

**Call to worship: Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 21**

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written in 1979 to celebrate the bi-centenary of John Wesley's preaching in Paradise Square, Sheffield. The words and melody of this one were composed during a train journey between London and Chesterfield and it was inspired by the opening of the 1933 “Methodist Hymn Book”, which reads ‘Methodism was born in song.’ The author, Revd. Brian Hoare was New Testament Tutor at Cliff College and in 1979 he was serving as a member of the main committee that created “Hymns and Psalms”. We shall sing hymn number 21, ‘Born in song’.*

**1. Born in song!**

**God's people have always been singing.**

**Born in song!**

**Hearts and voices raised.**

**So today we worship together;**

**God alone is worthy to be praised.**

**2. Praise to God!**

**For he is the one who has made us.**

**Praise to God!**

**We his image bear.**

**Heaven and earth are full of his glory;**

**Let creation praise him everywhere.**

**3. Christ is King!**

**He left all the glory of heaven.**

**Christ is King!**

**Born to share in our pain;**

**Crucified, for sinners atoning,**

**Risen, exalted, soon to come again.**

**4. Sing the song!**

**God's Spirit is poured out among us.**

**Sing the song!**

**He has made us anew.**

**Every member part of the Body;**

**Given his power, his will to seek and do.**

**5. Tell the world!**

**All power to Jesus is given.**

**Tell the world!**

**He is with us always.**

**Spread the word, that all may receive him;**

**Every tongue confess and sing his praise.**

**6. Then the end!**

**Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.**

**Then the end  
Of all earthly days.  
Yet above the song will continue;  
All his people still shall sing his praise.**

© Brian Hoare (born 1935)

***Let us pray.***

Lord of creation, we have come to worship and adore you today, for you are truly amazing, faithful and loving in everything you do. As we look around us, we rejoice in the beauty our world: the many varieties of plant and animals; the magnificence of the sky with many kinds of clouds and swirling myriads of stars at night; the trees that not only help absorb greenhouse gases, but release oxygen to maintain life; mountains and valleys, rivers, seas and islands that fill us with awe.

As we consider the vastness and complexity of everything you have made, we realize how amazing your wisdom is and how mighty is your power. Although, compared with you, we are weak and unimportant, you love us so much that you came as Jesus to show us in words and acts of love how you want us to live. His death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us new life through faith in him. Holy, gracious Lord, accept the best we can offer you in our worship today, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and friend. Amen.

***Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Lord of all, thank you for all you do for us, for all you give us and all you accomplish in us, for we know your love and generosity are boundless. You are holy and faithful, but we know that we let you down in what we think, say and do. We aren't always wholehearted in our discipleship and we know we don't always treat other people as we'd like to be treated. Help us change our ways and forgive us, Lord.

***'Lord, in your mercy,' ..... 'Hear our prayer'.***

Forgive us, too, when we fail to help neighbours who are in need, in distress, or in trouble, even though we know we should. Teach us to be warm-hearted and as compassionate as Jesus was in his ministry.

***'Lord, in your mercy,' ..... 'Hear our prayer'.***

Merciful God, we believe that you hear our prayers and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more. May we serve you and our neighbours with joyful faithful hearts in the precious name of Jesus, our friend and Saviour. Amen.

***As Jesus taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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 next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.***

***Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'***

- 1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,  
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,  
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**
- 2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,**

**Work for all people, trade for their skills;  
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,  
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:*  
*God of the poor, friend of the weak,  
Give us compassion we pray:  
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;  
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.***

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,  
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.  
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain. *Chorus:***

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams  
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;  
Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:***

**5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame  
Until your justice burns brightly again;  
Until the nations learn of your ways,  
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus: © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)***

***In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concerns for people nearby and far  
away to the Lord. Let us pray.***

Heavenly Father, in response to your loving-kindness to us, help us to serve as your earthly hands, feet, eyes, ears and voice as we reach out to people around us, especially those who need support and friendship. We know how much you care for us, so we want to care for our neighbours in return. We know that what we can offer isn't as much as we would like it to be, but help us serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we exceed our expectations, but where we fall short, we pray that you will reach out in compassion by warming the hearts of people with greater power and influence, so they may ease some of the suffering around the world, for we believe that nothing is beyond your powers.

