

21st June 2026 – Morning Service

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship

Jesus said 'The Kingdom of God is like the smallest seed that when it is planted in the earth grows and becomes the biggest of all plants.' As we come together to worship let us open ourselves up to the limitless potential of God's Spirit bringing life and growth to us and let us also be open to the signs of God's Kingdom among us and within us.

StF 25 – God is here!

- 1) God is here! As we his people
Meet to offer praise and prayer,
May we find in fuller measure
What it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
All our varied skills and arts
Wait the coming of his Spirit
Into open minds and hearts.
- 2) Here are symbols to remind us
Of our lifelong need of grace;
Here are table, font, and pulpit;
Here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
Here in silence, as in speech,
Here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each.
- 3) Here our children find a welcome
In the Shepherd's flock and fold;
Here as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us, as of old;
Here the servants of the Servant
Seek in worship to explore
What it means in daily living
To believe and to adore.
- 4) Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,
In an age of change and doubt,
Keep us faithful to the gospel,
Help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
All we have to give, receive:
We, who cannot live without you,
We adore you! We believe!

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Opening Prayer

Lord, we come as your people; we come as your friends. We come together. We come as we are. We come to worship that we might go out in your name.

Lord, we come because you have called us. We come because you have made everything ready for us. We come because, by your grace, you will make us whole.

Lord, from the business of our lives we have come to be still, in the hush of your quietness. From the noise of our questions, we have come to hear your voice. From the anguish of our hearts, we have come to receive your peace. From the emptiness of our struggles, we have come to be filled. Lord, we have come, and we ask that you will meet with us now.

Lord of all, your creation bears its witness to your glory; every corner of the world announces your praise; every tree and flower, every hill and valley, every lake, river and ocean joins in the chorus of praise to our creator God.

Lord God, Creator and Sustainer of all we see and hear, we offer you our worship and our praise. We praise you for giving us eyes to see and ears to hear that we may enjoy the wonders of your world - for the beauty of all that you have made and for the gift of being thrilled and uplifted by what we see and hear. We sing our hymns of praise to your glory, our one great, powerful and almighty God. We bring our praises in the name of Jesus Christ who is Lord of all the world. **Amen.**

StF 107 – I sing the almighty power of God

- 1) I sing the almighty power of God,
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
And built the lofty skies.
- 2) I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at his command,
And all the stars obey.
- 3) I sing the goodness of the Lord,
That filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with his word,
And then pronounced them good.
- 4) Lord, how thy wonders are displayed
Where'er I turn mine eye,
If I survey the ground I tread,
Or gaze upon the sky!
- 5) God's hand is my perpetual guard,
He guides me with his eye;
Why should I then forget the Lord,
Whose love is ever nigh?

Isaac Watts

Reading: Ezekiel 17: 22-24 (NIV)

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.

“I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”

StF 82 – O Lord my God

- 1) O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed!
- 2) When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;
- 3) And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die -- I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:
- 4) When Christ shall come with shout
of acclamation
And take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God,
how great Thou art!

*Ch) Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

Stuart K Hine © 1953 The Stuart Hine Trust

Reading: Mark 4: 26-34 (NIV)

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Reflection

Many great things begin in small and often hidden ways. A building begins with one brick upon another, a book begins with one word on a page, a journey with a single step, a giant oak from an acorn, a river from a small spring. Things that have integrity and truth always seem to start from humble beginnings.

In Mark 4, we have a collection of parables which mostly deal with the growth of seed. They serve as a commentary on what has been happening in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

The parable of the seed that grows by itself and the parable of the mustard seed were meant to encourage the early Church, which was worried about the slow growth of the Kingdom. These parables were telling the disciples to be patient, to trust, and not to expect instant results. Through the power of God, and from small insignificant beginnings, the Kingdom will grow into something great.

The prophet Ezekiel foretold that God would take a twig from the top of the cedar and plant it in Zion. Under God’s protective power that twig would grow into a great cedar, which would give shelter to every kind of bird, and this connects with the parable of the mustard seed in our Gospel reading.

