

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of June 2026

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Sunday 7th June 2026 – 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service was compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

When we think we are beyond hope:
God's restoring love offers a fresh start.
When life is too messed up, beyond hope:
God's restoring peace gives hope in our darkness.
When we think we are not good enough:
Jesus comes offering hope beyond hope.

Hymn: At The Name Of Jesus (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 captain
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.

Opening Prayers:

God of many surprises, we come before you now. We marvel as we see Matthew follow, the woman healed, the girl raised from the dead. God of wondrous healing, no one is beyond hope with you. Your people believed and you healed. Grant us the same ability to come to you in simple trust. How marvellous are your ways, O God. We worship you.

Lord, you always had time for people. Forgive us that so often we misuse time. We miss opportunities to serve you. Forgive us, Lord, and make us ever hopeful.

There are times we don't have enough faith to hope in you. We don't believe you can heal us in the way we need it most. Forgive us, Lord, and make us ever hopeful.

There are times we write people off, decide they're beyond hope. Stay within our own four walls, not venturing out to serve you. Forgive us, Lord, and make us ever hopeful. Amen.

Matthew 9:9-13 & 18-26 - English Standard Version

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly^[a] the woman was made well. ²³ And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. ²⁶ And the report of this went through all that district.

Living Hope by Phil Wickham

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful saviour, I'm Yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope x2

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me x2

Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free...

Thought for the Day:

The predominant theme throughout the Gospel of Matthew is Jesus' declaration that he has come to seek and save 'the lost Sheep of the House of Israel' – the Jews. He gets into big trouble for expanding his search to the Gentiles, but in today's reading Jesus encounters trouble enough simply by seeking those within the house of Israel – the Jews – who are lost. We know Jesus' heart is for all people; no one is beyond hope.

Today's passage opens with Jesus back in his hometown, where he calls Matthew a tax collector to follow him. Here we see Jesus not only reaching out to the lost and lowly, but also to the privileged and powerful. Matthew's story raises the question of inclusion and exclusion: who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

At that time, there were people considered by society to be either in or out: there were the Romans who were in – the occupying power – who had their own society and as the oppressors looked down at the Jews; there were the Jews who had their own hierarchies of who was important and who wasn't, who can contribute and who should be shunned – the Jews looked down on the Gentiles.

Jesus shows that there is no place for saying who is in and who is out, including within his group of disciples. In the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry by calling specific people to be his disciples. Now, Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. The choice of Matthew, you'd have to say, was a little bit out of the box – the other disciples were mainly fishermen.

Even as a Jew, Matthew would have been totally surprised when Jesus came into his life – something beyond what he was expecting or could even hope for. When Jesus reached out and invited him to follow and be a disciple, it would have been a total turnaround, not only leaving his life of privilege and ill-gotten wealth but also following a teacher who obviously upset the establishment. Can you imagine?

When Jesus calls Matthew, it provokes immediate controversy. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were outraged. And maybe this is Jesus' point. When the Pharisees saw who Jesus was hanging out with, Jesus' response was: 'If you are well, you don't need a doctor. I came only to seek and save the sick' (9:12). It's a little parable. Jesus says to his critics in effect: You are all insiders, saved, among the elect, you are already in; you don't need an invitation.

In these stories, Jesus invites us to examine our relationship with him and ask the question: Have we allowed Jesus into our lives to change us each day as we grow our faith?

The story of Matthew's calling is about profound grace, about a life turned around. It's a story that calls us to rejoice for all who had been beyond hope and have been found and can claim that Jesus is Lord. It is also a story that challenges each of us to go and share that hope with one another and those who think they are beyond hope.