Lord of all, hear our prayer for the leaders of the nations of the world. Warm and inspire them to govern with mercy and justice. Teach them to negotiate when disputes arise and to compromise in order to avoid warfare. It is heart-breaking to see reports about the injuries, deaths, deprivation and destruction in Ukraine and the Holy Land which falls very short of its title and we pray for a just ending to the fighting there. We pray for an end to strife in Iran, Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Somalia and Congo as well as to tensions between India and Pakistan in Kashmir and between Cambodia and Thailand. Lord, so much needs to be done, but let peace begin in our own hearts, in the way we treat our neighbours.

Heavenly Father, remember the victims of global warming, where strong storms, floods, drought and wildfires are wreaking great destruction. Help all humankind to take greater care of this planet over which we have been made stewards. Let us waste less, recycle more, pollute less and use only the resources we need, so that future generations inherit a healthier planet.

We pray for neighbours who are sick, in body, mind or spirit, for those who are in any kind of need, or trouble, for neighbours who are lonely or who have lost someone

dear. In a time of silence, we name people about whom we are especially concerned, confident that you will understand their need and will reach out to them. .... Heavenly Father, may we offer practical support wherever possible to those for whom we pray, but we ask that you will enfold them with your love, offering healing, hope, renewed strength, courage and, not least of all, lasting peace.

Holy God, we offer our prayer for churches in our Circuit and also the Church throughout the world. Unite us in Spirit, love and truth. Teach us to work together and give us the courage to bring good news to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world which desperately needs good news.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with both friend and stranger, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

**The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21**

Someone in the crowd said to him,

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied,

"Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them,

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable:

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself,

"You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

But God said to him,

'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Amen.

*A penultimate hymn was written by John Bell and the late Graham Maule of the Iona Community. It is set to a melody composed by John Bell, not their usual settings of old Scots ballads. We shall sing hymn number 701, 'Heaven shall not wait'*

**1. Heaven shall not wait**

**for the poor to lose their patience,**

**the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:**

**Jesus is Lord;**

**he has championed the unwanted;**

**in him injustice confronts its timely end.**

**2. Heaven shall not wait**

**for the rich to share their fortunes,**

**the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:**

**Jesus is Lord;**

**he has shown the master's privilege -**

**to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.**

**3. Heaven shall not wait**

**for the dawn of great ideas,**

**thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:**

Jesus is Lord;  
he has married word and action;  
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

4. Heaven shall not wait  
for triumphant Hallelujahs,  
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:  
Jesus is Lord;  
in our present imperfection:  
his power and love are for now and then for evermore.

© John Bell (born 1949) & Graham Maule (1958 – 2019)

**Sermon:** *'A person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions,' Luke 12:15*  
A businessman was walking along the jetty of a holiday resort when he saw a fisherman reclining in a deckchair, reading a newspaper.

**"What are you doing, just sitting there? Why don't you go out to catch some more fish?"** asked the businessman.

**"And why would I want to do that?"** replied the fisherman innocently.

**"If you do, you could catch more fish, buy another boat, hire some more men and catch some more fish!"** exclaimed the businessman, secretly thinking the fisherman to be very dull-witted.

