

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 13 June 2021. Written service circulated to both churches

Welcome to worship from The Bridgwater Drive Church. Today will be a Communion service here at Bridgwater. If you are a member of Christ Church watching at home and wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper, you may, however the Christ Church monthly communion for June will be celebrated next week.

Call to worship (inspired by Mark 4:26-34)

Called to be branches in Christ's body,
we yearn to be connected to the vine.
Called to be mustard bushes offering shade to God's creatures,
we search for places to plant the seeds of faith.
Called to be growing with God in the midst of this world's painful questions,
we seek God's nurturing presence.

written by Katherine Hawker

Hymn Lord of all hopefulness (R&S 531)

Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like,
No cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking,
And give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,
At the break of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome,
Your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing,
And give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord,
At the eve of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours,
And give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord,
At the noon of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment,
Whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping,
And give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,
At the end of the day.

Opening Prayer from the URC Prayer Handbook, p43

God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meagre lives and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving kindness for you in this world. You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear. You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness. Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us. Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

written by Nancy C. Townley

Prayer of Confession

God, you created this world for abundance, so that even a tiny seed brings forth a great tree. Forgive us for keeping that abundant life to ourselves, for jealously hoarding your generous gifts, for choosing self-interest over compassion and justice. Teach us what it means to live harmoniously as part of your creation, generously sharing your abundance with our brothers and sisters in need. **Amen**

Hear and believe these words of grace:

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.

And so I declare to you: In Jesus Christ we are loved, we are forgiven! **Thanks be to God!**

Offertory

May the offerings brought this day be used as seeds,
planted faithfully and nurtured lovingly
so that God's way may be realized anew in this world.

Grant us the humility we need to plant and then tend your precious garden. Amen

written by Katherine Hawker

Bible readings: Mark 4:26-34

Today's reading from Mark seems to be in two parts, so I will take it in two parts. Firstly, "...the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces itself..." Claudia and I have recently planted a lot of seeds, and apart from watering them, it is a mystery how they have sprouted, or not sprouted in some cases – they have done it themselves. We forget, I think, when we hear about farmers and food cultivation, the ploughing, sowing and reaping that takes a lot of work, that the earth produces itself. There is infinitely more biodiversity and richness, in the natural, uncultivated rainforests, than we can ever produce in cultivated land. And yet we, humanity, is destroying rainforests at an incredible pace to grow cash products like palm oil, food for animals, and to provide grazing for animals. In the Amazon rainforest alone, around 17% of the forest has been lost in the last 50 years, mostly due to cattle ranching (World Wildlife Fund).

The main cause of deforestation is agriculture, and the main cause of forest degradation is illegal logging. In 2019, the tropics lost close to 30 soccer fields' worth of trees every single minute. In 2020, the Amazon lost 5 million acres. Deforestation is a particular concern in tropical rain forests because these forests are home to much of the world's biodiversity.

Eighty percent of the world's land-based species, such as elephants and rhinos, live in forests. Forests also play a critical role in mitigating climate change because they act as a carbon sink, soaking up carbon dioxide that would otherwise be free in the atmosphere and contribute to ongoing changes in climate patterns. Nature is declining at a rate unprecedented in human history, confirmed by a 2019 report on Biodiversity. The massive rate of extinction of plant and animal species will have grave impacts on people around the world.

And what can we do about all this destruction? It is so far removed from our existence here in Westcliff and the problems seem so huge, that it is tempting to simply bury our heads in the sand and not think about it. But there are things we can do – we can pray. We can avoid buying products with palm oil (check next time you are doing your shopping, an awful lot of food products we use include palm oil), we can eat less meat, we can be more aware of the issues and educate others, and we can sign petitions. And that brings me to the second part of this text – the parable of the mustard seed; that story we all know so well – from a tiny seed comes great things. From a tiny seed of each of us doing something to help the environment and prevent climate change, a big change can come.

The parable of the mustard seed emphasizes God's action in the world. God's action is almost imperceptible, tiny like a seed, yet it is real and will come to fruition in God's own time. Eventually it will grow into a huge tree. This may take many years, but God's work will be done, it will be

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completed. In our House Group study at Christ Church, we have been talking about how change happens, and how long it can take. As an example, think of the end of apartheid in South Africa. From the start of civil disobedience to the policy from 1950 until its end in 1993 took 43 years! But apartheid did come to an end eventually.

