

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of July 2024

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7th July 2024 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call To Worship:

Lead us, Lord, to the good green grass and the life-giving water.

Lead us, Lord, to the promises of your word.

Lead us, Lord, to the gathering of your people.

Lead us, Lord, to your kingdom of joy.

Amen.

Hymn: Lead us heavenly Father lead us (StF 238)

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

Prayers:

Father, you are the king of heaven,
above all forms of earthly kingship;

Jesus, you are the king of love incarnate,
our Saviour, lover of souls;

Holy Spirit, you are the spirit of divine kingship,
surging among us in power and glory.

We adore you, not with gold and jewels
or the symbols of earthly rulers,
but with hearts and minds open
to the love and wisdom of your divine leadership.

Father, we confess that we are often divided;
although united in proclaiming you our king,
we disagree on what that means, and what you are like.
We think you favour our church over others,
and even fight among ourselves, claiming greater knowledge,
greater understanding, than any of us can possibly have.
Today, we put our differences aside and come before you as one,
to acclaim and worship you as king over all.

Amen.

We join our prayers together as 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 and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Hymn: All praise to our redeeming Lord (StF 608)

All praise to our redeeming Lord,

who joins us by his grace,

and bids us, each to each restored,

together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;

and, gathered into one,

to our high calling's glorious hope

we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.

Ev'n now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
concentred all, through Jesus' name,
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Bible Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-5 & 9-10

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your own flesh and blood. ²In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’”

³When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

⁴David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. ⁵In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

⁹David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces^[b] inward. ¹⁰And he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him.

Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?” ³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, ^[a] Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. ¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Sermon:

What do we expect a leader to look like? What are our expectations formed by? - our culture?, our personal history? Sometimes we make assumptions about people – they cannot possibly be leaders because they are too young, the wrong gender or from a different ethnicity. It’s known as ‘unconscious bias’ and many organisations are now recognising that it exists and are training managers and recruiters to be aware of their own unconscious assumptions about others.

If we look around our own world, we see that it is sometimes the leaders we don’t expect who are shaking things up. Think of Greta Thunberg and the many young climate activists she has inspired. They are challenging the complacency and inaction of governments and refusing to be silenced. King David, despite his personal failings, was regarded as the ‘model king’ of Israel. In today’s reading from 2 Samuel, we see him fulfil his God-

given destiny as he is anointed and makes the city of Jerusalem his own. Yet we remember that as a young shepherd boy, he did not seem a very likely future king. But God saw beyond external appearances to the heart (1 Samuel 16.7b).

In today's Gospel reading, we see Jesus visiting his hometown of Nazareth, and teaching in the synagogue. But his hearers remember him when he was a boy, the child of Mary, the carpenter's son, and reject his teaching. They cannot see beyond their own 'unconscious bias' about what a leader and teacher should look like.

Think about the people around you. Are there people with gifts that could be nurtured and encouraged? Are there potential leaders in our midst? Ask God to show how you might be an encouragement to that person and resolve to do something about it.

Hymn: The kingdom of God is justice and joy (StF 255)

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.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;
The captives are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share;
And hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice:
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
God's love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross:
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

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.

Intercessions:

Lord, just as you sent out your disciples of old to share the Gospel, we pray today for all people who serve in the field of mission, at home or abroad.

For all those in ministry and leadership within the church. For all those making themselves vulnerable by sharing of you.

**Merciful God sufficient, we lift our prayers before you.
Strengthen and protect your people sharing the Gospel.**

We pray for the conflicts and tensions raging throughout the world – hatred, bombings, corruption. We pray for all those caught up in such situations. And for the people working to bring about reconciliation.

**Merciful God sufficient, we lift our prayers before you.
Diffuse hatred and bring peace to the world.**

We pray for all countries struggling to cope due to lack of resources, vaccines and clean water. For those everywhere who are sick; be it in mind or body. For those who put their own lives at risk to help save others. For the bereaved.

