

Dorset South & West Circuit Written Service for Sunday 13th June 2021 – MHA Sunday by Revd Steph Jenner

Welcome to the service today, designated MHA (Methodist Homes for the Aged) Sunday. I worked for MHA for many years as a 'Live at Home' Scheme Co-ordinator (now community scheme) and then at the Regional Office in Leeds, so MHA is close to my heart. The theme for MHA Sunday is relieving loneliness and bringing hope so we shall be thinking of this as part of our worship.

Our call to worship Psalm 92: 1 – 4

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Adoration God of all, we praise you for your loving presence with us through good times and difficult times. You know each of us by name and call us into communion with you and one another. Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth you welcomed the outsiders, your love is for all people and knows no bounds. You showed your ultimate love by coming amongst us as one of us, leaving behind all heavenly splendour to experience the joys and hurts, highs and lows, laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. Yet you remained obedient and full of love, and lived, served and died for us. You were raised from the dead and offer us everlasting life. And so we declare your holiness, majesty and beauty that radiates from all that is around us. And we with all creation shout praise to you. Glory, power and praise be given to you O God.

As we recognise your goodness and love, all that you have given to us, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your continued presence through your Holy Spirit, we recall in our minds the things we do, think and say that fall short of all that you call us to be. As we reflect on loneliness and isolation, we ask for your forgiveness in the way that your church has contributed to others feeling un-welcome in our midst. We confess the things that we haven't done which could have helped others feel more included. We offer our confession for the ways in which people still exist on the margins. Silence Lord forgive us, and renew us in the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you.

Hymn StF 318

Christ, our King before creation,
life, before all life began,
crowned in deep humiliation
by your partners in God's plan,
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, forgive our self-deceiving,
come and reign in us today!'

Lord of time and Lord of history,
giving, when the world despairs,
faith to wrestle with the mystery
of a God who loves and cares,
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, by grace beyond conceiving,

come and reign in us today!'

Word that ends our long debating,
life of God which sets us free,
through your body recreating
life as life is meant to be,
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
'Lord, in us your aim achieving,
come and reign in us today!'

Ivor H Jones

Reading 2 Corinthians 5: 6 – 10, 14 – 17

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil...

...For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Reading Mark 4: 26 – 34

He [Jesus] also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Hymn StF 255

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory
to God all in all!

Bryn Rees

Thoughts

When someone says 'everything is new, everything old has passed away', I find that there are at least two different reactions – one of 'great, we can start again, forget the old, move on' and another of 'I will miss it, not sure I'm ready to move on' – either is perfectly valid, and there are many nuances on both. As ever, nothing is clear cut.

But in our readings above, the new is a new creation, which, to me, speaks of things evolving, moving forward into something new, different, but with the remnants of the past still there, as a basis, informing the new, much like a seed growing. The seed becomes the plant, becomes the flower or fruit – it isn't seed one minute, the suddenly the plant, then suddenly the fruit.

As we moved into our new house we have started planting things in the garden. Each time I walk past I can see buds forming, which increase in size, and I know will eventually split apart to reveal a beautiful, fragrant bloom or fresh green leaf. It is a joy to watch this creative, evolving process.

When Jesus is talking to his followers, he describes the kingdom of heaven as a seed, knowing that the people listening will understand how seeds grow, even if it is very difficult to believe that such small seeds can grow into such amazing plants in size and variety. They understood, as we understand, that growth happens continually as one phase moves into another, it doesn't take sudden jumps, even if it is continually observed. But it is also understood that outside elements are required for the changes, sunshine and rain, and occasionally other nutrients.

When we move from one state to another, however slowly and imperceptibly, we, because we are sentient beings, may suddenly realise that a change has taken place, and we feel we are in a new place. It may be a joyful relief, or it may be a worrisome time, or anything in between. And we are on the verge of such a time. As I write this, we are still on track to 'unlock' on 21st June, which will cause all sorts of feelings in people. People who have been starved of company, family and friends, other visitors, may find it overwhelming if everyone comes at once, however welcome each individual is; people who have got used to the quiet and routine of being 'just me/us' may struggle to adjust to involving others in their plans and days; people who have found extreme frustration in being restricted may find their returned freedom awesome and want to go back to everything. None of these are wrong, they are simply different ways of reacting to 'new'.

And if we can remember this, that we are individuals, with our own feelings and understandings, then maybe we can pause and think that how we react to situations, is not the same as everyone else, and we need to continue to be kind, and be patient, and ask of each other, rather than assuming. Taking it slowly like a budding flower, and allowing adjustment, until our confidence and our faith take us to the kingdom of God on earth for everyone, because we have grown it, gradually, carefully; because we have nurtured it and brought sunshine and rain and other things essential for life; because we have watched it and taken delight in it, shown it to and shared it with others; because we know that God is there in every stage from waiting to growing to fruiting to dying back.

So, as we move on, and hope is on the horizon, brought by the dedication of health professionals and volunteers, the scientists and the planners, those keeping one another safe by washing hands, wearing masks, and keeping physical distance from one another, just in case – we think of the ways we can safely help one another to move forward, by words of encouragement (written as well as spoken), by prayer and spiritual acknowledgement that people are more than just physical beings, by being sympathetic, especially with people who do not react the same way that we do, and with utmost love and patience. And the kingdom of God will grow.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give thanks for your faithfulness to us. For the outpouring of your love and grace and for all that you have promised to us. For your love that has guided us through life, and will continue to be with us. We give thanks for communities where all are included and made to feel welcome. We thank you that you call us to be part of your Kingdom in the here and now. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Please take a moment to think on how you feel, how you really feel, today and about the future...
...and ask God to guide you and bless you

Now try and put yourselves in the place of someone you know, think about their situations and how they may be feeling today and about the future...

...and ask God to guide them and bless them

Repeat this as often as you wish to for family and friends

Then think about a world situation that you have seen or heard about, try and sympathise with their situations and how they may be feeling today and about the future...

...and ask God to guide them and bless them

Repeat this as often as you wish to for different situations

Revisit your own thoughts and feelings, in the light of other people, known and unknown, and see how you can help, can improve, can grow to bring in the kingdom of God...

... and ask God again to guide you and bless you.

Amen

Hymn StF 678

Come, all who look to Christ today,
stretch out your hands, enlarge your mind,
together share his living way
where all who humbly seek will find.

Come, all who will from every place;
find here new powers of unity,
accept the Spirit's strong embrace
which binds us in community.

Come, young and old from every Church,
bring all your treasures of prayer,
join the dynamic Spirit's search
to press beyond the truths we share.

Bring your traditions' richest store,
your hymns and rites and cherished creeds;
explore our visions, pray for more,
since God delights to meet fresh needs.

Come, trust in Christ and live in peace,
anticipate that final light
when strife and bigotry shall cease,
and faith be lost in praise and sight.

Richard G Jones

Lord's Prayer (please pray whichever version you prefer)

Blessing

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with us now and always.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.
In the name of Christ. Amen.