

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of July 2026

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Sunday 5th July 2026 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service was compiled by Rev'd Richard Parkes

Call to Worship:

Jesus, we come to you to celebrate your love and to receive your word.
You taught that we must worship God in spirit. We long to worship with
your people, but we know you are with us, in these strange times. Amen.

Hymn: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (StF 503)

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.

Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayers:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we praise you for your goodness towards us
and all your creation:

For the love that reaches out to draw us to yourself
That we might experience the life that is called abundant.

Father, we praise you for your purpose for our lives.

You asked us to keep one day special, one day sacred

So that we might have the fullest opportunity

For worship, renewal and rest.

You have always wanted us to understand

that we are not machines who can work continuously.

You have made us in your image,

And we need times of rest, refreshment and stillness.

And you commanded us to keep this day holy,

To set it apart to be used differently.

And we praise you, because Christ's life, death and resurrection
have transformed this Sabbath day of rest

into a day for our good, to seek renewal

and to be open to the power and grace of the risen Christ.

May all that we say today, and how we say it –

May all that we do today, and how we do it –

May how we use your day - and how we focus our hearts on you in it

Bring you glory,

And may our lives bring you joy.

In the name of Christ, Prince of Peace. Amen

(From '500 prayers for All Occasions, by David Clowes. Slightly adapted)

Lord, we have made life complicated. Endless passwords to remember,
too many channels on TV, and we can't possibly watch them all.

Too many choices at the supermarket. Too many companies demanding
to know how they performed.

We are weighed down by the demand to make decisions. We are

befuddled by the complexity. We have created a gordian knot of our lives.

Forgive us. Tell us again of the simplicity of the gospel – Jesus lived among
us, and died to forgive us. Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: Come, Let Us Sing Of A Wonderful Love (StF 443)

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true,
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came,
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful Love,
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walsmley (1831-1870)

Introduction to Romans:

Here, Paul is wrestling with the reality of his own sin. He recognises that we are not always as in control of ourselves as we would like to think. People who are addicted, for example, usually want to shake themselves free – but they cannot. Or, the people around them won't allow it (sin isn't just my problem, there is a corporate aspect of sin). John Donne, the 16th/17th century poet, put it like this, "Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run, and do run still, though still I do deplore?." He can't help

himself, though he knows it's wrong. But there is hope. 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

Romans 7:15-25:

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Introduction to the gospel reading:

John the Baptist plays a much larger role in the gospels than we usually give him credit for. According to John's gospel, several of the disciples were already disciples of John the Baptist before they went to follow Jesus. And the murder of John provokes a change in Jesus' ministry. Here, Jesus complains that the people don't like John because he's too austere, and they don't like Jesus because he likes to party with people. Make your minds up! Jesus urges people to accept God's yoke – an obedience to God that is life affirming, rather than an obedience that lays ever more burdens on people.

Matt 11:16-19,25-30:

¹⁶ 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look,

a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

To ponder:

Jesus finishes today’s saying, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’ I guess that this is many people’s favourite passage. My yoke is easy, my burden is light. Rest for our Rest for our souls.

I sometimes wonder if we don’t make faith too complicated. That seems to be true of the Pharisees, who (as portrayed in the gospels) seemed to take delight in making more and more rules that people had to abide by. These rules were there to make sure that people didn’t accidentally break God’s law. But the very complexity of the rules made life difficult. Instead of helping people to grow closer to God, it made them concentrate on the rules. That that made for a religion of law, rather than grace. It seems a natural human instinct to make rules and laws, even unofficial ones. My dad was a lovely man. But we once argued as we were going to church. I was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, whilst he was wearing a suit. I pointed out that I was at least going to church! But he was brought up with the rule that you put on your Sunday Best for church.

And yet, the law keepers are not consistent. John the Baptist is too austere – he doesn’t eat or drink, so he must be mad. Jesus enjoys the company of ordinary folk – and they clearly enjoyed being with him.

Perhaps with Jesus they felt an openness and acceptance from his graceful presence. But he's dismissed as being too fond of the bottle.

Instead, Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter. When asked which was the greatest commandment (a common question to rabbis at the time), Jesus replied "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Jesus highlights the essence of the law, not the details.