**Merciful God sufficient, we lift our prayers before you.
Restore health, comfort and console.**

When the disciples were sent out, they were instructed to take no food with them. We pray for all people who live each day not knowing where their next meal is coming from. For all those who rely on aid or food banks to put a meal on the table.

**Merciful God sufficient, we lift our prayers before you.
Feed and nourish those in need.
Amen.**

Hymn: Hear the call of the Kingdom (StF 407)

Hear the call of the kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ
Walking justly before Him

Loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through us

*King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name*

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

Blessing:

Lead us, Lord, when we lose sight of you.
Lead us, good Lord, through darkness to your light.
Lead us through disappointment and failure
to a place of new calling.
Lead us though we often struggle
and sometimes do not listen to your voice.
Lead us, good Lord, deeper into your love for us.

Amen.

Sunday 14th July 2024 – Action for Children Sunday

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge

Today is Action for Children Sunday
*Please remember Action for Children in your prayers
and support them as you are able*

Call to Worship:

Come all you people, our God is here!
Come from every corner and place,
from every tribe and tongue and language.
Come strangers and friends, believers and seekers,
the lost and the found. All are welcome here.
Sound the trumpets! Blow the horn! Tap out sound!
Clap your hands! Sing and dance! Hit the drum!
Move to the beat!
Flute and oboe join the mix! Lift hearts and hands.
Strike the steel pan! Tingle the triangle! Raise the sax!
Recorders at the ready, choir on repeat:
raise your voices, shout out loud!
Come let us worship, come and bow down,
come let us offer our hearts and our lives.
Come all you people – our God is here!

Opening Prayer:

Lord of all, we come to offer all that we have and all that we are –
body, mind and spirit.
We come to offer you our joys and struggles.
We come to celebrate your extravagant love and abundant gifts,
and to give thanks for your unending promises to us.
Lord of all, teach us to hold nothing back
and to give our all as we serve you in the world. **Amen.**

Hymn: With gladness we worship (StF 17)

With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices, how blessed to bring!
The old thankful story shall seek Thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God!

Thy right would we give Thee - true homage Thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through:
With all Thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we celebrate Thee,

Renewed by Thy Spirit, redeemed by Thy Son,
Thy children would bless Thee for all Thou hast done:
O Father, returning to love and to light,
thy children are yearning to praise Thee aright.

We join with the angels, and so there is given,
From earth, Alleluia, in answer to Heav'n.
Amen! Be Thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson (1807-1889)

A Prayer of Adoration:

Your face is shining upon us, Lord;
in our worship, we reflect the light that comes from you.
You lift up your countenance upon us,
and we are blessed and lift up our hearts to you. **Amen.**

A Prayer of Confession and an Assurance of Forgiveness:

A Prayer of Confession:

Father, we confess that we are often half-hearted
when we come before you;
we lack commitment and passion in our lives,
and in our worship.

Yet you are never half-hearted towards us;
you commit yourself to our care
although we do not deserve it,
and you love us with a passion
beyond our understanding.

We are sorry for our lukewarm love
and our lacklustre worship;
we recommit ourselves to you,
and to your proper praise and adoration. **Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Our feet may falter as we come before you,

but you forgive us, O Lord.

Our eyes may be downcast as we approach,

but you forgive us, O Lord.

Our minds may be busy with the cares of the day,

but you forgive us, O Lord! Amen.

Hymn: Make way, make way, for Christ the King (StF 264)

Make way, make way, for Christ the King

In splendour arrives.

Fling wide the gates and welcome Him

Into your lives,

Make Way! (Make way!)

Make Way! (Make way!)

For the King of kings,

(For the King of kings)

Make Way! (Make Way!)

Make Way! (Make Way!)

And let His kingdom in.

He comes the broken hearts to heal,

The prisoners to free.

The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,

The blind shall see.

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,

Who weep and sigh;

With laughter, joy and royal crown

He'll beautify.

We call you now to worship Him

As Lord of all.

To have no gods before Him,

Their thrones must fall!

Graham Kendrick

Readings: **Psalm 24**

Of David. A psalm.

- ¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
² for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.
³ Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?
⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.^[a]
⁵ They will receive blessing from the LORD
and vindication from God their Savior.
⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.^{[b][c]}
⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
⁸ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.
⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory.

2 Samuel 6:1 - 5, 12 -19

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

6 David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand. ² He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. ³ They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart ⁴ with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. ⁵ David and all Israel were celebrating with all their

might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

¹² Now King David was told, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God.” So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. ¹³ When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴ Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, ¹⁵ while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸ After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. ¹⁹ Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

Reflection:

There are a number of questions and opportunities to pause and consider your thoughts in the following Reflection – why not take a piece of paper or a notebook and as you are invited to consider various matters write down your response. Then, before you move on to the next part of the reflection, consider your response from the position of someone else, perhaps someone younger or older, someone with a different ethnic background, someone who has recently discovered faith/or someone who has been on their Christian pilgrimage for many years. There might be opportunities for conversations with others – do have those. Don't rush.

Seek to reflect on the issues raised asking for God's revelation and His guidance on whether/how there should be an outworking of your discoveries.

I was once told by an Open University tutor to 'think more broadly', I encourage you to do the same with this reflection and in the future areas to which God leads you.

What is the most valuable object you possess? Do you value it for its cost or for its associations e.g. the meaning it carries in your family? How do you treasure this possession? – do you keep it locked securely away? or polish it? or give it a prominent place in your home?

What about the most valuable possession of your faith community? The ark of the covenant contained the Ten Commandments, God's word to his people and a sign of his presence with them. What objects in our church building or home life speak to us of the holy presence of God?

David and the people are celebrating the most valuable object they possess, which was lost and is found (cf Luke 15). Their core symbol of God's presence is back with them. They are reunited with the Lord of hosts. They rejoice with extravagant, physical, multi-sensory worship involving the whole community, and with generosity, offering rich food to folk whose normal diet was very plain. How might we and our faith community recognise and celebrate the things that mean most to us in our shared worship life?

Is our worship inward-looking or does it allow us to reach out to those beyond the walls of the building? Is it exclusive, putting others off? or does it make others feel welcome? Does our worship fuel us for the week ahead or do we leave it behind in the church building, putting it in a box until the next service?

And how do we worship extravagantly during the week? How do we show our love for God during the week? We may not dance down the streets in joy, but can we radiate our love for God in other ways, through a simple smile or an act of service? Are our lives as well as our worship always pleasing to God?

What will you offer to God this week?

Hymn: King of Glory, King of Peace, I will love Thee; (StF 56)

King of glory, King of peace, I will love Thee;
and that love may never cease, I will move Thee.
Thou hast granted my request, Thou hast heard me
Thou didst note my working breast, Thou hast spared me

Wherefore with my utmost art, I will sing Thee,
and the cream of all my heart I will bring Thee.
Though my sins against me cried, Thou didst clear me;
and alone, when they replied, Thou didst hear me

Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise Thee;
in my heart, though not in heaven, I can raise Thee.

Small it is, in this poor sort to enrol Thee:

e'en eternity's too short to extol Thee.

George Herbert (1593- 1633)

Prayers for others and Lord's Prayer:

Lord, words and actions have consequences. They can hurt or heal. Build or break. Herod's rash words and subsequent actions had dire consequences.

We pray for all people today whose words and actions have led to negative life-changing results. We pray for those who have succumbed to peer pressure. All who have been pressured into doing wrong and find themselves living with the consequences.

God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.

We pray for people of all ages trapped in toxic relationships. For victims of abuse. For the lonely and the elderly in our communities. All those whose vulnerability is exploited by the actions of others.

God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.

We pray for the work of Action for Children for all those who are cared for and those who actively care for children and families. Grant each of them an awareness of your love for them, your care of them and your presence with them, always.

God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.

We pray for the newly elected government and all who hold important positions in our Nation's leadership. We pray for Christians in

parliament. For ambassadors. For peacemakers everywhere. May they speak your truths and be heard.

God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.

