

A service for MHA Sunday (StF) 14th June, 2026

Call to worship: Romans chapter 12 verses 5 to 6

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 who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. Amen.

We are Church, people with many differences, yet united in Jesus Christ: people with a variety of gifts and graces, yet invited by Jesus to use them for God's kingdom. Our opening hymn was written in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. Hymn number 24, 'Come, now is the time to worship.'

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue

Will confess you are God,

One day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

For those who gladly choose You now.

Come, now is the time to worship

© *Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)*

Let us turn to the Lord in Prayer.

Almighty God, how wonderful and awesome you are. When we consider the works of your hands, the galaxies of stars, planets and moons that move according to your will, the beauty and complexity of life on earth, the dramatic lightning and thunder, the awesome power of wind and water that remind us how insignificant we are compared with you. And yet you have loved us with undying grace, even when we defied you and set ourselves against you.

At the right time you took our human form and lived among us as Jesus Christ. He revealed your nature and purpose to us in words and works of grace, becoming the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. By dying, he broke Satan's power over us and through his resurrection, death no longer has the final word, for Christ offers us everlasting life. Almighty God, how wonderful and awesome you are. Amen.

Let us confess our sins. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.

Loving Lord, accept our praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet on which we live, for all the blessings we receive from you, for continuing to love us even at our worst when we are faithless, loveless and disobedient, but most of all, for Jesus Christ without whom we hopeless and helpless.

Merciful God, we confess that we don't live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly. We certainly do not always love our neighbours as we love ourselves and, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience, we know how deeply we grieve you and add to the world's brokenness. Forgive us, Lord and help us change our ways.

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

Loving Lord, warm and mould our hearts and guide us to live as you want us to by obeying your call to serve our neighbours with compassion and generosity of spirit.

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

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus, unburdened by guilt. May we love and serve you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully, so our lives honour you in the beautiful name of our risen Lord Jesus. 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.

The second hymn was written by Marty Haugen, a hymn composer and performer from Minnesota. He is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. The house in this hymn is Mother Church, a community, not a building. Hymn number 409, 'Let us build a house where love can dwell,'

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell

And all can safely live,

A place where saints and children tell

How hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

Rock of faith and vault of grace;

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions: *Chorus*

All are welcome,

All are welcome,

All are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak,

And words are strong and true,

Where all God's children dare to seek

To dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

And of symbol of God's grace;

Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: *Chorus*

3. Let us build a house where love is found

In water, wine and wheat:

A banquet hall on holy ground

Where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,

Is revealed in time and space;

As we share in Christ the feast that frees us: *Chorus*

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach

Beyond the wood and stone

To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,

And live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger

**Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger: *Chorus***

**5. Let us build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.**

**Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: *Chorus* © Marty Haugen (born 1950)**

***We come with our prayers of Intercession for neighbours nearby and far away.
Once again when I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.***

Heavenly Father, hear us as we pray for this beautiful, but broken, world. We pray for people throughout the world who feel abandoned, isolated and lonely. We ask that community may be built up in all places, that people may reach out to those who are alone and welcome them in. We look to the example of Jesus and pray that people of faith in all places will work together to draw all into fellowship, putting your love into practice.

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

We pray for the church, here and worldwide, offering our thanks for the fellowship of our church family. Help us to seek and reach out to people in our community who feel lonely to ease their plight and make your church resemble your kingdom more closely.

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

God of grace, we pray for everybody who is feeling alone and unloved in our nation. May they come to know your love and may we and fellow Christians reach out to them in compassionate fellowship. We ask you to bless the MHA befriender scheme and other befriending schemes that they may feel supported as they seek to match those we seek to help with a befriender. We ask that those who don't know what support is available will find the people and services that will best help them and we offer a prayer of blessing for volunteers who offer their generous care.

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

Lord of shalom, of healing, peace and well-being, remember people we know who are unwell in body, mind or spirit, for those facing or recovering from operations and for all who care for them, in both hospitals and the community. We hold to you those whose earthly life is drawing to a close, asking that they may know your peace and be surrounded by love.

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

We pray for all whose loneliness is rooted in bereavement, that your promise that all who mourn will be comforted is fulfilled. May their present grief be outweighed by happy memories and may they find hope and strength in you. We call to mind people whom we have loved but see no longer, thanking you for all they gave to our lives.

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

Almighty God, as we pray for healing and peace for our neighbours, we pray for peace and justice in our world: for a just end to conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East; for an end to racial, religious and social tensions in our own country. Grant the leaders of nations and all of us the wisdom, courage and compassion we need to stand up for justice and kingdom values, so that all people may learn to live in harmony, embracing differences and recognizing our common humanity.

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

Lord of chesed, warm our hearts and inspire us to play our part in driving loneliness and need from our communities. Help us speak out against structures and systems that increase loneliness and reduce connection. Nudge us to see times and places where we can reach out to somebody who might otherwise be alone and help us to be mindful of people whose need we might not see.

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

Abba, heavenly Father, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Fill us with the fullness of your love, then send us forth to share it with everyone we encounter, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

Our next hymn was 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}**

Gospel reading: Luke chapter 14 verses 15 to 23

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man 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 make them come in, so that my house will be full.'" Amen.

Our next hymn is Sydney Carter's, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' which he wrote in 1965. You may not know that, during the 1950s and 60s, Sydney worked as a lyricist for Donald Swann in the famous revues of Flanders and Swann. Instead of singing 'The gas-man cometh', we are going to sing hymn number 256, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?'

