

The Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Methodist Conference 2021/2022

The Revd Sonia Hicks has served as a Circuit Superintendent in three connexions: Britain, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas and the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI).

Sonia's commitment to oppose all forms of injustice began when she was a member of the Youth Exchange to Zimbabwe. She has since been Convenor of the World Relief and Development Committee for MCI, and has served as a Trustee for both *All We Can* and *Christian Aid Ireland*.



The Revd Sonia Hicks has also served on the South East District Synod Planning Group, on the Methodist Diaconal Order Leadership Group and on the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee.

The President's Address to the Methodist Conference 2021

One of our family traditions is that, when someone has a birthday, they can choose the meal for that day. At first, it was their favourite home-cooked meal but then it became their favourite restaurant until the pandemic struck last year. Suddenly, there was no more gathering to celebrate special birthdays or anniversaries. Everything changed. Everything was different. I guess we are not the only people who had special ways of remembering family milestones. I guess also that many of us have missed opportunities to come together, whether in our homes or at a restaurant. As food is eaten to the sounds of laughter, the relationship ties between us are strengthened once more. What is true for ordinary families is also true for the people of God.

I believe that at the Eucharist, people are renewed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to live out their calling and that is why we have all missed Holy Communion during this pandemic. Time and time again, as wine is poured and bread is broken, we understand more fully what it means to be invited to the Heavenly Banquet and how that knowledge shapes what we do and say here and now. It is at God's table that we begin to grasp what it means to live as Kingdom people and so it seemed appropriate to the Vice-President and to myself that the image of people gathered at God's table should form part of the presidential theme for this year.

This is similar to the theme chosen by Inderjit Bhogal, the last Black person to be elected as President of the Conference, over twenty years ago. The question for us is what is our vision of God's table now? How does that vision manifest itself for us today in 2021? It is important to remember that God sees every individual as a beloved child. God longs to spread 'the wings of grace o'er thee' as the Hymn 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation' asserts^[1]. Therefore, God invites all of us, each one of us, to the table. At God's table, there is an invitation for all. All are invited to partake of God's love. All are invited to partake of God's grace. All are invited to experience God's acceptance. This year's presidential theme is:

God's Table: An Invitation for all

Pictures of the Last Supper fascinate me. A few years ago, we went to Milan and were privileged to see Leonard da Vinci's portrayal of the Last Supper. Obviously, this original picture is not in the best shape, but it still held an attraction for me. I am always interested in whether all twelve disciples are present or if the artist has removed Judas from the table. [This is an image of da Vinci's Last Supper](#) with all twelve disciples and Jesus. The Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus gives a clue

about which of the disciples will betray him. **“He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me.’** [Mark 14: 20]

That tells us that Judas must have been present as they ate, yet I have seen several depictions of this scene where Judas is not at the table. [This is a portrayal of the Last Supper by Meglic Vladimir](#) minus Judas. Seemingly, Judas’ invitation to the table has been rescinded, at least, in the mind of the artist.

[In another portrayal, you can spot Judas in the shadows](#), if you look hard. Always, Judas is the unwelcome figure. The disciple without the halo. The one in the shadows or, as in [Cesare Magni’s copy of Da Vinci’s masterpiece](#), the one who is black.

Both of my parents were brought up in a small village called Warsop on the Caribbean island of Jamaica. My paternal grandfather, James Edwards, was a Local Preacher in that village. With the Methodist Minister only able to come to the village infrequently, my grandfather acted as a local pastor, taking services, attending to the pastoral needs of the community, as well as exercising his vocation as a farmer. Warsop Methodist Church was particularly important to my grandfather. He ensured that the building was kept clean and the grounds around the church were tidy. My great-grandfather had also been a Methodist Local Preacher. He too travelled around the various communities caring for the people and helping as much as he could.

Therefore, Methodism is part of my family’s DNA. My Great Aunt Lize was one of the first family members to arrive in Britain from Jamaica. She came with her Methodist membership ticket – her proof that she had accepted the invitation to be at God’s table. On the first Sunday morning in this country, she got dressed in her best clothes – her Sunday best, as she had always done in Jamaica – and headed to the nearby Methodist church, just down the road from where she was now living. Not exactly sure when the service was to begin, Great Aunt Lize arrived as the congregation was singing the opening hymn. She sneaked in at the back and prepared to worship God with her Methodist family, as she was used to doing.