We pray for all NHS staff. That more doctors and nurses will be recruited as many leave due to demanding workloads and the exhausting toll of the pandemic. We pray for the sick, the exhausted, the bereaved. For all care givers everywhere.

God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.

We pray for the church that it will stand and act upon your Word without compromise. We pray for all who minister and lead us. For all who you call to speak out. That we, your people will, like the Prophets of old, listen, hear and respond in the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray you will strengthen, guide and guard.

**God of all power, love and faithfulness, hear our prayer.
May your love and truth direct us in all things. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, (StF 317)

At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed;

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, To the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Saviour in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817 – 1877)

A Sending Out Prayer:

God of all, send us out into the world you have made.

Help us to be the people you want us to be;

help us to live in ways that show your love

for us and for all people.

Keep us dancing, keep us singing

and keep us walking in your ways.

Keep us open, keep us generous

and keep us ready to give our all for you,

as you have given everything for us. **Amen.**

Blessing:

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with you now and with all those whom you love and cherish,

in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**

Sunday 21st July 2024 – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

Call to Worship:

Lord, You are with us wherever we go.
Your presence constantly encourages us
to step out into new adventures.
Forgive us when we try to limit You.
Make us ready to respond to Your voice,
and to seek the new things to which You call us. **Amen.**

Hymn: To be in your presence (StF 530)

To be in Your presence,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete:

This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.

To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away,
To cherish each moment –
Here I would stay,

This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.

Noel Richards (b. 1955)

Prayer of Praise:

Sovereign God,

You are the giver of life, the root of all our being,
The Creator of the ends of the earth, of all that is, and shall be, and has
been.

Loving God,

You give purpose to our lives, a sense of meaning to every day,

A mood of hope as we look to the future,
An inner confidence whatever we may face and so we praise You.

Living God,

You are with us always, imparting strength,
Giving guidance, offering comfort, and so we adore You.

Saving God,

You have come to us in Christ, revealing Your goodness,
Demonstrating Your love, expressing Your care, and so we honour You.

Gracious God,

You are the giver of more than we can ever deserve,
Granting Your constant blessing, surrounding us with Your unfailing love,
Providing for our deepest needs, so we thank You.

Almighty God,

Receive our praise, our thanks, our worship,
For we bring it to You in grateful response to all Your goodness,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Gracious God, though we try to put the past behind us, all too often we are haunted by mistakes.

Though we try hard to make amends for the wrongs we've done, we find it hard to escape a sense of guilt.

Remind us that You are always ready to offer free and total forgiveness,
No matter how foolish we have been or how many opportunities we have wasted.

Teach us that the past is done with and the future is open before us.

Receive, then, our thanks, and lead us forward,

In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.

Psalm 89 from 'Psalms Now'

Psalm 89 promises God's steadfast love, compassion and faithful support for David in all the challenges of leadership in a father-son relationship (see also Psalm 2:7). Returning to Nathan's prophecy, God will uphold David's descendants.

'I feel like singing this morning, O Lord.

I feel like telling everyone around me how great You are.
If only they knew of the depths of Your love and Your eternal care for
those who follow You!
But my songs are so often off-key,
My speech is so inadequate.
I simply cannot express what I feel,
What I know to be true about Your love, for Your creatures upon this
world.

But even the songs of the birds
Proclaim Your praises.
The heavens and the earth beneath them,
 The trees that reach towards You,
 The green hills and soaring mountains,
 The valleys and the plains,
 The lakes and the rivers,
 The great oceans that pound the shores –
They proclaim Your greatness, O God,
And Your love for Your human creatures
Throughout this world.

How glorious it is to be alive, O Lord!
May every breath of my body,
 Every beat of my heart,
 Be dedicated to Your praise and glory. **Amen.**

Hymn: As the deer pants for the water (StF 544)

As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.*

I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye.

You alone are my strength, my shield

You're my friend and You are my brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything.

