

Worship for 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Whether you are local to South Warwickshire or come from another part of the world, whether you are a regular worshipper or just trying it out, whether you have been a follower of Christ for decades or are not really sure what you believe you are welcome to worship.

The service has been prepared and led by a number of people:

Kate Tennyson and Tim Pearson have carried the administrative and technical work;

Candy Evans and Nigel Saxton are the readers

David Greenwood has chosen the hymns

Barbara Greenwood is the preacher

Richard Wilde and Audrey Simpson, that's me, will lead the prayers

If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on

swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Come, bring your mustard seed of hope,
bring your yeast of expectation,
your treasure of thanksgiving.

Bring the pearls that are your prayers,
bring the net of your lives.

Come, one and all to worship God.

Hymn: StF 82 – O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder

- O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hand has made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed:**

***Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!***

- When through the woods, and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees; when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:**

***Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!***

- And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin:**

***Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!***

- When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home – what joy shall fill my heart; then shall I bow in humble adoration, and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:**

***Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!
then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!***

Prayer of approach

Lord our God,
nothing can separate us from your love,
not things in our past, nor things to come.

There is nowhere we can go to flee from you,
nor can anyone come between us,
for your love is with us in life,
Your love is with us through death.
Amen.

Prayer of Adoration

We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for the richness of the parables
that root our faith in the ordinary
and yet transform it.
Increase in us a sense of wonder,
that we might see signs of your kingdom
wherever we are,
and bless us with the words to tell new stories
of your love and grace to all we meet.
We pray in your name.
Amen.

Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins.

Silence

Loving God,
**We have sinned against you
in what we have thought, said and done.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and turn away from what is
wrong.
Forgive us for the sake of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Silence

Declaration of forgiveness

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
This is his gracious word:
'Your sins are forgiven.'
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 254 – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,**

**and all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:**

***Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!***

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto
you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:**

***Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!***

**3. We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, Alleluia:**

***Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!***

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*1st Reading 1 Kings 3:5-12
(New Revised Standard Version - NRSV)*

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you."

⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between

good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

*Psalm Psalm 119:129-136
(New International Version - UK - NIVUK)*

¹²⁹Your statutes are wonderful;
therefore I obey them.
¹³⁰The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.
¹³¹I open my mouth and pant,
longing for your commands.
¹³²Turn to me and have mercy on me,
as you always do to those who love your name.
¹³³Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me.
¹³⁴Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may obey your precepts.
¹³⁵Make your face shine on your servant
and teach me your decrees.
¹³⁶Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
for your law is not obeyed.

*Epistle Romans 8:26-39
(New Living Translation)*

²⁶And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.
²⁷And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.
²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love

God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love

³¹What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³²Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honour at God's right hand, pleading for us.
³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶(As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.
³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel *Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52*
(New Living Translation)

Parable of the Mustard Seed

³¹Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

Parable of the Yeast

³³Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

⁴⁵“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls.

⁴⁶When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Parable of the Fishing Net

⁴⁷“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, ⁵⁰throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹Do you understand all these things?”
“Yes,” they said, “we do.”

⁵²Then he added, “Every teacher of religious law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of

Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old.”

Sermon

When I was a teenager I remember being entranced by a cartoon which was published in the newspaper my parents took. It was entitled *Love Is...* and each installment depicted a cute cartoon girl and boy illustrating one possible way of completing that sentence: Love is bringing her a bunch of flowers, just because; Love is rubbing his feet when they're aching; Love is cooking the meal she likes best, even when you don't.

There are many, many ways of ending that sentence, because there are many, many ways of experiencing love. And I would say the same approach would work if we swap the word Love for Life. Life is beautiful; Life is difficult; Life is not all a bed of roses; Life is what happens while you're making other plans; Life is a sexually transmitted disease which is invariably fatal; Life is a journey, a puzzle, an enigma, a gift.

Human beings have always wrestled with, and argued about, the right way to live. A lot of the angst we feel about it has to do with social expectations – they way we are accustomed to people behaving, and the pressure we put on one another when someone doesn't fit in. But social mores change over time and place. Six months ago, if I had met someone for the first time in a formal setting I would have put out my hand to shake theirs, and I would have been a bit miffed if they declined. In early March, we had three new people turn up to Bread Church at Warwick, each of whom put out their hand to shake mine when I approached them, and I declined – I do hope they weren't offended. Now – I just can't imagine shaking anyone's hand, for a very long time.

One of the ways in which we cope with the complexity of life and relationships is by making rules. We've certainly had a lot of those in the past few months – we've struggled to adapt, to

keep up when they change, and to know what to think when other people seemed to be either ignoring them, or taking them to the nth degree. The trouble with rules is that they cannot cover every single situation or occurrence. Hence they need to be interpreted.

When God offered Solomon, who had just been made King, anything he wanted – offered to grant him one wish, if you like – he asked for wisdom. Wisdom to know how to interpret and apply the law; wisdom to decide between competing priorities, to discern the best way forward for all of the people he was called to rule over. In so doing, he implicitly acknowledged that he would often face situations when he wouldn't know what to do for the best. I'm sure we've all felt like that at times, not least during this pandemic. When the way ahead is unclear or confusing, our readings this week offer us encouragement and hope.

Our Gospel reading ends with Jesus saying that 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. What is he talking about? Well, scribes were scholars of the law. They had read and studied and pondered how to understand and apply the Hebrew Scriptures, what we tend to call the Old Testament, for years and years. That's the old treasure. But the Kingdom of Heaven – the intimate, personal knowledge of God, the relationship with our creator which Jesus speaks of, is the new treasure. It is like the wisdom which Solomon asked for and received – but it's so much more. It is the ability to read the times; to understand the way that things are changing and moving, and react accordingly.

