

A service for MHA Sunday, 12th June, 2022 (StF)

Introduction and call to worship

MHA is the largest charity care provider for older people in the UK, founded by members of the Methodist Church in 1943. Today MHA supports 18,500 older people. Today we give thanks for all that MHA, with the help of supporters, has accomplished; we pray for MHA's residents and members and for those who work and volunteer in the care of others; and we add our voice to helping all older people live later life well through advocating and lobbying for older people in society and those who work in the social care sector.

Our theme this year is Growing Together. Together we can support older people to live later life well through our praying, our giving of gifts of time and money, and together we can add our voice to call for adult social care to be a national priority for the Government. Our service today focuses on the benefits that God's creation offers to all of us, and how MHA is using their outdoor spaces to support the wellbeing of those in later life.

Psalm 95 verses 3 to 6

For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Cecil Frances Alexander, the wife of the Bishop of Kerry and Raphoe, William Alexander. Her first name was the result of a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called 'Fanny' by her friends! This hymn was one of a number written to explain the catechism to bored children at Sunday school, but is one of the most loved by adult, too. Number 100, 'All things bright and beautiful,'

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful,

The Lord God made them all.

**1. Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colours,
He made their tiny wings: Chorus:**

**2. The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky: Chorus:**

**3. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one: Chorus:**

**4. He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well: Chorus:**

Let us pray.

God of grace, in the story of creation, you made the earth a garden and entrusted it to us to till and to keep, a place of peace and beauty where we could walk with you.

In the story of redemption, the one who died for us was buried in a garden, and there you raised him up to greet us with new hope and risen life.

In the story of the Church, you tend us as a garden, a place of careful pruning and abundant harvest, where we can work with you.

Meet us, we pray, in all the gardens where we go for nourishment, refreshment and prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us offer our prayer of thanksgiving and confession.

Almighty God, we offer heartfelt thanks for all the many blessings we receive from you: for the good things we enjoy; for everyone who guides, loves and inspires us, but most of all for your undying love. Forgive us when we are selfish or self-righteous, unforgiving and judgmental. Pardon us when we have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness. Renew and restore us, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death. Re-ignite the embers of our faith, so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

Loving God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only pardoned us, but invite us to walk with you once more. Hereafter, may the Holy Spirit enable us to serve you and our neighbours gladly and faithfully, so our lives honour you in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

As our Saviour 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.

We continue with a hymn by Revd. Foliot Stanford Pierpoint, who was ordained in the Church of England before taking a post as classics master at Somerset College. This hymn was intended to be a communion hymn and was said to have been inspired by the view from a hill in Bath which filled the author with awe. We shall sing number 102, 'For the beauty of the earth'.

**1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies: *Chorus:***

***Gracious God, to Thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.***

**2. For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light: *Chorus***

**3. For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight: *Chorus***

**4. For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled: *Chorus***

**5. For each perfect gift of Thine
To our race so freely given;
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven. *Chorus***

© F.S. Pierpoint (1835 – 1917)

We come now to our prayers of intercession. When I say, 'God of grace', please respond with 'hear our prayer.'

Loving God, although the world in which we live is wonderful and self-sustaining, the news we hear speaks of its brokenness and daunts our spirits. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power.