Intercessions:

God of mercy, you chose a tax collector, Matthew, to share the work of the Apostles. In doing so, you showed us that with you, all things are possible, and that though we are sinners, we too can answer your call to evangelise the world. We pray for anyone thinking about their faith and how to deepen and spread the Good News at this time.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer

Creator God, we pray for all who work in finance, government, or public service: That they may act with integrity and compassion, inspired by Matthew's transformation from tax collector to servant of the Gospel.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer

Father God, Matthew was a disciple of Jesus and a former tax collector, so we pray for all those we know facing financial struggles. Help them to manage their resources wisely and remain faithful to your call, even amidst worldly temptations. We pray for those being supported by Christians Against Poverty, and the Citizen's Advice Service.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer

Loving God, we pray for all who bear the burdens of pain, bereavement, worry and depression. We pray for those whose illness stems from anxiety. We pray that they may have an awareness of your presence and an understanding that you are bearing those burdens with them and always working towards their healing and wholeness.

We bring all our prayers in Jesus name Amen

Hymn: Called By Christ To Be Disciples (StF 660)

Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword —
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Blessing:

May God, who is never-ending, put his hope around us.
May Jesus, the hope of the world, be known as he goes with us.
May the Holy Spirit, our great enabler, empower us to bring
hope to others.
Amen

Sunday 14th June 2026 – 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time (MHA Sunday)

This service was compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton in June 2024

Opening Words:

Come, all of you, just as you are, to worship.

Whether today you feel strong or weak, full or empty, God welcomes you all.

So come, just as you are, to worship.

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.

E'en now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
concentred all, through Jesu's 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!

Prayer:

God of all,
as one family we worship you.
We are mothers and fathers,
we are sisters and brothers,
and we worship you.
We are sons and daughters,
aunts and uncles, grannies, granddads,
and we worship you.
We are cousins and neighbours, friends and colleagues, and we worship
you.
As your family, as your church, as your community, wherever we may be,
we worship you.
Amen.

When We Are Too Weary by Thom M Shuman (*published in Where the
Broken Gather*)

When we are too weary
to take another step
on the road to the kingdom;
when our hearts are worn down
by the pain always rubbing
against our lives;
when we are wasting away
because of fears and worries,
you come, Soul Strengtheners,
stretching out your hand
to hold us in your love.

When everyone else has turned
their backs on us and walked away;
when we cry out in the night
only to find the world has

turned a deaf ear to us;
when folks think we are crazy
because we believe that
good can overcome evil,
love can conquer hate,
hope can replace despair,
you do not forsake us,
but stay at our side,
Brother to all people.

When our doubts rub
a callous on our souls;
when we wonder if we
are able to see your kingdom
emerging all around us;
when others seem to want
only the worst for us,
you pull us out of harm's way,
Spirit of faith and hope.

And so as we reflect on the grace upon grace
that are the gifts we receive from the Lord
let us bring him our thanks as we pray as he has taught us.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Father God, I Wonder (StF 72)

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist
without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care. But now
I am your child, I am adopted in your family,
and I can never be alone 'cause Father God you're there beside me.

*I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praise, forevermore.
I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praise, forevermore.*

Reading: Mark 3: 20 – 35

One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn't even find time to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. "He's out of his mind," they said.

But the teachers of religious law who had arrived from Jerusalem said, "He's possessed by Satan, the prince of demons. That's where he gets the power to cast out demons."

Jesus called them over and responded with an illustration. "How can Satan cast out Satan?" he asked. "A kingdom divided by civil war will collapse. Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart. And if Satan is divided and fights against himself, how can he stand? He would never survive. Let me illustrate this further. Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger – someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

"I tell you the truth, all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. This is a sin with eternal consequences." He told them this because they were saying, "He's possessed by an evil spirit."

Then Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them. There was a crowd sitting around Jesus, and someone said, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you."

Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he looked at those around him and said, "Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Reflection:

On the wall above the desk in the church office was a little notice – 'You don't have to be crazy to work here, but it helps!' It was meant as a bit of a joke, of course, but there's actually a depth of truth to it. There is something different about church, and to the outsider maybe even something strange. We aren't just another club or social gathering. We say and do things that often don't make sense to other people. On days

when many people are washing their cars, preparing a barbecue, cutting the lawn, we gather together to lift our voices in worship, to break bread, to be challenged by words that don't always seem to fit with the prevailing views of the world around us. To some all of this does look a little bit crazy. But that's nothing new.

