

Worship for 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online) Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to our service for 7 June – which is designated Eco Sunday in our Methodist Circuit. It seems a good time to look at some of the things our churches have been doing on the community gardening front over the last few months.

My church in Kenilworth, for example, now has a new area at the front we've called Grounds for Hope. A small group has transformed it from a bit of scrub land behind a dense hedge into a welcoming place to sit – or it will be when we finally decide how to do the seating. But it's already attracting loads of visitors including youngsters on their way to school. There's stuff growing in the beds with names that appear on trendy cookery shows, like chard and kale. People are encouraged to pick the

produce, with recipes available if – like me – you wouldn't know one end of a chard from the other.

Recently, Dale Street started putting its Good News Garden together with help from volunteers from The Princes Trust. And I think Mickleton started the trend with its 3 Bees Community Wildlife Garden.

All these – and so many other open spaces around us – are great places to appreciate the wonder of God's creation. Even in the form of creepy crawlies, like the minibeasts some youngsters have been finding in Kenilworth's Grounds for Hope this week as part of the first ever Kenilworth Naturewatch.

The Preparation

Call to worship

Let's use the words of our first hymn to reflect on these glories of creation: O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder (StF 82)

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

 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath 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!

2. 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!

3. 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 how in humble aderation

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!

Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989) vv. 1, 2, 4 based on *O store Gud* 1885by Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)

Opening Prayers

As we come before God in prayer, I'd like to say a special 'thank you' to Susan Anderson for crafting these powerful words for us

Father

We give thanks for this home and all its bounty. Every piece of drone footage brings another wonder, another glory.

We give thanks for volunteers all over the world. The reflection of Jesus seen in those who give so freely and selflessly, often in places where safety can't be guaranteed.

We give thanks for innovations that bring us vaccines, energy solutions, new technology kits, the Zooms, Teams, Facetime and WhatsApp to name but a few, which allows us to connect during covid times, keeping loneliness and sadness in the margins.

We give thanks to all those who work for the NHS and caring professions. Compassion as natural as breathing to those delivering care.

We give thanks for the food on our plates and those who provide it.

We give thanks for all those who give time to charities, so many working behind the scenes to make a difference to someone's day.

And we give thanks for all these gifts. The Lord is bountiful and the well never dries and we are watered for all time. We are truly blessed. Amen

Creator God

Our days are filled with fickle weather, cataract winds, hail and all too brief glimpses of sun.

Reluctant trees and flowers have late spring on hold, bold lilac scent is blown into the air and buds remain tight shut.

These wild, maelstrom skies are just another picture of your majesty. Whether we seek warm sunshine in a corner or shelter from the chill air the beauty of your earth reveals itself to us every day.

Dawns greet us with exuberant bird song, sunsets bring pinks, purples and Titian skies. Your handprints cover the vistas just as they always have done. Summer scents will arrive, roses will unfurl and dragonflies will drift on evening breezes. We marvel at this gift of turning seasons and it's not always in the grand scale. Twirling a buttercup under a chin brings a smile and often uplifts our wellbeing at just the right time.

Your glory is all around us, ceaseless, enthralling, amazing.

Our God gives, Our God loves us, Our God gives, Our God provides, Our loves us, Our God guides us And, our God lives within us. Awesome is your power Awesome is your heart The Lord reigns, Let the earth rejoice And let the world be glad. **Amen**

In these covid days it isn't easy to find time to just be and talk with You.

Our minds are crowded with things to do, things not to do and things we crave but can't have, endeavouring to do our best as we leave our front door; grab a mask, gel, keep a safe distance and remember to smile behind the face covering.

Everywhere you look there are signs, adverts, news coverage, bulletins, headlines, debates, covid noise pervades. Yet, when it gets too much at times, we might forget we don't need to book a slot to lay before you our frazzled brains and pains.

There is always time, forgive us Lord when we fail to see that and are blind to your eternal, limitless love for us.

In these covid days, we haven't always been the disciple we could and should be. With the Holy Spirit we can achieve, we can save and we can help. Let us find courage and different ways of offering our services to those in great need even if is just a chat. Your son, our Lord Jesus, showed us the way. Forgive us when we are blind to the Cross.