I don't know about you, but I feel that that would be a wonderful ability to have, and I'm also aware that I have plenty of room to grow in that regard. So, in these rapidly moving and

confusing times, where do we turn? Here are two thoughts for you take away and ponder for yourself.

The first comes from the parables in our Gospel readings. The mustard seed and the yeast show us the potentially enormous power of small things. The habit of reflection or prayer – taking even a minute or two to pause at regular intervals, to allow our mind to still, can be incredibly powerful. In those few moments, we may find an insight which unlocks the problem we've been wrestling with; we may find new feelings of compassion towards the person who's been annoying us, enabling us to engage with them in a more graceful way. Small things make a big difference – a word of welcome or encouragement, a smile to the stranger we pass on our walk, a phone call or a text or a card to tell someone we are thinking of them, can have far-reaching effects. Each act on its own may seem insignificant; but if we make them our daily habit, they can add up to a great deal.

The second comes from our reading from Romans. Do you sometimes feel that you don't know what to pray for – or how to pray? Do you ever wonder if God is listening, if there is any point in praying at all? You are not alone in that. But the promise of Romans is that God's Holy Spirit helps us when we don't know how to pray. God is praying for us and in us, even if our own words and actions feel inadequate. In truth, our words and actions will always be imperfect. But they are still precious to God, because we are precious to God. Our trying, our desiring to please God, pleases God. We try and we fail, or we fail to try – but that won't stop God loving us. Nothing will stop God loving us. Nothing can cut us off from God's love, even when it doesn't feel that way.

Remember the power of small things. A word of prayer here, a kind action there, a moment's stillness to invite the Spirit to speak. These are

the small things of our daily lives which add up to one big thing – building the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now. Remember the love of God, which is always with us, whether we are aware of it or not. God’s love is amazing, unconditional, all-embracing, never ending. God’s love is yours, and it’s mine, for ever.

Hymn: StF 255 – The kingdom of God

- 1. The kingdom of God
is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy;
God’s power and glory
in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.**
- 2. The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God’s banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.**
- 3. The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.**
- 4. God’s kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory
to God all in all!**

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

We offer prayers of thanks to God:

We pause and think back through what we have read, seen or heard today. We think of the outstanding women and men of faith down the generations. King Solomon of whom we heard today whose birth in controversial circumstance perhaps nurtured humility and his quest for wise discernment. Queen Deborah who, years later, would give good and Godly leadership with compassion for her nation informed by her faith, Mary whose response made possible the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way in which He modelled wholesome and holy living.

Then think of those down the centuries to our own time who have stood out from the crowd exercising wisdom and compassionate leadership.

Then thank God for those who would never stand out – indeed would shrink at the very idea, who have been role models, mentors and guides for us in our life’s journey.

For all these good and Godly people we give thanks.

And now the prayer for day 26 in the Handbook penned by Teresa of Avila

All creation blesses you, O Lord,. Exiles offer you worship. Pilgrims hallow your name. Saints adore you. Humanity offers its praise. And we your servants lift our hearts and voices to you in joy and thanksgiving.

Amen

Hymn: StF 654 – The love of God comes close

- 1. The love of God comes close
where stands an open door
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor.**

*The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*

2. **The peace of God comes close
to those caught in the storm,
foregoing lives of ease
to ease the lives forlorn.**

*The peace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*

3. **The joy of God comes close
where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life
are found through smiles and tears.**

*The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*

4. **The grace of God comes close
to those whose grace is spent,
when hearts are tired or sore
and hope is bruised and bent.**

*The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*

5. **The Son of God comes close
where people praise his name,
where bread and wine are blest
and shared as when he came.**

*The Son of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk his way.*

Prayers of intercession

We bring the needs of others and ourselves to God. Let us pray:

Father God, we rejoice in the feeling of belonging to this amazing organism, The Church. Today celebrating our partnership in the gospel with Christians in Eurasia Area of the United Methodist Church – a church which is growing and in need women and men to hear a call to ministry giving wise leadership. WE also pray for the United Protestant church of France, and Belgium and in Germany we pray for mission

partners Rev Barry and wife Gillian. We acknowledge the link our District has with German Methodists. For our circuit and churches naming our superintendent Peter who we say farewell to and his successor, Iain, as he and his family prepare to move here. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer

Guide the nations in the ways of justice, liberty and peace; We pray for those who are negotiating our future relationship with the E U and the huge implications for so many who are concerned about jobs, travel and security. Lord, we need leaders who seek wisdom to lead the nations with integrity and deliver on 'leveling up' our nations. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer

Comfort those in sorrow; heal the sick in body or in mind and deliver the oppressed . WE pray for victims of neglect and abuse, for those who grow up in dis-functional families. May they, like Solomon, grow into maturity finding healing and wholeness. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Receive our thanks and praise for all who have served you faithfully here on earth, and those coping with bereavement.....
May we and all your people share the life and joy of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and forever
Amen**

The Offering & prayer

Many of us make bring our gifts and offerings
through standing orders,

through charitable gifts that we make, giving our
time and our availability, our care and our
compassion. We offer all we give as part of this
worship this morning. We say together:

**Gracious God, accept these gifts, and with them
our lives to be used in your service; through
Jesus Christ our lord. Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 545 – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my
heart

- 1. Be thou my vision, O Lord, of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou
art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the
night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my
light.**
- 2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.**
- 3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the
fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true
might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong
tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power
of my power.**
- 4. Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:**

**O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou
art.**

- 5. High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright
Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever
befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.**

Prayer & blessing

We finish our service with the words of blessing
from epistle of Jude

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling,
and to make you stand without blemish in the
presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only
God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before
all time and now and forever.

Amen.