Mark tells us about the day when Jesus' family came to 'rescue' him. Word on the street was that he'd lost the plot, he was 'out of his mind', that he was crazy. In his gospel Mark tells us of the many things that Jesus did. Freeing people from their sickness to live full and purposeful lives. Mark doesn't depict Jesus as someone who accepts that the world is a place of sickness, sin and evil. Mark shows us a Jesus acting as if God has begun to do something new, acting as if God's reign had already come. That's why people were saying 'he's out of his mind.' And this is a message that runs through all the gospels – the kingdom of God isn't simply near, it's actually here.

In one of his worship songs Matt Redman sings the lyrics 'I will dance I will sing to be mad for my King.' And in 2 Corinthians 5: 13 we read 'If it seems we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God.' The song at the very end of this service talks about God inviting us to engage in the mission of Christ on earth. To work with him and his kingdom values, which will often mean swimming against the tide of the world around us. I'm sure you've seen the poster of the one fish in the shoal swimming in the opposite direction to the rest. It's not an easy place to be and many would think you were daft for even trying but it is what Jesus calls us to do. Martin Luther King, who knew only too well what swimming against the tide can mean, remained faithful to his vision and his belief in God against all the odds. He used to talk about maladjustment – in the sense of not adapting to the circumstances and surroundings we find ourselves in just because that's what is expected by society. He said that he never intended to adjust to the evils of segregation and discrimination. He never intended to adjust to religious bigotry. He never intended to adjust to economic conditions that meant necessities being taken from many in order that a few might have great luxuries. He said that it may well be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted, those who don't just adjust their lives in order to 'go with the flow'. He ended one of his speeches with these words – "Let us be as maladjusted as Jesus of

Nazareth, who could look into the eyes of the men and women of his generation and cry out, ‘Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that spitefully use you.’” These are the actions that transform relationships and could change the world. This is what it means to be swimming against the tide, standing out in the crowd because you’re different, being the voice that is laughed at or shouted down because others don’t want to hear what you are saying.

‘You don’t have to be crazy to work here, but it helps!’ Likewise, you don’t have to be out of your mind to do the work of Jesus Christ but there are some who, as you live a life that is faithful to God’s kingdom, may think of you in that way. We must each decide by what values we will live our lives by – will we be with the main shoal swimming in one direction or will we be out there with Jesus swimming the other way because that is the way of the kingdom. It isn’t easy – but when we accept the invitation to engage with Christ in his mission on earth that’s when we hear his voice gently whispering in our ear ‘You’re my brother. You’re my sister. You are my family.’

Hymn: For I’m Building A People Of Power (MP 151)

For I’m building a people of power
and I’m making a people of praise,
that will move through this land by my Spirit, and will glorify my precious name.

Build your Church, Lord,
make us strong, Lord,
join our hearts, Lord, through your Son; make us one, Lord, in your body,
in the kingdom of your Son.

Prayer:

As members of Jesus’ family, we pray in his name. Let us pray:
Lord, may we show your likeness in all that we say and do.
That through us and the Church others may see your beauty and truth,
experience open-hearted love and acceptance, and find a unity of purpose.

Gracious God : **let your will be done.**

Lord, as members of the human race help us to work together.
Sharing resources, looking out for those who are struggling,
respecting and learning from one another.

Gracious God : **let your will be done.**

Lord, may we give support and space to those we love and nurture.
Through our words and actions may they come to see the depth of your
love for them. Gracious God : **let your will be done.**

Lord, may all who come to you in need find forgiveness and healing,
a wholeness of body, mind and spirit,
and the strength to cope with whatever difficulties they are facing.

