

Circuit Service for Sunday 26th July 2020 prepared by Revd David Jenkins

We are coming into the presence of the living God, Creator of the universe. Before God our own lives might seem quite insignificant and in some ways they are- God is from everlasting to everlasting - we're not: God knows and understands everything that's ever happened- you couldn't say that of us; the wisdom, strength and love of God are unlimited and that doesn't apply to us.

And yet everything matters, everything, however small has its place and its significance. The universe is not only about great planets but tiny microbes; so the thoughts we think and the words we say and the things we do matter.

We're coming now to our first hymn- Hymns and Psalms number 330 and Singing the Faith number 100 "All things bright and beautiful". The hymn speaks about how all things, even the tiniest ones, have their place.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPMA5I3-0Jw>

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all.

1. Each little flow'r that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.
2. The purple-headed mountains,
The river running by,
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky.
3. The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.
4. The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
To gather every day.
5. He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.

And now we pray together-

From the rising of the sun to its setting you are God. Your mercy streams over all the earth. Like the summer sun you pour your forgiveness upon us without reserve. All nations bask in your rays. All people share your blessings. All children are equally loved and valued by you.

Forgive us for imagining we are your favourites, for expecting special treatment, for thinking we deserve extra benefits. Help your church to be as inclusive as you are, as all-embracing as your love is. Give us breadth of compassion and openness to change. Show us how to affirm others and not shut people out because their ways are not our ways. Lead us to rejoice in variety and say yes to a multi-coloured world, encouraging the removal of prejudice and fear. So may your daily-rising sun shine on us all and your son Jesus be our example of how to share and care; how to forgive and how to embrace; how to touch and how to heal; how to suffer and how to die and how to live. In his name we ask it. Amen

Now we're invited to say the Lord's Prayer together

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done
in earth, as it is in heaven:
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil;
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever.
Amen.

When Desmond Tutu was 10 years old, a spindly, barefoot youth growing up in a slum area, he was walking along a dusty road with his mother one day when he saw approaching them a tall, gaunt white man in a flapping cassock and a big black hat. As the man drew near to Mrs Tutu he lifted his hat in greeting. Desmond had never seen anything like this- a white man giving a courteous and respectful greeting to a black woman. The white man was Trevor Huddleston, then parish priest of a black township in Johannesburg. Desmond Tutu went on to become the first black Archbishop of Cape Town. It was largely due to his influence, (and also that of Nelson Mandela), that when apartheid was finished and the new democracy came into being there was not the bloodshed and revenge that people had anticipated.

Maybe it all started back then, in Trevor Huddleston's greeting to his mother, that Desmond began to have hope that things could be different. When he was growing up, the white

boys used to call taunts as he passed, and his father was humiliated by constant demands to see his "passbook" and the black children would often scavenge the bins of the white schools for food.

There were various influences that helped Desmond Tutu -watching the wife of a missionary who was patiently teaching a dumb deaf and blind man to read Braille; and the influence of the wise black schoolmaster teaching in a school that didn't have enough desks to go around; and Trevor Huddleston himself later in Desmond's life. As a teenager he was suffering from TB and wasn't expected to recover. He went to a sanatorium and was there for 2 years and Trevor Huddleston used to visit him every week. Desmond Tutu said of him that he had learned to see people as people. "In his eyes you felt you were special-he made you feel you mattered."

And it all began with that small action of the raising of a hat.

The hymn we are going to sing is Singing the faith 137 and Hymns and Psalms 636 "New Every Morning"

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

1. New every morning is the love
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.

2. New mercies each returning day
around us hover while we pray,
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

3. If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still of countless price
God will provide for sacrifice.

4. The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask,
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

5. Only, O Lord, in thy dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above,
and help us, this and every day
to live more nearly as we pray.

Our first reading this morning is from Matthew's Gospel Chapter 13. Jesus is speaking.

"Every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasures things old and new.

