

A service for 19th July, 2026 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 86 verses 9 and 10

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Edward Russell Smith, “Tedd” to his friends. He was born and raised in Ontario, Canada, but became an American citizen and served as pianist for Billy Graham’s Crusades for more than thirty-five years, travelling the world as a result. We shall sing hymn number 36, ‘There’s a quiet understanding’.

**1. There’s a quiet understanding
When we’re gathered in the Spirit,
It’s a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.
There’s a love we feel in Jesus,
There’s a manna that he feeds us,
It’s a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.**

**2. And we know when we’re together,
Sharing love and understanding,
That our brothers and our sisters
Feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
For the way you love and feed us,
For the many ways you lead us;
Thank you, thank you, Lord;
Thank you, thank you, Lord.**

© Tedd Smith (b. 1927)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we come to offer our worship and adoration to you this morning with songs and prayers that proclaim holiness, wisdom, might and boundless love. You created life throughout the Universe and maintain it in compassion. It is amazing that you, the Lord of All, should care for feeble sinners like us, yet through the life, death and resurrection of you Son, Jesus Christ, you have redeemed us from the power of sin and death. Amazing heavenly Father, accept our heartfelt praise for your grace and goodness.

Thank you, Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy and for the wide variety of blessings we receive from you. Loving God, as we look around on this Summer’s day, we thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for even when we stray from you, in love you seek us out and welcome us home. Loving heavenly Father, all glory, honour, power and praise be yours now and evermore.

Merciful God, although we try hard to do your holy will, we know that we still say and do the very things we know we shouldn’t. We confess that we don’t always love and serve you wholeheartedly. Nor do we love our neighbours as we want them to love us. Help us to change our ways, Lord, and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers and we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and actions, so we live as you desire us to by bearing good news in all we do and say, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

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.

Our second 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.**

**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, when we remember the needs of people nearby and far afield, when I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.

Almighty God, omnipotent and holy, we pray for the world and all places where there is war, conflict, prejudice, division and fear, that leaders of nations will turn away from violence and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We pray for just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present, especially in Ukraine, the Holy Land and Iran and

we remember people who are victims of our failure to love one another as Christ has commanded us to.

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

Loving faithful Shepherd of your people, we pray for victims of disasters, refugees, the starving, overlooked and homeless and for all who seek to help them. We pray in particular for the people of Venezuela and Spain.

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

God of shalom, Lord of peace and wellbeing, we bring to you people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those living with a dementia and all who care for them; for people who are lonely, needy, troubled and afraid; for those whose lives are coming to an end and for all who are grieving. In a time of silence, we offer names of those for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you already know their needs and will reach out to them

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

God Most High, we pray for our leaders, both local and national, that you grant them wisdom and integrity in their service. Please end the toxicity that has developed in politics, so politicians are not threatened or harmed for carrying out their duties.

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

Lord Almighty, we pray for this church, churches in our Circuit and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us in mission, so we build your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness.

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

Abba, heavenly Father, please accept and answer our prayers, not as we deserve, but as you know and love us. Bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe and free from sin. Most of all, help us to share your overflowing love with friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

Our next hymn poses something of a challenge to somebody who believes in John Wesley's "Four All's", for Revd. Henry Alford's hymn speaks of predestination in the idea that some are born for salvation and others for condemnation! Nevertheless, it speaks of the 'Wheat and weeds', or 'Wheat and tares' depending on which version you are singing. Ours from "Singing the Faith" is considerably revised, but not quite what I really wanted. Perhaps I should take note of the advice given to nineteen-year-old Isaac Watts by his father: "If you don't like the old book, then I suggest you write something better!" Revd. Alford was Dean of Canterbury from 1857 until his death in 1871. Hymn number 123, 'Come, you thankful people, come'.

