**York Methodist Circuit Lent Course 2017**

**Holiness and Justice**

The course is based on the booklet ‘Holiness and Justice’ produced by the Methodist Church. Copies of the booklet are available for everyone (contact the circuit office if you have not received any).

For some people, the booklet itself may be all that is needed to stimulate discussion and encourage reflection.

Others may like more direction, so these notes have been produced to give individuals and groups more material to use as they see fit. Each group is free to use the material flexibly.

The booklet has seven sections, whereas most groups will only meet five times during Lent; therefore the first section is to be highlighted at our Circuit Service on the Sunday before Lent begins (3 p.m. on 26th February at Acomb), and the next two sections have been merged into one to create five sessions.

The suggested format of these groups is:

* Opening Prayer
* Discussion based on the booklets and these additional notes
* Time of prayerful reflection using music, words and artwork

(Some extra material is included for further discussion)

Groups will need individuals or a team to plan the sessions, act as enablers and ensure that appropriate music is provided for the meditations. By asking around or downloading from the internet it should be possible to find most of the suggested pieces, or suitable alternatives. Since we are focussing on justice, you are reminded of the need to acquire music in ways which respect the rights of the copyright holders!

Two of the sessions suggest hymns for study. Access to copies of *Hymns & Psalms* would therefore be helpful. Most of the hymns referred to are also in *Singing the Faith*. However there is a hymn sheet available for those who would find this more convenient.

Session 1: Wonder and amazement/ A sense of holiness

* What does ‘holy’ mean to you?

You might like to look the word up in a dictionary or online to find some pointers (or even use a theological dictionary).

Try to come up with a working definition of ‘holy’.

* Read Isaiah 6: 1-4 (or 1-8) and Exodus 3: 1-5
* Share any moments like these that you may have experienced.
* You might also like to think of other ‘close encounters’ with God recorded in the Bible. What is the outcome of these encounters?
* Do you think that these special moments are given to us entirely as God in his wisdom sees fit, or can we seek or cultivate them? Can you think of any Biblical precedents to support your conclusions?

Time of Reflection

Listen to some music e.g. *Be still, for the presence of the Lord* or *Open the eyes of my heart* and meditate on the artwork in the booklet (sections 2&3)

In a time of quiet ask God to make himself real to you (but think what you are asking and be prepared for the answer, bearing in mind what such an encounter meant for Moses and Isaiah).

Pray for someone you would love to have an experience of the reality of God (but again, be prepared for what part you might be called to play in God’s answer).

Pray too for those around you, for such experiences can be communal as well as individual.

For further discussion:

Can we become more attuned to seeing the burning bush rather than ‘eating blackberries’ (see the poem in the booklets)?

Can you think of any modern equivalent to ‘take off the sandals from your feet’ as a response to God’s holiness?

Session 2: A Gift of Holiness

* Study the picture in the booklet (Holiness & Justice 4). Discuss what it says to you.
* Read H&P 749 & 726 vv.1, 2 (and the hymns in between if you like!)

In Hymns and Psalms especially, this section is packed with hymns on the same theme, mostly by Charles Wesley. We forget that this thirst for holiness was a driving force of the Methodist movement.

Can we re-discover this passion for holiness?

* Do you feel ‘un-holy’? (What is the right word for this?)
* You are not going to earnestly seek something unless you sense that you lack it. Why do you think this feeling is less prevalent than it was?
* Remembering last week’s discussion about seeking a closer experience of God, can holiness be ‘cultivated’ or do we simply wait for God’s gift? (Consider Matthew 7:7-11)
* Go back to Isaiah 6:1-7 and consider what light this may throw on the quest for holiness.

Time of Reflection

Listen to one of Charles Wesley’s hymns on the theme of holiness. (It should be possible to locate e.g. ‘O thou who camest from above’)

Read Ps.51 vv.1-15 (or listen to part of Allegri’s ‘Miserere’ in English).

Allow a time of quiet to wait on God and ask for his gift of holiness. (The song ‘Purify my heart’ would be suitable in the background)

For further discussion:

Do you think that the quotation from Therese de Lisieux in the booklets implies a different understanding of holiness to that in Charles Wesley’s hymns?Session 3: Holiness and Justice

* Can you think of a time when you have felt unfairly treated?

How does it feel? How do you deal with it?

* Some suggested readings (there are plenty more!):

Deut.24:19-21; Exodus 23:1-9; Isaiah 58:6, 7; Amos 5:11-15, 21-24

* To what extent are we guilty of injustice even though we never actually oppress anyone directly, just because we are part of an unjust system?

Try to think of examples. What can we do to change the system?

(See the quotation in the booklet from Bonhoeffer. What did Bonhoeffer do about injustice as he saw it?)

Time of Reflection

It might be helpful to have a globe or world map (e.g. from ‘The Works’) and light candles on or around it.

Think about the injustice in the world and what you can do about it.

Some suggestions for music: ‘O Lord, the clouds are gathering’; ‘Who can sound the depths of sorrow’; ‘A touching place’.

For further discussion:

Do you think the emphasis on social justice is more dominant in the Old Testament than in the New? If so, why?

What are the key New Testament passages about social justice?

What do you say to people who tell us not to dabble in ‘politics’ and get on with preaching the Gospel instead?

Session 4: Walking the Path Together

This session is influenced by John Wesley’s emphasis on ‘social holiness’, which means seeking holiness together.

The thrust of Wesley’s strategy is that the quest for holiness is not an individual event but a team one - hence the importance of ‘mutual encouragement’ groups (‘classes’) in Methodism.

* How similar is this to the modern enthusiasm for mutual encouragement groups like slimming clubs? Why do they work?
* Read Hebrews 10: 23-25

When was the last time you were ‘spurred on’ by another Christian in your walk with Jesus? Are we too gentle with one another nowadays?

* Consider 2 Corinthians 13:1-10

Can you imagine a minister or other church leader speaking to you like that?

* Read Acts 2: 42-47

It is often said that this is one of the most encouraging yet most challenging passages in the Bible. How do you react to it?

Time of Reflection

Meditate on the picture in the booklet while listening to Acts 2: 42-47 again.

A good hymn to read or listen to would be H&P 374: ‘Thou God of truth and love’. Why is this hymn in the ‘Marriage’ section?

For further study:

Hebrews Chapter 12 makes useful reading in this context.

If the group has time to spare you might like to discuss H&P 753, and consider how we ‘build one another up’. Are there lines in this hymn that you would want to question?Session 5: Holy Living

Consider:

* How would you like to see yourself change?
* How would you like to see the world change?

In small groups of two or three discuss these aspirations and see if you affirm each other’s hopes.

* What are the barriers to these changes happening?

Consider Matthew 18:19-20 (back in the larger group if you wish)

* Going back to last week’s study, discuss how sharing our hopes, fears and struggles opens up channels of God’s grace.
* Have you ever had a change of heart on some issue as a result of fellowship with other Christians?

Time of Reflection

Look at the picture in the booklets and consider what it says to you.

Choose one thing that you are going to do to make a difference in your life and in the life of the world.

Write it down and put the paper in your copy of the booklet to remind you.

Pray in silence for those around you that they will be guided and strengthened in their own commitments.

Suitable music: ‘Be thou my vision’, ‘Take this moment’.

Read Isaiah 6 v.8 in conclusion

For further study:

We often conveniently stop reading about Isaiah’s vision at this point. What does the rest of the chapter say to us about our calling?