God of Shalom, we pray for peace throughout the world, though our attention is concentrated at present upon the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. In your mercy Lord, bring about a negotiated peace that enable Ukraine to continue as a sovereign democracy. Reach out to the Ukrainian people, from President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, that they may remain steadfast, courageous and undaunted, so they will be able to resist Russia's might and frustrate the Kremlin's aims. We pray for the civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces and refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Hold them close in your care that they may be comforted and protected. May friendly countries provide support not only during the war, but for the time it takes to rebuild Ukraine from the ashes of destruction.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels. We thank you for those who supply and run food banks and for organisations like the Salvation Army which help the poor. Guide the Government, business leaders and local councils to find ways of helping the poor.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless our gifts and our words, bless our time and talents, and transform them so that there may be justice and equity for those in later life, and value for those who work to support them. Bless the work of MHA. The thousands of residents, members, staff and volunteers, the families and their communities.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the garden of your Church, O God. Guide those who plant and tend it. Protect the young, strengthen the weak, and make us fruitful in ministry and mission. May your Holy Spirit inspire this church and the World Church to find new ways of bringing good news to a world that desperately needs it.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the gardens of the world, the soil and rain and sunshine, and the work of all who sow and reap. Give abundant harvests, and teach us to share them with justice. Bless the efforts of the Disasters Emergency Committee and other charities as they strive to help people in Afghanistan and other famine-stricken countries. Bring an end to the embargo on wheat from Ukraine that is adding to the problems people face.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the gardens of our community, including the work and ministry of MHA and for all those in later life. For people who rely on the stillness and beauty of gardens for their wellbeing and for all those who give of their time and effort to improve the quality of life for others. In all our care for one another, make us grow in wisdom and love, in gentleness, kindness and truth.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Give tender care to all who are struggling through weakness, sickness, grief or change. Lord, thank you for bringing us through the troubles of the last two years. Comfort us for the loss of our freedoms and those we love. Show us your grace at work in the times when growth is painful or when death is near.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but warm them with your love, so they may find comfort, healing, courage and enduring peace.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with our neighbours, through Jesus Christ, the true vine. Give us grace to abide in him as fruitful branches, and bring us at last with all your saints to resurrection life. Amen.

The Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 43 verses 16 to 21

This is what the LORD says—he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. Amen.

The Gospel reading is John chapter 15 verses 1 to 8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Amen.

Our penultimate hymn was written and composed by New Zealander Richard Gillard. It took him more than a year to complete, for he wrote the first verse in 1976 and the remainder in 1977. I think it was worth the wait! We shall sing hymn number 611, ‘Brother, sister, let me serve you’.

**1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you:**

**Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.**

**2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.**

**3. I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.**

**4. I will weep when you are weeping:
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.**

**5. When we sing to God in heaven,
We shall find such harmony;
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.**

**6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you:
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.**

Richard Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song

Sermon

Marigold plants are able to transform some land, as small and insignificant as they may seem. Not only will they, with the right nurture and care, grow in to a colourful display providing beauty, but they have many other benefits too. Here is some science: The roots of a marigold hold within them a chemical substance that keeps harm away, like eel worms, and not only that but the roots also encourage the growth of fungi which exchange nutrients with host plants for their mutual health and growth. That's why marigolds make good companion plants for potatoes, tomatoes, basil, cucumbers, aubergines, squash, melons, asparagus, sweet corn, chillies and peppers. Here ends the science lesson.

It is quite incredible when you think about it, especially if you imagine transforming some waste land as Isaiah describes into something abundant. One of the ways MHA fosters wellbeing in body, mind and spirit is to encourage service users, tenants and residents to spend time in our gardens. I am a chaplain at Bridge Court, a retirement-living or housing with care home where tenants are encouraged to live as fully and independently as they can, backed up with twenty-four-hour care. Our garden is nowhere near as large as our neighbours' at Waterside House, but it has several raised garden beds which are tended by several of our tenants. Some beds are for flowers, whilst others are used to grow a variety of fruit, salads and vegetables. Not only do the tenant gardeners benefit by continuing a lifelong hobby, but other tenants enjoy the sights, sounds and produce that is grown. Moreover, the garden attracts many birds and squirrels, both of which are delightful, though the squirrels sometimes wreak havoc.

Our neighbours at Waterside House, offer dementia care and have a vast garden with paths that allow residents to wander safely and to enjoy the beauty of nature. The impact the outdoors can have on those living with a dementia is well documented and for many residents the sounds and smells in our gardens not only generate wellbeing, but

are signposts in their memories that allow them to live more fully in the present. This is being repeated in many parts across the whole of MHA, and with your support MHA is able to help more people who live with a dementia, both those living in the wider community as well as residents.

