

United Reformed Church of Eastcote & Northwood Hills

Order of Service 26th JULY 2020, from 10am via Zoom

Welcome

Call to worship

As we enter God's holy presence this morning,
are you ready to hear again about God's kingdom?

Come, open your hearts and minds
to see the kingdom around us and within us.
Come, and worship the living God.

Amen.

A gathering prayer

Lord God, as we gather in our own houses but together in your house, we
thank you for your presence, here with us.

Thank you, Lord, that each one of us is unique,
yet we share a common bond in you.

We come together as one body,
but we all learn and experience things in different ways.

We thank you for your amazing word
that gives us so many pictures of your kingdom.

Something for everyone,
something to feed our hearts and minds.

Be with us, Lord,
and bless us richly as we call upon your name.

Amen.

A prayer of approach

O God, mere words cannot convey
what a privilege it is to be heirs to your kingdom.

As we explore your word today,
help us to learn about new treasures as well as old.

May we see the amazing things you can do in our lives.
We are part of your kingdom,
and we come to you in awe and wonder.

Amen.

HYMN: FATHER I PLACE INTO YOUR HANDS. VERSE 1.

**Father, I place into your hands
the things that I can't do
Father, I place into your hands
the times that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands
the way that I should go,
for I know I always can trust you.**

REFLECTION

On the pilgrim way: 'What does being generous mean now?'

Sheila Maxey wonders how to be generous in lockdown



A poem by John O'Donohue which has helped me throughout this lockdown is now bothering me. It begins: 'This is the time to be slow /... until the bitter weather passes'. Yes, I have had to learn to accept long, slow days – I have even learnt to relish them – but bitter weather is not my experience at all.

As time goes on, I become more and more conscious of other people's bitter weather: people with no income at all, queueing up at foodbanks; theatres and other creative ventures closing down; a generation of eager, sociable students faced with online tuition. The poem's third verse begins: 'If you remain generous,/ time will

come good'. But what does the word 'generous' mean for me, when all that society, and my nearest and dearest, want of me is that I should stay at home and stay well? I've had a lifetime of having an open door to friends and strangers. Now, no one has crossed our threshold since 19 March.

Generosity, in my book, means going out to meet need. Of course, there are phone calls – lots of them – and listening is a form of generosity. And I can give money, as we are living very cheaply during this lockdown. But basically, as society struggles with this calamity, 'stay at home and stay well' seems to be the mantra for my generation.

There is an awful lot of 'passing judgment' about – the complete opposite of generosity – and I find it in my own heart. I look at a group on my daily walk and think: 'They can't possibly be all one family.' I note the increase in traffic and think: 'Those can't all be essential journeys.'

An excellent United Reformed Church resource about the way forward suggests my age group should not gather in church buildings for many months to come. (See www.urc.org.uk/new-normal.) Congregations will have to gather without us. Now, that calls for generosity of heart on our part, and a certain humility: do we not wonder whether the congregation will survive without us? If it does, surely it will do so differently?

Out of concern, our children have sent us comedy DVDs to keep us going. They commission knitting from me to keep me occupied. I begin to think that the generosity of heart required of me is to live contentedly and patiently through this period, causing my nearest and dearest, including my church community, as little worry as possible. And, if possible, I should exercise a ministry of encouragement to those who are guiding our way forward in church and in society.

I leave John O'Donohue with the last word: 'If you remain generous,/ Time will come good;/ And you will find your feet/ Again on fresh pastures of promise,/ Where the air will be kind/ And blushed with beginning.'

Sheila Maxey is a member of Brentwood United Reformed Church, Essex

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Sheila Maxey www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2020/06/on-the-pilgrim-way-what-does-being-generous-mean-now/

NEWS OF THE CHURCH FAMILY

Offertory

READINGS

Matthew 13. 31 – 33; 44-52

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

The Parable of the Yeast

He told them another parable: '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.'

Three Parables

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Treasures New and Old

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Romans 8. 26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God's Love in Christ Jesus

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection:

Our gospel reading today presents several different ways to think about the Kingdom of Heaven. The images would have been familiar to the original audience, as many of them were drawn from everyday life. Initially there is a dual message about the Kingdom of Heaven. First it is something that seems very small to begin with but will grow. Like the yeast and the tiny mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven will grow and permeate far and wide. The other images speak to us about the worth or value of the kingdom. For both the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value, someone gives everything to acquire them, the kingdom is worth more than anything else.

