

**Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship**

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021**

**Every contact leaves a trace - Led by Janet Baker**

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Welcome, grace and peace to you all – wherever or whenever you are listening to or reading this Circuit Audio worship – from Janet and Richard Baker in Poole.

CALL to WORSHIP: We are people of the Resurrection – Let us greet each other:  
Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**HYMN StF 443** [Please either listen to the hymn here](#) - or read or pray these words:

Come let us sing of a wonderful love, tender and true;  
out of the heart of the Father above, streaming to me and to you:  
wonderful love dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell, joyfully came;  
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell, sharing their sorrow and shame;  
seeking the lost, saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet; why do they roam?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget; home weary wanderers, home!  
Wonderful love dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love, come and abide,  
lifting my life, till it rises above envy and falsehood and pride;  
seeking to be lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

(Robert Walmsley (1831-1905))

**LET US PRAY:**

Loving God, wherever we are, in all that we do, in whatever situation we find ourselves in - help us to remember that your love for us surpasses any other – that you are with us.

Praise be to you – the creator of all there is and by whose wisdom we are created and sustained.

Praise be to you – the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by whose love we are redeemed and forgiven.

Praise be to you – the source of all that we have and are - and by whose Spirit we are made whole and brought to perfection.

Loving God, we have let you down – in what we have thought, said and done. We have not loved you as we should and we have kept you distant in our lives by not treating others as we should. We are sorry – Help us to know that the good news, for all who put their trust in Christ Jesus is, that our mistakes can be forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen

And as our Saviour taught His disciples – so we pray:

OUR FATHER, in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

**READING: Acts 8:26-35 (NIV) Philip and the Ethiopian**

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip. ‘Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home, was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I?’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’

The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about – himself, or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

**HYMN StF 501** Sing, read or pray these words with Richard

Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths your word imparts,  
to study that your laws may be inscribed upon our hearts.

Help us O Lord to live the faith which we proclaim,  
that all our thoughts and words and deeds may glorify your name.

Help us, O Lord, to teach the beauty of your ways,  
that all who seek may find the Christ, and make a life of praise.

(William Watkins Reid (1923 – 2009))

**READING: John 15: 1-8 (NIV) The vine and the branches**

‘I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.’

**REFLECTION:**

I love detective novels – and plays – and come to that - television detective drama – of all kinds. Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Wexford, Hercule Poirot, Silent Witness, Vera, Hetty Wainthrop, Midsomer Murders, Morse – I love them all.

And one of the things I have learned as a devotee of detective investigations – is that in every encounter 'Every contact leaves a trace'

One of the pioneers of Forensic Science – Edmond Locard – known as the Sherlock Holmes of France - formulated the 'exchange principle' which holds that in every encounter, something will be left behind and something will be taken away. Every interaction leaves a material trace.

It's the principal that the Gospel writer John has tapped into, in the way he has used the imagery of 'Jesus as the Vine – and we as the branches.'

When the Word became flesh, God was able to interact more closely with us through Jesus. He 'dwelt in us' and 'we in Him' That act left its trace in us. As a Vine leaves its trace in its branches - so we would in our turn, leave that trace with others as we interacted with them.

We all have hundreds of interactions each day – and so we all have hundreds of opportunities to leave – even the tiniest trace – of Love, Joy, Peace, Hope, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.

According to Paul – these traces are the fruit of the Spirit that has been gifted to us through our contact with God through Jesus the Vine. We will bear much fruit through our contact with Jesus - if we dwell in Him as He dwells in us.

'No branch bears fruit by itself – it must remain in the Vine. I am the Vine – you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you – you will bear much fruit. Without me, you can do nothing. Remain in me.'

It seems then, that the whole essence of Christian life and discipleship is rooted in this connectedness - this continuing contact - this abiding – He in us and us in Him.

So – what does this mean in a practical – every-day sort of way?

Sharing in the sacraments? – worship in general? - prayer? – Bible reading and study? celebration and fellowship? These are all ways in which we can come to know God better – and remain 'connected.' Loving, caring and, serving others, will also enable us to align ourselves and our lives ever more closely to the values and ways of His Kingdom.