In these covid days energies can be low. The little bit of recycling goes undone, the kettle overfilled, food wasted, lights left on, didn't plant for the bees, forgot our bags for life and left the heating on too long.

Forgive us Lord for our disconnection with creation when we allow daily life to obscure the beauty of Earth, our home. We ask for forgiveness when we make poor choices and selfish decisions without a second thought for the deep seas, the air we breathe or the very stars in the skies.

We will now have a few moments of silence to make a connection and conversation with God knowing that he listens, he forgives and has a love for us that passes all understanding.

We can be whole, We can listen, We can see, We can use the talents and love you have given us,

We can strive to be less judgemental, We can lead a resurrection life.

Lord we ask for your forgiveness that we may leave this worship today healed and restored.

We offer these prayers in the name of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn: StF 73 – Fill thou my life, O Lord my God

- Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways.
- Not for the lip of praise alone nor e'en the praising heart I ask, but for a life made up of praise in every part:
- Praise in the common things of life, its goings out and in; praise in each duty and each deed, however small and mean.
- Fill every part of me with praise; let all my being speak of thee and of thy love, O Lord, poor though I be and weak.

- So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me receive the glory due; and so shall I begin on earth the song for ever new.
- So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free; but all my life, in every step, be fellowship with thee.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808–1889)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Genesis 3:8-15 (NRSVA)

⁸They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' ¹¹He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹²The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' ¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' ¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent,

'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.
¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head,

and you will strike his heel.'

Psalm 130 (NRSVA)

Waiting for Divine Redemption

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
² Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
⁴But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.
⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Epistle 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 (NRSVA)

¹³But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture — 'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Living by Faith

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

^{5:1}For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Gospel Mark 3:20-35 (NRSVA)

²⁰And the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan?²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' — ³⁰for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

The True Kindred of Jesus

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' ³³And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

Hymn: StF 62 – Sing of the Lord's Goodness

- Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
 come to him and bless his name.
 Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever, faithful to the end of days.
 Come then, all you nations,
 sing of your Lord's goodness,
 melodies of praise and thanks to God.
 Ring out the Lord's glory,
 praise him with your music,
 worship him and bless his name.
- 2. Power he has wielded, honour is his garment, risen from the snares of death. His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken, new life he now gives to all. *Come then, all* you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness, melodies of praise and thanks to God. Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music, worship him and bless his name.
- 3. Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow, Spirit of our God most high; solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner, splendour of the living God. Come then, all you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness, melodies of praise and thanks to God. Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music, worship him and bless his name.
- Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet, praise God with the lute and harp;

praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing, praise God till the end of days. Come then, all you nations, sing of your Lord's goodness, melodies of praise and thanks to God. Ring out the Lord's glory, praise him with your music, worship him and bless his name.

Ernest Sands (b. 1949)

Sermon

By the time you read this, what I'm about to describe will probably be a distant memory - or maybe not. Just as more restrictions were lifted across the country, the Government introduced new guidance for areas where the Indian variant has been spreading quickly, telling people to avoid unnecessary travel to and from those areas, and to meet others outdoors if at all possible. They introduced new guidance – but they didn't tell anybody about it. When people found out about it there were howls of protest at local lockdowns being introduced by stealth, and the last I heard the Government has clarified that there are no new restrictions in those areas, they are under the same rules as the rest of England it's just, they're advised to be extra careful.

That confusion between what is law and what is advice, or guidance, has been a recurring theme throughout the pandemic. It's always been an issue in law – when is a guideline only a guideline and when is it law. Is a guideline which isn't enforced any use to anybody? This confusion between law and guidelines has always been an issue in theology.

"Whoever does the will of God," says Jesus, "is my brother and sister and mother." Well, who is it who does the will of God? Is it everyone? Or most people, or only a few? Or perhaps nobody at all? And how do we know what the will of God is? Is it like a law book – a strict and clear code, with no ambiguity or need for interpretation? Or is it more like a set of broad principles – ethical values, which guide our day to day actions.

In the creation myth from chapter 3 of Genesis – which personally I believe to be an inspired instructional story rather than an account of a historical event – we read of the fruit being eaten in disobedience to God's explicit command, and that disobedience being discovered as God walks in the garden in the cool of the day. The story demonstrates three tendencies which exist in all of us.

