant Prayer has been compared by some to a set of New Year resolutions, but ones that emphasise the importance of doing and being as much as believing. But more than that, the prayer represents a commitment to being a disciple, putting God first in our lives, and in everything about our lives: what we do, what we say and who we are. It is both a surrender to, and a trust in, God. The final few words are a gracious reminder: 'You are mine and I am yours'. We don't pray and live just in our own strength – but in God's.

Read through the prayer slowly, a line at a time.

What jumps out at you?

What would you find easy to say?

What would you find difficult to say?

Think how it might apply to your life – the whole of your life.

You may want to have a look at *The Methodist Way of Life* to help you. What things might God be asking you to stop?

What might God be asking you to continue?

And what new things may God place in your life?

The Covenant

God made a covenant with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law. The covenant was renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in his life, work, death and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power, and united in love and obedience. In this covenant God promises us new life in Christ. For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God.

We meet, therefore, as generations have met before us, to renew the covenant which bound them and binds us to God. Let us then seek forgiveness for the sin by which we have denied God's claim upon us.

Prayer of Confession

Have mercy on me, O God, in your constant love; in the fullness of your mercy blot out my offences. Wash away all my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your help again and strengthen me with a willing spirit.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore, to all who truly repent this is his gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven'. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Let us again accept our place within this covenant which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples. This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work.

Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both; in some we may please Christ and please ourselves; in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us. Therefore, let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ. In obedience we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to

you. We are no longer our own but yours.

Read the **Covenant Prayer** again (from the reflection). If you are able, do stand to say it.

Prayers of Intercession

As we have entered this covenant not for ourselves alone, but as God's servants and witnesses, let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Loving God, hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church: make us all one, that the world may believe.

Inspire and lead all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world: establish justice and peace among all people.

Have compassion on all who suffer from any sickness, grief or trouble: deliver them from their distress.

We praise you for all your saints who have entered your eternal glory: bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray in silence for our own needs and for those of others

. . .

Lord our God, you have helped us by your grace to make these prayers, and you have promised through Christ our Lord that when two or three agree in his name you will grant what they ask.

Answer now your servants' prayers according to their needs; in this world grant that we may truly know you, and in the world to come graciously give us eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing

The blessing of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always. Amen.

(Extracts taken from the Methodist Worship Book ©1999 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes)

Sunday January 10th 2021

This the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
We are the family of God.
And are called by God's name.
We are heirs of Christ's kingdom.
And born of the Spirit.
Let us, therefore, come together in thanksgiving. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God,
Your Spirit swept over the waters of creation;
You are sweeping over us now, creating something new.
Open us to a new awakening, a new beginning,
where we recognise the goodness of Your creation,
and experience all possibilities in You.
Turn us away from the darkness and lead us to the light.
In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray.

Lord, we have entered the season in which Your Light has been given to the world, your blessings have been poured out on the world, and yet all we can think about is our own problems, our own needs, our own desires.

Forgive us Lord.

Pour your baptismal waters over us again, cleanse us from our pride and selfishness.

Nourish and heal us so that we may joyfully serve you.

Wash away our jealousy, greed, and everything that stands in the way of our truly being the people you have called us to be.
We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

The love of God is always offered to us,
freely, joyfully, for all eternity.

We rejoice that this is the Good News of our Lord. Amen.

Reading – Mark 1: 4 – 11

Reflection (by Rev Janet)

We have been advised not to make New Year's Resolutions this year, because the chances of us keeping them in these difficult days are slim to nil! And anyway, by the 10th of January most people have already broken them!

New Year's resolutions are nearly always a short-lived change in our lives. The changes that we really need to make are much deeper and longer lasting. It may be good for our physical health to give up smoking, take more exercise or eat less cake, but our spiritual journey is even more important and deserves more thought.

The beginning of our spiritual journey is marked by our baptism. Now, baptism means different things to different people: for some, it is just a traditional thing to do, for others, it is about becoming a part of the family of God. Some believe that baptism is about being washed free of sin and having a new start in life. In some churches, baptism is offered to babies, in others to adults.

Even if we cannot remember it, we have almost certainly been baptised. And we know it is important because Jesus Himself was baptised. He took on human nature and He became one of us. So what does His baptism tell us about Him, and how does it relate to each one of us?

At baptism, Jesus was recognised as God's "Beloved Son" – so at baptism we celebrate that we too are children of God. We are adopted into God's family.

At baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus. And the amazing thing is that through our baptism, the Holy Spirit comes on us and empowers each one of us to live for God. We are empowered by God to meet the challenges we face in life. We are empowered by God to forgive others, to love others, to be reconciled. We are empowered by God to live out our destinies and become the people that he longs for us to be. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to make the changes that we need to make in our lives. Those real, lasting, deep changes that only we and God know we need to make.

Jesus, you are changing me.

By your Spirit, you're making me like you.

Jesus, you're transforming me:

that your loveliness may be seen in all I do.
You are the potter, I am the clay.
Help me to be willing to let you have your way.
Jesus, you are changing me.
As I let you reign supreme within my heart.

Prayer: Gracious Father, you are Lord of our beginnings and our endings and all that lies between. We praise you: for how you have poured out upon us blessing after blessing; for how you have reached out to us; for how you have come to us; for how you have spoken to us. Help us to live the faith you have given us.

We thank you for how Christ Jesus came among us and identified himself completely with us. Help us to commit ourselves to him and to the family he has called us to be a part of - to be members of his visible body here in this place - his feet and his hands - his eyes and his ears - his light and his salt - day by day.

Bless your church, O God, that your will may be done and your name be glorified. Make us one as you are one; both those who are near and those who are far off.

Bless the grieving with your comfort, so that they may know your light even in the time of their deepest darkness.

Bless the broken in body and spirit with your healing, so that they may know you are Lord of all their days and so that they may praise you each day no matter what it may bring.

Bless, O God, all those for whom we now ask in the silence of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer....

Our Father who art in heaven...

Blessing: May God enfold you in tender and lasting love. May Christ be beside you in times of struggle. And may the Spirit guide you back to the path whenever you stray. Amen.

Sunday 17th January 2021

Call to Worship

We sit and wait, connected in our worship yet reading alone.
We listen for your voice Lord, speak into our day and prompt
our words and actions. We are ready.

Opening Prayer

I do not fear this day, for you are with me wherever I might go,
your light to shine ahead, your footsteps to lead the way.

I do not fear this day, for your word will be my guide, your
strength will sustain me, your love revive me, this day and all
days.

I do not fear this day, for you are with me.

I may be asked to be brave and I will seek your strength. I may
be asked to speak out and I will choose my words wisely. I may
be challenged about my way of life, allow me to live with
integrity. I may need to change something about myself and I
can do that with your help. May I always know that I am loved
and accepted for being me and that little old me is important
and part of your plan.

Amen

Speak out loud (or sing) the Lord's Prayer.

Readings

1 Samuel 3 v 1-10 - The call of Samuel

John 1 v 43-51 - The call of Philip and Nathaniel.

Hymn 663 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

Reflection (Denise Johnson)

One of my first ever Sunday school prizes was a book about
Samuel, and it featured the story that we have just read. I have
always loved the story. I was a child myself when I opened the

pages of that book and jumped into the reality of God speaking and calling that little boy. I wondered if something like that would ever happen to me. I think I hoped that it would.

The story of the calling of this young boy Samuel is set in a time where God appeared to be quiet. People were watching and waiting for God to speak, a lamp burned in the Temple twenty hours a day just in case something happened. Imagine the surprise when God did speak and it wasn't the wise or powerful that heard him, it was a boy. Eli, the Priest was wise enough to recognise that God wanted the boy to listen and he urged him to do just that.

If I sat with God and I could hear an audible voice I am not sure what I would think. I would probably find it hard to listen and would probably want to ask many questions. I have questions which many of you probably have. Questions like – why do people have to suffer? Why did my friend die young? Should I forgive everyone no matter what they have done? Is everything in my life part of a plan? These are hard questions which many of us have asked over the years and maybe keep asking. Into these questions comes my own working out through a lifetime (so far of 56 years!); comes my learned incomplete answers; comes my ability to sit with the difficult and the challenging and the thought provoking. My thoughts on all these questions have changed over the years and will probably change again. Life comes with its questions and challenges but deep within there is this call, this voice which has always been there. Even in my darkest times of doubt and difficulty this small, still, calm voice is present. I have never heard the voice of God but I have felt it all of my life. Over the years wiser, older friends have taught me that God is a constant when all else changes and all I need to do is be like that boy in the story – sit with God and listen.

I am an unfinished child of God, we all are. Take heart and stay with that still small voice.

Hymn Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

Prayers

Who is there like you, God of mercy and grace who loves us as you do?

Who knows and understands our actions as you do?

Who hears the thoughts and words of our heart as you do?

Who knows our joys and sorrows and shares them as you do?

Who feels the pain we endure and comforts us as you do?

Who hears as we confess our sins and forgives as you do?

Who takes a broken heart and makes it whole as you do?

Who finds a life that's lost and welcomes it home as you do?

Who is there like you, God of mercy and grace who loves us as you do?

Amen

Blessing

The peace of God be in your heart

The grace of God be in your words

The love of God be in your hands

The joy of God be in your soul

and in the song that your life sings.

Sunday 24th January 2021

Call to Worship:

Let us come from our everyday and our routine and meet with God – the one who made us, and who gave us our daily bread through the week just gone.

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us where we are in the middle and muddle of our daily tasks. Help us to hear your call, to recognize your voice, and to respond to your invitation to be with you now. Amen

Prayers:

God of our salvation; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God of glory; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God our rock; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God our refuge; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God of mercy; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God of loving kindness; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God of power; we pour out our hearts in praise.

God who calls us to follow; lead us where you would have us go. Amen.

Lord God, like so many characters in the bible, fear can stop us responding to your call on our lives.

Fear of being unpopular, of being inadequate, of having to give up something, fear of losing people we love, fear of change. we are sorry for giving in to our fears. Helps us to respond to your call without hesitation.

Jesus you came proclaiming the good news of God and endured the cross because of love for us. Through that same cross we are forgiven. We may share this good news so that others may know your love and forgiveness. Amen.

The Lords' Prayer

Reading: Mark 1v14-20: The beginning of Jesus ministry and calling of first disciples

Reflection: (Rev Barbara Pettitt)

I love this passage of scripture and one of the reasons is that I am fascinated by the speed with which those first disciples follow Jesus. I wonder if there was discussion, that isn't recorded, between them and Jesus. Or did they really see something so amazing that they just left their nets, left their father, and followed. Simon and his brother Andrew literally leave their nets in the sea and follow. James and his brother John left their father, you might say the family business with no warning. And how did Zebedee feel when his sons just left? Was he pleased? Or was he worried about the future, his and theirs?

I love this passage as well because Jesus comes to these men in their daily life. He came where they were. He didn't wait for them to come to him. He interrupted what they were doing and issued his invitation.

I imagine we could learn something important from that for our own mission. So often we want people to come. Come to Church, we say, come and see what we are doing and find out about God. Maybe instead we should go to people. Maybe we should be with people in their daily living and find out what their lives are about? Jesus did send out his first disciples to share good news.

Francis of Assisi once said: "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words". A great lesson for us, because, believe it or not how we act says far more than what we say. How we are with people, how we treat people, how we treat each other is far more powerful than our words. How we are with and about God is more important than our words.

I love the idea that Jesus comes to us where we are in our daily lives. Not just with his initial invitation to follow but in our discipleship as well. He disturbs us in our comfortableness, he kind of creeps up on us when we least expect it.

I'm leaving us with these questions taken from the Roots magazine which gives preachers hints and ideas for hymns,

readings, prayers etc for each Sunday. Please ponder these questions today and in the coming week.

What do you feel about the idea that you are chosen by Jesus?
What is it about Jesus that would make you want to say, 'yes'?
What might make you hesitate in your response to Jesus?

And Jesus said to them, follow me. Amen.

A Personal Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that when it is stormy all around us your love is changeless.

Thank you, Lord, that although we are broken people, your love is changeless.

Thank you, Lord, that your compassion overwhelms us, and your love is changeless. Amen.

Hymn:

I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry

All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.

I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide till their hearts are satisfied.

I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord

A sending out Prayer:

Loving Lord, thank you that you meet us in the middle and muddle of our everyday lives. Help us to hear you call, to recognize your voice, and to respond to your invitation to follow you whatever you might be doing. Amen.

Sunday 31st January 2021

Call to worship

We are called to recognise God's authority and to submit to it in every area of our lives.

Let us invite God to direct our thinking and our prayers.

Let us give God the highest place in our lives.

A prayer of adoration

Let us worship the living God.

Father God, holy and majestic, what an impression faith in you has made on our lives! God of all wisdom, you are the source of all authority in heaven and earth.

Compassionate Lord Jesus, what an indelible impression you have made on our spirit! Lovingly speaking through your life on earth: your sacrificial authority on the cross breaking through the barriers of sin.

Awesome Holy Spirit, what an impression you make on our life! Through our faith, you continue to impress upon us the supreme wisdom of God, Gracious and Fair. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, source of all authority in heaven and earth, eternal praise belongs to you. Amen.

A prayer of confession

O God, when Jesus spoke in the synagogue, everyone was astonished by the absolute authority of his words and presence. In today's world, it is so easy to be taken in by someone's words or their favourable, commanding presence. We think, perhaps, of people in the media, the music scene and social networks. But, unfortunately, not everyone's words have integrity or match their actions. O God, help us to discern who to give credence to.

