

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Today is Methodist Homes (MHA) Sunday and it is an opportunity to give thanks and reflect on the support given to over 18,500 older people through MHA's care homes, retirement living schemes and MHA Communities schemes. It has been an incredibly challenging year for MHA as it has for many others. There has been an outpouring of prayers and support from the church community to MHA and that has really encouraged and helped MHA's staff, volunteers, residents and members.

Today, some of the service is from the MHA resources for this day.

We take some time of quiet as we still ourselves and focus on God's presence. If you wish, you may like to light a candle as a sign of the light of Christ, present with us now.

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 46 : 7 – 11

The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields^[d] with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

HYMN: StF 55 Immortal invisible

[Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise - YouTube](#)

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

3 To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.

4 Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908)

PRAYERS

Adoration

God of all, we praise you for your loving presence with us through good times and difficult times. You know each of us by name and call us into communion with you and one another. Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth you welcomed the outsiders, your love is for all people and knows no bounds. You showed your ultimate love by coming amongst us as one of us, leaving behind all heavenly splendour to experience the joys and hurts, highs and lows, laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. Yet you remained obedient and full of love, and lived, served and died for us. You were raised from the dead and offer us everlasting life. And so we declare your holiness, majesty and beauty that radiates from all that is around us. And we with all creation shout praise to you. Glory, power and praise be given to you O God.

Amen

Confession

As we recognise your goodness and love, all that you have given to us, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your continued presence through your Holy Spirit, we recall in our minds the things we do, think and say that fall short of all that you call us to be. As we reflect on loneliness and isolation, we ask for your forgiveness in the way that your church has contributed to others feeling un-welcome in our midst. We confess the things that we haven't done which could have helped others feel more included. We offer our confession for the ways in which people still exist on the margins.

A time of stillness

Lord forgive us, and renew us in the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you.

Amen

Thanksgiving

We give thanks for your faithfulness to us. For the outpouring of your love and grace and for all that you have promised to us. For your love that has guided us through life, and will continue to be with us. We give thanks for communities where all are included and made to feel welcome. We thank you that you call us to be part of your Kingdom in the here and now. **Amen.**

HYMN: StF 608 All praise to our redeeming Lord

[STF 608 All praise to our redeeming Lord - YouTube](#)

- 1 All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.
- 2 He bids us build each other up ;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.
- 3 The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove ;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.
- 4 E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree ;
concentred all, through Jesu's name,
in perfect harmony.
- 5 We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.
- 6 And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

BIBLE READING : Mark 4:26-34

The Parable of the Growing Seed

²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head,

then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Reflection by Rev Val Spencer

We can all delight in seeds growing, be it on the window sill or in the garden. It's a miracle every time. You set the seeds, water them, and wait. And mostly they come up, breaking through from the darkness of the soil, fresh green shoots appearing as they aim for the light. You are not required to do anything but watch and marvel at the creative life force within the seed and the earth bringing new and abundant life into being.

Jesus uses seeds growing as a parable to show us what the kingdom of God is like. It grows with its own spiritual creative force bringing new and abundant life. But you have to set some seeds or you will not get a harvest! We must never equate the size or strength of the kingdom of God with the size and strength of the church or even our denomination - but we do see many signs of the kingdom in the life of the church.

Within Methodism we have two strong loving arms which touch the lives of thousands. There is Action for Children (formerly NCH) and MHA. Today we celebrate MHA.

It was established in 1943 as an independent charity by the Methodist Church and was then known as Methodist Homes for the Aged. It provides care and support to people of all faiths and none but still has very strong and essential

support from the Methodist Church as well as other Christians.

MHA now provides care and accommodation for 18,500+ people, has 7500 staff and 4000 volunteers. It is the leading charity provider of excellent older person care in the UK and includes Homes like The Martins here in Bury St Edmunds, and elsewhere retirement-living communities with social and leisure facilities and flexible care when needed, as well as community support for people living in the own homes.