Firstly, the tendency to do wrong – whether you understand that as disobeying God's explicit command, breaking the law, or a more general deviating from the God's principles and values. The man and the woman were told not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, yet they did. We are told not to lie or steal, yet we do; we are told to be generous and to love our neighbour, yet we are sometimes selfish and bear a grudge – and so on and so forth. We break God's commands – we do wrong.

Secondly, the man and the woman try to cover up their wrongdoing by hiding from God. We cover up our actions, we are economical with the truth, even explicitly deny what we did to try to hide it from those around us. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes not – though of course we will never succeed in hiding what we've done from God. Why waste our time trying? But we do.

And thirdly, the man blames the woman, and the woman blames the serpent. When our wrongdoing can no longer be hidden, we blame someone else, or the circumstances. It was their fault, not ours.

We do wrong; we deny we've done wrong; and then we excuse our actions by blaming someone else. There is another way. Ideally, we wouldn't do wrong in the first place – but we are human, and frail, and unlikely to succeed in that 100% of the time. So the other way comes into play when we become aware of our wrongdoing. That may only be when someone else points it out to us, or it may be the gentle, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, pricking our conscience. When that happens, rather than deny it, or blame someone or something else for it, we can acknowledge it, own it, and take responsibility for it. That can be very hard to do. It may require us to say sorry, which we often do in the hope and expectation of immediate forgiveness. When it comes to human beings, we may be disappointed – they are not always ready or able to forgive straight away. But one thing is for certain – denying our wrongdoing or blaming someone else will not lead to reconciliation, whereas honesty and taking responsibility, can.

God, of course, does forgive immediately – indeed, Jesus' death is the guarantee which shows that God's forgiveness is already there, waiting for us to claim it. When we acknowledge our wrongdoing before God, our relationship with the divine is immediately restored. This is great grace – and St Paul writes to the Corinthians about God's grace abounding more and more – reaching everyone, resulting in great thanksgiving.

This is what leads Paul to say that while he and his companions are outwardly wasting away, inwardly they were being renewed day by day. I have encountered several people like that – either physically very ill and declining, or going through an extremely difficult period, but inwardly calm, peaceful – almost luminous with faith. That is grace indeed – a gift of God, not something we can earn or claim as our right. We can however do things which increase our chances of encountering that grace day by day, so that when we really need it, we will know where to look.

Where do you find God? There is no single answer to that – no right place, or time or way. So I'll put it differently – where do **you** find God? Is it in stillness, or in nature? Is it when you look at your grandchildren? Is it sitting in a quiet church? Is it reading your Bible or a devotional book, or listening to music, or watching the sunset? Wherever **you** find God, whenever **you** become aware of the divine love which underlies all life, that is the place to go. Go there regularly. Tarry there a while, and allow that place, that activity to speak to you. That is the place to take your worries, your fears, your guilt and shame and sorrow, and let the healing balm of God's Spirit soothe them.

And then come back – come back into the world with its demands and annoyances and uncertainty. Come back – but bring back with you some of the peace which you felt. It is the grace of God – and the more you know of it, the better able you are to share it with others. Will you still do wrong? Almost certainly. Will you still try to hide it? Probably, but hopefully you will be a little quicker to realise and own up, because you will know without a shadow of a doubt that God forgives, and all will be well in the end. Will you still blame other people? Probably, yes – but maybe a bit less often, a bit less vociferously.

As you do this – spend time in God's presence and bring that peace back into the rest of your life – and do it repeatedly, a change occurs. We begin to act less from our minds, and more from our hearts. We know God's commands not so much intellectually as instinctively. We also know that, for all our failings, God loves us. And we are better able to love one another – which is one of Jesus greatest commands to all of us.

Hymn: StF 372 – Come down, O Love divine

- Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine, and visit it with thine own ardour glowing; O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear, and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.
- O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming; and let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight, and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.
- Let holy charity mine outward vesture be, and lowliness become mine inner clothing; true lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part, and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.
- 4. And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long, shall far outpass the power of human telling; for none can guess its grace, till he become the place wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Bianco da Siena (*d.* 1434) *translated by* Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

Lord

We offer these prayers from deep within our hearts.

