

A Service for MHA Sunday (StF)

14th June, 2020.

Call to Worship: Joel chapter 2 verses 28 and 29

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” Amen.

We begin our MHA service with a hymn written by Bernadette Farrell in 1993. Hymn number 706, ‘Longing for light, we wait in darkness,’

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see. Chorus:

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our Light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice. Chorus:

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed. Chorus:

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone. Chorus:

5. Many the gifts, many the people,

Many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,

Making your kingdom come. Chorus:

Let us pray.

Lord of all, holy and gracious, our life is in your hands. You are our Guide and Saviour, compassionate and faithful, who revealed your true nature through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the faith and power to seek and do your holy will. You give our lives purpose and meaning: you guide us through the darkness of the world with the light of your love. We rejoice that every day of our lives you care for us, nurture and protect us and though we sometimes stray from you, you don't abandon us, but seek us out and draw us close to you once more.

God of all time and space, we acknowledge our failure to love and serve you wholeheartedly, by limiting your loving concern for our neighbours, for our unwillingness to trust you when we are called to serve others, for allowing our worldly concerns to drive you from our consciousness. Forgive and increase our trust in you. O changeless God, so we may play our part in healing some of the brokenness we see around us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your abiding wisdom, made available to us throughout the daily wonders of life. Lord Jesus Christ, you reveal to us the joy, challenge and opportunities of daily discipleship. Holy Spirit, help us to grasp in faith, the human and the spiritual within our journey full of years. In trust and faith we praise you for open ears and eyes to your voice of love. In trust and faith we praise you for opportunities to bring comfort, consolation and courage to others as we journey on in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We shall say together the prayer Christ taught us:

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 the prolific Methodist minister Revd. Fred Pratt Green. Hymn number 388, 'Let every Christian pray,'

1. Let every Christian pray,

This day and every day,

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

**Was not the Church we love
Commissioned from above?**

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

**2. The Spirit brought to birth
The Church of Christ on earth**

To seek and save the lost:

God never has withdrawn

Since that tremendous dawn,

Those gifts of Pentecost.

3. Always the Spirit strove

To teach her how to love:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Age after age, anew,

She proved the gospel true:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

4. Only the Spirit's power

Can fit us for this hour:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Instruct, inspire, unite;

And make us see the light:

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

© Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your Creation and for the great gift of life, but more than these we thank you for loving us so much that you came to save us through Christ Jesus, your Son. In response to your grace, help us to play what part, however small it be, to build a better world by seeking justice for all-comers, by striving to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources rather than fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, rather than being divided by them. Help us to stand up against prejudice in any of its forms, remembering

that Jesus in his own ministry was open to outcasts and Gentiles, offering them his love.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who hold authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace, rather than using force of arms to have their own way. We pray for victims of war, terrorism and persecution: the families and friends of people who have been killed; those who have suffered life-changing injuries; others who are broken in mind and spirit; widows and orphans who are struggling to survive and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant them much needed support and steadfastness of spirit, so they may begin to rebuild their lives.

Lord of justice and mercy, hear our prayer for racial justice, particularly for the family and friends of George Floyd, whose death at the hands of a policeman has led to protests not only in the USA but in this country, too. Help us spread the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, so every life counts.

Heavenly Father, as we pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19, many of us are filled with anguish at the deep suffering of people here and abroad. Lord, the strains of the present state of lockdown are severely testing our faith and resolve. Reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of life, may the NHS receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. Bless all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers, key-workers and kind-hearted volunteers, who are seeking to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Grant them the determination and courage they need to cope with the pressures they are facing and keep them safe in their work.

Spirit of healing, whose loving-kindness is boundless, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are.

Loving God, remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or who are facing a broken relationship, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them..... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Faithful, all-embracing Lord, we pray for those, full of years, yet empty of peace: intimidated by unfamiliar walls, faces and routines, haunted by loose threads and unfinished business, fighting to hold together, body, mind and spirit. God of all peace, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of calm.

We pray for those, full of years, yet empty of purpose: unable to fill the void, left by absent friends and grown-up children; facing the losses of health, home and independence. God of all purpose, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of worth.

We pray for those, full of years and overflowing with joy: at one with beauty and inspired by love; whose hopes have, weathered many a storm and whose faces bear the wrinkles from countless smiles. God of all joy, through the example of our elders, grant us the courage to model contentment, resilience and grace for a new generation.