Gracious God : **let your will be done.**

We bring our prayers in faith and trust as members of the family of Jesus,
and we pray in his name. **Amen**

Hymn: The Church's One Foundation (StF 690)

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the word;
from heaven he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

Called out from every nation,
yet one through all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses
with every grace endued.

In toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation

of peace for evermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
at last the church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
in heaven your face shall see.

Blessing:

God of understanding,
help us to follow Jesus in sincerity and truth,
that we may be his mother, sister, brother.
And as we go from this space
may your blessing rest on us
and on all those whom we love,
now and forevermore.
Amen

Sunday 21st June 2026 – 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Father's Day)

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Today is Father's Day. In many of our prayers, we acknowledge God as 'Father', notably in The Lord's Prayer, but for many people, both young and older, their experience of fatherhood is a difficult or painful one. Broken relationships and childhood memories can all conjure up negative images and they find the concept of God as a loving Father can seem far removed from reality. We need to hold this in our thoughts today and in our prayers. While we can be assured that God, as a parent, is all-loving, we remember those who find this truth difficult to understand and accept.

Call to Worship:

Wherever you are from, whoever you are,
come and follow Jesus.

Come as you are, come ready to serve,
come and follow Jesus.

Come with determination, come with all your heart,
come and follow Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: 'Holy, Holy, Holy' (StF 11)

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee:
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the Saints adore Thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
though the sinful human eye Thy glory may not see,

only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber (1783 – 1826)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Creator God, thank You for the gift of this new day as we lift our hearts in wonder.

The sun rises in splendour, the earth bursts with life,
and every breath we take is a gift from Your hand.

You are the One who paints the skies with light,
who scatters the stars across the night,
and who calls each of us by name.

We praise You for Your faithfulness that never fades,
for Your mercy that meets us each morning,
and for Your love that holds us through every season.
All glory and honour belong to You, now and forever.

Lord Almighty,
You are high above the heavens, yet You bend low to hear our prayers.
You command the seas and calm the storms;
You breathe life into the smallest seed and the mightiest tree.
We praise You for Your power that shapes the universe,
and for Your tenderness that shapes our hearts.
When we are weak, You are our strength;
when we are lost, You are our guide.

Living God, remind us of the many ways You speak - not just through Scripture and prayer,
or simply through leaders and teachers, but through the voices of others,
even when what they have to say challenges and disturbs, seeming to question our established beliefs,
contradicting received wisdom and undermining what we have taken as read.

Speak Your Word afresh in whatever way You choose, and help us to listen. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Lord, sometimes we find Your words hard.
And, if we don't like them, we block them out,
think they can't possibly be meant for us.

Forgive us, Lord, and make us ready to follow You.

Sometimes we treat precious things as two a penny.
We are tempted to give up on Your ways.
It feels too hard to make good choices.

Forgive us, Lord, and make us ready to follow You.

Sometimes we are afraid of making hard decisions,
of people hurting us, harming us, hating us.
We are afraid to acknowledge You, God.

Forgive us, Lord, and make us ready to follow You.

With humble hearts, we have confessed our sins.
Jesus forgives all those who are truly penitent.
We live anew in our Saviour, Christ Jesus.
Praise be to God. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Reading: Psalm 86 taken from 'Psalms Now'

Introduction:

The Psalmist draws close to God in prayer using familiar, well-worn words. He identifies himself as poor, needy and dependent on God. It is not clear what threat is faced, but the Psalmist relies on God's steadfast love to protect him.

O Lord, my prayer to You always comes out of a life full of need.
I am Your servant; I am trying to represent You.
I need Your support for every step I take.
How gracious You are to hear my plea
and respond to my cry
and pour out Your forgiving love upon me!

People are so foolish
about the things they love and worship.
You alone are God,
and You alone possess the healing grace
that can support and sustain fickle hearts.
Continue to lead me in Your course for my life.
Enable me to walk, body and soul,
in loving obedience to You.
Then I shall glorify You forever,
and my life shall be
a continual thank-offering to You.