1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there? Chorus:

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,

Were you there?

2. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? Chorus:

3. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there? Chorus:

4. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there? Chorus:

5. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there? Chorus:

6. Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, Chorus:

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,

I'll be there.

© Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}

Sermon: The Parable of the banquet. Luke 14: 15 – 23

Jesus' parable is about God's boundless generosity and human responses to it. It is a rebuke to the Chosen People, especially the Pharisees and Scribes, who were the invited guests of the heavenly banquet, but who declined at the last minute for the most trivial reasons. No sensible person would buy a field without seeing it first and, besides, there would be no reason why he could not see it a day or two later. The same applies to somebody buying oxen – the equivalent of a big tractor. There was no pressing need to try them out. If their quality was suspect, why on earth would you have bought them? The newly-married man might have claimed a scriptural basis for his refusal, for Deuteronomy decreed that he should stay with his wife for the first year of marriage. However, this rule was only to excuse men from military service, not social obligations.

The guests had originally accepted the invitation, so the host had spent time and effort to prepare the feast, only to have his slaves rebuffed with spurious excuses at the last minute. Their refusal was a great – and possibly calculated – insult to the host. It is no wonder that he was angry. Rather than cancel the banquet, the host directed his slaves to gather everybody they could, the poor and diseased, who were regarded as lost sinners by the Pharisees. When there were still unoccupied places at the banquet, the host directed his servants to bring in people from the countryside – real outsiders, for Jesus was alluding to Gentiles. The parable teaches us that we are all invited to be part of God's kingdom, irrespective of race, colour, creed, age, gender or politics. However, we must not presume that we are the 'chosen ones' and must answer the invitation without excuses.

This is, indeed, good news, but what does this parable require of us? The Lord loves us and he requires us to love our neighbours, including those who are marginalised or forgotten. This year MHA is focussed on the issue of loneliness which is

a serious problem in the United Kingdom today. A Community Life Survey from October 2023 to March 2024 reported that in England approximately 3.1 million who responded said that they felt lonely often or always. Some had not talked to another human being for a week or longer, in some cases a lot longer. Age UK states that older people living in England are 5½ times more likely to be lonely if they don't have someone to open up to when they need to, 5.2 times to be frequently lonely if they are widowed and 3.7 times more likely to be lonely if they are in ill health.

Key factors associated with loneliness in old age include: facing bereavement; living alone; living with restricting illnesses or disabilities; caring for a partner; physical and mental health difficulties; low finances that make activities unaffordable; not having access to computers, the Internet, or smart 'phones and reduced mobility. Current research points to lonely people dying younger, suffering more physical ill-health and being prone to clinical depression. Indeed, loneliness and lack of conversation can result in people showing signs of a dementia, even though they aren't living with dementia.

As a retired MHA chaplain, I don't just consider a person's physical and mental health: I look at their spiritual health. Spirituality is not just about our faith: it is about what gives life meaning to somebody; what helps someone to feel in touch with themselves and the world in general; a walk in town or countryside, a lovely view, sunrise or sunset, good food or even a cup of tea or coffee with a friend can enhance spiritual well-being; being in touch with nature, pets, poetry, music, crafts or cookery may meet our spiritual needs, as can meaningful routines or hobbies. Essentially our spirituality makes us feel it is worthwhile getting out of bed!

Whilst there are some people who prefer their own space and company, most others crave friendship, conversation – recognition that they are alive and valued, so a smile, a kindly word, a conversation or a hug can do wonders for most of us. (Just make sure that you have their permission before the hug!) We had a graph with a horizontal line across the centre. Above the line is well-being; below is ill-being. Our aim was and is to keep those we care for above the horizontal line and to recognize and remedy situations where they slip into ill-being. In our homes and MHA Communities, where people who live in their own home meet in community centres, we provide activities, sometimes entertainment and outings and we encourage people to eat together. However, not everybody who is lonely is able to live in one of our homes or be a member of a MHA Community which is where the MHA Befriending services come into the picture.

Many churches organize similar work to ease loneliness and MHA is trying to manage an organize befrienders, doing the usual safeguarding checks and providing training and practical advice. MHA Communities, Retirement Living Schemes and Care Homes, build up community within communities, supported by chaplains and in Dementia Care, music therapists. I still visit Bridge Court every fortnight to lead a short service, then have an hour's singalong, but I arrive there two hours before the service, so I can chat to tenants, day-centre members and staff, to share their joys and woes, for Bridge Court has become part of my family.

If you see a need for a MHA Community in this area, please let me know and I shall point you in the direction to make enquiries. A question I am often asked is whether or not MHA is only for Methodists and I will point out Revd. Wesley's ALLs! Rather like the host in the parable, ALL are invited. If you are thinking I'm after your money, well MHA will appreciate anything you are able to give, but we need your prayers and, if you are able and willing, you can become a telephone befriender by contacting MHA at mha.org.uk and Befriending Service for Older People. If you have problems getting

through, please let me know and I'll try to help. May God bless MHA and may he bless us, too. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by John Bell and the Late Graham Bell of the Iona Community. Although their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads, this is sung to a French carol melody, 'Noel Nouvelet'. We shall sing hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely, too:
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you.**

**2. Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry, too:
In the kingdom's causes,
Let me rage with you.**

**3. Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets,
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity, too:
Let my care be active,
Healing, just like you.**

**4. Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph, too:
Where good conquers evil,
Let me dance with you.**

**5. Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.**

Benediction

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