You alone are my strength, my shield

Martin J. Nystram (b. 1956)

Gospel Reading: Mark chapter 6 vs, 30 – 34 and 53 – 56

‘JESUS SHOWS COMPASSION’

Introduction:

The selected verses frame the feeding the five thousand. This major narrative is held within a framework of Jesus' concern and compassion for His disciples and for the wider community. The focus of these verses is on His teaching and healing.

The picture of the disciples without time to grab a sandwich (v.31) will resonate with many people! Jesus seeks some respite for them in the wilderness, the traditional place of encounter with God. However, His deeper concern is for the community. He draws on a familiar image for kingship in naming them as sheep without a shepherd.

The second section focuses on Jesus' healing and again vividly evokes people's desperate need of the help He brought. Even through the touch of his cloak, God's presence in Him was powerful enough to drive out the disease that damaged lives against God's will.

‘The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to Him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He said to them: “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

[The story of the feeding of the five thousand follows on here]

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they

heard He was. And wherever He went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed the sick in the market-places. They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched Him were healed.

Poem: written by Martin Greyford Phiri

Take time to think;
it is the source of power.
Take time to read;
it is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to play;
it is the secret of staying young.
Take time to be quiet;
it is the opportunity to seek God.
Take time to be aware;
it is the opportunity to help others.
Take time to love and be loved;
it is God's greatest gift.
Take time to laugh;
it is the music of the soul.
Take time to be friendly;
it is the road to happiness.
Take time to dream;
it is what the future is made of.
Take time to pray;
It is the greatest power on earth.

Reflection:

John Jackson, an advocate for the disadvantaged in communities tells of an event that happened one day at the food distribution centre where he volunteered:

“The line was long that day, but moving quickly. At the end of the line stood a young girl around twelve years old. She waited patiently as those at the front were given parcels of food. Slowly but surely, she was getting nearer to the front. She didn't notice the growing concern on the faces of the people distributing the food. There wasn't going to be enough. The food was rapidly running out. Their anxiety began to show, but still the girl didn't notice. Her attention was always focussed on three figures huddled together under a tree across the street. At last she stepped forward to get her food. But the only thing left was a solitary banana. Quietly, she took the

precious gift and ran across the street where three small children waited under a tree. Very precisely, she peeled the banana and carefully divided it into three equal pieces and placed the precious food into the eager hands of the young children. Then, for her own meal, she licked the inside of the banana peel.

John concluded the story: “And I will always believe that I saw the face of God that day.”

Fact – or – fiction? What do you see in that story – does it seem a little far-fetched? Sadly, it’s a fact. It’s a heart-rending story, but it’s not about foodbanks or hard-working volunteers. It’s a story about compassion, a story where the motivation is an act of loving kindness of a young girl towards her three younger siblings. A Bible dictionary defines ‘compassion’ as active love for those in need; an active force which does not sympathise with another’s distress, but gets involved whenever and wherever possible’. That seems like a very challenging ideal.

The Bible often refers to compassion, in the Old and New Testaments and the Epistles. It is very often spoken of as ‘mercy’. It’s not a right or entitlement, but a gift or blessing, the basis of how God cares for His people. For example, Psalm 51 is a classic setting. The New Testament often speaks of Jesus’ compassion – so often for the crowds of people who followed Him everywhere. Think of the passage known as ‘The Beatitudes’. The writers of the Epistles speak of God as the ‘Father of compassion’ [2 Corinthians Ch. 1 v. 3]. James speaks of God as being: ‘Full of compassion and mercy’ [chapter 5 v. 11].

In today’s reading, we are told that Jesus is full of compassion, here, primarily for His disciples and the hundreds who followed to listen to Him. It had been a typically busy day – so busy there had been no time to eat or take a break. I wonder if that resonates with you – or someone you know? Life can be so demanding. So, they got in a boat and headed towards a quieter spot on the north east side of Lake Galilee for some ‘me’ time. But wasn’t to be! Crowds of people had gathered from all the surrounding towns and villages, such was Jesus’ popularity – and they were not going home disappointed. They realised where the group were heading and ran on ahead. Although it was some four or five miles, they arrived before the boat. No peace, no rest, no refreshment! I wonder how you would have responded? Would it have been frustration, anger, disbelief, amazement? Jesus looks on the crowds and is filled with compassion. They were like

sheep without a shepherd, desperately searching for some helpful words or actions from Jesus. His deep love and His care for the people are especially stressed in the way He ensures that their physical need for nourishment is met. But Jesus has something greater in mind – their spiritual needs – and as the Shepherd, He would meet the needs of His flock. He shows His compassion by His words and His actions – teaching and healing. Hundreds saw the face of God that day.

