

May 23rd 2021

Welcome to this year's Easter Offering Service, which a group of women from across the Connexion started to plan just over a year ago. This service follows the tradition started 136 years ago to raise money for Methodist Women Missionaries. Today, it is the World Mission Fund that receives your money and prayers. In 2019, the Easter Offering Service raised over £370,000. Due to Covid 19 last years' service was not used, so the material and resources have been carried over to this year

The theme, 'Into all the world' was inspired by 2020 being the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower to America. It is also the 260th anniversary of Methodist mission, which began in the Caribbean.

Psalm 139

- 1 O Lord, you have searched me out and known me ;
you know my sitting down and my rising up ; you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 **You mark out my journeys and my resting place and are acquainted with all my ways.**
- 3 For there is not a word on my tongue, but you, O Lord, know it altogether.
- 4 **You encompass me behind and before and lay your hand upon me.**
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, so high that I cannot attain it.
- 6 Where can I go then from your spirit ? Or where can I flee from your presence ?
- 7 **If I climb up to heaven, you are there ; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.**
- 8 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 9 **Even there your hand shall lead me, your right hand hold me fast.**
- 10 If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me and the light around me turn to night,'
- 11 **Even darkness is no darkness with you ; the night is as clear as the day ;
darkness and light to you are both alike.**
- 12 For you yourself created my inmost parts ;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 13 I thank you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ;
marvellous are your works, my soul knows well.
- 14 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.
- 15 **Your eyes beheld my form, as yet unfinished ;
already in your book were all my members written,**
- 16 As day by day they were fashioned
when as yet there was none of them.
- 17 How deep are your counsels to me, O God !
How great is the sum of them !
- 18 If I count them, they are more in number than the sand,
and at the end, I am still in your presence.
- 19 Search me out, O God, and know my hear; try me and examine my thoughts.
- 20 **See if there is any way of wickedness in me and lead me in the way everlasting.**

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Sing or Read:

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me,
mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson (1890–1977) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 395

Genesis 12: 1-5 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan.

Sing or read:

1 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.

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people’s pain ;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send ?

3 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 ?

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 663 Words and Music: © OCP Publications, 5536 NE

Matthew 28: 16-20 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- Obedience

In both passages, obedience is key. Abram obeys God and leaves the post-Babel nation and its security. He takes a pilgrimage-style journey, trusting that he will reach a world that is better, because God made it. Abram showed prompt obedience in his response.

In Matthew's account the eleven remaining disciples (Judas is no longer with them) follow Jesus' directive to go to the mountain in Galilee.

- The message is for all people

God's original blessing in the Old Testament was that all mankind would be blessed. Here the promises are restored for all Abram's descendants, ie future generations.

The disciples were told to "make disciples of all nations". They were to offer baptism so that those baptised could show their commitment to, and union with Christ.

- Reassurance

Genesis promises that "all will be blessed". Abram took people with him on the journey. They were people who had gathered around Abram in Babel. Some may have been servants or slaves, but many were probably there voluntarily, as employees.

The final words in Matthew are both reassuring and powerful, recognising that in Jesus, 'God is with us'.

Questions to reflect upon:

Where have you been in your life? What has brought you to this place in your Christian journey?

What obstacles and diversions have there been on the way?

Who has helped you when the road got tough? What experiences, good and bad, have made you the person you are today?

How has Jesus changed you and guided you so far?

Who have you been able to support in their Christian journey?

Where are you going? What is the next step in your journey of faith?

Examples of next steps could be: baptism, confirmation, membership, local preaching, ordination, overseas service, serving in your local church or community, dealing with issues such as addiction, bad habits or failing to forgive people, and allocating more time or money to God's work.

Who can help you walk the next part of your journey?

Who can you support on the next step of their journey?

The Merton Prayer

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude, (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1956) (Merton was an American Trappist Monk and theologian 1915-1968)

Sing or read:

- 1 Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land ;
I am weak, but thou art mighty ;
hold me with thy powerful hand :
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore ;
feed me now and evermore.
- 2 Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream shall flow ;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through :
strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield ;
be thou still my strength and shield.
- 3 When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside ;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side :
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee ;
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1717–1791) *translated by* Peter Williams (1727–1796) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 465

Holy Spirit, send us out.

Gentle Spirit, calm our fears.

Spirit of truth, lead us to a broader vision of your work.

Spirit of strength, in our weaknesses, make us strong.

Spirit of power, show us when and how to act for you.

Holy Spirit, send us out.

Amen.

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

