

**Winchester, Eastleigh, and Romsey Circuit
Worship at Home Sheet Sunday 30th July 2023
Prepared by Revd Ruth Fry**

Opening prayer

Gracious God,
As we prepare to meet with you,
help us to be aware of your presence this day.
As we bring you our worship
And offer you our praise
Draw near to us now
As we draw near to you

Amen

Listen, read, pray, or sing along (STF 51)

<https://youtu.be/FLsGGPFSufQ>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail
not ;

as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :

Great is thy faithfulness !

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see ;

all I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love :

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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Prayers

Just and merciful God,
We glimpse your presence in the world you have
created, its power and beauty, its music and
poetry, its diversity and fertility.
We praise and adore you in the knowledge that
that you are with us in this world.

Thank you that we live and move and have our
being in you. Yet always amid creation's glory, we
see sin's shadow and feel death's darkness.
It is around us in the earth, sea, and sky, in the
abuse of matter. It is beside us in the broken, the
hungry and the poor, in the betrayal of one
another, and often deep within us, in a striving
against your Spirit.

Forgive us that we may forgive one another, help
us that we may become people of healing, and
renew us that we may be makers of peace.

In Christ's name we pray,

Amen.

Read Romans 8 v26-39

Read Matthew 13 v31-33, 44-52

Reflection

In chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Romans we have
the often debated comments about God's
election, foreknowledge, calling and
predestination. As Methodists we struggle with
such a seemingly Calvinistic theology and instead
choose to place a strong emphasis on prevenient
grace. However, if for a moment we set aside
theological speculation on what exactly Paul
meant here we see that his focus is pastoral
consolation about who is included in God's love. It
is an unambiguous and uncompromising message:
'*nothing in all of creation can separate us from the
love of God*' (v39)

Paul lists the many threats to human well-being —
suffering, weakness, frustration, bondage to

decay, ignorance, trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, death, life, angels, demons, powers, the present, the future, heights, depths, and, in case he's overlooked something, he includes "*anything else in all creation.*"

What would be on your list as a threat to human well-being in today's world?

Whatever it is Paul is adamant that ultimately nothing can separate us from God's love. It is a message of hope, of encouragement.

In the Gospel passage from Matthew 13 Jesus teaches his followers that the presence of God's kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed — something so small and seemingly insignificant, so fragile and easy to ignore. And yet, it has the capacity to grow into the greatest of shrubs becoming a tree that the birds choose to nest in.

God's kingdom Jesus says is as imperceptible as yeast leavening a batch of dough. It's difficult to detect unless you take the time to look very carefully. It's not immediately apparent, even though you know it's there somewhere.

It's also, Jesus says, like a fishnet containing all sorts of fish, the good and the bad together. The bit we sometimes think it's our job to decide is which fish are good and which are bad but that is for God and God alone to decide. Judgement belongs to God, and we may be in for some surprises!

The phrase '*The Kingdom of heaven is like...*' appears six times in all during today's Gospel passage.

The one that intrigues me most is the one about treasure hidden in a field. Why would anyone hide treasure in a field? Surely putting it in a safe would be a much better idea!

It wasn't uncommon in the first century to hide money or other belongings in the ground. Banks

simply didn't exist. Poverty and political turmoil made everyone vulnerable to having their possessions stolen or taken by those in power. It wasn't unusual therefore for a stash of valuables to be left in the ground because the previous owner had died without letting anyone know they were there. Jesus uses this idea to describe the kingdom of heaven.

By rights, such accidentally discovered treasure would belong to the owner of the land. Local laws and customs seem to suggest that so long as that treasure remained buried, it was considered part of the field. If it was removed from the ground, it was the property of whoever owned the land. In other words, the treasure could not simply be taken—that would be theft. However, if the field's owner sold the land this would include any buried valuables. The new owner would be legally free to dig up and take any such treasure.

The point Jesus is making is not about the details of the property laws of the day it's about the value of the Kingdom of heaven. He says the Kingdom of heaven is worth trading for absolutely everything a person owns; it is that valuable. Later in Matthew chapter 19, Jesus famously tells a rich young man he must sell all that he owns and follow him if he wishes to inherit eternal life.

Some commentators read this parable differently, seeing the treasure as the people of Israel and Jesus as the man who sacrificed everything — the riches of heaven, his life — to buy the field and thereby to redeem them. However, this seems to insert meaning into the parable that is not obvious from the text. The person who buys the field acts to gain something much more valuable than that which he sacrifices. Scripture elsewhere makes it clear that God did not choose Israel because of some special worth (Deuteronomy 9:4–6).

The key learning point here it seems is that any sacrifice is worth making to belong to the kingdom of heaven.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along (STF 255)

<https://youtu.be/KXZsAM4T7iU>

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.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

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.

God's 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)

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Edition, number **255**

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Intercessions

Holy God,
Who, in Jesus, touched the earth,
Admiring its beauty and blessing its people,
We honour you for the gift of life
And all the gifts that life brings us:
Food, shelter, company,
The experiences that make us think,
The people that bring out the best in us.

Hear our prayers for the places in this world
Where beauty has turned to ugliness,
Food has been replaced by famine;
friendship has been forgotten
And fear, hostility, and hopelessness
Have the upper hand.

God, in your mercy
Bring healing, bring peace

Hear our prayers for people who cannot pray
Because of pain, loss or worry;
And for those who will not love themselves
And so cannot love their neighbour.

God, in your mercy
Bring healing, bring peace

Hear our prayers for ourselves-
Our private yearnings,
Our secret hopes
And any doubt, jealousy, or anger
To which we hold too tightly.

God, in your mercy
Bring healing, bring peace

The Lord's Prayer

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

If you give your weekly offering through an envelope scheme or in cash, please set it aside, and pray with those who give using Standing orders.

Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them our lives, to be used in mission and service through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, read, pray, or sing along (STF 566)

<https://youtu.be/Of4I5bTdZ8M>

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee ;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love ;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King ;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold ;
take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine ;
it shall be no longer mine ;
take my heart — it is thine own ;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love ; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store ;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

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Closing prayer

The light of God to lead us
The power of God to hold us
The joy of God to heal us
The grace of God to caress us
The love of God to bless us
Amen.

Resources used:

Prayers adapted and taken from Iona Abbey Worship Book, the Iona Community, wild goose publications 2016 texts for preaching, a lectionary commentary based on the NRSV-Year C.

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