Hear our prayer for all who access MHA's outreach and services, for those who lead and guide MHA, for the managers, staff and volunteers who run homes and schemes day by day and for everybody who supports its aims through giving and prayer. May the fullness of your shalom be theirs now and always.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you and that the life of Christ may be revealed in all we do and say.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to shine the light of your love upon our sin-darkened world in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Gareth Hill in 2013 for the seventieth anniversary of MHA. We shall sing 'Timeless God, you hold our story,' to the Welsh melody "Calon lan".

1. Timeless God, you hold our story:

Weave our dreams into your plan.

Make your church a living witness,

To the work that Christ began.

Come the day that love has conquered,

And the hosts of heaven sing,

May our lives on earth have echoed:

'God is Lord and Christ is King'.

2. Gracious God, your offer wisdom,

Far beyond our human minds.

Yet you trust us, in our weakness,

To bring insight to the blind.

Come the day that love has conquered

And the hosts of heaven sing.

May our lives on earth have echoed:

'God is Lord and Christ is King'.

3. When our human powers falter,

Keep us focused on your call.

Strengthen us to share the message,

Of abundant life for all.

Come the day that love has conquered,

And the hosts of heaven sing.

May our lives on earth have echoed:

'God is Lord and Christ is King'.

4. God eternal, hear our longing,

To be heralds of your grace.

Till creation's restless longing,

Finds its peace in your embrace.

Come the day that love has conquered,

And the hosts of heaven sing.

May our lives on earth have echoed:

'God is Lord and Christ is King'.

Gareth Hill (1956 -) To 'Calon Lan' StF 323i

Our New Testament reading is Acts chapter 2 verses 42 to 47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Amen.

We shall continue our worship with a hymn by Mart Haugen, a liturgical composer and musical performer from Minnesota. He is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. 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)*

The Old Testament reading is Ruth chapter 2 verses 1 to 13

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters,

"The LORD be with you!"

"The LORD bless you!" they called back.

Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" The foreman replied,

"She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter." So Boaz said to Ruth,

"My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed,

"Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" Boaz replied,

"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." "May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls." Amen.

Sermon: "May the LORD repay you for what you have done." Ruth 2:12

At the time of Jesus, there was a great debate about which was the greatest of the Commandments. Jesus linked, 'Hear, O Israel, The Lord Almighty is one; you shall love the Lord Almighty with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength', with 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,' for if you love God, you will love your neighbour and by loving your neighbour you demonstrate your love for God. Our reading from Acts related how the first Christians shared their material possessions according to the needs of individuals

within their community – offering practical, rather than sentimental love – that led others to become followers and earned the favour of all the people.

If you want a really romantic story, you can set aside Barbara Cartland, or Mills & Boon, for the Book of Ruth is better and shorter than most novels! The story is simple: Elimelech, his wife, Naomi and their two sons left Bethlehem during a famine and settled in Gentile Moab. After Elimelech died, the sons married Moabite women and cared for Naomi, but ten years later, both young men died within a short time of one another, leaving the three widows in a terrible plight, for without husbands, they had neither status nor defence against any kind of privation. **In the unsentimental society of the time, there was no state support for people unable to support themselves.** All they could hope for was the charity of relatives, or of finding another husband, but as Naomi would have been past child-bearing age, another husband for her was out of the question! She knew she had to return to Bethlehem, if she was to avoid starvation, but her daughters-in-law decided to accompany her. Despite her protests, Ruth refused to leave her, declaring instead, **'Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried.'**

Ruth's courage was as great as her steadfast love for Naomi, because neither woman had any guarantee that they would be well-received by any of Naomi's relatives on her return. However, a relative of Naomi's late husband, a man called Boaz, saw Ruth gleaning the wheat dropped by the harvesters on his land. He not only permitted her to gather wheat, but told her she could quench her thirst whenever she wanted to and instructed the harvesters not to molest her. He told her that he had heard of her devoted care for her mother-in-law, Naomi and gave her his blessing. Not only did the story end happily with her marriage to Boaz. But Ruth became Great-grandmother of King David and a forebear of Jesus Christ, whose steadfast love for all of us led him to Calvary to redeem us from our sins. The Book of Ruth not only lives out the Greatest Commandment, but also directs us to care for the old and vulnerable, about which there is little mention in the Gospels, probably because most ordinary people at the time died before they reached their late forties. Nowadays, it is no longer unusual for someone to live well beyond eighty, whereas sixty years ago life expectancy was around sixty-five.