The spiritual care of Chaplaincy is provided to all as well as the physical and emotional care needed and it is all offered sensitively and lovingly with a Christian ethos.

MHA is a sign of the kingdom as it has grown so much from its beginning 78 years ago. MHA has pioneered dementia care and such strategies as Music Therapy and is seen as an example of excellence nationally and is highly regarded professionally.

Jesus told a story about a tiny mustard seed growing into a very big shrub where birds could find a home. Maybe he told this story to let us know that his kingdom will not be like the kingdoms and empires of powerful human rulers but a gentle accommodating kingdom where a fragile creature can find a home. People who use MHA's services are often at a stage in life where their situation has become fragile and they need somewhere that meets their needs and provides a place for them to flourish and lead as full a life as possible.

At The Martins MHA and in Homes and Schemes around the UK people are assisted to enjoy life, their differences respected and interests fostered as far as possible within the context of their frailties and health.

Thankfully although it has been hard to live through the pandemic in Care Homes and many have felt the isolation acutely and suffered because of it, no-one died of Covid-19 at The Martins. Thanks to the amazing dedication of Manager Liz Fleming and the Staff Team residents have come through as well as they possibly could and we pay tribute to their dedication and sacrificial care. We have a Volunteer Support Group which helps in normal times to provide activities and worship and shares in social events and fund raising for the Amenity Fund.

Today you are invited to contribute to MHA funds as part of your offering to God. And especially today we ask your continuing prayers for The Martins and MHA as an organisation. God grant them strength, and long may they continue to bless us and our community with their caring and loving commitment.

HYMN: StF 611 Brother, sister let me serve you

[Brother, sister, let me serve you - YouTube](#)

- 1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.
- 2 We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road ;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.
- 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear ;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.
- 4 I will weep when you are weeping ;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you ;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.
- 5 When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.
- 6 Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Richard A. M. Gillard (b. 1953)

Prayers of Intercession

This prayer has been adapted from a prayer offered by Les, a resident of MHA Harwood Court care home in Newcastle upon Tyne

Let us pray

We pray for those on the margins of our society and those in our communities living alone without loved ones to support them.

We pray that You will open our eyes to the needs of older men and women within our midst, open our hearts to accommodate them and our minds to understand how what we do affects them.

We pray, especially today for the work of MHA and all it does to enhance the life experience of older people, including people living with dementia. We thank you for The Martins and ask for your blessing of the residents and the staff.

We pray for the work of MHA Communities as they seek to relieve loneliness and isolation, and particularly for the new work of Digital Communities reducing loneliness and bringing hope to people everywhere.

We pray for all those we are concerned about, our friends and our families and those that we hear about in the news. In a moment of stillness we bring before the Lord our own prayers.

We remember those great saints who have gone before us and now rest with you.

We pray that all people may learn of Your Love and Grace which are available to all and that reminds us we are never alone.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Friend. **Amen.**

We bring all our prayers together in the words that Jesus gave us.
Our Father..

Blessing of our Gifts

Loving God
we bring you these gifts
not to settle a debt or buy your favour
but as an expression of our love,
a token of our gratitude,
an outpouring of our worship
and a symbol of our commitment.
Use them, and use us, in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

HYMN: StF 410 Lord your church on earth is seeking

[Lord, Thy Church on Earth is Seeking \(with lyrics for congregations\) - YouTube](#)

- 1 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking your renewal from above ;
teach us all the art of speaking with the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission :
sending us to every place —

preach, baptise, fulfil my mission,
serve with love and share my grace.

- 2 Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within :
light for darkness ; joy for sorrow ;
love for hatred ; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.
- 3 In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Hugh Sherlock (1905–1998)

A prayer of dismissal

May God's blessing hold our community.
May Jesus' grace shape our community.
And may the Spirit's challenge
be our future.

THE GRACE

We say together...
**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all ever more. Amen.**

Some resources taken from
[MHA Sunday service 2021.pdf](#)
CCLI:7749.