I find the daily journey
not only difficult but painful.
There are forces within me and around me
that overpower me.
But You are a loving and patient God.
Continue to have mercy upon me,
to stir me from the doldrums of sin,
to deliver me from selfish involvements,
to forgive my sins and failures,
to shore up the weak places in my life.
Help me
feel Your loving acceptance
and reflect to others
the joy of being Your child and servant.

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

Reading: Matthew chapter 10 vs. 24 – 39 NSRV

Introduction:

Matthew continues Jesus' teaching on mission to the world pointing out that the disciples must expect opposition, including possibly from their own families. Following Jesus won't be straightforward, but He reminds the disciples of their value and of God's love for them.

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Reflection: ‘TOUGH LOVE’

One of my favourite musicals is “*Les Misérables*” - the adaptation of Victor Hugo's famous novel about the French Revolution. It takes us to the squalid streets of Paris in 1832. It is sung by the “miserable ones” - those from whom the novel takes its name. The beggars, the poor - those who society turns its back on and they sing to the upper classes, crying that they “Look down. See our misery.” Theirs is a cry as old as human history and as fresh as today's news headlines. The world has always been filled with the downcast of human nature crying out for mercy and justice. Soon after this cry from the wretched ones in *Les Misérables* the student

revolutionaries swing into action on their behalf. These young idealists are out to see that justice is done. They sing together these words: “do you hear the people sing? Singing the songs of angry men? It is the music of the people who will not be slaves again!” The revolutionaries go on to sing of “ life about to start when tomorrow comes.” Suddenly, the possibility of hope appears in the face of human wretchedness. It is the word of hope that is being held by every generation in human history. This theme of *Les Misérables* strikes a universal human chord. People of every age have cried out for a better life. It's a story that takes a firm grip on our human heart strings. Hope for the poorest of the earth lies deep in the hearts of human beings in every generation. As so often is the case, however, those who strive for the new world that tomorrow brings are the ones slaughtered at the barricades. The women sing of their grief at seeing the young men dead on the battlefield. “They were school boys, never held a gun, fighting for a new world that would rise up with the sun. Where's that new world now the fighting's done? Nothing changes. Nothing ever will..... Same old story. What's the use of tears? What's the use of praying if there's nobody who hears? Nothing changes. Nothing ever will” sing the women. The people are gripped by despair - there seems no hope.

Then the final chorus comes and that hope is awakened. The musical dares to proclaim hope for the most despised of the earth. The last words of the chorus ask if we hear the sound of distant drums. These drums pound out the hope for the future that will come with tomorrow.

“Tomorrow comes” are the last bold words sung in the musical.

“Tomorrow comes!” That is how it's always been - and might always be. The hope that helps the poor, the lowly, the hungry face each day. The hope that the future will be better than the present.

Do those words seem familiar? Do they strike a chord with today's Psalm? The writer draws close to God in prayer, using familiar words. He reminds God that he is poor, needy and dependent on Him. He relies on God's steadfast love for protection. He recognises God's protection in the past and in his current despair, pleases again for this love. He acknowledges that God is gracious and is all-loving and faithful, therefore he can rely on God's mercy. So, whatever the past has brought, whatever the present

holds and the future carries, the Psalmist knows he can rely totally on God - as he has always done and always will.

These same concepts of value and worth are also reflected in our passage from Matthew. On first reading, Jesus is not presenting a helpful account of what is expected of those called to follow Him - in fact, it sounds very off-putting! But then, Jesus was rarely straightforward and His teaching is meant to make you think. Why was Jesus being so harsh? Or, was he trying to protect His disciples?

I have in my kitchen, a picture I love which reminds me of how privileged I am. It is of the hands of Jesus holding a sparrow in each hand as they feed on the seed He is holding. If this tiny sparrow - the most prolific of birds - is so special to Jesus - what is that saying about me? It tells me - and you - how much more precious we are to Him. So His teaching is not about discouragement, rather, putting His disciples on their guard against what they may encounter in following Him.