And the more we pray and do – in His name - the more we will be drawing closer to Him and the more we do that - the more the trace of that contact with God through Jesus - will be found ON us and IN us – and THROUGH us, to those WE come into contact with – the neighbour, the work colleague, the shop assistant – the postman – the family member - even the bus driver.

Every contact leaves a trace – and the story of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian teaches us some important guidelines about those contacts and sharing our faith. Everyone Philip meets is an opportunity waiting to be shown the love of God.

Philip, one of the seven deacons appointed by the disciples to help distribute resources, had been ministering in Samaria and was now on his way back to Jerusalem. Prompted to take the desert road south to Gaza, he came across a rather unlikely character- an important Ethiopian eunuch – in charge of the royal treasury - and a Gentile – miles from home – and reading the Jewish scriptures! Hearing the man reading from Isaiah, the prophet, Philip opens a conversation: 'Do you understand what you are reading?'

START FROM WHERE PEOPLE ARE.

The Ethiopian wouldn't have been interested if Philip had launched into a conversation about Christian repentance and salvation through the Cross! He began with the passage of Scripture the man was studying.

Then he tunes in with the Ethiopian's questions and is able to explain who Jesus is and why he died - using the scriptures and interpreting them in the light of the resurrection. His knowledge and confidence came from the discussions and faith-sharing he himself had had with the other Jesus followers he knew - those small group times of fellowship where their own questions and doubts had been expressed and where they had learnt the language to explain it to others –

Where do WE learn the language – gain our confidence to share our faith? Who has God positioned us to be near – on our road – in our work place – or in the bus queue? Every contact leaves a trace.

Philip found a starting point from which to captivate the attention of the traveller. He began with the very passage, the stranger was wrestling with – and used it as a launch pad to tell him that Jesus was the person he was looking for.

Paul also took opportunities where he could share his faith, by starting from where people were. He didn't change the message but changed the way he presented it – In Lystra the barbarian peasants simply wanted to ensure a good harvest and avoid offending the gods of their area. So Paul preached about the True Lord of the Harvest. In Athens, the more educated Athenians, asked different questions about how to appease the gods - and not wanting to leave any out in case some dreadful catastrophe should occur, they had erected a shrine to the Unknown God.

So, Paul used the writings of their own Greek philosophers and poets to convince them that their Unknown God was the God that had sent His Son to Earth, in Jesus Christ. Paul then proceeded to share the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus with them. He used the opportunity of the contact – to share his faith, starting from where they were.

Throughout history, Christians, from the earliest missionaries onwards – found local starting points and used them to explain how Jesus was the answer to the questions that were being asked – and so we, too must be alert to the opportunities that present themselves, to leave a trace of the Kingdom.

And we don't always have to wait for opportunities to invite conversation. Sometimes the opportunity can be a deliberate 'seed planting.' The silent witness of the bare cross placed outside the church on Good Friday which, on Easter Sunday, became festooned with spring flowers – or a poster, a picture or a simple cross on the wall of our meeting rooms, could be a subtle invitation to a conversation about our faith.

A particular kindness, or a conversation about a recent faith-based activity might also be just the prompt that stirs an interest and an invitation. We'd invite a friend to our bowls club – if they showed an interest, would we not?

Every contact leaves a trace.

Secondly – We must RECOGNISE THAT GOD IS ALREADY AT WORK – WE sometimes talk about what OUR mission is. But it is God's Mission and we are being invited to join in. We must leave the 'Yes' or 'No' to God. We only make the contact that leaves a trace, plant the seed and offer the water to help the seed take root. It is God that will make it grow. Are we making contact, sowing seeds and offering nurturing water in our churches, so that God can grow His Kingdom?

We may not come across someone reading a book of the Bible on our way to work or in the bus queue or in the Doctor's surgery – but I remember once being asked by the youngster cutting my hair – Are you doing anything special this weekend?

Well, I was preaching on the Sunday. Was this a God moment? I took the plunge and told her - and after that, every now and again, we had all kinds of quite deep conversations about church – and God and life – about the Christian response to the news etc She would ask me if I was preaching that Sunday – what about? – where? – what sort of people went to listen? – what went on? – Could anybody go?

God is already at work in the situations we find ourselves in and in the conversations we get into. Are we ready to leave a trace of the Kingdom in the encounter?