It's the essence of the law that matters. The more rules we add, the more we lose grace. That's why Jesus is able to say that his yoke is easy. Which is not to say that we don't need to discipline ourselves. But we are not to live watching every step, worrying about the details of our lives. The bigger picture is God's grace, God's generosity and the call to respond with generous living. The easy yet demanding yoke.

Tony Campolo, a writer from the USA, recounts how he was in a seedy diner in Honolulu, Hawaii. There was a group of prostitutes there, and he overheard one of them say that her birthday was the next day and that she had never had a birthday party or a birthday cake in her entire life. Campolo and the diner owner worked together to throw a surprise party for her at 3:30 a.m. the following morning. When she arrived, the diner was decorated and the room was packed with other sex workers celebrating her birthday. I think Jesus would have been there.

Hymn: Empty, Broken, Here I Stand (StF 421) (Kyrie Eleison – Lord have mercy)

(Video of the song is found here:

[Empty, Broken, Here I Stand \(Kyrie Eleison - 5vv+refrain\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#))

Empty Broken Here I Stand, Kyrie Eleison.

Touch Me With Your Healing Hand, Kyrie Eleison.

Take My Arrogance And Pride, Kyrie Eleison.

Wash Me In Your Mercy's Tide, Kyrie Eleison.

Kyrie Eleison.
Christe Eleison,
Kyrie Eleison.

When My Faith Has All But Gone, Kyrie Eleison,
Give Me Strength To Carry On, Kyrie Eleison.
When My Dreams Have Turned To Dust, Kyrie Eleison.
In You, Oh Lord, I Put My Trust, Kyrie Eleison.
Kyrie Eleison,
Christe Eleison,
Kyrie Eleison.

When My Heart Is Cold As Ice, Kyrie Eleison.
Your Love Speaks Of Sacrifice, Kyrie Eleison.
Love That Sets The Captive Free, Kyrie Eleison.
O Pour Compassion Down On Me. Kyrie Eleison.
Kyrie Eleison,
Christe Eleison,
Kyrie Eleison.

You're The Voice That Calms My Fears, Kyrie Eleison.
You're The Laughter, Dries My Tears, Kyrie Eleison.
You're My Music, My Refrain, Kyrie Eleison.
Help Me Sing Your Song Again. Kyrie Eleison.
Kyrie Eleison,
Christe Eleison,
Kyrie Eleison.

Humble Heart Of Holiness, Kyrie Eleison.
Kiss Me With Your Tenderness, Kyrie Eleison.
Jesus, Faithful Friend And True, Kyrie Eleison.
All I Am I Give To You. Kyrie Eleison.
Kyrie Eleison,
Christe Eleison,
Kyrie Eleison.

Nick and Anita Haigh

Prayers:

Thanks for life, for celebrations, for people to celebrate with. We thank you for friends and family, we thank you for colleagues. We thank you for the people of our church – hold us together in your love.

But now, as a sign of our love, we bring to you our prayers.

Lord, we pray for your peace for those who are stressed out and anxious. Come into their turmoil, may your presence give strength and calmness.

Lord, we pray for your peace

for those who suffer from the wounds of war, violence
and hatred.

May they know healing and be inspired by the hope of your kingdom.

Lord, we pray for your peace

for those who won't accept the invitation to the full life that you offer; for those whose lives are governed by rules and regulations.

May they know how to let go and throw themselves into the challenge of faithful living, living life to the full with you.

Send your peace, Lord,

that we may think, act and speak harmoniously.

Take away our selfishness,

so that we can share the joys, and feel the sorrows,
of our neighbours.

May your peace, which passes all understanding,

keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Hymn: Faithful One, So Unchanging (StF 628)

Faithful One, so unchanging,

Ageless One, You're my rock of peace.

Lord of all, I depend on You,

I call out to You again and again.

I call out to You again and again.

You are my rock in times of trouble.

You lift me up when I fall down.

All through the storm Your love is the anchor,

My hope is in You alone.