I think sometimes we can focus too much on what we think Christians should be like, or what the church should do to attract more people to worship on Sunday and forget that actually we spend most of our lives not in this building, but in our homes, at work, in the street, interacting with people who probably aren't Christian, some of whom may have another faith, or they may not believe in God at all, with lots of variations and combinations in between. And there are many people who don't know anything about climate change and how, while it might seem like a problem far away in other countries – someone else's problem – it will soon affect us with rising seas levels and coastal erosion. And the people whose houses have been flooded several years in a row and in the North and West will tell you that it is already affecting us. We are an interconnected planet, a whole ecosystem – what happens in the Amazon rainforest affects us all. The overconsumption in the West, in the UK and America, affects us all and yet our governments are still promoting a spending spree as the economic recovery from the pandemic – buy more, eat more, consume more!

Yet still God is at work in all of that, and through all people, if we are open to seeing it. It may be as tiny as a mustard seed, but the Holy Spirit is there in the world. But we also need to remember that we have a part to play – the seed may grow on its own, but we have to take the sickle and harvest it, otherwise it will rot in the ground. We must do all we can to protect God's creation for everyone. To stop the destruction of rainforests and nature.

The parable of the mustard seed may be a well-known story, one we've heard many times before, one we think we are comfortable with. And it may be a bit cheesy looking at a mustard seed and imagining what it might grow into, but it is a positive story. The kingdom of God will come, maybe not in our lifetime, or even our children or grand-children's life times, but it is up to us to keep searching, to keep learning and listening and to be patient waiting for the seeds to grow.

Hymn Mustard Seed – to the tune of *Amazing Grace*

Oh, once there was a mustard seed
Almost too small to see.
I planted it and watched it grow
Into a spreading tree.

The tree became a home for birds;
The branches held their nests.
The birds they came from miles around
to find a place to rest.

But mustard seeds will never grow
Into such spreading trees
We tell the tale so we will know
God's kingdom yet to be.

How can we live our lives today
to be the mustard seed?
We'll share God's love with all we meet
and help the ones in need.

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Lord's Supper

We remember, as we do at every communion service, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,

to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

This is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,

and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,

and we may be ready to live for you

and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Prayer after communion

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, we pray for the last day of the G7 Summit. Grant the world leaders wisdom to act with conviction for the benefit of the whole planet. We pray that these nations – among the wealthiest and most polluting in the world – will stop investing in coal, oil and gas in their recovery responses following the pandemic and that they will instead fund a recovery from coronavirus that leads to a steep decline in greenhouse gas emissions, and more sustainable energy and transport. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

As next week is Refugee Week, we pray for all refugees and migrants fleeing war and persecution. The Bible teaches us to care for the stranger in our midst, the orphans and widows. Help us to fulfil this desire of God's to care for the oppressed and vulnerable. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who go hungry and the homeless, and for the people who help and care for them. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the NHS and care home staff, for doctors, nurses, porters and cleaners, carers and their families, and for all those involved in the delivery of vaccinations. May they have the strength to continue in difficult times. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all people in leadership, locally, nationally and around the world that they may act with wisdom to bring about and maintain peace and order. We continue to pray for peace in the Middle East and an end to violence in Colombia and Myanmar, and for the rights of peaceful protest and demonstration, particularly in Hong Kong. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who feel lonely and sad, for those who struggle with mental health issues made worse by the pandemic, and those who care for them. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those who are ill and those who care for them; for those awaiting test results or treatment, for the dying and those who mourn. May your infinite love and grace surround them and bring them peace, in Jesus' name. May your loving presence be known to those who are lonely. Give your strengthening power to those who are weak. May those who lack be filled, those who mourn be comforted, those who worry be calmed and those who seek forgiveness find it in Jesus Christ; in whose name we now pray

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Break thou the bread of life (R&S 314)

Break Thou the Bread of Life,
Dear Lord, to me,
As Thou didst break the loaves
Beside the sea;
Beyond the sacred page
I seek Thee, Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee,
O Living Word.

Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord,
To me, to me,
As Thou didst bless the bread
By Galilee;
Then shall all bondage cease,
All fetters fall,
And I shall find my peace,
My All in all.

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Blessing

Mighty God, to you belong the mysteries of the universe.

You transform shepherds into kings, the smallest seeds into magnificent trees,
and hardened hearts into loving ones.

Bless us with your life-giving Spirit, re-create us in your image,
and shape us to your purposes, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing.

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