When the hymn ended, the minister came from the front of the church and, on reaching Great Aunt Lize, asked her where she was from. She explained that she was newly arrived from Jamaica and started to reach for her membership ticket in her handbag. “Your sort go to the other church”, said the minister not even noticing the ticket. Great Aunt Lize was confused: “My sort?”, she repeated, “Isn’t this a Methodist church?” “Yes, it is a Methodist Church” said the minister, “But people like you go to the church down the road.”

His words started to make sense to my Great Aunt. By, ‘people like you’ this minister meant Black people. He was saying that Black people were not welcome in that church, not even Black Methodists. Hiding her hurt, Great Aunt Lize asked: “Can I just stay until the end of the service today?” “No,” said the minister, “Your presence is upsetting my members. Please leave now.” So, my Great Aunt Lize gathered her things and left that place of worship. My family’s story of rejection by the British Methodist Church is the experience of many Afro-Caribbean people in this nation.

I guess that if that minister had drawn a picture of the Last Supper, there would have been only white people surrounding Jesus. A Jesus, who, of course, would be like the images of Jesus I regularly saw as a child. A Jesus, who though Jewish, had had an Aryan makeover: Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes. The invitation that God gives would be rescinded for anyone with brown skin – anyone who looked different.

As the minister told my Great Aunt Lize, ‘her sort’. As sinful human beings, we are very good at placing limitations on God’s invitation. People are fine, we think, as long as they look like me, act like me, believe like me. As long as they are ‘my sort’. The trouble is God’s invitation to the feast is bigger than our fears of difference, greater than our prejudices. God’s invitation seeks to encompass all who long for the good news of freedom, justice, mercy and acceptance.

When I hear the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite Woman in Matthew’s Gospel, I am struck by her tenacity. Like most women in the Biblical narratives, she has no name. We know that she has a daughter who is demon-possessed, and we can understand something of the desperation that has led her to Jesus. But she is not only a woman, she is also a foreigner. Will it be possible for

her to claim some of the blessings that God promises to all nations through the Messiah? As it says in the book of Isaiah: **“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food...”** [Isa. 25: 6a]

At first, the Canaanite woman sees only obstacles in the attitude of the disciples. They want to shun her. They do not want to engage with her needs, her desire for her child’s healing. Yet, she persists. She stands her ground. Then, there is the obstacle of Jesus’ attitude. Jesus too, seemingly, does not wish to engage with her. He is silent. As a young person growing up in this country, I have always feared the silence of others in the face of the prejudice I have observed and encountered.

I wonder what silence signifies when I share the pain of racism. Does it signify guilt, indifference, or disbelief? Oftentimes, I am asked to examine the situation where I have been side-lined or made to feel less than. Am I being too sensitive? Have I not understood the ‘joke’? For a person belonging to a minority group, there is always a tendency to internalise prejudice. So, I have already asked myself: do I need to be more patient, do I need to be more loving, do I need to be more forgiving?

At those times, it takes all my inner strength, all of it, to re-state my case. Sisters and brothers, prejudice is never okay. It is never acceptable. So, I understand the inner strength that the Canaanite woman must rally to persist in the face of silence. But then Jesus speaks: **“It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”** [Matt. 15: 26]

Suddenly, we appreciate the gap between Jesus and the woman. A gap that takes in ethnic and cultural divides. A gap that incorporates the religious and the social. It is a huge gap. When I come face to face with prejudice, it always feels like a huge gap to overcome. When people see my black skin and assume that I am second-rate, I sense the weight of historic racism polluting the here and now. It is as if I am being ejected from God’s table. But God does not rescind His invitation because of our prejudices, our misconceptions, and our fears.

This is what the Canaanite woman believes and so she fights for recognition even from the Chosen One of God. She claims her portion at God’s table because she sees beyond the words of Jesus to their common humanity. The Canaanite woman has a place at the table. Her sick child has a place at the table. And, finally, Jesus recognises and accepts that fact. **“Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”** [Matt. 15: 28]

We worship God who is a God of grace. God freely offers grace to us and because we are God’s people, we should be compelled to offer that grace to others. Just as God accepts me so I must accept others. And, as I am accepted, I am being changed through the work of the Holy Spirit. We, the people of God, should accept others and allow the Holy Spirit to work in them also. I have been a recipient of God’s grace through godly folk many times in my life but today I want to share just two examples.

