

Worship for MHA Sunday (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Today we are celebrating the work of Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA), the largest private provider of care in the country. We are especially thankful for the extraordinary work they are doing to keep residents and staff safe during the pandemic and for their prophetic voice to government on behalf of the most vulnerable in our communities. MHA have collated much of the worship material we are using today. Thank you to all who have been involved in preparing our worship: our Superintendent minister Peter Powers who brings us a word, Anne Oliver and Nigel Saxton for preparing the prayers and readings, and to Tim Pearson for choosing and leading some of our worship songs. Thank you also to Kate Tennyson for pulling it all together. If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with Peter on revpeter.mwc@gmail.com

Today is 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 community groups. Together with 7,000 staff and over 4,000 volunteers and countless supporters, MHA enables older people are able to live later life well. MHA's vision is for people to find meaning and hope in later life, to tackle loneliness and isolation by facilitating community, and for people to continue to learn and grow in their faith, or indeed rediscover faith. MHA seek do to this through their chaplaincy service, providing spiritual care for residents, their families and for their staff. MHA also provides music therapy for people living with dementia, helping to alleviate the common symptoms of dementia like anxiety. And their work in the community, partnering with the church to reach out in to our communities to ensure that loneliness and isolation does not have to be part of growing old.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship *Psalms 66:1-4*

- ¹ Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
² Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious.
³ Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power
that your enemies cringe before you.
⁴ All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you,
they sing the praises of your name."

StF 76 – Give me joy in my heart

- 1 Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising
give me joy in my heart I pray;
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising
keep me praising till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***
- 2 Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,
give me peace in my heart I pray;
give me peace in my heart, keep me loving
keep me loving till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***
- 3 Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
give me love in my heart I pray;
give me love in my heart, keep me serving
keep me serving till the break of day:
*Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!***

Prayer of adoration

God of all that is, we praise you for your goodness and your kindness that you bestow on your people. Throughout your word we read stories of the lowly being lifted up, the outsiders being included, 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, along with all creation shout praise to you. Glory, power and praise be given to you O, God.

Prayer of 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 kindness, and remember you and your words, and our experience of the past days, forgive us for times when we have chosen not to be kind, and times when we missed an opportunity to offer kindness. We think of our relationships, those close to us who we let down; those who we might not even know their name but to whom we could have been kinder; the world we inhabit and the needs of this planet and ways in which we have been unkind in caring for it.

Silence

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

Amen

StF 256 –When I needed a neighbour

- 1 **When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?**
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 2 **I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?**
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 3 **I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?**
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 4 **When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?**
When I needed a shelter, were you there?
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 5 **When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?**
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?
- 6 **Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there**
wherever you travel, I'll be there.
And the creed, and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Reading Genesis 18:1-5

The Three Visitors

^{18:1}The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

Reading Romans 5:1-8

Peace and Hope

^{5:1}Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

StF 396 –*Spirit who broods*

- 1. Spirit who broods,
Spirit who sings,
mothering bird,
peace in your wings –
*Come from within, come, make us one,
come and renew the face of the earth.***
- 2. Spirit of truth,
laser and light
searching the path,
seeking the right –
*Come from within, come, make us one,
come and renew the face of the earth.***
- 3. Spirit of love,
larger than law,
quick to forgive,
keeping no score –
*Come from within, come, make us one,
come and renew the face of the earth.***
- 4. Spirit of hope,
never subdued,
Spirit of God,
Spirit of Good –
*Come from within, come, make us one,
come and renew the face of the earth.***

Reading Ruth 2:1-13

Ruth Meets Boaz in the Grain Field

^{2:1}Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour."

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

⁴Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they answered.

⁵Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

⁶The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

⁸So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

¹¹Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹²May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

¹³“May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

Introduction to video: ‘We are MHA’

The theme this year is kindness, inspired by the kindness of MHA’s staff, volunteers and supporters shown daily to those in later life. This coincides with the book of Ruth, where Ruth becomes a blessing to her mother in law, and in turn they both are blessed. Ruth showed kindness to her mother in law and found blessing in doing so. There are examples of kindness being shown every day at MHA. We’ve chosen to

focus on two people who we will hear from later. Erika shares how she wanted to do something positive for others. So she volunteered for MHA, giving her time, as well as her skills that she was able to use to set up a dance class and a walking group. Both of which, enable people to later life to live well in the Rothwell area. She found that in giving in this way, she felt rewarded by seeing the joy that was being brought to others. We see some of that joy being received by one of MHA’s residents, called Ruth, not to be confused with the Ruth in our Bible story. But like Naomi, Ruth became widowed but has found kindness and blessing from MHA volunteers and staff, particularly the chaplain. She found a home, a place to belong. For her it’s been really important to be able to continue with her faith journey and it has been MHA that has enabled her to do that.

Can you think of times over the last week when someone has been kind to you?

Can you remember something kind that you did for someone this week?

What did it feel like to be given kindness?

What did it feel like to show kindness?