So what is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

It's like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree and the birds of the air nest in its branches.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure which a man found hidden in the field. He hid it and then with joy sold everything he had to buy that field.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. On finding one pearl of great value, he too sold all he had - and brought that pearl."

Those parables of Jesus are saying that little things matter. There isn't a smaller seed than the mustard seed, but look what happens when it grows! The woman wouldn't use very much yeast, but look what it produces!

There is great encouragement for us when we sow seeds of goodness, of hope, of faith, of love- that those seeds will germinate. There is encouragement that the influence we have on society, however small it may seem, is worthwhile.

Thinking back to Trevor Huddleston raising his hat- it was such a small thing to do but how important that was! How easy it would have been to have passed by without taking notice!

Imagine someone has come to this country as a migrant and the first person they see is you and you give them a great smile of welcome -wouldn't that speak volumes?

Let me tell you what happened to me and my wife Paula on the 1st of January this year. We set out to go to a National Trust property, but it seems like everyone else had the same idea, so there was a long queue of traffic. We were going there for lunch but realised that wasn't going to happen, so we came out of the queue and we found a restaurant not very far away. You remember restaurants? We asked if it was possible to have a table for two and the waitress found us one and we thanked her. She brought the menu across and we thanked her, and ordered. A waitress brought knives and forks for us, and we thanked her. You could tell it was a posh restaurant because we normally have to find our own, or even bring our own! Another waitress came and poured water for us and again we thanked her. Then the meal came and we said "thank you". You know how when you're having your meal someone will come across and ask if we're enjoying it? When one of the waitresses came up she said "We are all talking about you both -you are so polite".

Now I found that very humbling and quite astonishing that in their experience such politeness was so unusual; that such a small thing seemed to matter so much. It made me wonder what's it like with other customers? Presumably there will be some customers who are downright rude, who would be demanding, complaining, almost abusive. But surely most customers are not like that? I guess most customers would concentrate on the people they are with and the food they're eating and maybe they wouldn't be so aware of the

waiters or waitresses? While we have human beings waiting on us (it may be robots before long!) it's good to acknowledge them and be grateful to them.

(I don't often tell stories to my credit for two reasons -one is it's the very opposite of what preaching is about and secondly there aren't many stories to my credit!)

During lockdown you might have been busy with jigsaws and you will know that every piece, however small has its place and contributes to the whole picture.

I would like to tell you a story that is cheeky towards Methodist ministers! I am one myself, and my colleagues are very long- suffering people in having someone with my sense of humour amongst them. This story does not reflect on the ministers of the Basingstoke and Reading Circuit as they are the crème de la crème! This is about ministers in another part of the country who have been to a conference and it is the last day of the conference and ten of them are coming down the corridor and they are singing as if they had just won the World Cup, "5 days! 5 days!". Someone asked what they were celebrating, and they replied, "This jigsaw -we've done it in 5-days and on the box it says 2 to 3 years!" This shows the high intellectual abilities and calibre required of Methodist ministers and the fact that they could learn something-for the whole of the conference was about collaboration (working together) and eventually it dawned upon the 10 of them that, of the 20 pieces that made up the Jigsaw, instead of holding onto the two pieces that each one had, if they worked together they might be able to finish the Jigsaw and lo and behold they did! So even Methodist Ministers can learn- and that's encouraging!

What I was going to do was to show you a picture of Albert Einstein, then I was going to ask you to study his hairstyle which looks disorderly and untidy; and then I was going to ask you to examine the lockdown hairstyle of the person who is speaking to you and ask can you make the connection? After a short pause I was going to say "Yes you're quite right-it is the hairstyle of genius!"

However Albert Einstein wasn't always a genius -for 2 years of his life he hadn't said a word and his parents were worried about him; and he didn't shine at school either-his Greek teacher said "you'll never amount to anything boy"! People might take time to develop but they are none the worse for that.

When the seed is buried under the Earth it doesn't attract much attention but it's on the way to being a tree-like shrub. God isn't always involved in the big and the spectacular, but in the hidden and slow developments too.