Firstly, when I was eighteen, I was selected to go on the Methodist Youth Exchange to Zimbabwe along with six other young people from Britain. We stayed with families all over Zimbabwe and I remember turning up one evening to stay with a family in a small township house. There were eight members of that family and only one bed which they insisted I have. They were willing to have less in order to acknowledge my place at God’s table, in order to illustrate their acceptance of me as another person made in the image of God.

I was very impressed by this definition of ‘white privilege’ given by Arlan Hamilton, who describes herself as a ‘gay black woman’. Arlan founded Backstage Capital, a firm that provides start-up funds exclusively to people of colour and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs. She said on her Twitter account:

If trying to understand sharing your inherent privilege, think: when someone shorter than you needs to see the stage better at a show, you usually let them stand in front of you, right? You both get to enjoy the show, it’s only a slight inconvenience, and you don’t shrink.^[2]

How do we acknowledge the place that others are entitled to at God’s table? What are we willing to give up in order to give them space? What does this look like in terms of Black people, young people, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community? If we think that their rights have nothing to do with us, then we do not yet understand this Gospel reading. As Christians we are to mirror the grace and

the mercy of God. We are to find ways of issuing God's invitation of acceptance to those we meet on a daily basis. No ifs, no buts. And, as Arlan stated, we won't shrink: the slight inconveniences to us will make a big difference to those who are always at the back of the queue.

The second example happened whilst my husband, Conrad, and I were serving as Mission Partners in Jamaica. We were stationed to two adjoining Circuits in the parish of Portland, which is on the eastern side of the island. I served in the Manchioneal Circuit and Conrad was in the Port Antonio Circuit. My Sundays involved two two-hour services, sometimes travelling an hour's drive from the manse to get to the churches in my pastoral charge.

One Sunday, Conrad asked me to call in on one of his members who had requested that we collect something. I was to do this after preaching at two two-hour long services. All I wanted was to return to the cool of the Port Antonio manse, eat my dinner and go off for a long nap away from everyone else. It didn't seem too much to ask. Just a cool breeze, a nice dinner, and a comfortable bed. Perfect!

But Conrad, after leading worship twice himself, was now at home with our three small children, so it wasn't really fair to ask him to go instead of me. It was logical that I went. It was reasonable that I was the one to go. But all I wanted was a cool breeze, a nice dinner, and a comfortable bed. So, you can imagine how thoroughly disgruntled I was at having to go and having to make polite conversation.

When I got to the house, I swallowed as much of my bad mood as I could. Sister Atkinson, one of Conrad's members, asked me to come into her kitchen where there was a big box on the table. In it, this servant of God, had piled a roasted chicken, rice n peas, three different sorts of salad, and everything you could possibly want for a meal. There was juice to drink, there was a container of gravy, there was a huge Jamaican fruit cake.

It wasn't just a meal; it was a banquet. "Rev. Sonia", she said. "I know that you and Rev. Conrad preach a lot on Sundays and then you have to make dinner. So, today, I thought I would make it for you. It is all hot and ready to go so let me help load this into your car and you can go and have dinner with the family."

I was totally overwhelmed by her kindness, by her generosity. Our family not only had enough food for that Sunday. We were able to enjoy Sis. Atkinson's portable banquet for several days afterwards. Each time, I bit into her delicious cake, I thanked God for Sister Atkinson's thoughtfulness. In her actions, I saw a compassion that mirrored the grace of God. The impact of that kindness has never left me, and it is something I want to aspire to.

To me, the banquet of heaven is promised to all those who recognise God's reign: all those who aspire to the Kingdom values of love and mercy. It is an invitation to all including the Canaanite Woman, the Refugee in our midst, the stranger, the person who voted for Brexit and the person who voted to remain in the EU. It is extended towards the Jewish nation and towards the Palestinians.

It is an invitation to those who think and act like me and to those who choose to think and act in a different way. I believe that there is a place for all in the presence of God, at God's Table. But, as we acknowledge that everyone has a place, we also must acknowledge that we will therefore live with the tension of not all thinking the same. We will also have to recognise that living with such tension is never the easy option.

