

Let us Pray:

For the world in uncertainty, not knowing who to trust.

Help us to preach faith until we find faith.

When we are not sure about how we can help or if the milk we have left on the doorstep is making a real difference.

Help us to do all the good we can; in all the places we can; to all the people we can; as long as ever we can.

As we try to share birthdays online and celebrate accomplishments at a distance. When we fail at home schooling or find it hard to engage with people inviting us into social media events. When we struggle to adapt to new ways of working and sharing love. When we just feel lonely.

Remind us of all the grace we may find in the places we go to unwillingly.

We think about the people who are unsure if their finances will hold and if they can afford this lockdown. In some countries the money just is not there for food or medicine and these basic needs are not met. We pray for those whose struggles increase while the attention is on Covid 19.

Bring us healing where the need is greatest.

For those that are grieving because they have lost someone in this strange time, maybe unable to gather as wanted to say goodbye. To all who need an arm around their shoulders but their hug is at least two metres away.

Help us to find the means of your grace in new ways.

Offer the Lord's Prayer in your preferred form or language.

Our Father...

*Closing hymn: [345 \(StF\)](#) [216 \(H&P\)](#) **And can it be that I should gain...***

Closing Prayer: [John 17: 10-11](#) Jesus prays:

All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

We say **The Grace ...**



United in Christ across Darlington District

Sunday May 24th

Prepared by Revd John Squares, Deputy Chair



Call to Worship:

God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners into freedom; but the rebels shall live in dry places. Psalm 68: 6

Hymn 329 (StF) / 735 (H&P)

Jesus, the First and Last, on you my soul is cast: you did your work begin by blotting out my sin; you will the root remove, and perfect me in Love.
[\(hear\)](#)

Yet when the work is done, the work is but begun: partaker of your grace, I long to see your face; the first I prove below, the last I die to know.
[\(hear\)](#)

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

We Pray:

Father of all, pour into our hearts the love that casts out fear, the truth that sets us free and the grace that is sufficient for all our needs, and grant that we may rejoice that though you are unseen, you are not unknown and that, though you are hidden from our eyes, we may behold your beauty at the last; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888)

*Reading: **1 Peter 4: 12 - 14, 5: 6 - 11***

All today's lectionary readings can be found on this link:

https://lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Easter/AEaster7_RCL.html

Today is Aldersgate Sunday or 'Wesley Day'.

Revd John Squares offers an Aldersgate Reflection:

This is a story about two Methodist bishops. “Methodist bishops?” you might ask while crying, “terrible idea!” John Wesley agreed, in the main, reluctantly appointing Methodist bishops to serve the emerging church in America.

As a visiting American I chose to stay in England to serve in ministry partly because of the egalitarian structure we have. I love the British system. I think if we change our management structure to a hierarchical one, we are letting go of something beautiful of the Methodist identity. I have spoken a few times at Conference about how Episcopal is an anagram of Pepsi Cola and I do not want us to become more corporate as a church. I love that the minority voice, the one most on the margins of the structure of our church is lifted up as equal to the most senior leader. You never can predict where the truth is going to come from and the founder of our movement was a very human human-being. Some of the greatest truth that came from his leadership was unintended.

I was doing the tour of the Wesley home in Epworth and the guide held up a quilt that was made by the hands of John’s many female admirers. Suggesting that John had any social skills went against all I learned in reading every word he wrote, by force, in my preparation to become a Methodist minister. My favourite stories were about his quirky lack of social skills, his humanness. I asked the tour guide if he knew about Sophie Hopkey? After the tour he invited me for tea and we debated Wesley’s record with the ladies and how a failed relationship led him to flee America and seek advice from an evangelical preacher in London, Peter Bohler. Tail between his legs he wondered if he was made out for ministry. Bohler advised, “preach faith until you find it”.

The first Bishop was a folksy country gentleman named Bevel Jones. I come from folksy southern gentleman stock and Bevel took an interest in me at Emory University. Nearing graduation he asked me what I was planning on doing. I told him I was unsure about working in the church and was leaning to serve a non-profit. An opportunity had been made to me at a drug rehab ministry in San Francisco. There had been a girl involved in the thinking to go there who was no longer a part of the equation. He took me aside and said, “Boy, the parish ministry is going to be something you are really good at. Don’t give it up before you start. I’m going to send you to England...” That’s how Methodist Bishops think, they send free thinking people places. I went where I was sent and found what I was missing. Bevel’s advice included purging myself of any thinking about relationships. My beautiful

English wife had me convinced for the first few months of dating that pillock was a term of endearment. That I had no idea she was teasing ratified her claim. I am in good company and want to affirm Wesley as a pillock too.

Wesley is a great model for anyone that is not sure about next steps. This whole wonderful church evolved around him before he found the heart-warming experience at Aldersgate. In Methodism it is common to find yourself struggling to conform and unsure of what we should be doing next to solve our problems. If you are unsure of your next steps, seek the advice of someone you admire and in faith keep promoting its value until that value takes new meaning in your heart. You will find treasurable stuff along the way.

Kern Eutsler was the second Bishop. I find myself in lockdown unsure if I should go out to the shops, leaning away from the recommended exercise out of a fear I need to continually combat. I follow Peter’s advice. I cast my anxiety on God. It carries me through the funeral, the Costco experience and I feel better after the dog walk. Very shortly it returns, outside of my control. I told Kern, a friend of my grandfather about the plans to go to England or San Francisco. I explained Bevel’s advice and how I hated being told where to go... There was another option or two in the mix. England meant serving the church directly and I was most certain that was the worst direction for me. He asked me about Wesley’s heart-warming experience at Aldersgate, had I realised how late in ministry that longed for thing came to him and how he approached finding it? Kern reminded me Wesley says, “I went into that upper room *unwillingly*.”

How many of us have found social connection through things like Zoom recently having previously denied the merit of electronic communication? When we approach what being church is post lockdown, it will be a phased return with protocols many of us will not like. Congregations will need to work together at first as many of our members will not be advised to participate in the early phases. Some of our churches will not have enough leaders to function. It is doubtful the fiery ordeal that is testing us now will just go away. Glory is often revealed to the Methodist believer in the place that we approach unwillingly. John found it in that study of Martin Luther in Aldersgate as his heart was strangely warmed. We have many stories to tell of the places lockdown has taken us to inside familiar walls, screens, scriptures, bindings, our hearts and minds... I pray the glory that emerges outshines the fire. God bless you until we can meet again.