**"And why would I want to do that?"** retorted the fisherman.

**"Oh dear, what a fool this man is!"** thought the businessman. Patiently he explained, **"If you did as I suggest, you could buy even bigger boats, employ more men and catch huge amounts of fish."** The fisherman looked even more confused:

**"And why would I want to do that?"** he asked. The businessman sighed and explained, as if to a child,

**"Well if you caught huge amounts of fish, you could afford to sell your business, put your feet up and relax!"** The fisherman grinned and replied,

**"And what do you think I'm doing now?"**

The reading from Luke consider the foolishness of striving for material possessions at the cost of one's relationship with God. Jesus responded to a demand from a man locked in a dispute over an inheritance, by telling a parable about a rich farmer. The complainant treated Jesus like a normal rabbi, who could be expected to arbitrate in civil matters, but Jesus recognised that the man was motivated not so much with a desire for justice as for coveting what his brother possessed. Jesus' refusal to have anything to do with the case was followed with a warning against making material possessions your life's aim. The reason why the farmer is described as **'a fool'**, is because, in another book of wisdom literature, Proverbs, the term fool is used for one who does not recognise God's involvement in human life and who lives for himself or herself alone. Such people often make gaining wealth their goal in life, leaving no room for God and neighbour as a result.

The result of the farmer's desire for earthly riches is a personal disaster: he dies before he can enjoy what he has striven for. Torah commanded Jews to share excess harvests with the poor, the orphaned and widows, but the foolish farmer wanted to keep everything for himself, forgetting that the harvest itself was God's gift. He may have died wealthy in material terms, but his conversation was self – centred, all 'I' and 'my'; no mention of other people or of God. What kind of relationship can he have had with family, friends – or, indeed, with God? It is easy to agree with Jesus in the case of the rich fool, but how would we stand if Jesus were to come to us now?

Whilst the country faces massive interest repayments for borrowing of not only of the current Government, but of the previous one, the United Kingdom's total credit card debt has exceeded £1.5 trillion with an average debt in excess of £20000 per man, woman and child for our plastic cards. Is it, therefore, a coincidence that we often hear news reports of youngsters running wild because their parents are too busy, or indifferent to care for them? Is it surprising that this country has record numbers of people with mental ill-health and one marriage in three breaks down? Our society is paying a high price for making what we earn or own more important than the quality of relationships with our families, our neighbours and, most importantly, with God.

Worse still, if Jesus walked into church now, could we justify what is being done in our name? I'm not alluding to our role in political relationships with other nations, but to the grinding poverty endured by the Undeveloped and Developing Nations, largely because of the policies of the IMF, the World Bank and Western Governments that not only break G8 agreements, but maintain unfair trading rules that actively forge the chains of poverty. ***Despite the Millennium Pledge, most Third World children still receive little or no education; many still begin work at five or six years of age; the sick can't afford to see a doctor, let alone buy medicines and millions of the world's poor don't even have one meal a day!*** The poverty we see in this country is bad enough, but the plight of our poorer brothers and sisters is an affront to the Almighty!

By his death at Calvary, Jesus broke the chains that kept us prisoners of sin, so we are called to make our own sacrifice to break the chains of poverty that enslave most of Developing World. Although the United Kingdom has begun to reduce some debt, there is still a long way to go and our Government is going to need to build up our defences because of President Putin's sabre-rattling. It is incredibly difficult for a balance to be struck. Nevertheless, all faith groups, but especially Christians, need to campaign harder to shake this country from complacency and false values. If we don't then things won't improve, so we will fail both our Saviour and the world's poor.

Although the United Kingdom faces serious economic problems which urgently need to be tackled but for those who argue that coming through the current crisis must be our priority, rather than caring for world's poor, let them consider this: ***19000 children from the Developing World die each week from starvation, or common illnesses that their weakened bodies can't fight.*** This means if I have preached for 15 minutes, thirty Third World children will have died. Christ set aside all self-interest to save helpless sinners like us. ***Dare we turn our back on the suffering of the Developing World, and put self-interest ahead of our neighbours' needs, or shall we renew our efforts to seek justice for them? Amen.***

***We shall end our worship with a hymn written by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. He was the Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London at the time and his organist, Gerald Barnes composed one of four melodies for the hymn which, naturally, is called "Tetherdown"! Hymn number 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy'.***

**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 lepers are cleansed, 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. The 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 {1911 – 1983}*

***Benediction***

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all forever more. Amen.