

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit

SERVICE AT HOME

– Sunday, July 16, 2023

Prepared by the Revd Gareth Hill

This is my final Service At Home on my final Sunday in the circuit before retiring and moving back home to South Wales. The theme is a break away from the Lectionary to focus on Jesus' words "seek first God's Kingdom". I hope you read it as an encouragement to keep your focus on God and his rule in our lives. Thank you for your fellowship and encouragement over the past eight years and God bless you for the future - Gareth

Call to worship

(inspired by Matthew 6: 10)

In this world: kingdom living.
In our mouths: kingdom praises.
In our hearts: kingdom goals.
In our hands: kingdom gifts.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in
heaven! Amen.

*- Carol Penner, posted on Leading in
Worship. <http://carolpenner.typepad.com/>*

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Praise him! Praise him! (SoF 465)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRHedB3pRB4>

**Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
Sing, O earth—His wonderful love proclaim!
Hail Him! Hail Him! Highest archangels in glory;
Strength and honour give to His holy Name!
Like a shepherd, Jesus will guard His children,
In His arms He carries them all day long.**

***Praise Him! Praise Him! Tell of His excellent greatness;
Praise Him! Praise Him! Ever in joyful song!***

**Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
For our sins He suffered, and bled, and died.
He our Rock, our hope of eternal salvation,**

**Hail Him! Hail Him! Jesus the Crucified.
Sound His praises! Jesus who bore our sorrows,
Love unbounded, wonderful, deep and strong.**

**Praise Him! Praise Him! Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
Heav'nly portals loud with hosannas ring!
Jesus, Saviour, reigneth forever and ever;
Crown Him! Crown Him! Prophet, and Priest,
and King!
Christ is coming! over the world victorious,
Pow'r and glory unto the Lord belong.**

Prayers

The Kingdom of God is at hand – You proclaimed it, Jesus; but, it often feels a million miles away. You demonstrated its grace and showed its power, but the signs often appear faded or absent in our world.

We need Your Kingdom to come, O God, in all its fullness, in all its glory. This waiting, this "now and not yet" experience of Your reign is hard and frustrating.

So we pray for Your Kingdom to be revealed in our lives, turning our sickness and sin, our brokenness and fear into friendship and compassion, wholeness and joy.

We pray for Your Kingdom to be revealed in our neighbourhoods, turning our division and suspicion, our judgement and our competition into fellowship and care, compassion and service.

We pray for Your Kingdom to be revealed in our world, turning our war and our disparities, our consumption and our self-interest into peace and collaboration, stewardship and reverence.

Your Kingdom is here, and it is coming, O God. Make us faithful heralds of its message and tireless practitioners of its ways. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

- Adapted from John van de Laar (copyright © 2008), posted on Sacredise.com.

Lord's Prayer

Reading **Matthew 6: 19-33**

¹⁹ 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² 'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ 'No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

²⁵ 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ 'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Jesus, hope of saints and sinners

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcSqfZtdYd4>

The recording is an organ version of the tune Blaenwern. The words were written for a friend who asked for some contemporary lyrics relating to Facebook and other social media.

**Jesus, hope of saints and sinners,
yours the name we're called to share.
Hillside teacher, story-weaver
and the heartbeat of our prayer.
You invite us all to join you
at the Father's Kingdom call:
so the friends of heaven gather
to declare the Friend of All.**

**Where we nurse a fading image
of the Kingdom drawing near,
build upon our silent longing
make your vision crystal-clear.
Let our lives and lips reveal you
in the journey we've begun:
so that hope, in being faithful,
loves 'til death is overrun.**

**Passing fame and fading glory
are the hallmarks of our age.
Give us voices to declare you,
Jesus, Lord on every page.
Hallelujah, friend of sinners,
yours the profile we would own:
yours the call to closer friendship,
yours the invitation home.**

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1QG www.songsolutions.org*

Sermon

³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*

Today's reading is about Jesus reminding the people that if they lift their eyes they will see their priorities are not where they think they are.

The Jewish mindset in Jesus' day (and, arguably, still today) was that the Promised Land was theirs by right – not a gift from God. That mindset has led to today's conflict in the region.