The story is told of a famous monastery that had fallen on challenging times. Its buildings were once filled with young monks and it's huge Chapel resonated with the singing of the choir. But now, it was almost deserted. People no longer came to be nourished by prayer. The few that remained praised God with heavy hearts. On the edge of the monastery woods an old Rabbi had built a tiny hut where he would go and fast and pray. No one ever spoke with him but whenever he appeared, the word would be passed from monk to monk: "The Rabbi walks the woods." For as long as he was there the monks felt sustained by his prayerful presence.

One day, the Abbot went to visit the Rabbi and poured out his heart to him. As he approached the hut, the Rabbi was standing in the doorway, arms outstretched in welcome - as though he had been waiting for some time. The two embraced like long-lost brothers. They just stood there, smiling at each other - a picture of pure joy. The Rabbi motioned the Abbot to enter. In the middle of the room was a wooden table holding an open Bible. They sat for a moment, in the presence of the Book. Then, the Rabbi began to cry. The Abbot could not contain himself. He covered his face and began to cry too. The two men sat there like lost children, filling

the Hut with their sobs and wetting the table with their tears. When the tears ceased and all was quiet again the Rabbi lifted his head. "You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts," he said. "You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that no one must ever say it out loud again." He looked straight at the Abbot and said, "The Messiah is among you." For a while, all was silent, then the Rabbi said: "Now you must go." The Abbot left without looking back. Next morning he called his monks together and told them that he had received a teaching from the Rabbi in the woods, and that it must never be spoken aloud. He looked at each of his brothers and said: "The Rabbi said that one of us is the Messiah." The monks were startled and puzzled as they questioned what it must mean. But no one ever mentioned it again.

As time went by, something unusual began to happen at the monastery. The monks began to treat one another with special reverence. There was a gentle, wholehearted human quality about them now which was hard to describe, but easy to see. They lived with each other as brothers who had finally found something. And yet, they prayed over the Scriptures together as those who were still looking for something. Visitors found themselves deeply moved by the genuine caring and sharing that passed between the brothers and before long, people were coming again from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life of the monks. And young men were asking once again to become part of the community. The Rabbi no longer walked in the woods, but his prayerful presence remained. [Think for a moment – who was the Rabbi in the woods?]

Jesus emphasises once and for all the power and authority being accorded to His disciples - extensions of His own ministry, expecting nothing in return for their efforts except perhaps violence and persecution. After painting a fairly bleak and fearful picture of what they may encounter - even from within their own families - Jesus leaves the disciples with words of encouragement, empowering them with assurances of strength and ability - just as the Psalmist was assured of God's steadfast love and protection, just as we are assured that the Messiah is among us. When welcoming happens, Jesus wants both the host and the guest to understand the value of the relationship. What appears as a welcoming

exchange is an action between the host, the one who receives; the one who directed the host – Jesus - and the One who sent Jesus, God Himself; and the one who receives, receives Jesus through us.

THE MESSIAH IS AMONG US

This prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola is always read on Remembrance Sunday but is equally valid for every day and is a reminder to all of us:

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous
teach me to serve You as You deserve
to give and not to count the cost
to fight and not to heed the wounds
to toil and not to seek rest
to labour and not to seek reward
except that of knowing that I do Your will. **Amen.**

Hymn: Show Me How To Stand For Justice (StF 713) [Alternate tune 'Calon Lan' S the F 323(i)]

Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing Your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
For my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in Your Son.
Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on Your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.

Make me conscious of Your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with You.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Let us come before God, who hears the cries of His people and knows the needs of the world.

With faith and trust, we bring our prayers of intercession.