It is quite wonderful to take something that appears to be lost, forgotten, or neglected, and plant something in it, that not only brings colour and beauty but is also life giving. Vegetables may grow on their own, but adding marigolds as a natural pesticide which also exchange nutrients, enables something better to come about. It's like that in our work, friendships and of course our relationship with God. There is so much we can do on our own, but there is more we can do and be when we grow together.

Our gospel reading reminds us of remaining close to God. "Remain in me and I will remain in you", not because of anything else, except that we too can know life in abundance when we are in relationship with Jesus. Being part of God's church enables us to grow together in relationship with one another and with God. The marigolds teach us how crucial our roots are. Having our roots firmly established in God helps us to navigate this world, not so as to avoid pain and hardship, but not to face those things alone, God remains with us.

MHA is proud of its roots, and values the passion and vision of its founder, a Methodist minister, Revd Walter Hall, MHA continues to be inspired by their founding values today: nurturing mind, body and spirit, inspiring the best in each other, and respecting every person, treating them with dignity to enable people to live later life well. Isaiah says: "See I am doing a new thing...I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland". We've all experienced something of emptiness, of waste, of neglect. Look at how the pandemic affects our world, our communities our neighbourhoods. Health, jobs, relationships, family and friends: so much has been lost. And to grow back from that, to find healing, we need one another, together.

To give a voice for older people, to campaign for a better and fairer social care system, we need one another. The wonder of God's creation is seen in the way it continues to re-create. Despite the neglect...even in the wastelands there is growth. There is nothing so empty or so desolate that it cannot be filled with the love and the grace of God. Once something is planted it takes someone, or in the case of the huge garden at Waterside House, we could do with willing volunteers, to support the gardening staff to nurture, to grow and to tend.

The growth of MHA over the years required many hands, much giving and prayer to become a support to more than 18,500 older people across the UK today. In care homes, retirement living schemes and communities groups, MHA relies on thousands of staff and thousands of volunteers. For their specialist services providing chaplaincy, music therapy and communities schemes, and in creating beautiful outdoor spaces, they rely on people's generous giving. In campaigning on behalf of those in later life, and those frontline workers who care, we need to add our voice. We are better together. It is good for us to be in community, the church, to be that place where we can be nurtured and grow together. Not just ourselves, but to partner with others, so that together, for those in later life, whoever, and where ever they are, can be looked after and be nurtured and grow too.

Isaiah says, 'See! I am doing a new thing'. What is the new thing that God is calling you to? At MHA people discover and rediscover gifts and passions, hopes and dreams. Volunteers, residents, members, families and staff nurturing and caring, joining in with one another, finding joy and hope, growing together. Where there was wasteland there

will be streams of water according to Isaiah.

Where are the wastelands in our community? What new thing is God doing? What will you do? Maybe help someone with their gardening? Take some flowers to someone to brighten their day. Join together campaigning to fix social care and adding your voice? Just as plants do not live in a vacuum and their health depends on being connected to other plants, so too we need one another. Together with MHA we can make more outdoor spaces viable and useable for older people, together we can campaign and give a voice for older people. 'See I am doing a new thing', MHA invites us to be part of the new thing that God is calling us to as we grow together.

As part of our response, will you consider giving financially to support the work of MHA and specifically to enable more residents to enjoy the benefit of being outdoors? Will you add your voice to the campaign to fix social care by using MHA's tree of hope? May God bless our giving, and enable wise stewardship of our gifts so that those in later life can live with dignity and hope, and those who work in care can be valued. Through all that we give and do, may You be glorified. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Sydney Carter for the School of Southwark Cathedral in 1971. It was intended to be chanted unaccompanied, except by a tabor and the simple melody was named after the Provost of the Cathedral, Revd. Ernest Southcott, but has been misspelt in hymnals as 'Southcote'. Hymn number 476, 'One more step along the world I go'.

**1. One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:*
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.***

**2. Round the corner of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me: *Chorus:***

**3. As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know: *Chorus:***

**4. Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:***

**5. You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus***

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Blessing

May the blessing of God almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who plants, nurtures and calls us to grow together, descend upon us and remain with us forever. Amen