We pray for all those affected by the turmoil and distress in the Middle East. We think of those who should be waking to birdsong, laughter and a sense of being free, but might find all they hear are bombs, gunfire, screams and tears. We pray the ceasefire holds and brings hope for peace. May they see love in those sent to help.

We pray for all those who have to live with mental health issues and each day is a challenge to get perspective, tenderness, recognition, respect and acceptance. We ask Lord ,that all those who help such as health professionals, family, friends, neighbours, helpers, carers and many more feel your presence as they strive to bring light to those who live in dark shadows. May Your gaze rest upon them.

We pray for all those who lead and have to make difficult decisions, especially when the answers and solutions bring heavy burdens. We think of world leaders as they try to make a life beyond covid possible. We pray that they bring us together, bring justice, peace, safe havens and a fair place for all. We ask that poverty, disease and famine becomes a thing of the past. We pray that African countries facing famine in the near future because covid has prevented necessary farming, find a world ready and willing to feed them.

May Your guidance and wisdom visit them.

We pray for the drivers of eco solutions. We ask that all respond to the challenges our homes face so that our legacy will be hope for the children of the future. We pray that voices are heard leading to clear deep blue plastic free seas, crisp clear air, bees collecting pollen from pesticide free blooms and nature's balance restored.

May these eco disciples be supported and God's grace journey with them.

We pray for our Superintendent, Presbyters and all disciples who work in our Circuit as they strive in Your name under continued very difficult circumstances. Covid and the future continues to present a myriad of questions and answers sometimes the answers are just out of reach. The sea may seem very stormy at times. May their boat find calm, safe waters.

We pray for people who find themselves in such a dark, difficult place that they make a heartrending choice. We think especially of the news story concerning a baby found in the canal. The child is in God's loving hands and we pray the mother finds care and balm. May angels descend and protect her.

We can now take a few moments to bring before our Father those matters which are resting heavily on our hearts and minds.

As we prepare for the days ahead may we know that you are by our side always. We can be people of the Way and the footsteps made by Jesus were freely made. Let us embrace the Holy Spirit, go forward with Your heart beating inside us and be disciples.

We offer these prayers in Your name. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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

THE DISMISSAL

Prayer & blessing

Song: The UK Blessing

The Lord bless you And keep you Make His face shine upon you And be gracious to you The Lord turn His Face toward you And give you peace

The Lord bless you And keep you Make His face shine upon you And be gracious to you The Lord turn His Face toward you And give you peace

Amen, amen, amen Amen, amen, amen

The Lord bless you And keep you Make His face shine upon you And be gracious to you The Lord turn His Face toward you And give you peace Amen, amen, amen Amen, amen, amen Amen, amen, amen Amen, amen, amen

We pray a blessing, manna rain down from heaven this isn't second guessing We know we are protected May the peace that surpasses all understanding be our message Grace and favour is in your nature, in your essence

May His favor be upon you And a thousand generations And your family and your children And their children, and their children

May His favor be upon you And a thousand generations And your family and your children And their children, and their children

May His favor be upon you And a thousand generations And your family and your children And their children, and their children

May His favor be upon you And a thousand generations And your family and your children And their children, and their children

May His presence go before you And behind you, and beside you All around you, and within you He is with you, He is with you

In the morning, in the evening in your coming, and your going In your weeping, and rejoicing He is for you, He is for you he is for you, He is for you

Amen, amen, amen Amen, amen, amen

May His favor be upon you And a thousand generations And your family and your children And their children, and their children

May His presence go before you And behind you, and beside you All around you, and within you He is with you, He is with you

In the morning, in the evening in your coming, and your going In your weeping, and rejoicing He is for you, He is for you he is for you, He is for you

Amen

Original Song "The Blessing" by Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe and Elevation Worship.

Written by Chris Brown, Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe and Steven Furtick

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Ernest Sands (b. 1949)
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StF 72 – Fill thou my life, O Lord my God
Horatius N. Bonar (1808–1889)
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The UK Blessing Original Song "The Blessing" by Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe and Elevation Worship. Written by Chris Brown, Cody Carnes, Kari Jobe and Steven Furtick Bible Verses

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