

# 14<sup>th</sup> June 2026 – Morning Service

Abie Dutton

## Call to Worship: Romans 12: 4-5 (NIV)

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Today we celebrate MHA Sunday, a day to reflect on MHA's work through its Community Service, Care Homes and Retirement Living Schemes. Locally, in Wolverhampton, there are two MHA homes, Bridge Court and Waterside House.

To begin let us sing our first hymn which reminds us that Jesus died not just for a select few but so that **all would be welcome**, we all form one body together in Christ.

## StF 409 – Let us build a house

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| 1) Let us build a house where love can dwell<br>And all can safely live,<br>A place where saints and children tell<br>How hearts learn to forgive.<br>Built of hopes and dreams and visions,<br>Rock of faith and vault of grace;<br>Here the love of Christ shall end divisions: | 3) Let us build a house where love is found<br>In water, wine and wheat:<br>A banquet hall on holy ground<br>Where peace and justice meet.<br>Here the love of God, through Jesus,<br>Is revealed in time and space;<br>As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:                       |
| Ch) <i>All are welcome,<br/>All are welcome,<br/>All are welcome in this place.</i>   | 4) Let us build a house where hands will reach<br>Beyond the wood and stone<br>To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,<br>And live the Word they've known.<br>Here the outcast and the stranger<br>Bear the image of God's face;<br>Let us bring an end to fear and danger:                 |
| 2) Let us build a house where prophets speak,<br>And words are strong and true,<br>Where all God's children dare to seek<br>To dream God's reign anew.<br>Here the cross shall stand as witness<br>And as symbol of God's grace;<br>Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:      | 5) Let us build a house where all are named,<br>Their songs and visions heard<br>And loved and treasured, taught and claimed<br>As words within the Word.<br>Built of tears and cries and laughter,<br>Prayers of faith and songs of grace,<br>Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: |

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## Introduction

I am not a tea or coffee drinker, but there is something quietly powerful about conversing over a cuppa with someone else. The first cup, your cup, might just be about a drink but that second cup is about the conversation that follows. It's about spending time together, sharing stories and feeling connected. It means you are not alone. Across the UK, almost one million older people experience loneliness. Their days pass quietly with no one to share a conversation with, no one to sit with, and no one to ask how they are. Almost a million people living alone, making one cup, not two.

This is why MHA has launched their *Second Cup* appeal, raising awareness and vital funds to support older people experiencing loneliness through their befriending services. Bridge Court and Waterside House both do so much to ensure their tenants never face loneliness. For example, on weekdays Bridge Court hosts a day centre, with a dozen or more people from the community involving themselves in activities, and friendships with the tenants. But MHA knows there are so many more people in the communities which

need support, who just need someone to reminisce with. That is why we are here this morning, to raise funds for them.

### **StF 37 – You're calling us**

This song was written by Graham Kendrick in 2008. It reminds us of our calling from Jesus to reach out to the poor, the sick, the stranger, the children and the lonely. All are called to follow Christ become part of the body, that does not happen without us calling out to them.

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| 1) You're calling us<br>And so we are gathered here.<br>You're building us<br>Into a house of prayer.<br><br>A holy place<br>Where stories of grace are told;<br>A sacred space<br>Where miracles unfold<br>And praises rise<br>From the offering of our lives.<br>Let's fill this house,<br>Let's fill this house. | 2) We're living stones<br>Built together here<br>With nail-pierced hands -<br>Oh teach us holy fear.<br><br>And prayer will rise<br>For all nations;<br>And open skies<br>Will pour your glory down;<br>And there'll be praise,<br>For the Lord is in this place.<br>Let's fill this house,<br>Let's fill this house. |
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*Ch) Call the seeker,  
Call the stranger,  
Call the children,  
Let's hear their praises.  
Call the lonely,  
Call the broken,  
Young and old  
Will sing hosannas.  
Let's fill this house,  
Let's fill this house  
With praise.*

*Graham Kendrick © 2008 Make Way Music*

### **Opening Prayers**

Loving God, you are present in simple acts of kindness: in the kettle boiling, in the offered chair, in the listening ear, and in the second cup poured with patience and love. You offer grace to all who answer your call, to the stranger, the lonely, the broken, the young, and the old. We praise you for the dignity and wisdom of older people, for lives shaped by faithfulness and perseverance, and for every moment when companionship overcomes isolation.