My Great Aunt Lize was refused a place in that Methodist Church on the first Sunday when she came from Jamaica. But Great Aunt Lize did not go to a church for 'her sort'. Great Aunt Lize did not go to any church for fear of being made to leave before the worship had commenced. And because that story was our family story, there was no regular church going for any of us. We would attend weddings and baptisms, but we did not risk entering a church uninvited where we might be ejected because of the colour of our skin. When my sister, Luna, came to live with the family years later, my sisters and I went, for a while, to the local church but it was not Methodist.

However, like the Canaanite Woman, my Great-Aunt did not give up on her spiritual inheritance. She did not give up hope of returning to the Methodist fold. Great Aunt Lize would often come over

to our house and bring some Caribbean treat, like hard-dough bread, with her from Brixton. One day, she came full of excitement. "I have found a Methodist Church. It is near to where you live!"

I didn't even know what a Methodist Church was. I had been to a Congregational Church and then to an Anglican one. I thought to myself: What was so great about a Methodist one? "So, where is this church?" my sisters asked. But when Great Aunt Lize explained, we all laughed. "Aunt Lize, that's not a church. It's a prison! It has a great high wall, and no one comes out or goes in!" But Great Aunt Lize insisted – it was a Methodist Church. There was a banner on the front of the building saying 'Clubland Methodist Church'. And so, it was decided that we should all go on Christmas Day a few weeks later. Unbeknown to us, the new minister had only put that banner up a few days before when the church had re-commenced weekly worship.

On Christmas Day 1976, nearly twenty years after making Britain her home and being asked to leave a Methodist church, Great Aunt Lize claimed her rightful place at the table and I found my spiritual home. I stand here today because of the tenacity of my mother's aunt who was like a grandmother to me. A tenacity mirrored by that of the Canaanite Woman: **"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."** [Matt. 15: 27]

My spiritual home became Clubland, which is now Walworth Methodist Church, in Camberwell, South-East London. Today, Walworth Road has over 500 members but when I went there, there were only a small number of us. Revd. Vic Watson had been stationed to that one church Circuit in 1976 and, by the grace of God, he re-built the church membership with a small but dedicated group of people.

But what I remember most about Vic was that he kept saying to me: "I think you should be a Methodist minister." I can recall that he started saying that to me when I was fourteen years old. At the time, I thought that Vic was perhaps slightly mad and that Methodist ministers thought that their main role in life was to find more Methodist ministers! I always laughed off Vic's comments because, when I looked around, I didn't know any other ministers who were Black or were women or were, to be perfectly honest with you, as feisty as I was. There was no way I could do what Vic did. It was impossible or so I thought.

But Vic never stopped telling me that I should be a Methodist minister. And it was his persistence that won out in the end. One day, Vic came to me and asked: "Do you want to know more about God?" Well, of course I wanted to know more. I was hungry for God. I wanted to know how to love God more, how to serve God better. I went to every Bible Study, every World Development Group meeting, every church service. God was, and is, my anchor.

When I said 'Yes', Vic handed me a note to preach! Well, that's one way of issuing an invitation. But Vic was right. In the Local Preachers' class, I learnt even more about God and how to tell others about Him. I learnt the art of crafting sermons, choosing better illustrations and of reminding others that God has issued an invitation to serve and love Her. God's invitation is to everyone and, as Christians, it is our great privilege to share that invitation in word and in deed. As Peter learnt in his encounter with Cornelius.

Peter had witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on people he had seen as outside of God's Grace; those excluded from God's table. But Peter's vision and the ensuing encounter with Cornelius had made this apostle re-evaluate all that he had previously thought about God's invitation. **"Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'"** [Acts 10: 34-35] Peter's mind had been transformed but this was not necessarily true for the whole Church in Jerusalem. To them, Peter had gone 'rogue'; Peter had 'lost the plot'. Our epistle reading is where Peter is summoned to explain his actions.