Brian Doerkesen (b. 1965)

Blessing:

Dear Lord, as we go out today,
help us to go in your way and in your time.
Watch over us in all our goings out and comings in,
until, in your time, we see you face to face. **Amen.**

**Sunday 12th July 2026 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Action for Children Sunday)**

This service was compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

God has called us here today; we've chosen to come. God calls us to come closer;

God invites us to be present to his presence. May we choose to say 'Yes' to God today.

Hymn: And Can It Be (StF 345)

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Opening Prayer:

Lord God, you are full of blessing and faithfulness: as shown in your promise to Isaac and Rebekah; As shown in your Son, Jesus, whom we choose to follow;
As shown in your Holy Spirit, residing in and with us. You are God, full of blessing and honour, continuing to promise much today. Even if we must wait a while,
you are faithful, your timeline is not ours. As we wait, we hold close your blessings and promises, treasuring them as you treasure us. We cherish, honour, and adore you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord, we chase after many things, money, possessions, even relationships – things we feel we need, must have, should have and are entitled to. We act on impulse, wanting things now. In our instant world, waiting is a struggle.
Lord, we are sorry for chasing such things, for being selfish and for making poor choices. Help us to look to you first, to trust and wait for your guidance. Lord, we are sorry. Amen.

Hymn: Seek Ye First (StF 254)

Seek Ye First The Kingdom Of God
And His Righteousness
And All These Things Shall Be Added Unto You
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Ask And It Shall Be Given Unto You
Seek And Ye Shall Find
Knock And It Shall Be Opened Unto You
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

We Shall Not Live By Bread Alone
But By Every Word
That Proceeds From The Mouth Of God
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Genesis 25:19-34:

¹⁹ These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. ²¹ And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?"^[a] So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³ And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you^[b] shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob.^[c] Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. ²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.^[d]) ³¹ Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." ³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau

bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Thought for the Day:

It's not fair!' is the cry of small children everywhere, often when siblings are involved. Perhaps you remember being told 'Life isn't fair'. But did that help then, and does it help now? It seems to dismiss the validity of our deep sense of justice – things ought to be fair – and perhaps induces an attitude of fatalism: Why bother trying to fix things if they aren't ultimately fixable?

In today's story, we are faced with the massive injustice of God's choice of Jacob, the younger twin:

'Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger.' (v.23)

God's ways are inscrutable, as Job and Paul and many other Bible characters have concluded, and we are powerless before him:

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.' (Isaiah 55:8)

So perhaps we have to be pragmatic in choosing what to attempt to change or influence – that might include trying to prevent injustice in the first place. Isaac and Rebekah chose unjustly:

'Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.' (v.28)

There is definitely a warning for us here: in almost any role we're in, we may feel drawn to some individual(s) more than others, but we need to do our utmost not to practise favouritism. Perhaps surprisingly, the favoured one sometimes suffers the most – as in the case of Jacob's own favouritism towards Joseph.

We are then faced with two pivotal choices: the deliberate injustice of Jacob's trickery, and the stupid and irresponsible behaviour of Esau. We note the cunning, considered calculation of Jacob, and the reckless and ill-considered response of Esau. Neither are commendable. Perhaps both can offer us some pointers as we learn to choose well.

First, Jacob, the relatively powerless younger brother, decides to use what power he has to manipulate the situation in order to gain the upper hand. We don't know if he was aware of the prophecy Rebekah had received but, if so, he decided to 'play God' by attempting to bring about its fulfilment himself. In an unconsciously prophetic action, he emerged from the womb 'gripping Esau's heel' (v.26). He grew up with the compulsion to grasp that which was his to receive: an illustration, perhaps, of the New Testament tension between salvation by works and salvation by grace

Do we sometimes make the same mistake, trying to play God rather than seeking his wisdom or being willing to wait for God to act in his own time? Second, the privileged and potentially powerful older brother, who should, as the firstborn son, have been taking his role, responsibilities and rights seriously, 'despised his birthright' (v.34). Why? Because he was driven by his physical appetite, choosing the instant gratification of his material needs over the ancestral gift of being the firstborn. Interestingly, the tempting of Esau was seen by medieval expositors as a typology of the temptation of Christ.