In Jesus’ parable of the seed growing of itself, what is stressed is the certainty of the harvest once the sower has done his job. It was meant to encourage those early disciples who had become discouraged because little seemed to be happening. Like those early disciples we too want results and we want them fast. (God give me patience - and give it me now!) We live in the age of the instant product. We have instant soup, instant coffee, instant photos – pretty well instant anything – and although we know that the quality may suffer, we are often willing to sacrifice that for the time and effort saved because it is all about convenience.

This age could be called ‘The Age of the Push Button’. All we have to do is press a button or turn a switch, and things happen. All those labour-savings devices take some of the monotony and drudgery out of life and work, but there is a danger of living in the world of the push button. The push button encourages the minimum effort, the least cost, the shortcut approach to everything. It may lure us into always seeking the easy option, even when there is no easy option, at least, not if we want the genuine article.

There are some things that can’t be rushed. To grow to maturity as a human being is the job of a lifetime. To build a good relationship with someone takes time. To get to know and understand our children, or – for many of us now – our grandchildren, takes time. There are no shortcuts for things like these.

In Jesus’ story the farmer did his part; he sowed the seed. All he could do then was trust, be patient, and wait. These are not easy virtues for any of us and yet life calls for a lot of these virtues. Some people feel that they must always be up and doing as if everything depended on them, and I must admit that I am one of those people! I am no good at relaxing and just doing nothing. I need to be doing something and really that is no good for my sanity or my blood pressure! I know of many people who go on holiday and spend the time on a sun-lounger reading a book. That is certainly not for us. That probably explains why we don’t come home with a suntan. We don’t stay still long enough for the sun to catch us!

But joking apart, we have to acknowledge that we can’t do everything. Spiritual development, and indeed human development, is a process and it will go on, provided we don’t resist it.

I was talking to a friend of mine a short time ago and she said something to the effect that she feels that her beliefs are being changed and that it is something that causes her concern. I know where she is coming

from. I don't want somebody telling me what I ought to believe or trying to impose their views on me, but on the other hand I would say that I hope our thoughts and our beliefs are changing. If we still believe everything in the same way that we did as children, then we have not grown spiritually. We no longer believe in the tooth fairy, and we no longer believe in Santa Claus, and I don't mean that in any way to be disrespectful or to imply that the Bible is a fairy story. In Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 13 we read the words, *'When I was a child, my speech, feelings and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am a man I have no more use for childish ways.'*

When we were children, the seed was planted in our minds in the stories we were told, but it is only as we have matured and God has given us the intellect to reason it out for ourselves that we look at and, hopefully, see things in a different way. Don't worry if your thoughts are changing it is all part of our spiritual growth and development. We must remember that the Bible was written a long time ago for people of a very different culture from our own.

When we went to Israel in 1999, our guide Vered was a young Jewish woman who was very knowledgeable. When we talked about the stilling of the storm, she reminded us that on the sea of Galilee storms spring up in an instant and disappear just as quickly. She also told us that the level of the sea of Galilee was much lower 2000 years ago than it is today, so when the disciples perceived that Jesus was walking on water, he could, possibly, have been walking on stones just below the level of the water. I'm not saying that he did, but we don't know exactly what happened on either of these occasions, and I'm certainly not trying to say that Jesus didn't walk on water or still the storm. But at the end of the day, does it really matter? That is not what our faith is all about.

Hopefully our faith is much stronger now than when we were young, but that stronger faith has taken a lifetime to develop, and hopefully today we no longer see things through childlike eyes. Maybe life would be easier if we did!

Like the parable of the seed growing itself, the parable of the mustard seed, although short, is a very encouraging little story. It was meant to reply to the question 'could the Kingdom really grow from such humble beginnings?' Mark's reply was that the little cell of disciples could, indeed, become a Kingdom. The thing that I really like about this story is the bit about the birds making their nests in its shade. When we look at the Church today, I think we would agree that many are sheltered in its branches. The Church family is very important in our lives and the lives of many people worldwide.

A tiny mustard seed that grows into a great tree to give shelter to all the birds of the air, where each can feel at home, loved, and cherished, whatever their gifts, their weaknesses or their needs. What a beautiful and hopeful image of the Kingdom.