Jesus didn't have time for hoarders of wealth, status and those who stood on their rights with no care for others. If you recall, when Mary discovers she is to bear the Messiah, she sings in the Magnificat of the rich being sent empty away and the excluded being raised up when God's Kingdom turns the world upside down.

At this year's Methodist Conference the church committed itself to the **Walking with Micah** challenge: living out God's Kingdom values in our daily lives.

So what is the Kingdom of God?

Well, Tom Wright says in *Luke for Everyone: The kingdom of God is, at its heart, about God's sovereignty sweeping the world with love and power, so that human beings, each made in God's image and each one loved dearly, may relax in the knowledge that God is in control. Reflecting on the birds and the flowers isn't meant to encourage a kind of romantic nature-mysticism, but to stimulate serious understanding: God, the creator, loves to give good gifts, loves to give you the kingdom - loves, that is, to bring his sovereign care and rescue right to your own door. At the heart of the appeal is the difference that Israel should have recognized, between 'the nations of the world' and those who call God 'Father' - that is, between Gentile nations and Israel herself. If the gods you worship are distant and removed, or are simply nature-gods without personhood of their own, then of course you will be worried. If your God is the father who calls you his child, what is to stop you trusting him?*

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, says that God's rule isn't found in the acquisition of money or an abundance of personal possessions. People who lust after those things will discover there is no room for the Kingdom of love and grace to break through all that possesses you.

You'll never see the generosity that's lying at your feet.

The generosity of God, Jesus says, is lived out by us when we recognise that we are deeply loved and valued. Our challenge is not just to trust that for our own lives but offer it to others as a sign of God's grace.

One of the greatest curses of our age is worry.

Sadly, our news media so often plays into that fear with headlines about what we should eat, or shouldn't; whether a particular drug is good or bad for us; are the next generations going to be OK when we're no longer around? So many things to get worked up about.

Don't get me wrong, there are real issues to challenge: the climate crisis; the almost-systematic belittling of the poor or refugee; the glorifying of acquiring wealth ... and much more.

But Jesus wants to point us to the unrelenting and undeniable love of God for all that God has made. Living well is not just about owning what you want.

Jesus said: 'Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?' (Matthew 6: 27)

The best thing we can do for people who have yet to encounter the Kingdom of God in their lives is to learn gratitude for the gifts at our door and let our lives speak for us.

We need to lose the idea of heaven as a mysterious place "up there" separate from earth which we never experience until we die. The new heaven and the new earth will be God's rule and reign transforming our old earth so that greed, sickness and death are wiped away for eternity.

The resurrection has already broken through and we are beginning to see those shafts of light. Every person who signs up for God's Kingdom here on earth is a citizen of heaven living that out here and now.

That means that greed and possession-grabbing is being slowly dismantled by people like you if you begin to show gladness and generosity, grace, loving service, hope in your street and neighbourhood.

So use every opportunity to live as people who have already moved address: from the

Possession Penthouse to Grace Street. Model
grace at all times. Live as a servant people.

Intercessions

*Bring before God the people you want to pray
for: family, friends, the sick, the marginalised.
Then share this litany.*

For all whose image of your creation
is marred by pain and suffering
Your kingdom come
Your will be done

For those who wake each morning
to shellfire and destruction
Your kingdom come
Your will be done

For children dispossessed of childhood
and transformed into soldiers
Your kingdom come
Your will be done

For orphans wandering lonely roads
to uncertain futures
Your kingdom come
Your will be done

For each persecuted family
carrying your Cross
Your kingdom come
Your will be done

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Worship** website. <http://www.faithandworship.com/>*

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Hear the call of the Kingdom (StF 407)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjRmIEhkHnw&list=RDhjRmIEhkHnw&start_radio=1

**Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.**

**Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.**

**King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.**

**Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.**

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...

*Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart
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Blessing
(based on John 3: 16-17)

Just as God's Word was sent into the world
to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day
to be light and love, healing and hope.
Go now to be light for the world!
And may the grace and peace of God the
Creator,
the Redeemer, and the Sustainer
come upon you this day
and remain with you always. Amen.

*- from "O Merciful God: God of Wisdom: Prayers for the Fourth
Sunday in Lent," written by Rev. Kathryn Matthews Huey and
the Rev. Susan A. Blain. Posted on the United Church of
Christ's Worship Ways website.*

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