

East Durham Methodist Circuit:

On-line Service for 6th June 2021

Prepared by Maureen Simpson and Gwyneth Walsham

Reader (video): Margaret Naylor

Theme: Feeding Faith

Call to worship:

To You oh God we come,
To You oh Lord we turn,
To You we offer up our praise
As we seek now to learn more of You. Amen

Hymn: Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise Steve McEwan **StF 50**

1. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise,
the city of our God, the holy place,
the joy of the whole Earth.
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory,
He aids us against the enemy,
we bow down on our knees.

2. And Lord, we want to lift Your name on high,
and Lord, we want to thank You,
for the works You've done in our lives;
and Lord, we trust in Your unfailing love,
for You alone are God eternal,
throughout Earth and Heaven above.

Prayers of praise and adoration:

Let us pray

Lord as we come with our prayers this morning we begin by singing Your praises a theme we will continue in our Psalm this morning.

The work of God's hand is so evident to us in every sunrise and sunset, in flowers and trees not to mention birdsong. We also see His goodness and kindness through the actions of family and friends. Even in these difficult times of the pandemic we only have to look carefully to find evidence of God's work.

We have been blessed with some beautiful weather this week which has lifted our spirits and reminded us once again of how amazing You are. Sadly many people continue to experience difficult times when everything seems so grim and difficult. Lord we pray that even during these times we will find something to express our gratitude for.

It is so much easier to remember You on a Sunday when we sit in our churches or join in with the online services. Help us to continue to praise and adore You during the week when things may become busier and we have less free time.

You are our God, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, never let us forget that so we may continue to proclaim Your greatness to all nations until the end of our time on Earth when at last we get to join You in Your heavenly kingdom. **Amen**

Reading: **Psalm 92 A song for the Sabbath day** New International Version

¹ It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, ² proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, ³ to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. ⁴ For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

⁵ How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts! ⁶ Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, ⁷ that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. ⁸ But you, Lord, are forever exalted.

⁹ For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. ¹⁰ You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox, fine oils have been poured on me. ¹¹ My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

¹² The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; ¹³ planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴ They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, ¹⁵ proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Hymn: **Lord I lift Your name on high** Rick Founds **StF 332**

Lord, I lift Your name on high
Lord, I love to sing Your praises
I'm so glad You're in my life
I'm so glad You came to save us

**You came from Heaven to Earth
To show the way
From the Earth to the cross
My debt to pay
From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord, I lift Your name on high Repeat...**

Reading: **Mark 4:26-34** New International Version

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.

Hymn: **Just as I am** Charlotte Elliott **StF 556 / H&P 697**

1. Just as I am, without one plea
But that You died to set me free
And at Your bidding, 'Come to me'
O Lamb of God, I come!

4. Just as I am - Your love unknown
Has broken every barrier down -
Now to be Yours and Yours alone
O Lamb of God, I come!

2. Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fighting within and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come!

5. Just as I am, of that true love
The breadth, length, depth and height to
prove,
Here for a time and then above
O Lamb of God, I come!

3. Just as I am, You will receive
welcome pardon claim believe
Because Your promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come!

Message:

I love green! There are so many greens. Just look outside - even a single plant has so many greens in it. Green means 'alive'.

The Cedar of Lebanon is alive, big green and strong. Grass is only green for a while. It dies off quickly especially in the Eastern Mediterranean.

People are like that. Either big and strong in faith like the green of the mighty Cedar, or temporary like the grass. A sharp burst of faith - then it dies. This reminds me of the days of the crusades when people responded in hoards to altar calls. Where are they now?

Jesus loved plants and trees, He often used them in His stories. He could have talked about carpentry but not everybody understands carpentry terms. He could have quoted Judaism but that would have been inclusive and restrictive. He talked about plants and trees - people recognise them.

Like trees, faith is about growth. It doesn't stop with creeds, church membership or vows. There is always more. Growth and faith are silent, ongoing and constant. Who

can fail to be amazed at how an acorn turns to an oak, a caterpillar to a butterfly, a lost person to a believer?

How can faith stop growing if it is fed! We can sow seeds of faith in people. We can help them but they need space to grow. It is up to them to nurture it.

I am not a tree hugger, but love to touch them, smell them, see them. Even in lock-down I have been able to walk among trees. I walk to Station Woods and wonder at the colours, shapes and sizes, each a unique creation, like humans. Both have needs for light, food and water. The conditions must be right to grow. It's the same with faith. We have different personalities - we approach Spiritual growth differently.

We can be barriers to growth in ourselves and others. We put up barriers. Churches are full of them. Lack of time to pray. No space in worship. Church politics and vocabulary that is strange to new people and a barrier even to long established worshippers. Not talking to and really getting to know each other, especially new people, but it is possible for people to attend church for years and not talk to each other. It horrifies me that bullying happens in churches. Territorial behaviour is common: "that's so and so's seat" for example. Is this what God wants? We are all part of the growing kingdom of God. Like trees that compete for light, we need to give each other space and respect and to understand each-other's ideas. Value the experience of the old! Give each other space!

We are constantly reminded to care for the Earth. Care for the environment, going green. It's the same with faith. Faith needs to be fed, nurtured, shared and understood, regardless of how long we have been in church, we are all at different stages of spiritual development.

We need to feed our faith and that of others. Do we feed faith?

Meditation: by Maureen Simpson

1. I have faith, but can I see
How faith can blossom like a tree?
I stop and thoughtfully compare
How tree and me our spaces share.

2. As the trees share earth and sky
Let us pause and wonder why
We are so slow in faith to grow
Faith in those who do not know.

3. Is your faith evergreen?
Always there to be seen?
Or is it temporary, like the grass?
Temporary - soon to pass.

4. Do we plant faith like a seed
In folk we meet, folk with need.
Do we rejoice and let faith grow
In ourselves and folk we know.

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God You tell us that faith as small as a mustard seed is always enough. Remind us now that prayers small and feeble though we may believe them to be will always be enough if they are offered in a spirit of devotion and a willingness to be close to You.

You are able to take our scattered thoughts and images and see them grow into something beautiful for You.

We pray now for those closest to us - our families and friends who keep us going through the good and bad times.

For those around us in the community of faith, online, electronically, in spirit and in fellowship. All of them we know are known to You and we ask Your blessings for them.

We pray for the people who help to guide us through our lives and faith who direct us to your kingdom. For teachers with their diligence and commitment, those who we look upon as heroes and role models. May they be strengthened as they seek to lead us in ways of righteousness.

Father God we pray for all who serve the community and nation. Those who have responsibility for making the decisions which steer us through life. May they always stand for what is right and seek to benefit all whom they serve placing the greater good above the love of self.

We pray for all in need, broken or ill at ease in body, mind or spirit. Lord we name them on our hearts now.

Silence...

And finally we think of ourselves, small as a mustard seed, frail as the green shoot. Strengthen us in our growth. Take us and use us for your purposes. Let us believe in your ways and not in our own successes and failures for we are Yours and Yours alone in Jesus' name we pray

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to say:

**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: O Jesus I have promised John Ernest Bode StF 563 / H&P 704

1 O Jesus, I have promised
To serve You to the end;
Lord be forever near me,
My Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If You are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If You will be my guide.

3 O let me hear You speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
Lord speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

2 O let me feel You near me!
The world is ever near:
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, now draw nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

4 O Jesus, You hast promised
To all who follow You
That where You are in glory
Your servant shall be too;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve You to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my friend.

Blessing:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.