

## Friends

Last Sunday, after an ecumenical service at Burnham, I got talking with a non-Methodist and I was a bit surprised when he asked me why we didn't do a confession and absolution. The flip answer would have been, "We did, weren't you paying attention?" but I think he was used to a liturgy that is the same every week and therefore didn't hear "the right words." Of course, all of us can be guilty of letting things pass us by as we settle our hearts and minds in worship, but I thought that it might be a good opportunity to explain about the prayers that we use in the Methodist Church for those who don't know, or perhaps haven't given it thought.

A regularly ordered service will contain four sets of prayers, three of them short and usually said together, and one longer. The service will also invariably contain The Lord's Prayer, and spotting that it is missing and pointing it out to the preacher is a time-honoured congregational sport.

The first set of prayers contain prayers of approach, praise and confession and are usually said after the first hymn. In brief they say: We are here; you God are amazing; in spite of this, we have got it wrong and ask your forgiveness. This is always followed by what is called the "assurance of forgiveness" in which the leader will remind the congregation that Jesus came into the world to save sinners and that if we truly repent, our sins are forgiven. The response to this is often: "Amen. Thanks be to God."

Later in the service, after the sermon and as part of our response to it, we have the set of prayers which are called "Intercessions." These will often include thanksgiving as well and are where we ask God for his help for ourselves, for the Church and for the world. Often, but not always, the Lord's Prayer is said at the end of these prayers.

The skill of the leader is to write or source these prayers so that they link in with the theme of the service, amplifying what has been said, or what will be said, without using them as an excuse to preach further – after all, God already knows what the Bible says and doesn't need us to explain it to him! See if you can spot these things this week.

God bless, Vicci