Seeds need darkness, isolation, and the cover of the earth in order to germinate and grow. Therefore, for something to begin in a small, hidden way, is, in fact, an advantage. It means it can develop at its own pace. We need to take care of things when they are beginning. If you wish the adult to turn out well then take good care of the child.

Great things are not done on impulse, but by a series of small steps taken over a period of time. Our lives are made up of little things: little deeds, little happenings, and so on. Just because we may not be able to go a mile today shouldn't stop us from taking the first step.

If there is something that we want to do, let us not hesitate and think too much. Let us make a start, however small. Let us take one step. Let us plant one seed. That is our part but having done that we have to acknowledge that we can't do the most important thing of all. We can't make the seed grow. That's God's part. And God does his part; any farmer or gardener will tell you.

Do you remember the song we used to sing as little children?

'See the farmer sow the seed while the field is brown,
See the furrows deep and straight up the field and down.
Farmer, farmer sow your seed up the field and down,

God will make the golden corn grow where all is brown.'

So, if there is something we want to do or goals we'd like to achieve, let's not sit around dreaming about them. Let's get on and do something about it. If we do that then we can be sure that, in good time, God will see to it that we have a harvest to reap.

After gathering in a bountiful harvest, a farmer took off his cap. Then standing in the middle of the empty cornfield, he looked up to heaven and said, 'thank you, Lord, for the fine harvest'. And the Lord looked down and said, 'and thank you – we did a good job'. We are the work of God's hands, but we are also God's hands at work!

Life calls for a lot of patience and trust. We can't plant an acorn today and expect to sit in the shade of an oak tree tomorrow. The same holds true for spiritual matters. It's up to us to make the effort and then trust that God's grace will take over.

Let us pray.

God of our lives, you call us to follow you into the future. You invite us to experience new things, to face new challenges, and to discover new ways of caring. When we are disturbed and fearful of what the future holds, give us courage. When we cannot see how we can do what you ask of us, remind us that you know and see into our hearts. When we get tired or feel disappointed by what is happening around us, remind us that you can bring change and hope out of difficult situations and help us to always look to you, our Strength and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

StF 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

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| 1) May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say. | 4) May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing -
This is victory. |
| 2) May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power. | 5) May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go. |
| 3) May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing. | |

Katie Barclay Wilkinson

Prayers of Confession

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we confess that we belong to a generation that appears to be hell-bent on doing its own thing. We confess that we have tried and failed. We thought we could follow Jesus and do it in our own strength; that we could serve our neighbour without relying on you; that we could live the Christian life and rarely turn to you in prayer; that we could plan our own lives, make our decisions and live each day, never listening to your voice and never reading your Word. We ask you forgiveness Heavenly Father, by your grace transform us and by your Holy Spirit teach us how to live for your honour and your glory. **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 684 – Here on the threshold of a new beginning

- 1) Here on the threshold of a new beginning,
By grace forgiven, now we leave behind
Our long-repented selfishness and sinning,
And all our blessings call again to mind:
Christ to redeem us, ransom and restore us,
The love that holds us in a Saviour's care,
Faith strong to welcome all that lies before us,
Our unknown future, knowing God is there.
- 2) May we, your children, feel with Christ's compassion
An earth disordered, hungry and in pain;
Then, at your calling, find the will to fashion
New ways where freedom, truth and justice reign;
Where wars are ended, ancient wrongs are righted,
And nations value human life and worth;
Where in the darkness lamps of hope are lighted
And Christ is honoured over all the earth.
- 3) So may your wisdom shine from Scripture's pages
To mould and make us stones with which to build
God's holy temple, through eternal ages,
One Church united, strong and Spirit-filled;
Heirs to the fullness of your new creation
In faith we follow, pledged to be your own;
Yours is the future, ours the celebration,
For Christ is risen! God is on the throne!

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Blessing

May the Lord help you to grow in his love, so that you may live a life worthy of the calling he has given you. May the Lord guide your steps and confirm your hearts in his love. May the Lord bless you and keep you in his care now and for ever. **Amen.**