Alas, longevity is not always a blessing, for physical and mental decline can impose severe limitations for both the elderly and their families. In particular, dementias like Alzheimer's Disease become more prevalent with old age. Currently, one in five people over eighty live with a dementia –at present, approximately 900000 in the UK live with dementias, so care for the elderly, both in the community and in specialised homes has reached a critical state, exacerbated by COVID 19.

MHA was founded in 1943 as "Methodist Homes" by a Methodist Minister, Revd. Walter Hall, three years after he was due to sit down. Revd. Hall and a group of fellow -Methodists were concerned about the wholly inadequate provision for older people in the UK, who lacked the means of self-support in their retirement. In those days between workhouses and before the Welfare State was born, they would have been admitted to bleak Old Folks' Homes, or if they were living with a dementia, incarcerated in Mental Hospitals. Revd. Hall and his friends were convinced that all people are entitled to a decent quality of life at any age, including their declining years, so they opened **their first residential care home in Wallington, Surrey, during 1945.** They encouraged their residents to be as independent as possible, to follow their interests as fully as they were able and to feel valued for themselves, irrespective of their physical or mental conditions.

The first Methodist Homes were residential, catering mainly for people who required a medium to high level of care, through physical and mental impairment. Such residents were deemed incapable of remaining safely in their own homes, but were encouraged to live life as fully as their conditions allowed them to. Occupation and activities were provided to keep the residents in as high a state of well-being as possible. There were to be none of the scenes where residents just sit around the edges of a lounge, bored to distraction – which you still find in some residential and nursing homes even in 2009.

The Methodist Homes Housing Association was formed in 1977 as MHA expanded its services, to allow the development of sheltered housing schemes and other forms of housing for elderly people. During the 1990s, the 'Live at Home Initiative' provided volunteer support for older people who were isolated and living in their own homes, enabling them to do so safely and with confidence. In order to provide a strategic overview and vision, so that the charity may continue to grow and meet the needs of an ever-aging population, the MHA Care Group formed in April 2001.

Wolverhampton has three MHA homes. The oldest is Engleberg, in Compton, which is a house donated to MHA, many years ago and is a well-established residential home, much adapted to meet the needs of the people who live there. The other two homes are situated in Moathouse Lane West, Wednesfield and are purpose-built to fulfil their designated roles. The first, Bridge Court, is a Retirement Housing Scheme for tenants who rent their own flats, live as independently and as full as they can, but who receive twenty-four hour care all year long; the second, Waterside House, is a residential home for people living with dementia. Each home has a chaplain, activity co-ordinators and Waterside had weekly visits from a Music Therapist, Chris Wilson, who featured on "Vicky McClure's Dementia Choir". Bridge Court has to put up with my regular singalongs – which is probably why Wolverhampton has higher rainfall figures than its neighbours. For the past fifteen years, I have had the privilege of being Chaplain at the Wednesfield homes, though for the last three years I have reduced my hours, becoming Chaplain at Bridge Court. I have not only shared the lives of tenants and their families but am proud to be part of a team of Ruths, remarkable, loving carers, for whom duties are more than just a job: they are a real calling.

If you wonder what you can do to support MHA nationally as well as in Wolverhampton, there are a number of ways in which you can assist. As a charity, MHA is grateful for any financial or fund-raising support you can give, for volunteers to support activities and outings, or for donations of old artefacts or magazines between the 1930s and 1970s, for use in reminiscence sessions as stimuli. Above all else, please pray for MHA, those who manage and care at the homes and all who live there, sharing the charity's philosophy that those in their care may find well-being, fulfilment and be valued for themselves whatever their physical or mental state. Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn I wrote little over a year ago at "Ignite" in Brierley Hill Methodist Church. 'Dare to dream! God's kingdom's here,'

**1. Dare to dream! God's kingdom's here,
Off'ring hope throughout the earth:
Dare to speak of Christ the Lord,
God, who shared our mortal birth;
Dare to strive to live out love,
Raise the poor and show their worth.**

2. Dare to love – which is God’s Law –

Serving all in Jesus’ name:

Dare to trust the Spirit’s power;

Breath of God and Holy Flame:

Dare to follow where he leads,

And Good News for all proclaim.

3. Dare to serve through good or ill,

Trusting in his saving grace:

Dare to seek and do his will,

Spirit-bound in Love’s embrace;

Till our mission we fulfil

And we see him face-to-face.

M. Rider – after ‘Ignite’ at Brierley Hill 18th May, 2019. Modified 03062020

Suggested settings: “Madrid” StF 154 or “Heathlands” StF 134)

Benediction

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