Kindness is a choice we make. And it’s not always an easy choice; it can sometimes be quite tough. But the more we practice it, the more of a habit it will become. Imagine if everyone showed kindness, imagine what our church would be like, what our community would be like and imagine what school would be like or our work places.

[Video now plays]

Sermon

There is so much in life that we don’t have control over, like the weather. There’s so much that happens to people, to you and me, all the time that aren’t under our control. We grow old, we can’t control that. Even so, there is huge business for those who want to buy into looking

younger. No matter how much we spend, or how many products we use, we grow old and at some point in our lives we rely on other people to help us. One thing we all welcome, and one thing we can all choose to give, is kindness. When you pass a stranger, give them a smile. Or help someone carry their shopping, or let someone out in front of you when you are driving, or buy a homeless person a hot drink. There are so many daily, small acts of kindness, and when we see it, it gives us hope against the backdrop of continuous bad news stories that fill our screens. There are ordinary people, all of the time, going out of their way to show kindness to others.

Kindness is not only a good thing to do, it has other benefits too. Studies have shown that if you perform just one random act of kindness a day you will not only reduce your stress, anxiety and depression but your body is flooded with the same hormones that make you and the person you helped calmer, healthier and happier. The story of Ruth is about kindness, it is about being a blessing, but in turn being blessed.

'Where you go, I will go...' She herself understood loneliness and isolation as she felt this after moving back to the UK, so she could recognise and see others in her community experiencing the same. Using her skills to help bring older people together and help them find community. And in so doing she found her own community, but also finds blessing as she sees people who might otherwise be lonely and isolated themselves become relaxed as they come through the doors, with a smile on their faces. In the book of Ruth, Naomi, Ruth's mother in law, had moved to Moab from Judah with her husband and two sons. Her husband died and so Naomi was left with her two sons, who both married - Ruth and Orpah. Ten years on, the sons died too. Naomi chooses then to go home back to Judah. Ruth, Orpah and Naomi become widows. Now in ancient times being widowed brings with it a great deal of vulnerability. As

such the Torah taught that widows ought to be treated with honour and compassion and offered protection so that no one takes advantage of them. In ancient times if a widow has no heir to carry on the family line then not only does she have no husband to provide for her and protect her, but there is no one to care for her in old age. She may have even been considered a disgrace to her family and left in a precarious position. God recognises the widow's plight and rises to her defence. In Psalm 68:5 it says, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling". How blessed will the orphaned and the widowed be in God's house. Naomi says to her daughters-in-law to go back to their families, to return home and kisses them goodbye. Orpah returns home, back to her family, back to her own country, her own culture. But Ruth decides to stay with Naomi, going to a foreign land, choosing a way of life where there is no recognition, no promise of a better future and she goes as far as saying to her mother-in-law; "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth 1:16. What an amazing statement, what powerful words of commitment and loyalty. She didn't owe Naomi anything; she didn't need to say that. But, in saying that, in her condition is even more powerful, so kind, so loving. Here is a grieving young woman, choosing to honour, care for, and be with her older, widowed, mother-in-law. Earlier we heard the story of a different Ruth, an MHA retirement living resident who became widowed, and like Naomi also experienced her own homecoming. Because of the warmth and the kindness of the staff, volunteers and the chaplain, she immediately felt a sense of belonging that she was home, this is where God wanted her to be. She feels so blessed that she is able to keep touch with her faith and believes that God has led her to that place, and she wants to give something back, baking for others and flower arranging for example. She knows

blessing because of her faith but also because of the kindness that has been given to her, through the care she receives, the community she has found, and in turn she is a blessing to others. Back to the Ruth we read about in the Bible, at harvest time, widows, together with foreigners and the fatherless, could glean in the fields of grain and gather left overs.

Deuteronomy 24:19, "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands". Ruth is a widow and a foreigner, and it is through this act of gleaning that Ruth is introduced to Boaz. Boaz as it turns out is a distant relative of Naomi. We see in the reading that Boaz is acting according to the law laid out in Deuteronomy, but more than that, he has taken a deeper interest in Ruth. He shows abundant kindness to Ruth. And as we go through the short book of Ruth, we know that Ruth marries Boaz, they have a child Obed, who becomes the father of Jesse, who becomes the father of David and the line follows to Jesus (Matthew 1). What an amazing story! A desolate widow Naomi is offered unswerving and selfless devotion by her widowed daughter-in-law, and kindness is bestowed upon them by Boaz. Individuals are blessed and become a blessing to others. Blessed and are a blessing. For Naomi she moves from despair to happiness, from emptiness to fullness, from destitution to security and hope. MHA's hope is to see people moving from loneliness into community, finding a sense of belonging. Whether that is part of a community group, in one of the care homes or retirement living to live later life with hope and meaning. Each of us can know something of that blessing which Naomi experiences, through our own relationship with God and one another in the life of our church and in our communities. There is great joy in knowing that you are

blessed. Each of us is known, loved and held by a kind and gracious God, who seeks us out and calls us by our name. A God who shows us through Ruth, that being part of the kingdom of God is not decided by your birth, or your parents, but it is through joining in with God's purpose and will. That in that joining in, we can know blessing and be a blessing.