Going back to the story of the young girl, it would have been easy for her to have eaten the banana herself, but she had compassion for her three siblings. She met their need first before her own. Where do **we** see compassion being shown today?

Compassion is a characteristic for all those who would follow Jesus – an active love for those in need, an active force which does not sympathise with another’s distress, but gets involved wherever and whenever possible. There will always be more needs to be met than ways of meeting them – the Bible reminds us of that. So **we** are challenged. How do we respond by **our** words and actions in our day to day living?

The next hymn reminds us that **EVERYONE** needs it – including **US**. It reminds us just how far-reaching Jesus’ words and actions can be. In caring for ourselves, we can offer so much to others. These verses from Matthew chapter 6 vs. 26 – 32 are a reminder of just how much compassion God has for us and what Jesus wants to offer us – and all God’s children – not just in material needs but those which go far deeper:

‘Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?’ [v.26].

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all’ vs. 28-32]. **Amen.**

Prayer:

Loving God,

Among the duties and concerns of another day,
We can so easily forget You, failing to make time simply to be still
And to focus on Your presence.
We rush from one thing to another, and forget what's most important:
Communion with You.
Even tasks undertaken in Your service,
Involvement in the life and work of Your Church,
Can suck us into a vortex of frenetic activity,
Well meant, sincerely offered, yet ultimately taking us away from prayer
and devotion,
From relating to You one to one.
Teach us that, for our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, we need
to step back from the world
And to recognise that You are God,
For if we lose sight of that, we lose sight of everything. **Amen.**

Hymn: Everyone needs compassion (StF 627)

Everyone needs compassion,
Love that's never failing:
Let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness,
The kindness of a Saviour;
The hope of nations.

*Saviour,
He can move the mountains,
My God is mighty to save,
He is mighty to save.
Forever,
Author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.*

So take me as You find me,
All my fears and failures;
Fill my life again.
I give my life to follow
Everything I believe in;
Now I surrender.

Saviour ...

Shine Your light
And let the whole world see,
We're singing for the glory
Of the risen King, Jesus.
Shine your light
And let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory
Of the risen King.

Saviour ...

Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding

Prayers of Love and Concern

Lord, Your compassion for the crowds that swamped You was ever present.

Compassionate Lord, we bring before you now our brothers and sisters around the world. In China where churches are being destroyed. In South Africa where many are being threatened with guns if they set foot out of their homes. We pray for all people, for all victims of war, terrorism, prejudice, wherever they occur.

**Lord of all righteousness and peace,
we pray for a dissolving of hatred
and a renewal of compassion and unity.**

Lord, You took Your disciples away from the crowds to rest and find refreshment. But it was not always easy, because the crowds followed and made demands on Your time. We pray for Your church today: for all ministers, worship leaders, youth workers. All those you have given the responsibility of leadership to. We ask that you enable them to find or regain a healthy balance amid the rhythm of life's rushing and resting.

**Lord of all righteousness and peace,
we pray for a dissolving of hatred
and a renewal of compassion and unity.**

We pray for the bereaved. And all those who are sick, in mind, body or soul. For all those burnt out by rushing here and there, caring for others without giving thought for their own selfcare. We pray for all those anxiously awaiting long overdue operations. And all those who are having to find new rhythms of life at this time due to suffering.

**Lord of all righteousness and peace,
we pray for a dissolving of hatred
and a renewal of compassion and unity.**

We lift before you all those in our communities who are finding life transitions difficult and daunting. Refugees settling in new places. Children leaving the familiar surroundings of junior school heading to secondary education. Teenagers leaving school and forging their own life. Young people looking forward, to college or university, apprenticeships or employment.