Thirdly – Philip was CONFIDENT IN USING SCRIPTURE to explain what Christ has done – He doesn't quote long texts – but he can tell the story – pass on the context – share the relevance – make it real. What he shares with the Ethiopian is grounded in his knowledge of scripture as well as his own personal experience.

Bible study, on our own and with others in a supportive group, will help us gain familiarity with the scriptures – and with the Jesus story, - and this in turn will help us to gain confidence in sharing our faith – and leaving a trace of the Vine to grow fruit.

We are told that the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing – and it is more than likely that he told others about his experience and thus affirmed the spread of the Gospel into that part of Africa.

However, we cannot expect to produce spiritual fruit unless we ourselves are well attached – with the life-sap of Jesus running through us. We must learn how to be confident in sharing our faith.

One of the oldest and perhaps the biggest grape vines in the UK grows at Hampton Court. Planted in 1768 it now measures 4 metres (13feet) around the base with the longest spur about 36-5 metres - 120 feet - long. It still fruits each year producing anything between 600 and 800 pounds of black grapes. And the secret? Lots of care and attention to how it is pruned and fed.

If we are to bear the fruit of the Spirit and if the crop of fruit is to be abundant – we must continue to be fed ourselves, so that we grow in strength and spiritual wholeness – but we must also be open to the pruning away of that which is unhealthy or harmful.

Every contact leaves a trace -

Start from where people are

Recognise that God is already at work and is inviting us to join Him in His mission to make a Kingdom of Love on earth

Become confident in telling the story and sharing the faith – by continual attention to the growth of our own spiritual journey.

But most of all – STAY ATTACHED – remain joined to the one true vine – who gives us life and who will sustain us always. And draw our energy, our spiritual sustenance and inspiration from the risen Christ through worship, prayer and Bible study.

May we continually seek full contact with God, so that He leaves a trace on us - and may we, in our turn, leave traces of Him in our encounters with each person we meet, in the coming week and beyond – for every contact leaves a trace.

Amen Thanks be to God.

**LET US PRAY:** Loving God – we pray for our world – its environment and its people. We have been asked to pray this week for the people of St Vincent. The Caribbean island which has been devastated by the eruption of its volcano. We pray especially for the work of the Methodist church as they seek to support communities with relief supplies. In all places may those who have power or influence work with integrity and wisdom, to bring wholeness and healing to our planet and peace and justice to all people.

PAUSE for reflection

We pray for the church. Where there is doubt, hurt or suffering - may all experience revelation and transformation, through the assurance of your presence with them. We pray for the church congregations of our own Circuit – as they gradually return to worship in their premises. May they be conscious of leaving traces of the Kingdom everywhere they go, on all they meet and on all who use their premises.

PAUSE for reflection

We pray for family, friends and neighbours – especially those who are living through difficult times – struggling with isolation, anxiety, illness or bereavement. May they know the love and comfort that comes from opening up to Jesus so that He may ‘abide’ within them.

PAUSE for reflection.

All these spoken prayers and the unspoken longings of our hearts, we pray in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ Amen

**HYMN StF 404** Please, either [listen to the final hymn here](#), - or read or pray these words.

God’s spirit is in my heart; he has called me and set me apart.

This is what I have to do, what I have to do:

*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,  
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,  
tell blind people that they can see, and set the down-trodden free,  
and go tell everyone, the news that the kingdom of God has come;  
and go tell everyone the news that God’s kingdom has come.*

Just as the Father sent me, so I’m sending you out to be  
my witness throughout the world – the whole of the world:

Don’t carry a load in your pack; you don’t need two shirts on your back;  
God’s workers can earn their own keep – can earn their own keep:

Don’t worry what you have to say; don’t worry because on that day  
God’s spirit will speak in your heart – will speak in your heart:

**CLOSING PRAYER:** The Lord bless us all – and keep us safe. The Lord make His face to shine upon us all and be gracious to us. The Lord turn His face towards us and give us all His peace. Amen

Bless each other as we share the Grace together:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us now and always. Amen

Stay safe and well, as we continue on our journey to the end of the national Lockdown and may every contact we make, leave a trace which brings honour to our Lord and brings His Kingdom a little closer to fruition.

God's blessing on you all.  
Janet & Richard