Ruth - young, foreign, destitute, a widow.

Boaz - middle aged, well to do Israelite, securely established in his home community.

Both offering themselves in selfless acts of kindness, through their blessing of Naomi, in their care for her, and as she journeys from emptiness to fullness. Ruth and Boaz too find blessing themselves becoming part of the genealogy of Jesus. MHA staff and thousands of volunteers and supporters give blessings every day of the year to those in later life, to those who feel lonely, to those who are frail, and those who are confused. For over 75 years, MHA have sought to bless those in later life, through the care they give, in supporting their spiritual needs through chaplaincy, through music therapy for people living with dementia, and through facilitating and reducing loneliness and isolation in our communities. In so doing people like Erika, and thousands like her find themselves and those being served, like MHA's Ruth, blessed.

Through your support of MHA you become part of this blessing too. We are blessed, we become a blessing.

This MHA Sunday, will you join in having an impact on those in later life?

What blessing can you be today?

What act of kindness might you choose to do?

Could you hold someone's hand in their time of great need?

You might choose to pick up the phone to an elderly relative, or neighbour living on their own.

There are so many ways to be a blessing to those in our families, in our churches, and in our communities who are lonely, and in need. There are plenty of Naomi's out there, wanting to move from emptiness to fullness, wanting a friend, wanting someone's hand to hold through difficult times, wanting somewhere to belong.

What part can you play in showing God's blessing to those in need?

May we know the blessing of the God of Ruth and Naomi, and may we be a blessing to others by what we do and what we are able to give. Amen.

StF 441 – As water to the thirsty

- 1. As water to the thirsty,
as beauty to the eyes,
as strength that follows weakness,
as truth instead of lies,
as songtime and springtime
and summertime to be,
so is my Lord,
my living Lord,
so is my Lord to me.**
- 2. Like calm in place of clamour,
like peace that follows pain,
like meeting after parting,
like sunshine after rain,
like moonlight and starlight
and sunlight on the sea,
so is my Lord,
my living Lord,
so is my Lord to me.**
- 3. As sleep that follows fever,
as gold instead of grey,
as freedom after bondage,
as sunrise to the day,
as home to the traveller
and all we long to see,
so is my Lord,**

**my living Lord,
so is my Lord to me.**

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Father we thank you for today. We thank You for our senses by which we can hear the songs of birds & see the drifting clouds.

Grant us hearts wide open to a world of variety and beauty.

With fresh gratitude let us now focus on your holiness and your love shown in Jesus who brings us the joy of being forgiven people. Help us each day to show others what a forgiven people look like.

We give special thanks for the work of MHA for the past 77 years, and for all organisations who bring care, compassion, healing and restoration through belief in Christ.

We thank You Father God for the immense amount of daylight that comes at this time of year, and we celebrate the person of the Holy Spirit who empowers our hearts to act in Your will, allowing us to live in the everlasting light of Jesus.

Amen

Prayers of intercession

One description of Jesus is the window through which we see God.

Since Jesus showed emotions then we know that God also has emotions.

In Zephaniah Ch 3 v 17 it is written "The lord your God will delight over you with gladness, He will renew you with His love, He will exult over you with loud singing."

In contrast to delight is the emotional pain that God feels where his people suffer – we share this pain, which is why we bring prayers of intercession.

As I pray there will be silences, please use these times to pray yourselves.

We pray for a world tormented by sickness, war, hunger and environmental damage. Let each now pray for one country that presses on our hearts.

We turn to our nation and the work of MHA. We pray for all decision makers involved in social care particularly in this county of Warwickshire some of which we now name.

We know that in our close and immediate community there are those who are sick, bereaved, unemployed and anxious. We now each offer You those people we know and care about who are in need.

Lord – You know each one of us intimately. You are aware of our fears – use our faith in Christ to overcome them.

You are familiar with our tangled relationships – please guide us.

You perceive our secret sorrows – let Your presence restore us.

You know of our doubts & failures – please encourage us in Your love.

All these prayers we ask in the special name of Jesus

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

Hopefully our giving to church has kept going at the same level since we stopped actually attending services in buildings and for all offerings I'll now give a prayer.

Father – we worship YOU before money. In a society obsessed with possessions, often money is put before people. The example of Jesus is to put people first. This is not to say that we despise money as it is a tool to be used wisely. We now ask You to bless all monies given to the building of Your Kingdom and we ask You to increase our awareness of the many precious things that money cannot buy.

Amen.

StF 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

- 1 May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.**
- 2 May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.**
- 3 May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.**
- 4 May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting –
this is victory.**
- 5 May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.**

THE DISMISSAL

Prayer & blessing

May the blessing of the God of Ruth and Naomi,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with us now
and always.

Send us out equipped by your Spirit to live out
your blessing and kindness.

In the name of Christ,
Amen.