There are at least two life lessons here. First, the importance of not making quick decisions when we are hungry, tired, stressed, angry, hurried, etc. Don't go shopping when you're hungry, and don't write emails when you're angry! Be careful to consider the long-term consequences of short-term choices.

The second life lesson is the importance of clarifying what's most valuable to us and constantly refocusing so that it becomes our guiding principle in every decision. For most people, the relational and the spiritual come first – not achievements or material things. Whereas Esau gave up his future and legacy in a moment of distraction from what was important, how are we ensuring our day-by-day choices keep us on the path God has for us?

Hymn: Let Love Be Real, In Giving And Receiving (StF 615)

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,

give me your love wherever we may go:
as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,
give me your love in spite of all you know:
as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments,
give me your trust when all my failings show:
as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Intercessions:

Eternal God of yesterday, today and tomorrow, forever constant in the changes and challenges of our lives, we bring our prayers for the world in which we live, the land on which we walk, the fields in which we sow, the people who walk the world with us, near and far.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For our world we pray, that humanity will learn to treat it with care and respect so that it may nourish and flourish not just present generations but future ones too. May we play our part by living sustainably so others may live too. May we treasure creation and not abuse and destroy. May we live for the future and not just the present.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For families who live on the breadline, for those confronting drugs, drink, guns, knives and gang cultures. For those who struggle to manage life's challenges. May they encounter people who will care for them, who will support, encourage, guide and provide for their needs so that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that there is hope that goodness and stability can grow and flourish.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For our health services, home carers, social workers. Those who seek to care and heal despite all the pressures that society places on them, that they may be supported themselves, financially and professionally so that, as they seek to heal others' wounds and support their needs, they are not themselves being wounded or harmed or finding themselves worn to a frazzle. As they seek to 'grow' others, may they grow themselves.

O God, we praise you and bring this to you,
because we believe you answer our prayers.

For these and all those in need, we offer our prayers.

Amen.

Hymn: Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah (StF 465)

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
where the healing waters flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield,
ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

Blessing:

Guide us, O thou great Redeemer:
guide us in our thinking,
guide us in our speaking,
guide us in our doings,
guide us always to choose what pleases you.
God is our hope.

Amen.

Sunday 19th July 2026 – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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.**

Call to Worship:

Come, all who feel alone or uncertain. God is here, faithful in every moment.

Come, all who rejoice and give thanks.

God rejoices with us and receives our praise. **Amen.**

Hymn: God Is With Us (Tune 'Ode to 'Joy') (StF 8)

God is with us: Creator, Father,
bringing everything to birth;
Mother of the whole creation,
fire of stars and life of earth:
down the countless years composing,
from the earth's evolving night,
love's response to love, and forming
mind and soul to seek Your light.

God with us: Redeemer, Brother,
Friend forever at our side,
Here, in flesh, You walked among us,
taking up Your cross, You died.
Crucified, despised, rejected,
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,
streaming from the cross, Your judgement,
full of mercy, clears our name.

God with us: Unwearied Spirit,
from the birth of time and space,
surging through unconscious being,
joyful, Life-Creating Grace:
Through the centuries You find us;
You, as God, inspire our prayer;

Life and Power at work within us,
love for ever, everywhere!

God, Transcendent, far beyond us,
closest Friend, unfailing Guide:
through the ages, wronged, affronted,
in Your poor, still crucified!
God with us: convict, forgive us;
by Your holy love destroy
all that hinders peace and justice:
fill this aching world with joy!

Alan Gaunt (b 1935)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Eternal and sovereign God,
with awe and wonder we worship You.
You are all-powerful, ever present:
shaping the pattern of history, transforming our lives.
You are all good, ever merciful:
showering us with Your blessings, forgiving our faults.
You are always true, ever constant:
daily fulfilling Your purpose with the same dependability.
You are all holy, ever perfect:
just and righteous in all You do.
We have not worshipped You as fully as we might;
not praised You with heart and soul and mind;
we have glimpsed so little of Your greatness.
Keep us mindful of Your unfailing mercy,
Your countless blessings,
and awaken us to our sense of awe and wonder before You.
Open our eyes afresh to Your splendour,
our hearts to Your love, our minds to Your purpose,
and our spirits to Your presence,
and so may we thrill to the wonder of all that You are,
in the name of the living Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Lord Jesus Christ, it is hard sometimes not to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges facing us and the obstacles which seemed to block our path.