Lord of the Church,
we pray for Your people across the world.
Strengthen all who proclaim the gospel,
especially in places where faith is met with opposition or danger.
Bless our ministers, leaders, and all who serve in Your name,
that they may be faithful witnesses of Your love.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

God of justice and peace,
we hold before You the nations of the world.
Guide those in positions of authority—
that they may act with wisdom, integrity, and compassion.
We pray for areas torn by conflict,
for those suffering from injustice,
and for all working to bring reconciliation and hope.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Creator God,
we thank You for the beauty of the earth and the gift of life in all its forms.
Help us to be faithful stewards of Your creation,
protecting the environment and caring for all living things.
We pray for communities affected by climate change,
natural disasters, and environmental destruction.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Loving Father,

we pray for our local community—
for our neighbours, our schools, our workplaces, and our families.
Bless those who feel isolated, anxious, or forgotten.
May we be channels of Your kindness and compassion.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

God of comfort,
we remember before You all who are ill in body, mind, or spirit.
Bring healing to the sick, strength to the weary, peace to the troubled and
comfort for those mourning loss.
We pray especially for those known to us in need of Your care...

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Thank You, God,
for all who show a father's love in our world.
Thank You for those who are special to us.
Be close to those for whom today brings reminders of difficult and painful
experiences.
Help us know that You, our loving Father, are always close.
In Jesus' name.

Faithful God,
accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Hymn: O Jesus I Have Promised (StF 563)

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve You to the end;
Lord, be forever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if You are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if You will be my guide.

O let me feel You near me;
the world is ever near;

I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me, and within;
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

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

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

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874)

Blessing:

Jesus, You call us to follow.
You send us out in Your power to share Your good news.
You challenge us to put You first in our lives.
Give us the courage to respond wholeheartedly to Your call
and to follow You wherever you call us to go.
No compromise. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Sunday 28th June 2026 – 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Conference Sunday)

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Come everyone, come one and all.

Come if you are new.

Come if you've been here every week for 80 years.

Come if your name is long.

Come if your name is short.

Come, all, come everyone.

Come and worship the Lord,
who knows you and loves you,
whoever you are.

Hymn: Come Now Is The Time To Worship (StF 24)

Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to give your heart

Come, just as you are to worship

Come, just as you are before your God, come

One day every tongue will confess You are God

One day every knee will bow

Still the greatest treasure remains for those

Who gladly choose You now

Opening Prayers:

I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.'

(short silence)

Mighty God, we bow down before you. We worship you. We trust you, deep in our very beings. Far beyond words. We love you, Lord.

Lord God, sometimes we aren't welcoming to people around us. We just don't recognise their worth in you. How hurtful must that be. We know we wouldn't like it. **Open our eyes to your forgiveness, Lord,**

Sometimes we get wrapped up in our own concerns. We don't notice much else. We certainly aren't looking for you. We don't recognise you when you are there. **Open our eyes to your forgiveness, Lord**

Sometimes we know we don't act as you would wish. In your mercy you show us the things we should do. **Open our eyes to your forgiveness, Lord. Amen.**

Matthew 10:40-42 English Standard Version:

⁴⁰ "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Hymn: As Water To The Thirsty (StF 441)

As water to the thirsty,
as beauty to the eyes,
as strength that follows weakness,
as truth instead of lies,
as song time and springtime
and summertime to be,
so is my Lord,
my living Lord,
so is my Lord to me.

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.

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.

Thought for the day:

Have you ever spotted a famous person? Did you go up and ask them for a selfie or an autograph, or were you too shy? Or perhaps you were unsure if it was them?

Some celebrities perhaps revel in people asking for selfies and autographs when they are out and about, whereas others probably wish they could hide or wear a mask, particularly if they are on holiday with their families. Being recognised is not always a comfortable situation. The same can be true for teachers if they meet one of their pupils while out shopping. Who feels more embarrassed, the student or the teacher? Might these interactions go more smoothly if we recognise the other person as human, like us, people in need of welcome, gentleness, privacy or respect.