**Lord of all righteousness and peace,
we pray for a dissolving of hatred
and a renewal of compassion and unity. Amen.**

**Hymn: A rich young man came seeking (StF 243 [Alternative tune 563
'O Jesus I Have Promised' Wolvercote])**

A rich young man came seeking,
God's Kingdom was his aim,
The Law had been his guide book,
His life was free from blame.
But Jesus asked the courage
To give His wealth away,
The young man turned in sorrow,
That price he would not pay.

The rich men's gifts were lavish
And made for public show,
The widow's gift was humble
And only God would know,
In giving to the Temple,
Although her coins were small,
Her gift had so much meaning
Because she gave her all.

One boy brought loaves and fishes,
No other food was there,
But Jesus fed the thousands
And still had bread to spare.
The miracle of plenty
Soon spread beyond that place,

That simple gift was offered,
Then multiplied by grace.

Lord, keep our care for money
From turning into greed.
Help us to use it wisely
To meet each other's need.
For whether poor or wealthy,
We have so much to share
And open-hearted giving
Will show Your loving care.

Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940)

Blessing:

God of all our days, our beginning and our end, help us to walk with You;
to trust You at every turning of the way; to follow where You lead us; and
to go where You send us.

In all the ups and downs of life, in times when we are certain about what
we need to do

and in times when we doubt that You are with us:

open our ears to hear Your voice; open our eyes to see You at work,
and open our hearts to trust You in every step of our journey. **Amen.**

Sunday 28th July 2024 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton

Opening Words:

We take this time to meet with you, Lord.
Whether in our homes, through the written word,
or physically present in a building,
we meet together, united by your Spirit.
Awaken our senses to your presence, for you are here.
You are here to forgive and heal, to teach and to bless.
Open the eyes of our hearts that we may see you.
All glory be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Hymn: New Every Morning is the Love (StF 137/H&P 63)

New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,
would furnish all we ought to ask:
room to deny ourselves; a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in thy dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792-1866)

Prayer:

Loving God,
we praise you for your faithfulness.
Through all the ups and downs of life you are always there,
holding us, caring for us, loving us,
even when we don't recognise your presence or acknowledge you.
We come to you humbly in this moment,
aware of our actions and attitudes.
Forgive us we pray,
renew us and refresh us,
through our Saviour, Jesus,
that our lives may sing out your melody
of love and grace.
In his name we pray.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer:

King David was a successful king who understood that his own kingdom and power was nothing in comparison to God for it is God who provides all that we need, whoever we are and whatever our circumstances. The words of our first reading express David's understanding and his experience of God at work in his life can give us hope and reassurance.

Reading: Psalm 145 v 10-18 (NIV)

All of your works will thank you, LORD,
and your faithful followers will praise you.
They will speak of the glory of your kingdom;
they will give examples of your power.
They will tell about your mighty deeds
and about the majesty and glory of your reign.
For your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.
You rule throughout all generations.

The LORD always keeps his promises;
he is gracious in all he does.
The LORD helps the fallen
and lifts those bent beneath their loads.
The eyes of all look to you in hope;

you give them their food as they need it.
When you open your hand,
you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.
The LORD is righteous in everything he does;
he is filled with kindness.
The LORD is close to all who call on him,
yes, to all who call on him in truth.

Hymn: My Jesus, my Saviour (StF 363/MP 1003)

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord there is none like you.
All of my days, I want to praise
the wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship you.

*Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing,
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
at the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.*

Darlene Zschech (b.1965)

Reading: John 6 v 1-15

After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!" When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

Reflection:

We learn so much about the nature of God in Jesus through this reading. And we learn a great deal about how God can use even the most miniscule of our resources. How often do we hear people, churches, organisations say 'There aren't enough resources.' Whether it's government spending, time, staffing levels, public or private sector there never seems to be enough to do what we want to do or think should be done.