Forgive us when our own words or actions don't marry with our calling. Help us to speak and act with integrity at all times. Help us also, O God, not to jump to conclusions by first impressions, preconceptions or prejudices – anything that turns us against people who don't quite fit our expectations of them. Yet you may wish to speak through them. Forgive us when we jump to wrong conclusions. Forgive us for judging. Help us to seek your wisdom, to see and hear you in all people regardless of age, appearance or background.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reading: Mark 1.21-28

Reflection

Mark has described how Jesus drew his team together, and now he tells us about the beginning of his active ministry. Jesus' first act is, in some respects, very traditional. He goes to the synagogue on the sabbath and teaches in the rabbinic tradition. Mark tells us nothing of what he said, but he does record the great impression he made on the congregation. Scribes often presented a range of opinions from earlier scholars, then left the congregations to make up their own minds. Jesus' teaching is clearly much more authoritative. It carries conviction and leaves people feeling that they had heard the 'word of the Lord'.

Jesus' words chime with his actions. His powerful words lead to a word of power as he overcomes the unclean spirit that is tormenting the man. The story reflects a battle of wills as the spirit attempts to gain control over Jesus by using his name and identifying him as 'the Holy One of God' (v.24). In many forms of magic, knowing a name is a source of power. In the face of this, Jesus is able to defeat the spirit with one word (in Greek): Silence! And the spirit can no longer speak, only scream as it leaves the man (v.26). Jesus shares God's power to create order simply through his words (Genesis 1.3). There is no

possibility of survival for the evil spirit in the presence of the Messiah, and its attempt to name Jesus only serves to reinforce his true identity.

Mark again emphasises the impact this has on the congregation – they are amazed and there is a hubbub of conversation as they discuss what they have just witnessed. In a society where much illness was put down to ‘unclean spirits’, the power to control them was astonishing, and it’s not surprising that Jesus’ reputation spreads rapidly. But his hearers have not forgotten his teaching, and they recognise the link between his teaching and his broader authority (v.27). It is perhaps ironic, though, that the unclean spirit knows perfectly well who Jesus is, while the congregation is left guessing.

It is said that people get a new job on the basis of the first 30 seconds of their interview. We form opinions of one another very quickly and this sets the tone for ongoing relationships. So, the impact Jesus made on that sabbath in Capernaum was vital to the flourishing of his ministry later on. The impression of authority and integrity would have stayed in people’s minds and attracted them to listen to him again. Does our church create a striking first impression? This isn’t just about the physical surroundings, though they matter. Rather, will visitors get a sense of Jesus’ presence, his authority, his passion for good, when they come into our church?

You are ‘the Holy One of God’ – the unclean spirit shouts these words at Jesus, rejecting him and everything he stands for. In doing so, Mark’s hearers gain a new way of understanding Jesus – he is the Holy One of God. What are the attributes of holiness? The story tells us that holiness and uncleanness cannot coexist, and that holiness drives out evil. Lived experience may lead us to query this. We know that often evil seems to come out on top, and that the line between holiness and uncleanness can seem blurred and messy. This story helps us see that, in Christ, it is possible to distinguish clearly between good and evil, right and wrong, and so there is hope that for us too, a truly good life will be possible in Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

Creator of the universe,
the world you created is wonderful.

Guide world leaders and conservationists as they care for our planet and make difficult decisions about how best to do so.
Help each of us to take better care of our natural resources.
As your servants,
keep us faithful.

Christ our Saviour,
you reached out to those in need:
the untouchables, the unloved and the ignored.
Strengthen the work of aid agencies and charities world wide
that they may be good stewards and make best use of the gifts
they are given.
Help each of us to give generously to those in need.
As your servants,
keep us faithful.

Spirit of Wisdom,
comforter and guide:
encourage those in the public sector,
teachers, medical professionals, emergency services and
social workers,
that they serve the best interests of the communities in which
they work,
according to the principles of your kingdom.
Help each of us to value and support those who work to build
up our communities.
As your servants,
keep us faithful.

Eternal God, Three in One,
receive with joy those who have died,
into an eternal rest;
accompany those who suffer in difficulties,
and help each of us to remain true to our calling, as your
chosen people.
As your servants,
keep us faithful. Amen.

A sending out prayer

Almighty God, be with us this week.
Meet with us each morning,
and in every situation throughout the day,
whoever we are with,
help us to draw on your strength and wisdom,
that we may be faithful and true
in following the example and pattern
given to us by Jesus.
Amen