It is interesting to note that the main charge against Peter is not that he baptised Gentiles. It is that Peter shared table-fellowship with them. **"...Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"** [Acts 11: 3] As Luke Timothy Johnson states in his commentary, on 'The Acts of the Apostles',: *"For a Jew to eat without attending to ritual purity or to dietary regulations meant loss of identity, for the entire rationale for such regulations was the 'holiness', that is the separateness, of this people, based on the commandments of God"*^[3] Peter counters this accusation by pointing out

that he was only responding to the divine initiative. At the end of the reading, it says: **“When they heard this, they were silenced...”** [Acts 11: 18a]

Again, I find myself wondering what this silence means? Do the other believers accept Peter's table-fellowship with Cornelius as valid? Should interactions with all Gentiles be welcomed or is Cornelius simply the exception? Within our Connexion, there have been times when the ministry offered by minority groups has not been accepted by churches and circuits but instead these individuals have been regarded as exceptions to the general rule. Having a minister who is black or a woman or a member of the LGBTQ+ community is seen as a temporary concession.

The stereotype of 'proper' ministry remains intact which can only be offered by those who are white, who are male, and who are heterosexual. For me, my blackness and my womanhood are not exceptions but elements of the rich tapestry which is God's creation. I. Howard Marshall, commenting on this passage, says: *‘We should not take verse 18 to imply that the church at Jerusalem forthwith entered zealously into a mission to Gentiles; indeed, it never seems to have done so, and as a result it lost its importance in course of time’* [4]

Diversity, practising inclusion in the church, is for me a principle of universal significance and if we do not champion this fact, then perhaps we too will lose our 'importance in the course of time'. Upon witnessing these events, Peter's eyes are opened just as the eyes of Saul were opened on the Damascus Road. The importance, of having our eyes opened, is underlined by Vicky Beeching, who was a Christian singer/songwriter.

When Vicky 'came out' as gay, she was heavily criticised by some Christians and her music career disappeared almost overnight. In her book 'Undivided', Vicky writes: *“I'd spent a lifetime trying to be someone else. Not only was that damaging me, it was also offensive to the God whom I believed has designed me and woven me together.”*¹⁶

Where do we, the Methodist people, need to open our eyes? Where do we, the Methodist people, need to see people as God sees them? I believe that my eyes have been opened by God on several occasions. I have had to view situations differently, accept those who were not the same as me, realise that God's love is always paramount. I have had to recognise the prejudices that are in me.

When I was in my late teens, I can remember pouring my heart out to God as I walked back from the Bible Study group at church. I said that my relationship with God was the most important thing in my life, but I wanted a special person in my life too. I wanted someone who could love me as I would love them. I wasn't too fussy: “God”, I said, “They don't need to come to church with me. So long as they let me to go to church, attend Bible Study and participate fully in the life of the church, that's all I want.”

Then, I met Conrad and we argued about everything. We seemed to agree on nothing except that we were both passionate about God. I realised that I was getting to really like him but there was one problem. I don't know if anyone has realised but Conrad is not black. He is actually white. “Come on God”, I said in prayer one day, “I didn't specify that this special someone had to be black, but I just sort of assumed that you would take that into account!” And God whispered to me. “Conrad is your special someone and he happens to be white. It's your choice” None of us can know who we will fall in love with. That is a matter for the heart and the heart alone. My eyes were opened.

Whilst I was still stationed to the Thames Valley Circuit, like many Circuits in this connexion last year, we held workshops to look at the God in Love Unites Us report. We set ground rules on what was acceptable to say in the various groups. Each member of staff joined a group and we listened to one another. I was particularly struck as someone spoke about her partner who was not a churchgoer. He supported the church she attended in small financial ways which the wider church was not always aware of. But, because of the way we often promote marriage over all other loving relationships, I realised that the church family, her church family, never prayed for this gentleman when it prayed for her on the church prayer rota.

That saddened and continues to sadden me. He was the most important person in her life and yet, practically to the church, he did not exist. For centuries, the Church has taught that marriage is the only valid intimate relationship recognised by God. Ironically, this teaching continued whilst some

denominations prohibited marriage between slaves and, even in apartheid South Africa, where marriage was outlawed if one partner was classified as coloured and the other classified as black or white. A loving relationship, one where there is mutual respect, is about commitment between two individuals whether a ring is involved or not. As a Christian, I believe that God is central in every loving relationship because God is love. My eyes were opened.

