



## The Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2026:

Today's theme is "Lightening the burden"

Prepared by Rev Neil Vels



### Opening Words

We gather to worship God with our full, imperfect selves.

**We come to delight in the law of God, who is Love.**

We gather as people who don't always know what to do in the face of difficult and complex circumstances.

**We come to delight in the law of God, who is Love.**

We gather as people who desire to follow God with our actions but struggle to connect what we want to do with what we actually do.

**We come to delight in the law of God, who is Love.**

Whether you come to worship today wondering if there is anything good left in the world or rejoicing in the small moments of goodness that remind you grace is still at work among us, you are welcome here.

**We come to delight in the law of God, whose grace shows us how to live, work, play, and rest as a community of faith woven together by Love. Amen.**

*(Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, January 2026. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/core-faith/week-1-sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-1-sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-core-faith-liturgical-resources>)*

### Opening Prayer

So, as we gather as a community of faith centred in you, Lord not centred in legalism in expectation, or in judgement

Help us to be open to your presence

A presence which comes to us in grace and goodness and open doors.

And help us to offer the same to all who come seeking. **Amen.**

### Song 560 My eyes be open to Your Presence

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viVq2vsliyc&list=RDviVq2vsliyc&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viVq2vsliyc&list=RDviVq2vsliyc&start_radio=1)

My eyes be open to your presence,  
my ears to hear your call.

My heart be open to your love  
and in your arms to fall.

My mind be open to your word,  
my soul to heaven's cure,  
that I be open to you Lord,  
This day and evermore.

My life be open to your leading,  
my hands to do your will.

My lips be open in your praise  
and for your truth to tell.

My home be open in your name  
for weary ones and poor,  
That I be open to you, Lord,  
this day and evermore.

### Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord, we come before you this day confessing that we don't understand our own actions. The very things we want to do, we don't do. Too often, we find ourselves doing the very things we hate.

We need you this day, Lord.

The harmful behaviours we tried to put down, we keep picking back up, and our soul is hurting. The chance we had to fix that broken relationship came, but anger and rage rose up again, inflicting harm and abuse upon the very people we said we loved.

We need you this day, Lord.

The opportunities we have been praying for came, but fear, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem drove them away. Lord, the good we want to do, we don't do; and the evil we hate doing, we just keep doing. Lord, what messed-up souls we are.

We need you now, Lord, this day.

Rescue us from works that lead to death; save us from self-destructive behaviours. We submit our lives into your hands right now.

**(Silence)**

Thank you, God, for your Son Jesus, who will make it all right. Thank you for your Son Jesus. He will heal our sin-sick souls. Thank you, God, for Jesus Christ, our Lord. When we find it difficult to do the right thing, we will place our trust in you. We are convinced that we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. Glory to God! Amen.

*Adapted from Joseph W. Daniels, Jr. in The African Worship Book, Year A (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 147, 155.*

### **Song 471 – Lord I come to You**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSi-9PPPGnl&list=RDLsi-9PPPGnl&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSi-9PPPGnl&list=RDLsi-9PPPGnl&start_radio=1)

Lord, I come to you,  
let my heart be changed, renewed,  
flowing from the grace  
that I found in you.  
And Lord I've come to know  
The weaknesses I see in me  
will be stripped away  
by the power of your love.

Lord, unveil my eyes,  
let me see you face to face,  
the knowledge of your love  
as you live in me.  
Lord, renew my mind,  
as your will unfolds in my life  
in living everyday  
By the power of your love.

*Hold me close.  
let your love surround me;  
bring me near, draw me to your side.  
And as I wait,  
I'll rise up like the eagle,  
and I will soar with you,  
your Spirit leads me on  
in the power of your love.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

### **Prayer**

We give you thanks, O God of compassion, for the salvation you have revealed to the little ones through Christ Jesus, our wisdom and strength. Teach us to take up his gentle yoke and find rest from our burdens and cares. Amen.

*([https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayer/?y=17134&season=season\\_after\\_pentecost&d=proper\\_9](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayer/?y=17134&season=season_after_pentecost&d=proper_9))*

### **Reflection**

There have been many difficulties with our Old Testament readings over the past few weeks as we've wrestled with Abraham and now Isaac. Isaac needs a wife and so he sends his servant to find one from their own people. They come back with Rebekka.

There's not space today to interrogate all the problems with the story, so I invite you simply to hold it before you as something which has come to us as we think about what we can take from it.

I was single for a long time and married late in life. While I used many dating apps and sites to try and find the right person, I wasn't ever very successful. I confess, however, to not sending my servant out to the well with piles of money to tempt her. There was a point when I started to believe that I wasn't good enough for anyone, regardless of how hard I tried.

In our gospel reading Jesus pointedly criticizes the people of his day who tried to put him into a box. Essentially, he says to them that as far as they're concerned, he'll never be good enough. If he lives ascetically, they'll complain, if he lives indulgently, they'll still be unhappy.

Jesus hasn't come to please the religious people! He's come to do something different – he's come to meet those suffering under the burdens of religion. Those who try too hard, those who are never good enough, who always seem to do what is wrong in spite of trying so hard to do what is right. His task isn't to prove himself worthy by the way he behaves, or indeed to give people more work, rather it is to lighten their burden.

Jesus knows what many of us take a lifetime to discover – that the most important things we can be is ourselves. Rather than trying to be something we're not, to live like a John when we're not, to live like a tax collector when we're not, the most important thing we can be is to be ourselves – even if it doesn't please those who come to us as self-appointed judges.

When we learn to do that, our burden will be lightened because we can stop pretending and be who we are!

I think this is what Paul is getting at also in Romans. When we stop trying so hard and rest in Jesus, we discover that we do indeed not do the things we don't want to do!

While that may apply on an individual level, I wonder what it says to us as a church? Are we trying too hard? Trying so hard to be liked and accepted, trying to dance when the flute is played, mourn when the dirges are sung, but somehow coming to the party too late? Trying to find a place where the heathen consider us good enough, but where we're holy enough for the religious?

I wonder what would it mean to centre our lives in Jesus, to live authentically as Methodists in England, neither playing for the crowd nor pleasing ourselves, knowing that we will receive criticism regardless of what we do? Rather let us cast off the many things that weigh us down and seek only to witness to life in Christ.

I think maybe this is something we can take from the story of Isaac finding Rebekka! He didn't have an app on which he was swiping left and right until he found the ideal person, he wasn't trying to impress anyone by changing who he was for them. He sent his servant to find her, and when she arrived, he loved her. Hopefully they loved each other!

In my own search for a marriage partner, it was when I learnt this - that I could offer myself as I was and accept Lynn as she was - that I discovered the person for whom I was searching. I believe we will discover the same to be true as we take hold of our identity as church and, rather than pander to what those around us are saying, get on with the work of lightening others' burdens.

### **Prayer of response and Intercession**

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God, and guided them in the way of your love, so listen now to those who call upon you.

*Prayers of the People, concluding with:*

Move us to praise your gracious will, for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death and opened for us the hidden ways of your love. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

([https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayer/?y=17134&season=season\\_after\\_pentecost&d=proper\\_9](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayer/?y=17134&season=season_after_pentecost&d=proper_9))

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Hymn 443 (StF) – Come let us Sing of a Wonderful Love**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dOSfceRw0U&list=RD2dOSfceRw0U&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dOSfceRw0U&list=RD2dOSfceRw0U&start_radio=1)

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 wanderer, 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.

### **Closing Blessing**

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore.