



# Highcliffe and Bransgore **Methodist Churches**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020, 10:30am, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Resurrection (Easter 6)

Prepared by Rev'd Phillip Dixon

This written worship has been prepared for you to use as we gather in separate places, united together in love for our Lord Jesus Christ. The knowledge that we are sharing in this worship in our own homes is an encouragement to us and at a time of physical separation brings us together spiritually.

We continue to be in the glorious season of **Resurrection** and as a resurrection people our proclamation is:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Good morning church!**

**Opening Scripture for our theme of Obedience and Discipleship:**

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into

practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.'

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. **Amen.** Matt: 7:21-29 NIVUK

**Opening Prayer:** Loving and gracious God we pray for Your abundant and generous blessing upon us this morning as we gather in our own homes to praise You. We pray for Your Holy Spirit to fill our lives and homes afresh today, send Your Spirit like a stirring and refreshing wind, blow away our fears and anxieties and strengthen us for the days ahead. Lord Jesus, may our praise be acceptable to You, our songs, prayers and readings of Your word and reflection. It is You we long for, to be near You, now and forever.

We pray in the name of our precious Saviour and Lord Jesus, **Amen.**



Sing for joy, O Heavens and exult, O earth;  
break forth, O mountains, into singing!  
For the Lord has comforted His people  
and will have compassion on His suffering  
ones. Isaiah 49:13 NRSV

### **Hymn: Lord of the Church SoF1433**

To the tune of "Londonderry air"  
sing/read /pray/proclaim the words.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZU5\\_ktdw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZU5_ktdw)

Lord of the church we pray for our  
renewing  
Christ over all our undivided aim  
Fire of the Spirit burn for our enduing  
Wind of the Spirit fan the living flame  
We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing  
The will that lacks the courage to be free  
The weary labours all but unavailing  
To bring us nearer what a church should  
be.

Lord of the church we seek a Father's  
blessing  
A true repentance and a faith restored  
A swift obedience and a new possessing  
Filled with the Holy Spirit of the Lord  
We turn to Christ from all our restless  
striving  
Unnumbered voices with a single prayer-  
The living water for our souls' reviving  
In Christ to live and love and serve and  
care.

Lord of the church we long for our uniting  
True to one calling by one vision stirred  
One cross proclaiming and one creed  
reciting  
One in the truth of Jesus and His word  
So lead us on till toil and trouble ended  
One church triumphant one new song  
shall sing  
To praise His glory risen and ascended  
Christ over all the everlasting King  
Timothy Dudley-Smith, Irish Melody, Oxford University Press

Lord, open my eyes that I may see, not the  
visible enemy, but Thy unseen chariots of  
deliverance. Amen  
*Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911)*

### **Prayer of confession:**

*He (Jesus) is the One all the prophets  
testified about, saying that everyone who  
believes in Him will have their sins forgiven  
through His name. (Acts 10:43 NLT)*

Lord Jesus, it is easy for us to become  
distant, to harden our hearts. For some of  
us it is a way of coping with the separation  
of today. Vulnerability causes pain so we  
choose to distance ourselves even further.  
Lord forgive us.

Thank you, Lord, that You are never  
distant or apathetic, as we ourselves can  
be. You never grow weary of loving us.  
Even when we harden our hearts, You  
lean and breathe Your love over us in  
ways we don't understand. When we do  
not pray, fail to read Your word, do not  
follow Your leading and don't speak and  
share with others our love of You. Lord  
forgive us.

For the times when we have done the  
easy, and selfish things, when in thought,  
word and deed we have not glorified You  
but instead harboured unforgiveness or  
resentment. For when we have made idols  
of our buildings and our preferred ways of  
doing things Lord forgive us.

### *Pause*

Lord Jesus, I name the specific things for  
which I come now repenting of and asking  
Your forgiveness...