In the Epistle to the Galatians, it is written: **“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”** [Gal. 3: 28] How would we re-phrase this for 2021 in the Methodist Church? For me, it would involve sharing space with people especially those who are marginalised in our society. It does not mean that we will fail to have any standards to uphold. There are standards that we will always be called to maintain as people called Methodists:

Firstly, it would mean adhering to the standard of love in all our interactions. What does love look like or feel like in any particular situation we face? How do I show love to the person who looks different to me and holds views at odds with my own? We will fail in our God-given mission to be salt and light unless we reflect love in all that we do and say. Let us hold on to the standard of love.

Secondly, we are called to uphold the standard of hospitality. Let us not be like the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Let us not communicate words of condemnation when we can speak words of welcome. God has shown us what hospitality looks like in and through Jesus Christ. It is the ability to enlarge one’s vision and allow the Canaanite woman her place at God’s table of mercy. Let us hold on to the standard of hospitality.

Thirdly, we are to uphold the standard of proclamation. We are called to proclaim God’s invitation, an invitation that has been issued to the whole world, a world that God called into being and declared to be ‘good’. But God’s invitation to sit at God’s table cannot be heard in this diverse world unless we, you and I, proclaim it day in and day out; in season and out of season, in what we say and in what we do. So, let us hold to the standard of proclamation.

I want to thank all those in my life who have upheld the standards of love, hospitality, and proclamation. Firstly, to all at Walworth Methodist Church and especially to Gwenda Watson, Vic’s widow. It was Gwenda who trained me to speak up in services and not to gabble my words. The church family, when I was a member there, encouraged me as a teenager to stretch my faith in so many different ways.

Secondly, I want to thank Methodist Circuits that I have served in and especially for the people of Manchioneal Circuit in the MCCA and Dublin North Circuit in the Irish Connexion. I cannot express what your acceptance of me has meant when I was the outsider in your midst. The one who sang hymns to different tunes and thought that it was normal. Thank you for the ways in which you taught me how it is possible to worship alongside those who think differently. Even in those circuits where I struggled to minister, I know that God was honing me as a Presbyterian. I want to express thanks to those who asked me to stand for the Presidency last year and to those who astounded me with their enthusiastic support. I pray that I will not disappoint God in this calling. Last of all, to my family – the ones who are here in the UK and those who are still in the Americas. Thank you for making me laugh at myself – frequently - and for all the love you constantly pour into my life.

In a world where people are excluded because of their ethnic background, their sexual orientation, their gender or simply because, like me, they were brought up on a Council estate, I believe that we are called to show God’s love for all people. It is a calling that Christian people have always struggled with, but we can and should be better at making God’s love a reality in the British Methodist Church, overcoming the systemic discrimination that exists.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with a final thought. If the other disciples had known beforehand that Peter would deny Jesus three times, and then go on to share table-fellowship with Cornelius, I wonder if they would have been willing to share the Last Supper with him? If the other disciples had known beforehand that Thomas would have doubts about the resurrection, would they have thought of ejecting him too?

Just as the minister ejected my Great Aunt Lize from the Methodist Church. I think it is just as well that it is God who invites us to the table and that none of us are given the responsibility of assessing who should be invited and who is welcomed. Mercifully, it is God alone who invites us to come because it is God's table.

Let us welcome the opportunity to sit at God's table and as we do so, let us maintain the standard of love, let us uphold the standard of hospitality and let us embrace the standard of proclamation so that the glory of the Triune God may blaze forth in these lands. Vicky Beeching did not continue with her music career following the rejection she experienced after coming out as a gay woman. She no longer writes songs and she sold all her guitars. I would like to end with some words from Vicky which are part liturgy and part benediction:

Words create worlds.

God spoke in Genesis, his language distilling into stars, oceans, planets.

And God still speaks today,

always innovating and constantly creative.

He does not bend to cultural progress, rather he leads the way.

Not innovation for innovation's sake,

But the plan of an upside-down kingdom where the last are first,

And the dinner table is set for the unlikeliest of guests. [6]

[1] *Singing the Faith*, number 88 © 2011 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes,

[2] <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/lifestyle/other/this-black-woman-used-the-perfect-analogy-to-explain-white-privilege/ar-BB1cL3gd> (14/1/2021)

[3] *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina, Liturgical Press, 1992, page 200

[4] *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1980, page 210

[5] 'Undivided', Vicky Beeching, William Collins, 1988, page 264

[6] 'Undivided', page 279