You certainly don't often hear someone say 'I have everything I need to do and be all I want to do and be'

And a seeming lack of resources is often what stops us from doing things. But it didn't stop Jesus.

In our reading, Jesus is facing a dilemma. Thousands of hungry people in the middle of nowhere. What does he do? Send them home? No, for that would mean a long walk and they still wouldn't eat for hours. No, here we see the compassionate nature of God. Jesus' heart goes out to these people to whom he has been giving spiritual food (and they were still hungry for more of that) but who now need physical food to sustain them.

Jesus has a way of challenging us through questions, of making us think as he engages with us. He asks Philip 'Where can we buy bread?' Philip is incredulous! Surely it's obvious that they would never have enough money to buy bread for this number of people! But then up pops Andrew with a lad's five loaves and two fish. He's hopeful perhaps but also doubtful ...hat

good will this do? Jesus shows no sign of disappointment at such a lack of resources. No. He tells the disciples to get everyone to sit down. Then he prays over the meagre offering and invites the disciples to distribute it. And there is enough for everyone. Not only does Jesus use a small gift to do a great thing but he doesn't do it on his own. He encourages others to help him for he doesn't work alone. We can't do great things without Jesus. But nor can Jesus do great things without us. Working in partnership with us is how God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, fulfils his mission.

And then note what Jesus does with the leftovers. He doesn't just leave the crumbs on the ground, which is what we would probably do, he says 'gather up what is left so that nothing is wasted.' Everything, even the smallest thing we offer to him is precious to him and can be used by him.

Jesus bids the hungry and thirsty to come to him and he asks us, relies on us, to introduce people to him. People hungry for peace, thirsty for joy. To show them who Jesus is and what he offers, through our words or actions, through our caring and compassion. And God has given us the resources to do that, resources that are intended for sharing. And the more we share, the more we find we still have to give. Twelve baskets of leftovers from what originally would have barely topped a quarter of one basket. We have an abundant God. Hallelujah!

Poem: Breadsong by Gerard Kelly

It's not in the bread
but in the breaking
that the mystery of God is told.

It's not in the seed
but in the dying,
not in the treasure
but in the digging for it.
It's not in the mountain
but in its moving.

It's not in the wine
but in the pouring out
that a new world is purchased
for the weary.

It's not in the cross
but in the crucified,
not in the nails

but in the nailing.
It's not in the grave
but in the rising from it.

It's in the giving
that the gift becomes life;
it's in the living
that the Word becomes flesh.
It's in this taking,
this receiving,
this sharing of a supper,
this pointing to a future
that is promised
and paid for
and pressed into our hands;
it's in this everyday mealtime miracle
that the universe is born
to new life.

Hymn: The Lord's my shepherd (StF 481)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways on righteousness,
And he anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

And though I feel the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one.
For you are with me and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, who fed a waiting multitude,
feed us this day.

Feed us the bread of life, so that we no longer hunger
for the things that harm our lives.

Feed us the bread of life, so that we no longer crave
for that which leads us astray.

Feed us the bread of life, so that we no longer yearn
for easy options.

Feed us the bread of life, so that we no longer need
to rely on our own strength.

Lord, we remember those who are hungry.

Hungry for food,
hungry for peace,
hungry for justice.

We remember those who we know
who need your touch of grace today -
for healing in body or mind
for comfort in sorrow
for your reassurance in times of uncertainty.

Lord Jesus, who fed the waiting multitude, feed all your
children, this day and every day.

In your name we pray.

Amen

Hymn: May the Mind of Christ my Saviour (StF 504/H&P 739)

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
live in me from day to day,
by His love and pow'r controlling
all I do and say.

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.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,

that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self abasing,
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Williamson (1859- 1928)

Blessing:

As the multitude came seeking Jesus,
we, too, have gathered here today.
As the people were fed,
we, too, have received nourishment.
As Jesus calmed the fears of his disciples,
we, too, can face this day with confidence that God is with us.
Fed by Christ, empowered by the Spirit,
loved by God, go in assurance.
Go in peace.
Amen

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