Methodist people will be delighted to know we are heading towards October and there's a shiver of delight that goes along the spine of every Church Steward at the prospect of returning all the "Statistics for mission" details! These statistics are not without purpose - after all it makes a difference if there's 3 people in your church or 300 -for one thing it takes a longer time to count 300! But for all the value of statistics, the kingdom of God is not measurable. It is not quantifiable. It is intangible.

So the first thing that we gather from these parables is that little things matter; the second thing is that every day of life matters. Those of us that have ever been close to death will

know that. We know every day of life is a bonus to be received with gratitude and lived to the full.

Jesus' parables are about what is happening every day. People are going about their everyday business- sowing seeds, searching for pearls ploughing fields, baking bread -and it's there that they will encounter the Living God -in everyday life.

In the Hebrew scriptures there are books known as The Writings which derive from the time of King Solomon. One of the authors, Ben Sirach, writer of the book of Ecclesiasticus said on one occasion, that a scribe like himself needed plenty of leisure, that he needed to meet with the great and to appear before rulers; so how could someone who handles the plough be wise? I think Jesus would have taken great exception to that! After all he spent most of his life working with his hands as a carpenter and master builder; and in his stories he's speaking about people who can encounter wisdom in handling the plough; people who don't have leisure, who don't meet with the great and with rulers, but are farming ,fishing and feeding their family and, in doing so, are finding the wisdom of God within everyday life.

I once lived up the road from George Herbert. (Not as the same time as George Herbert I hasten to add! Even though I might be getting on a bit I'm not that old!) George Herbert, one of whose hymns we are going to sing later on, said at the end of his poem on Prayer that prayer is "heaven in ordinary". Where we can encounter the life of the Kingdom of Heaven Is In ordinary everyday living.

One of the hymns we've already sung speaks of "The trivial round, the common task will furnish all we need to ask; room to deny ourselves, a road to bring us daily nearer God". Another hymn we will be singing speaks of "Praise in the common things of life, its going out and in, praise in each duty and each deed, however small and mean".

A monk called Brother Lawrence whose writings were collected together after his death and became a classic Christian book called "The practice of the presence of God", said that he could encounter God as deeply when he was washing the pots and pans in the monastery kitchen as he could when he was kneeling for worship in the monastery Chapel.

The early Celtic Christians had some insights from which we can learn. Their basic activities were accompanied by appropriate prayers. So when they got up in the morning there would be a prayer on rising; there would be prayer while making the fire; prayer while baking the bread, prayer while washing the clothes. The prayer underlined the significance of their ordinary everyday actions.

Often we go through life ticking off one activity after another, saying "We've done that" and probably not really thinking about the potential significance of that activity. The Celtic Christians were recognising the significance of what they were engaged in. They had other insights too.

You know the government (God bless them) have come up with various guidelines for us like social distancing at 1 metre + ? The early Celtic Christians believed that heaven was

about 1 metre + from earth and there were some places known as "thin places" (the island of Iona would be one) when the distance would be 1 metre -. it would be so close you can almost reach out and touch it.

I would like to say to you where you are this moment (probably in your own home) has all the potentiality to be a thin place, a sacred space, holy ground for it is there that you have all the potentiality to meet with God.

So little things matter and every day of life matters and how do we respond to that?

I'm indebted to the government again for one of their other slogans "Stay alert!", be aware, pay attention (Did your teacher ever bellow that across the classroom at you or was it just at me?) We need to stay alert for all sorts of things -we need to stay alert obviously to the corona virus and its potential dangers; we need to stay alert to the effects of climate change and pollution to our planet; we need to stay alert to the dangers of racism and all the isms of prejudice; we need to stay alert to political manipulation and the abuse of human rights.

And we also want to deepen our awareness -of God-of others and our self awareness. Jesus had eyes to see beneath the surface of things to their possibilities. All of life is infused with rich meaning and deep potential-if we have eyes to see. There is treasure to be discovered in very that field of activity in which you are now engaged. There are pearls of great price to be found maybe on this very day.