Today's short Gospel reading comes at the end of Jesus' instructions for mission, which he gave to his disciples. Jesus says that, if they are welcomed, it is the equivalent of welcoming God. The same is true for us. When we welcome others into our midst we are welcoming God, whose image we can see in everyone we meet. It doesn't have to be an elaborate welcome. Something as simple as providing someone with basic needs (a cup of cold water) is a demonstration of love and respect. 'These little ones' that Jesus mentions doesn't just mean the children, but the marginalised, the elderly, or those from minority groups – anyone, in fact, whom Roman or Jewish society did not rate highly.

Likewise, our contemporary values seem to struggle with 'otherness'. There seems to be a mismatch between accepting that everyone is different, while fearing the stranger in our midst. Living the Jesus way is counter-cultural in that it demands that we treat everyone

with the same worth and value, whatever their status, nationality or orientation. Jesus teaches that everyone should be valued and recognised as highly as another because they are made in the image of God. Serving them means serving God.

Even just remembering someone's name can bring them respect when otherwise they might go unnoticed. It is very frustrating to be called by the wrong name or have your name used informally in a formal situation, because our name is part of our identity and the essence of who we are. In the early days of her career, the tennis star Martina Navratilova got very frustrated with a Wimbledon umpire who couldn't pronounce her name. At one change of ends she was heard to say: 'Can't you get my name right?'

We can show respect to people simply by calling them by their preferred name in any particular situation.

So, our daily challenge is to recognise and acknowledge those around us who are being overlooked by others. Is there someone in your class who no-one plays with at break-time? Is there someone sleeping rough by the railway station entrance, or a person at work who never speaks to anyone? What 'cup of cold water' can we provide, or listening ear, or sandwich? Perhaps we can offer a friendly smile and invitation to join the game, or ask someone their name and then use it regularly when we pass them in the street?

Whatever we do, we can be sure that these small acts of faithfulness will not be unrecognised by God.

But Jesus's words don't just refer to our recognition of others. Part of being human is allowing others to minister to us on occasions. Allowing others to serve us can be just as gracious an act as serving someone else. This is another way of showing them respect: accepting their help. Whether we are giving or receiving, Jesus tells us: 'you will receive a reward' – the reward of being known and loved intimately by God, no matter what. What greater reward could there be?

Intercessions:

Let us pray for the Church and for the world, and let us thank God for His goodness.

Lord, we pray for your Church throughout the world: For those who lead and serve, that they may be faithful in teaching your Word and bold in living it out. We pray today for all Ministers, especially those who will be received into full Connexion and be Ordained. May they be a light in their community and a witness to your love. Lord, in your mercy, **All** Hear our prayer.

God of peace, we bring before you the nations of the world. We pray for leaders and governments, that they may act with justice, mercy, and integrity. We remember places torn by war, violence, and disaster, especially [insert current situations]. Bring healing where there is division, hope where there is despair, and light where there is darkness. Lord, in your mercy, **All:** Hear our prayer.

Loving Father, we thank you for the place where we live. Bless our schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods. We pray for those who feel isolated, for the unemployed, and for all who struggle to make ends meet. Help us to be generous in our care for one another. Lord, in your mercy, **All:** Hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we lift before you all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. We remember especially [insert names of those who are ill or in need]. Bring them comfort, strength, and healing. We pray too for those who care for others, that they may be renewed in their work. Lord, in your mercy, **All:** Hear our prayer.

We remember before you those who have died, especially [insert names if appropriate], and we pray for those who mourn, that they may know your comfort and peace. Grant us, with them, a share in your eternal kingdom. Amen

Hymn: O Lord My God (StF 82)

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

Refrain:

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

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

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

And when I think how God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burdens gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation,
To take me home, what joy will fill my heart!
Then I will bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Blessing:

As we go out from here,
help us to recognise
where there is need.
Show us how we can serve
and spread your love everywhere.

Amen.

Some material has been taken from Roots on the Web

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