

Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit, Worship Sheet Sunday 12th September 2021.

Today our focus is on our world church partnership in the Gospel,

Read Psalm 116: 1 – 12. The writer reminds us that God is with each one of us regardless of circumstance – in joy or sorrow. Having read it or while reading pause and thank Him for that presence as you recall memorable moments.

Read or sing StF 418 We have a gospel to proclaim.

In our prayers we thank God for his dependability and involvement in the mess of humanity. We seek forgiveness for our own shortcomings then after a pause say out loud “my sins are forgiven, thanks be to God”.

Readings: James 3: 1 – 12; Matthew 7: 1 – 14

Message: After an overnight flight January 8th, 1985, I arrived with my young family at Harare airport to be met by the Methodist President and connexional administrator. After a shower, a visit to Dept. Immigration to collect work permit I was given a car, a map and told to drive to Gweru some 280K (175 miles) down the main road where a deaconess would be waiting for us. She was and so also were circuit stewards who wanted to chat through some dates for the next couple of weeks. The culture shock and climate shock were shattering – in UK the temperature had not been above freezing day or night for almost a fortnight whereas midday in Zimbabwe it was 32C. And so began the most demanding, amazing, fulfilling eight years one could imagine. Part of a growing, young, and exciting church nationally and a community trying to come to terms with non-racial government and ethnically diverse population less than 5 years since the first universal suffrage elections put Robert Mugabe in the Prime Minister’s residence.

Aged 31, I was one of the youngest ministers in the Methodist Church. The 60 or so other ministers were older than because the Ian Smith regime had created a time when very few black Zimbabweans felt able to candidate during what became years of civil war. Thankfully that was already changing so that now retirement is compulsory at 65yrs and there are four times as many ministers in a church trebled in size. This at a time when the economy has been shrinking and poverty growing. HIV/AIDS devastated families and took the lives of many in their thirties to fifties leaving many widows and orphans. During my time I enjoyed generous hospitality and gracious tolerance of my stumbling attempts in the Shona language and cultural misunderstandings. At the time I saw my role as a mission partner circuit minister as encouraging indigenisation of the church – ‘please write your own new songs for worship and create local liturgies. Be inspired by what was achieved as the Southern Rhodesia District of the British Methodist Church for some eighty years but let the Spirit lead you in becoming truly The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe’
Is there a role today for Mission Partners? I believe there is and that it is now two way. We

still have much to learn from each other. No-one would deny that missionaries who went to Africa in the late nineteenth century onwards made some mistakes and had some cultural misunderstandings and preconceptions. However, there are those today who judge these mission minded men and women using the values and knowledge of the 21st century dismissing them as colonisers and racist. Jesus warns against judging our contemporaries and dismissing them as selfish or whatever without understanding them. I believe we are wise not to do the same to our predecessors. Many of the mistakes they made were out of ignorance of different cultural norms and values. Their motivation was to spread literacy and education among people who were until then entirely oral in their communication. They wanted to replace the African Traditional Religion with a faith encounter with Jesus and the joy of worship as they experienced it. By my day and even more since singing is freer and much truer to African style music and rhythm than God. They were not making money for themselves believing what they were doing was for the benefit of Africans improving their quality of life.

Today the best schools in Zimbabwe and many other African countries academically are those run by Christian denominations including the Methodist Church. It was Mission schools who sowed the seeds envisioning women and men who would bring about the struggles for independence including many who would become presidents and senior politicians, civil servants, educationalists etc. The first Zimbabwean President was a Thekwane Methodist School old boy and ordained minister, Rev Canaan Banana. Sadly some, including Mugabe, gained the vision, determination and political skills but lost the Christian values and morals taught in (in his case) a Roman Catholic school. Meanwhile the church continues to grow in number and depth in difficult days. We must let mission partners now living and working here help us evaluate our mission and priorities if the British Church is to rise again. As we celebrate a year of culture let's seek out and value all the cultures in our city especially the World Church now in Coventry.

Read or sing StF 407 Hear the call of the Kingdom.

In our prayers of intercession, we remember that some call today "Education Sunday" so take time to remember your school days and those who taught you the Christian faith and invited you to become a disciple of Jesus. Pray for all involved in education that you know. We pray for our partner churches elsewhere in the world today naming the Caribbean and Americas – Jamaica, Leeward Islands, Panama/Costa Rica, and the South Caribbean. In this country The Cornwall District and our sister churches in Coventry. WE pray for those who govern this and other nations especially as we think ahead to COP 26 and our own need to address Climate Change. We pray for the sick and for carers, for those who grow and distribute food, along with all key workers. We hold before God those who have died and those left behind grieving.

You may want to say the Lord's Prayer.

Read or sing StF 519 Father I place into your hands

I wish you all God's peace today and throughout this week.