**1. Come, you thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!
Fruits and crops are gathered in,
Safe before the storms begin:
God, our maker, doth provide
For our needs to be supplied;
Come, with all his people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home!**

2. All the world is God's own field,

Harvest for his praise to yield;
Wheat and weeds together sown
Here for joy or sorrow grown:
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

3. For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall bring his harvest home;
He himself on that great day,
Worthless things shall take away,
Give his angels charge at last
In the fire the weeds to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In his care for evermore.

4. Even so, Lord, quickly come –
Bring your final harvest home!
Gather all your people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There together purified,
Ever thankful at your side:
Come, with all your angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest-home!

© Henry Alford {1810 – 1871} altered

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 13 verses 24 to 30 & 36 to 43

Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner’s servants came to him and said,
‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’
‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him,
‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’
‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said,
“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered,
“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery

furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” Amen.

We continue with a hymn written by Martin Lekebusch an I.T. specialist, who was born into a Methodist family, but is now an elder at a Baptist church in Gloucester. The hymn was written when Bob Dunnett of the Birmingham Bible Institute spoke about problems in society, drawing on passages from the prophet Isaiah. With just a week’s notice, Martin was asked to write a hymn that reflected this theme. I have asked that we sing the hymn to “Scarlet Ribbons”, which I’m certain you will know, so you can concentrate upon the words. Hymn number 703, ‘In an age of twisted values,’

1. In an age of twisted values
we have lost the truth we need;
in sophisticated language
we have justified our greed;
by our struggle for possessions
we have robbed the poor and weak –
hear our cry and heal our nation:
your forgiveness, Lord, we seek.

2. We have built discrimination
on our prejudice and fear;
hatred swiftly turns to cruelty
if we hold resentments dear.
For communities divided
by the walls of class and race
hear our cry and heal our nation:
show us, Lord, your love and grace.

3. When our families are broken;
when our homes are full of strife;
when our children are bewildered,
when they lose their way in life;
when we fail to give the aged
all the care we know we should –
hear our cry and heal our nations
with your tender fatherhood.

4. We who hear your word so often
choose so rarely to obey;
turn us from our wilful blindness,
give us truth to light our way.
In the power of your Spirit
come to cleanse us, make us new:
hear our cry and heal our nations
till our nations honours you.

© 1999 Martin Leckebusch (born 1962)

Sermon: *‘In gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.’* Matthew 13:29

One of my gardening books claims that chickweed is a sign that you have good soil and despite my best attempts my garden produces lots of it. It is a most frustrating plant, because its roots entwine themselves around those of seedlings and, unless I am alert, they will drag out new plants when I am weeding, particularly my peas and beans. Having said that, if my crops are reduced, it is only an annoyance, whereas the failure of crops in biblical times was often a matter of life and death, so Jesus parable was pertinent to his listeners.

The weed called tares, is almost certainly darnel which closely resembles wheat in its early stages, yet which produces toxic seeds, not grain. As it grows, darnel roots intertwine with those of neighbouring plants, so the householder was wise to instruct his servants NOT to pull up the weeds, as much good wheat would have been lost. Lest you consider the parable is fanciful, think again, as it was a punishable offence in Roman law to sow darnel amongst an enemy's wheat: clearly, such an act of revenge must have occurred on a number of occasions! The parable of the wheat and tares refers to problems within the Christian Church itself and to the Church within the world. These problems are not disputes or grievances, for which Matthew advocated a policy in chapter 18, but address the authenticity of believers within the community.

The parable establishes the field as the Church upon which Christ's followers, the wheat, grow. However, there is an enemy within the Church; people who appear to be genuine followers, but who could ultimately damage the faith community. The real issue lies in correctly identifying the darnel and the wheat within the Church. When Matthew wrote his gospel, the Church was already experiencing problems with the **Kerygma**, or what should be preached. Unorthodox views caused major problems, which is why we have the various creeds, such as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which are intended to guide members to the core beliefs. If you wonder whether or not such creeds were necessary, consider two heretical viewpoints of the early church. **Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch**, who paid his 'supporters club' to applaud his sermons, asserted that Jesus was definitely not God, but only a divinely inspired man, whom God had adopted at a particular point of time. Such a heresy is called '**adoptionism**'.