Describing the kingdom as treasure buried in a field suggests that the kingdom needs seeking out. What does this image of hiddenness mean in practice? Even after you have bought the field, how will you find the treasure? Can you see signs of the treasure? Can you see signs of the kingdom where you are? What are they? How do we uncover the kingdom of heaven?

Talking of mustard seeds, today we have another "mustard seed" worth mentioning. Our service today is being "broadcast" on Zoom for the first time. I have no idea how many of you are listening to this on Zoom – either on screen or, for those of you who are without a computer or smart phone or are just very shy, by telephone. I suspect it is not too many. However it is only the beginning and maybe this particular mustard seed will grow as the weeks go by.

I have no idea when we will be back to holding services in the Church, but our new normal is unlikely to be the same as the old normal. The requirements of social distancing may mean that a good future for us may be to provide a live service alongside a Zoom service. We could even issue tickets or leave it to you to decide on Sunday morning whether to get up, get dressed and come to Church or whether to stay at home – even in bed, and take part in the service there! However please remember that if you are joining us with your camera on, everybody can see you! So please dress appropriately! You can switch off the camera, however, or choose to join us by telephone.

We are all learning as we go along, so some mishaps are to be expected. Apologies if everything does not go according to plan.

In our other new testament reading from Romans, Paul introduces the concept of the Spirit as an intercessor of God's people, and he unpacks the idea that God works in everything that happens to believers. The predestination spoken of here is a corporate one rather than individual; all those who respond to God's call are to be conformed to Christ, justified and glorified. The quotation from the Psalms acknowledges that God's people are often facing hardship and death. Nevertheless given the demonstration of God's love in Christ – who died and was raised – no forces or beings in the entire universe, even death itself, can separate believers from God.

HYMN: FATHER, I PLACE INTO YOUR HANDS VERSE 2.

**Father, I place into your hands
my friends and family.
Father, I place into your hands
the things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands
the person I would be,
for I know I always can trust you.**

A prayer of confession

Lord God, sometimes we feel so set in our ways.
We are not always ready to give something up
to gain the thing of value that you promise.
Forgive me, Lord, as we open our hearts to you.

We want to keep our treasures locked up
in a storeroom, safe from prying eyes.

Forgive us, Lord, as we open our hearts to you.

Sometimes we just expect things on a plate.
We are not always ready to work for something
that you call us to do.

Forgive us, Lord, as we open our hearts to you.

We do not want to be the yeast in our world;
but we are not always ready to be pummelled,
or to give up our easy lives.

Forgive us, Lord, as we open our hearts to you.

Sometimes we take our eyes off you and feel so lost.
Bring us back, please, Lord.

Forgive us, Lord, as we open our hearts to you.

Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Marvelous and mighty Lord,
we are forever grateful
for all the good gifts you give us,
for eyes to see,
for ears to hear,
for a brain to understand,
and a heart to love.

We praise you, Lord.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, you took so much care to describe your kingdom in ways everyone could understand, including us.

We pray today that you will pass on to us that gift of making ourselves accessible.

Keep us

from being a stumbling block to those who would seek you;

from using language that puzzles;

from actions that confuse;

from anything that keeps us apart from your people around us.

Your kingdom come, O Lord.

Your will be done.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.

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

HYMN: FATHER I PLACE INTO YOUR HANDS. VERSE 3.

**Father, we love to see your face,
we love to hear your voice.
Father we love to sing your praise,
and in your name rejoice.
Father we love to walk with you
and in your presence rest,
For we know we always can trust you.**

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WE WILL MEET WHEN THE DANGER IS OVER.

We will meet when the danger is over,
we will meet when the sad days are over;
we will meet sitting closely together
and be glad our tomorrow has come.

We will join to give thanks and sing gladly,
we will join to break bread and share wine;
and the peace that we pass to each other
will be more than a casual sign.

So let's make with each other a promise
that when we've all come through is behind,
we will share what we missed and find meaning
in the things that once troubled our mind.

Until then may we always discover
faith and love to determine our way.
That's our hope and God's will and our calling
for our lives and for every new day.
AMEN.

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Sung Blessing:

God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight;
so may God grace you, heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness into the light.

Hymns re-produced under CCL 11247