Merciful God, we confess that too often we have been too busy to notice loneliness, too distracted to listen, and too hesitant to reach out. Forgive us for the times when we pass by opportunities for conversation, friendship, and care because we are “too busy” or it does not fit our schedule. Forgive us for the times we have forgotten those who live alone or overlooked those whose days are quiet and isolated. You call us to be living stones, built together in love, yet we confess that we sometimes build walls instead of community. Jesus, our Saviour and our King, with your nail-pierced hands, teach us compassion. Teach us to make room at the table, to offer the second cup, and to recognise your face in every neighbour.

Renew us by your Spirit, so that our churches may become sacred spaces where healing, friendship and belonging can unfold. Fill this house with your presence. Fill our lives with your compassion. Fill your Church with songs of welcome and hope. For you are the God who sees, who listens, and who stays. **Amen.**

## StF 660 – Called by Christ to be disciples

- 1) Called by Christ to be disciples  
Every day in every place,  
We are not to hide as hermits  
But to spread the way of grace;  
Citizens of heaven's kingdom,  
Though this world is where we live,  
As we serve a faithful Master,  
Faithful service may we give.
- 2) Richly varied are our pathways, many callings we pursue:  
May we use our gifts and talents always, Lord, to honour you;  
So in government or commerce, college, hospice, farm or home,  
Whether volunteers or earning, may we see your kingdom come.
- 3) Hard decisions may confront us,  
Urging us to compromise;  
Still obedience is our watchword -  
Make us strong and make us wise!  
Secular is turned to sacred,  
Made a precious offering,  
As our daily lives are fashioned  
In submission to our King.

*Martin Leckebusch © 1999 Kevin Mayhew*

### Reading: Luke 14: 15-23 (NIV)

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.'

Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."

'But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me."

'Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me."

'Still another said, "I have just got married, so I can't come."

'The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room."

'Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full."

### Reflection

If you could invite anyone past or present to a dinner, who would you invite? For me it'd be Alan Turing (who was a part of cracking the enigma code), Rosalind Franklin (the woman who photographed the DNA structure), and Ada Lovelace (often considered the first computer programmer). These are some incredible scientists recognised now for how they propelled science. Yet, in their own times they were ignored, forgotten, ill-treated and isolated. They were full of knowledge but because of who they were, they were put down. How many of those one million people suffering from loneliness have knowledge to share, or stories that would leave us in awe, or wisdom that could change our lives, but have been ignored by the world?

I am bringing intriguing people to my dinner, but they still aren't the homeless, they aren't travellers, they are not the beggars on the street. I bet you weren't thinking about people like that either were you? The reading that we just heard from Luke broke the societal rules of who comes to a banquet. The poor, blind, lame and crippled held no place at that table, but Jesus says otherwise.

I am quite introverted and if I could, I probably would excuse myself from many social events, but I do not think my excuses have ever been as transparent and ridiculous as in this parable. The first two have very similar excuses: they need to go and inspect a new purchase. However both are not purchases you would make before inspecting and if for some reason you did, you could just go the next day. The land is not going anywhere, and the oxen will still be waiting. The third's excuse is at least somewhat realistic because in old testament law a man was to stay at home for the first year after marriage... from military service, not dinner with friends. All have denied their invitation; they have found alternatives that they seem to think are better. As we see in verse 24, these people will not get a taste of the Master's banquet. In other words, they will not join the feast in the Kingdom of God.

All make their excuses and say no which frustrates the master. He has prepared a banquet and a banquet he will have! So, he sends his servant out to the poor, lame, blind, and crippled. They are all invited and all accept! And there is still room at the table, so the servant is sent further afar to the travellers and foreigners. Those on the country roads would have no reason to believe they were truly invited, but the servant is to compel them. All of these "lesser" people are the ones who do not make excuses, do not attempt to find a better option, instead they accept and take a seat at the Master's table. They will eat in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The noticeable question this parable raises is "Who is welcome in God's Kingdom?" and the answer we are given is that everyone who accepts the invitation is welcome. It has nothing to do with a person's own effort or status.

But more importantly, today this parable should also ask "Who is missing from the table?" and more uncomfortably, "Whose absence have we learned to accept?". In Jesus' world, the blind, lame, and crippled were routinely left out. Their absence from the table was normalised. Jesus refuses to accept that normal because absence is rarely accidental. It is shaped by loss, exclusion, and neglect, as people are quietly pushed to the edges. The Kingdom of God is not simply about gathering those who already belong. It is about noticing who is not there and refusing to let that absence be the end of the story. In every era, there are absences that are easy to explain away. On this MHA Sunday we should think about one of our most normalised absences: people in later life. Their absence is rarely a dramatic thing, their loneliness grows through bereavement, declining health, reduced mobility, limited income, and shrinking confidence.