In any practical job it is very important to be attentive. Can you imagine during lockdown, never having done any wallpapering before, deciding to do it for the first time but not concentrating on what you doing! Can you imagine the results? If you're doing anything practical you need to give it your full attention, so the person who is planting the seed and the woman who is mixing yeast and flour, by paying attention, will ensure that the seed will be well rooted and the bread will be well baked. The man who is discovering treasure is quite possibly ploughing in that field and noticing what he's doing, and so he sees the treasure. The man who is searching for pearls needs to give his full attention because it would be so easy to miss that very valuable pearl.

Attention is not only important in practical life but in our spiritual lives too.

Little things matter, everyday of life matters, so stay alert, be aware, pay attention.

We're going to be quiet now when we have chance to reflect on what we have heard and then respond to it and then I will say a prayer

Weave a web of your presence around us today

Be with our hands as they work,

Be with our eyes as they see,

Be with our ears as they hear

Be with our tongues as they speak

Be with our feelings and thoughts,

Be with the people we meet

Be with the things we make

Be in and through,

over and under all,
that doing and hearing and seeing
speaking and making and being
we may glimpse your glory and hear your voice and joyfully work with you to create a new
heaven and a new earth. Amen

And now we sing our next hymn, in Singing the faith it's 668 and in Hymns and Psalms it's
803- this is the one by George Herbert, "Teach me my God and King in all things Thee to
see".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1Rpax0eEqI>

Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything
to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake;
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.

A prayer now for our world-
Loving King there's so much injustice in your world
injustice in families where not all are given the same rights or respect
injustice in countries where some are exploited and oppressed, discriminated
while others wallow in power or wealth
injustice between nations where some are destitute, hungry and in debt
so that others can live too well.
Lord we pray for all those that are victims of injustice of any kind

Loving King there is so much conflict in the world

conflict in families leading to deep wounds and unhappiness
conflict in countries between races classes and religions leading to suspicion violence and fear
conflict between nations -broken relations, skirmishes and wars we pray for all those that are victims of conflicts of any kind including those of the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen
Loving King we pray for Justice, peace and reconciliation in our relationships, in our society, and in our world.
We pray and pledge ourselves to work to the coming of your Kingdom in Jesus the Saviour's name. Amen

We sing now the hymn, "Fill Thou my life" Singing the Faith 73 and Hymns and Psalms 792.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 2mpY0NahNQ>

1
Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.

2
Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part:

3
Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

4
Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak.

5
So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.

Reading: Romans Chapter 8

We pray together:

Lord God as we hear these fantastic promises we thank you that you inspire our prayers; that you know what it is we want to articulate, whether we can put it into words or not and even through our groans and sighs you can interpret and understand. Thank you that you pray within us and lead us into valuable insights.

Thank you for the wonderful promises that all things work together for the good of those that love you- that however life may be we can hold onto the faith that you are working your purpose out.

We thank you too for the great promise that you are with us, so who or what can be against us? We are grateful for the great confidence it gives that the presence of God is alongside and within;

and finally we thank you for that wonderful promise that there's nothing in the whole of creation that can ever separate us from your love.

May these promises of God be foundational to the way we think and feel and live.

We ask this through Jesus our Lord. Amen

Our final hymn is Singing the Faith 476 and hymns and Psalms 746. "One more step upon the world I go"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6czcGvXQcM>

One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new,
Keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.

Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me.
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
You'll be telling me the way, I know.
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,

Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.

Our Service concludes now of a Prayer of blessing-

May God be your comfort and Strength, may God be your light and your way, may God be your hope and support and may the blessing of God Creator Redeemer and Giver of life be with you, now and forever, Amen.

(Some acknowledgments -the prayers that I'm using are mainly from a book from Donald Hilton called "The word in the world". There is a prayer of my own and the final blessing will be from the prayer book of a New Zealand church. The story about Desmond Tutu come from a book by Hilary Brand which is called "The power of small choices".)