Bishop Paul's view contrasted with **docetism**, which held that 'the flesh' is evil, so Jesus only appeared to be human, but was fully divine. **Docetists** maintained that Christ cast no shadow and only appeared to die on the cross. I think all of us would agree that, were that the case, God would have played the cruellest trick in human history, but the God we worship is the Author of truth and would never stoop to deceive. We can see how heresies undermine faith and why the leading Bishops of the early Church met to devise a uniform Creed. Incidentally, during the **Council of Nicea in 325AD**, **St. Nicholas** is said to have struck **Arius the Heretic** on the jaw during a heated exchange, far from the image of a jolly Father Christmas!

One of the real tragedies in the World Church is the inability of many Christians to set aside differences of opinion and to work in unity. I am certain that St. Paul would feel the same frustration with the Church in the Twenty-First Century as he did with the Churches at Corinth, two thousand years ago. Divisions weaken us, so we need to work together and allow Christ Jesus to be our judge, bearing in mind **Frederick Faber's** verse, "**But we make God's love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own**", in "**There's a wideness in God's mercy**".

We should remember, too, that we are part of a world that challenges kingdom values and tries to lead us, the Church, away from being what we are called to be.

We need to be united in love and mission, for as John of Patmos wrote, believers are under attack by forces of evil. They may not be as obvious as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, nor the beast from the sea in Revelation, but they are just as dangerous as challengers of our faithfulness to Christ, possibly more so, because they often appear desirable, rather than terrifying. For example, we are all subject to the allure of advertising which can make us seek more than we need, making power, possessions and status more important than the needs of others, including our relationship with families, friends and the Lord. They sometimes tempt us to take shortcuts or to act unethically in order to gain what we desire. Many people are led astray by the cult of celebrity, where shallow lifestyles and twisted values are made to appear essential.

On-line social Media is often the opposite of what it was intended to be. I despair at the bullying, disinformation, misogyny and body or lifestyle-shaming that lead young people in particular to physical illness, self-harm or suicide. The same Media can generate propaganda to foster prejudices that result in social and economic injustice, dehumanising people on racial, religious, political or national grounds, or because of their gender, age, youth, disabilities, lifestyle-choices or appearance. It is too easy to seek the quiet life, to keep one's head below the parapet, but if we do, we hide the gospel light under a bushel and nothing will change. **Not only is indifference not an option, it is sinful.** A lukewarm Church is of no use to the kingdom of God. In 1961 President Kennedy said, **"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"** and he was right.

As we are called to live and work in the world, we need to stand firm in our faith and live as Jesus calls us to, maintaining our integrity and showing our love for the Lord by how we care for our neighbours, even those we find it even hard to like! We ought to encourage one another to be environmentally sensitive for the sake of future generations, for God honoured us by giving us stewardship of the world. If we fail to do that because we are distracted from mission by arguments or worldly desires, we will be dandelion and not the wheat we would like to be! Don't allow these evils to drive us apart, for only Satan benefits from division. **May our daily lives show that we belong to Jesus by our words and deeds of love and unity. Amen.**

We shall close our worship with a hymn by Matt Redman, who was raised in Watford and began leading worship at Souls Survivor Church when he was only twenty. He is an evangelist, singer-songwriter, perhaps best-known for '10000 reasons', but he is one of the most successful contemporary hymn-writers. We shall sing hymn number 446, 'I will offer up my life'

**I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.
In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart. Chorus:**

***Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung***

As a praise of your name for the things You have done?

O my words could not tell, not even in part,

Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.

You deserve my every breath for you've paid the great cost;

Giving up your life to death, even death on a cross.

You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin,

Opened up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in. © Matt Redman (Born 1974)

Benediction

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