This host does not cancel the banquet. He does not accept that this is simply how things are. He sends his servants out into the streets. Then further still, beyond the usual boundaries. It's an active, deliberate, and persistent welcome. God does not wait for people to find their way in. God goes looking. Importantly, the servants are not asked to judge who deserves a place. They are sent to fill the table.

The problem of loneliness and exclusion is not fixed with explanation or sympathy alone, but with movement. With action. With people willing to be sent because God's response to empty seats is not resignation. It is commissioning! This is where the story meets us. We are the servant and it is our job to compel people to hear the invitation from God and accept. It is our job to share the invitation with everyone, no matter their status, their race, their gender, or their past. That is where MHA stands as one way the Methodist Church responds to this commissioning of God. Across care homes, retirement living schemes, and community services, MHA works to create community where isolation has taken hold, and connection where loneliness has become normal. One part of this is their befriending service. Through regular phone calls and visits, volunteers offer presence, attention and friendship. Alongside this, MHA's chaplains work day-by-day in care homes and retirement living schemes, offering pastoral presence, noticing who is struggling, and helping to ensure that no one is left unseen at the edges of community life.

This is the servant stepping out saying: there is room at the table.

So, what can we do to also be servants in this story?

For some, responding to this invitation will mean becoming a volunteer with MHA's befriending service, continuing to say to people in later life: you matter, and you have a place in this world. Some do this by

praying: holding before God those who feel lonely, and those who go out week by week carrying the invitation. And some do this by giving financially as a way of ensuring that the invitation keeps being offered, and that the table remains open to those who have stopped expecting a place.

May we be people willing to share that second cup. Willing to pray, to give, and to serve, so that the invitation keeps being offered. And somewhere, even now, someone who has stopped expecting an invitation is waiting to hear that it is true. Let us be people who help carry that invitation. Amen.

### **StF 611 – Brother, sister, let me serve you**

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| 1) Brother, sister let me serve you<br>Let me be as Christ to you;<br>Pray that I may have the grace<br>To let you be my servant, too.             | 4) I will weep when you are weeping,<br>When you laugh I'll laugh with you;<br>I will share your joy and sorrow<br>Till we've seen this journey through. |
| 2) We are pilgrims on a journey,<br>And companions on the road;<br>We are here to help each other<br>Walk the mile and bear the load.              | 5) When we sing to God in heaven<br>We shall find such harmony,<br>Born of all we've known together<br>Of Christ's love and agony.                       |
| 3) I will hold the Christ light for you<br>In the night-time of your fear;<br>I will hold my hand out to you,<br>Speak the peace you long to hear. | 6) Brother, sister let me serve you<br>Let me be as Christ to you;<br>Pray that I may have the grace<br>To let you be my servant, too.                   |

*Richard A M Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song*

### **Prayers of Intercession (edited from MHA)**

Creator God, we pray for all those throughout the world who feel abandoned, isolated, and lonely. We ask that community may be built up in all places, that people might reach out to those that are alone and welcome them in. We look to the example set by Jesus and ask that people of faith in all places might work together to draw all people into fellowship, putting your love into practice.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the church, both here and throughout the world, giving thanks for our church family and the fellowship it gives. Help us to see those in our midst who feel alone, and to reach out to them. Help us to make your church ever more closely resemble your kingdom.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for all who feel alone this day in our own nation. May they know your love, and may we reach out to them in fellowship and compassion. We pray for all those that are waiting to be matched with a befriender by MHA or by local befriending schemes and ask that they may feel supported in this time of waiting. We pray for those who don't know what support is available, that they might find the people and services that can best help them. We pray for volunteers, present and future, giving thanks for their generosity and care.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have recently moved into an MHA site. We give thanks for the fellowship found there and pray for anyone who is feeling alone or isolated; for those struggling with bereavement or ill health. We ask that they may find new connections and new ways to live life in all its fullness. We give thanks for the work of volunteers in MHA and ask your continued blessing upon them.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose loneliness is rooted in bereavement, that your promise of comfort to those who mourn may be fulfilled. May their happy memories in time outweigh their grief, and may they find hope in you. We call to mind those that we have loved and see no longer, giving thanks for all they gave to our lives.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, as we pray for fellowship and friendship for all who feel alone, inspire us and renew to play our part in driving loneliness from our communities. Help us to speak out against those structures and systems that increase isolation and reduce connection. Nudge us to see those times and places where we can reach out to someone who would otherwise be alone and help us always to be mindful of those who we might fail to see.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We offer these prayers through our friend and saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 255 – The kingdom of God**

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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 © Alexander Scott*

### **The Grace**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen.**