*A time of silence to hear what the Lord  
may be saying to us.*

God of love and power, thank You for Your forgiveness from my sins, strengthen me by Your Holy Spirit so that I may walk, this and every day, the path of righteousness and holiness with You. My past life of sin behind me and Your cross ever before me. I am forever Yours, a redeemed child of light, bought with Your sacrifice and blood on a cruel yet now empty cross, I am dead to sin and fully and gloriously alive in You. Amen.

### **Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8:26-40 Obedience and Discipleship**

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. <sup>27</sup> So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup> was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

<sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

<sup>31</sup> And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In His humiliation His justice was taken away,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For His life is taken from the earth."

<sup>34</sup> So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. <sup>36</sup> Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?"

<sup>37</sup> Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."

And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

<sup>38</sup> So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

New King James Version (NKJV)

**A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.**

#### **Preaching notes:**

Our theme for today's reading is Obedience and Discipleship. These two words are so closely interlinked and related together. Christ centred discipleship – meaning to be both a faithful follower of Jesus (a disciple) and to help others do so (a disciple-maker), can only come from the obedience to God and His teachings. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23)

and, “if you love Me you will keep my commands” (John 14:15) are two very clear examples of the interdependence between obedience to God and discipleship. Without discipleship, obedience is worthless, it is mere observance. Without obedience discipleship is ineffective, it is shallow, short-lived and unfruitful. This was as true for the early church as it is for us today. The account of Philip in this passage of scripture is an excellent example for us.

Following the persecution against the church that is underway in Jerusalem with the killing of Stephen, Philip is in Samaria – not in hiding – but preaching Christ to them. Multitudes heard and accepted the gospel and became believers. Remember that Philip is “one of the seven”, chosen to wait on the tables of the widows so that the apostles may concentrate on “the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-7). Philip demonstrates his obedience to God by being willing to seek and then undertake God’s will. How does he do this? He is just an ordinary man like any other, he is not a born orator or a raving extrovert. What sets him apart is his **willingness** to faithfully undertake what is required and to be under the authority of the leadership (the apostles), his **devotion** to the teaching of Jesus and the spreading of the gospel message and his **steadfast faith** in Jesus as the life-giver, the miracle worker and the redeemer from sin. These three personal attributes indicate that Philip is a man of Obedience and Discipleship. Philip, an ordinary man transformed by the extraordinary Holy Spirit living within him.

Philip is constantly hearing from God; he is in relationship with God and led by the

Holy Spirit in all that he is doing. To leave his successful ministry in Samaria and go instead to the wilderness or desert requires absolute obedience and trust. Philip’s response to the call from God to leave Samaria is, “he arose and went”. How does he know it is God that is telling him this and what is it for? This is one of the key lessons for us to learn from this passage. We will not always know the reason for the suffering, the dislocation or the change in circumstances, but we must always seek the will of God for our lives. If Philip was not obedient and had not left Samaria does it mean he is rejected by God? No, but it means he has stepped out of God’s perfect will and what was fruitful may now wither. Decline and division comes from disobedience to God’s will.

When Philip approaches the Ethiopian, we have a wonderful example of Discipleship, it is one person talking to another. One who has the Holy Spirit in his life and consequently the understanding and relationship with God and another who has an acknowledgment of God, (having been to Jerusalem to worship) and seeking knowledge (reading scripture). It is only by Philip being a disciple himself and within God’s will that he is able to lead the Ethiopian to be a disciple also. In much the same way as someone can only infect someone with a contagion if they themselves are infected, otherwise no amount of effort or schemes or investment will make the slightest difference, a new disciple can only be made by an existing disciple.

Philip, gently yet with the authority and truth of the Holy Spirit, unfolds the meaning of scripture and points the Ethiopian to Jesus.

The response of the Ethiopian is a desire to be baptised, not because he feels it is a “proper and normative” thing to do but because, having believed, he longs to be bathed in Christ’s death and renewed into His resurrection. William Barclay provides three reasons why baptism in these circumstances is the only response:

1. The symbolism of cleansing the soul, by being bathed in the grace of Christ, preferably in running water by full immersion.
2. It marked a clean break with the past, a line is drawn signifying newness.
3. A union with Christ, as the waters close over the head, it symbolises a death to the old as in Christ’s death and the emergence is like a rising with Christ.

The Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing”, having been discipled (albeit for such a short time) by Philip he was going home a changed man, full of joy, to take the gospel to Ethiopia, the first nation of Africa to be evangelised. As for Philip, he continues in his obedience to God, making disciples in every place he goes.

As we close, Obedience to God may not be one of the most popular ways of expressing and living our “modern lives” and there are those who say that we must be relevant to the culture of the day. The early church were the complete opposite to the culture of their day and yet the Lord added to their number, from small beginnings, with Obedience and Discipleship Christianity spread throughout the known world. **Amen.**

Baptism quote paraphrased from William Barclay “The New Daily Study Bible -Acts” page 80.

### **We pray:**

Lord, help me to be obedient to Your will for my life. Guide me by Your Holy Spirit, speaking to me so that I may disciple people like the Ethiopian and have the courage to speak to those nearest to me about Jesus. May I be always willing to serve You, whole-heartedly. **Amen.**

### **We pray together our Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy kingdom come;  
Thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

**Open Doors:** In these strange and shifting times, it can be easy to give in to fear and anxiety. The early church of Acts was facing a lot of opposition and attack, much like the persecuted church of today in places like Yemen, Iran, Pakistan and the Arabian Peninsula. We need to learn from the stories of today’s persecuted church and realise that they can teach us, the Western Church, lessons to navigate these uncertain times. **We belong to a family that helps one another**, see John 17:20-21. The persecution faced by northern Nigerian Christians from Boko Haram is much worse than what we may imagine but the lesson is the same, we must love and help one another. **We are not alone**, see Hebrews 12:1. North Korean Christians are greatly encouraged by knowing that other Christians are praying

for them “these prayers are really important to us, they will lead more people to Jesus Christ in North Korea”. **Jesus has overcome the world**, see John 16:33. Indian Christians suffer the deliberate destruction of their churches, “I never thought about giving up, I trusted that God would act”, this is faith in action and in any situation we can have hope and confidence. **God is our refuge and our strength**, see Psalm 121:2. Churches in Uzbekistan can be raided by the police, they confiscate Bibles and intimidate the leaders, “I won’t allow myself to be governed by fear because it does not help you at all”. We must live in the knowledge that God is indeed our help, strength and refuge. **God is trustworthy and we are not abandoned**, see Psalm 9:10. A 16 year old believer in India whose family experienced severe persecution for following Jesus writes, “God just wanted to teach us how to trust in Him and now we know that He is trustworthy, He never abandoned us”. In this time of uncertainty, we can pray for God to fully open our eyes to all that He is doing around us and have courage. Open Doors UK <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/>

**We Pray:** Loving God, place Your protection around the persecuted church. In all places of the world where our sisters and brothers are being held captive, we pray for their release. We pray for the bereaved, the lonely, the depressed and those hurting, may they know Your love and comfort. Give wisdom to our leaders at this time of the pandemic. We pray for the search for a vaccine to be successful. Strengthen those who are caring for the sick. *Bring your personal prayers for those you know....* And all God’s people joined in saying **Amen**.

**Hymn: StF 566 Take my life and let it be**  
Sing/read /pray /proclaim the words  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf11rReeWIs>

Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee  
Take my moments and my days  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise

Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee

Take my voice, and let me sing  
Always, only, for my King  
Take my lips, and let them be  
Filled with messages from Thee

Take my silver and my gold  
Not a mite would I withhold  
Take my intellect, and use  
Every power as Thou shalt choose

Take my will and make it Thine  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart; it is Thine own  
It shall be Thy royal throne

Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)

**Blessing:**

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make His face to shine upon you  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn His face toward you and give  
you peace. Amen

Until we meet again, God bless. Phillip  
Telephone 01425 673350

[phillip.dixon@methodist.org.uk](mailto:phillip.dixon@methodist.org.uk) YouTube links  
are external resources and are provided to help you engage  
with the songs. Singing the Faith resources are provided under  
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