

**A service for 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2026 (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 95 verses 1 to 3**

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. 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.***

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.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Merciful God, we admit 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 lead Christ-centred, loving lives, rather than selfish ones. Help us obey your call to serve our neighbours with kindness and generosity.

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 once more. Help us to love and serve you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully, so our lives honour you in the beautiful name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. 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.**

***Our next hymn was written by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher, who came from Country Durham. She was born in 1940 and became a local preacher when she was twenty. Her writings reflect her concern for those who feel disconnected from faith by their image of the church as being outdated and irrelevant***

*in the Twenty-First Century. Reflect on her words and consider how we can serve Jesus as he calls us to – possibly in new ways. Hymn number 664, ‘Lord, you call us to your service’. It will be sung to ‘Angel Voices’.*

1. Lord, you call us to your service,  
Each in our own way.  
Some to loving, caring, healing;  
Some to preach, or pray;  
Some to work with quiet learning,  
Truth discerning,  
Day by day.

2. Life for us is always changing  
In the work we share.  
Christian love adds new dimensions  
To the way we care.  
For we know that you could lead us,  
As you need us,  
Anywhere.

3. Seeing life from your perspective  
Makes your challenge plain,  
As your heart is grieving over  
Those who live in pain.  
Teach us how, by our compassion,  
You may fashion  
Hope again.

4. Lord, we set our human limits  
On the work we do.  
Send us your directing Spirit,  
Pour your power through,  
That we may be free in living  
And in giving  
All for you.

© Marjorie Dobson (1940 – 2020)

***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

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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.

*The writer of our third hymn, Karen Lafferty, wrote our next hymn during a financial crisis in 1972, when she was full of anxiety. She turned to Christ in prayer and sought solace by reading the Bible. When she saw Matthew 6, she realised that she would overcome the situation with God's help – and she did!*

*She said this: 'My life had to be centred around the promises of God's Word and be living proof that a person CAN take God at his word. The lyrics of my songs, coupled with my simple melodies, communicate these truths into the hearts and minds of those who listen.' We shall sing hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God'.*

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
And his righteousness,  
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

**Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:**

**Alleluia, Alleluia,  
Alleluia, Allelu–, Alleluia!**

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;  
Seek, and ye shall find;  
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;**

**Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:**

**3. We shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word  
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

**Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:**

## **Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 13 verses 31 to 33 & 44 to 52**

He told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

He told them still another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

He said to them,

“Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”  
Amen.

*We sing Bryn Rees’ vision of the kingdom of God. It is an all-URC composition, for Revd. Rees was at Tetherdown URC church in London when he wrote it and the organist, Gerald Barnes composed the melody, ‘Tetherdown’, too. 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}

**Sermon: Parables of the Kingdom of God: Matthew 13**

Matthew's gospel was written for the Jewish Christian community in Antioch during the last decade of the First Century when serious persecution of the faith by the Roman Empire was under way. It had started during the rule of Emperor Nero, thirty years earlier, but was about to be followed by what was called "The Reign of Terror" at the behest of Emperor Domitian between 93 and 96 A.D. Thus Matthew's retelling of the first two of Jesus' parables were intended to steady the nerves of members of the Church who were wavering, afraid that they would be swept aside by the might of Rome – for all would have remembered the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 after the Jewish rebellion.

The parable of the mustard seed predicted that a huge bush – the Church – would grow from a tiny number of people, representing the mustard seed. Certainly, whilst a mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds, its development into a plant four or five metres high is remarkable, but so was the growth of the Church from the Day of Pentecost when the hundred and twenty frightened and indecisive followers in that locked upper room in Jerusalem experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and poured outside, proclaiming the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Peter, inspired by the Spirit, preached his first sermon, as a result of which three thousand men and unnumbered women and children were baptised in Jesus' name. Luke recorded how the Good News spread and the Church grew with great speed. The reference to birds nesting in the mustard plant, was Jesus' coded way of saying that Gentiles – all comers – would be welcomed into fellowship, not just the original Jews.

The parable of a small quantity of yeast permeating a large quantity of flour – three measures would produce enough bread for one hundred people – again foresees the dynamic growth of the Church which could not be stopped even by the greatest superpower of its age. Note the word comes from the same Greek root as dynamite – explosive!

However, having given some encouragement, Matthew retold two parables which were a challenge to his listeners and are still a challenge to us two millennia later! What price are we prepared to pay to be part of the kingdom of heaven? In the first parable a man – possibly a hired labourer on one Denarius a day – discovered treasure in a field, reburied it and in great joy sold all he had, so he could buy the field and claim the treasure. Whilst we may well question his integrity, his joyful willingness to commit all he had in order to claim the prize, is the moral of the story: are we ready to offer all for God's kingdom?

The second account of the merchant who discovered a wonderful pearl and sold everything he had to buy it, is not about Christians giving up all for the kingdom, but of God's willingness to give his most precious Son to bring Adam's fallen race into a new, perfect covenant by his death and resurrection. Breath-taking! If we consider what God gave for our salvation: Jesus emptied of all heavenly attributes, except for love, to take our flesh and he willingly became the One perfect sacrifice at Calvary for the sins of the world; what could we give to match such amazing grace?

The moral is clear: if God is willing to give all he has to demonstrate his love for and commitment to us, dare we remain cold-hearted and uncommitted in response? The Methodist **Covenant Prayer** says '**I am no longer my own but yours..... I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal**'. Do we mean these words when we say them, or do we hope we won't be called to honour our pledge?

110 years ago today was the twenty-sixth day of the Battle of the Somme, on the first day of which the British and Empire armies suffered 20000 dead and 58000 injured attempting to take the German trenches. During the battle an Anglican vicar became

nationally famous when he earned the Military Cross for tending injured soldiers under heavy fire in no-man's-land. Yorkshireman, Revd. Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy followed his father into the Church of England. As a vicar, he was particularly concerned for the poor, the unemployed and disfranchised – giving away much of his salary to help them. He was soon in demand as a preacher at rallies and open-air meetings demanding social justice for all and won many admirers from the poor who heard him, but many fellow priests and politicians rejected him, calling him, **'That Socialist preacher'**.

Revd. Studdert-Kennedy saw the Great War as a battle between good and evil in the world, so in 1915, he joined the Army as a chaplain. He not only preached to the soldiers and sang hymns with them, but he actively supported them, writing letters home for them and providing little luxuries to make their lives happier. His habit of distributing cigarettes to them earned him the nickname, 'Woodbine Willie'. I dread to think what health professionals would say now, but cigarettes were less lethal than the bullets, shells and poison gas they faced hourly. Unlike many chaplains, he remained in the front line, rather than retiring to a safer base and he remained with the soldiers even after his MC had been awarded – when senior officers directed him to retire to the rear, lest he be killed!

When the Great War ended, Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy toured the country, trying to revive the Christian faith which had been much eroded during the war. His work overburdened him and, in March 1929, he collapsed and died in Liverpool. Many of the people who had criticised Revd. Studdert-Kennedy before 1916, now recognised his goodness and courage, but the best tribute of all came as his coffin was carried to the hearse. An unknown man simply stepped from the crowd and placed a packet of Woodbine cigarettes on his coffin – real recognition and appreciation for a man who had faithfully answered Christ's call. Revd. Studdert-Kennedy **fulfilled the last sentence of the Covenant Prayer: 'I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal'. Will we do so for Jesus' sake? Amen.**

*We shall close our worship as we sing hymn number 409, 'Let us build a house'. It was written by Marty Haugen, a hymn composer and performer from Minnesota. 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)

***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.