You call us to proclaim the gospel but so few seem interested in hearing it. You ask us to make disciples of all nations but only a handful seem willing to respond.

We live in a world where faith is ridiculed and Your name casually dismissed,

a world in which people live for today with no thought of tomorrow and in which good seems overpowered by evil.

Instead of truth we see falsehood, instead of love, hatred,

instead of peace, division,

instead of joy, sorrow –

the dawn of your Kingdom apparently further away than ever rather than drawing nearer, and we feel powerless to do anything about it.

Forgive us, and by Your Spirit, help us not to lose heart.

Help us to understand that we have a part in Your purpose and that the final victory is in Your hands.

Give us strength simply to do what You ask of us as best we can and to leave the rest in Your hands, confident that, though we may not see them, the seeds you are sowing are growing, and the day will come when your Kingdom will be established and You will rule with the Father, One God, world without end.

We pray as those who are forgiven and loved. **Amen.**

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

Reading: Matthew chapter 13 vs. 24 – 30 & 36 – 43 NRSV

Introduction:

This is one of a series of parables about the nature of the kingdom. Earlier in chapter 13 (verses 10-16) Jesus has indicated that He uses parables because they are intended to make us sit up and notice and they will only be understood by those who are paying close attention. In this case, the parable was so cryptic that the disciples asked for an explanation.

The Parable of the Weeds:

²⁴ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?'

²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

²⁹ But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

The Parable Of the Weeds Explained:

³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples approached Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will collect out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

'Pause For Thought' with the disciple Thomas:

Wheat and weeds,

good and evil –

it all sounds so simple, doesn't it? –

So straightforward;
the distinction between them as clear as it's possible to be.
And we'd like to think it is, wouldn't we:
Ethical issues, moral decisions,
black and white,
right and wrong,
true or false?
It's so much easier that way,
for we know precisely where we stand:
no need to argue or debate things,
no need even to think –
the correct course is prescribed for us and woe betide anyone who dares
to suggest otherwise.
But is that what Jesus was saying?
I'm not so sure,
for, look more carefully,
and you'll see that you can't always separate the one from the other,
not in this life, anyway.
There is good and evil, of course,
sometimes starkly apparent,
but the reality is that there's a bit of each in all of us,
everyone capable of rising so high or falling so low.
It's not for us to point the accusing finger,
to sort out the wheat from the weeds,
much though we'd occasionally like to.
Judge not, lest you be judged –
isn't that what Jesus told us?
And we ignore that message at our peril,
for we may well find ourselves in the dock
should we pursue our case too far.
No, the advice is simple enough:
Look not to others but yourself,
your own words, your own deeds,
and then, sure that the seed which was sown
is the one that is growing,
that the final crop lives up to expectations.

Judgement will come in God's good time,
our lives weighed in the balance and the harvest assessed –
will your life prove to have been fruitful?

Hymn: The Kingdom of God (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 prisoners 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!
His 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.

Bryn Rees (1911 – 1983)

Reflection: ‘The Wheat Among The Weeds’

Three of the most often broadcast television commercials at the moment all ask us this:

search through all your drawers, cupboards, shelves, dressers, desks, wardrobes, lofts, sheds, garages and search out all those things you don't use, need or want anymore. An opportunity for a good clear out. Just give them a call and they'll do all the rest, and you'll get a payment if you're happy, or goods returned if you're not. IT'S A WIN WIN!

Or is it?,

Take another look at what might seem valueless to you. It may be that you've moved house and you're short of space or it doesn't match your new surroundings, it may be broken and too expensive to repair or restore, it may not fit, it could be an unusable gift. There are lots of reasons why things get relegated. Then think about how you came to have it. If it was a gift, think about the person who gave it to you - the thought and attention they had given to choosing it. If you'd purchased it - ask yourself why - an impulsive buy or something you'd saved hard for. Perhaps it was something bequeathed or a family heirloom. Maybe something that brought back cherished memories of someone or something from the past, maybe childhood or holiday souvenirs. Endless reasons for once-cherished items. Everything has its value - even when that no longer applies for us. We may still part with it - or we may just put it back where we found it.

Sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, surrounded by crowds on the shore, Jesus taught them through His stories about the Kingdom of heaven, or in other words, the rule of God. The story we have heard is a strange Parable about wheat and weeds, something which would be very familiar with His hearers. Many were people who farmed the land, and Jesus likened it to the Kingdom of heaven. Farming was very different in those days to what we see today. No mechanisation, everything done painstakingly by hand. The good seed would have been saved from the previous year's crop. So,

Jesus says, a man went out into his field with his basket of seed and scattered it over the land as he walked. No neat rows or even spaces, no chemicals or fertilisers. Just seed and soil. Weeds grew up with the wheat: worthless weeds that competed for the soil's moisture and nutrients, the enemy of the farmer, competing with his healthy crop. The biblical word Jesus uses for this particular weed reveals it is particularly noxious. BUT - here's the problem, growing together, you couldn't tell the wheat and weed apart, and they had to grow until ready for harvesting before you could tell which was which. That's why when the farmer's servants came to ask if they should pull up the weeds, the farmer says no because their roots would be intertwined so that in pulling up the weeds, they would lose their precious crop as well. They had to wait until the harvest when everything was pulled up and the wheat and weeds could be separated with the weeds used for fuel and the wheat stored in the barn.

In terms of farming, it's really a common sense story but Jesus was using it to talk about the rule of God. So if we are to relate the meaning of the story in today's context, we see that the farmer's words and actions are likened to those of God and the wheat and weeds describe people in the world.

If we are truly God's people, then we are the wheat, sown from good seed, but living right next to, surrounded by noxious weeds that threaten to choke us off. Christians are portrayed here as a minority in a hostile world, we only have to turn on our televisions, radios or read a newspaper to realise how threatening that might feel. So, when we read the words of Jesus to let wheat and weeds grow together, it wasn't what the crowds wanted to hear. And maybe we'd feel exactly the same.

But how can we even be sure that we are wheat if we take that story literally? Can we be certain that if the weeds were pulled up, if those whose lives had taken wrong paths were gathered and thrown away right now, who would be doomed? In that case, the farmer's word to let both grow together would be good news allowing time for people to repent. Maybe for us, Jesus' words about letting wheat and weeds grow together until harvest are wise and good. You cannot really tell until harvest which is which.

CONFUSED? So were the crowds and so were the disciples so Jesus takes the story further.

What does this say to us about God?

God is patient: we should not judge too soon. Salvation comes through faith, not by what is achieved.

Righteousness is not visible: God's ways and our ways are not the same. In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed over and over again as reaching out to all kinds of people: tax collectors, lepers, foreigners; all those labelled as "least". We are called to go and make disciples, to share the gospel with all people - not just to those who are like us.

That is a hard truth to accept. We need our faith to be strengthened, especially in the world where we feel in a minority. We need to know that we are loved and accepted by God, now. But the parable tells us that God does not judge now for in gathering up what is evil, the good might be uprooted too.

Can we see ourselves, as members of Christ's Church, as those who struggle to remain faithful so that others too might see our faith in action and be encouraged? If people only see atheism and evil in the world, they will despair. Cynicism can be contagious - but so can faith and hope. God is calling us to be visible, to be that faithful witness as an example to those around us. Faith and hope - and the prayer, witness and acts of love that result from them show that we are One In Christ. We live by faith in the word of God and the hope of His promises. If we stay rooted in the soil of daily life, in our everyday routines within our families and communities, as students and homemakers, workers or retired, friends and neighbours, we are contributing to the harvest God is preparing. It may be that God can use our love and actions to turn around situations and circumstances of those on the edge of faith, with whom our roots intertwine, so that they may experience God's love too.

We all know only too well that there is good and evil in the world but the ultimate judgement is with God at the end of the age. So let's go back to the three advertisements. Would you still want to part with everything that you found? In God's eyes, everything is of value. Every time you see

the adverts perhaps they may remind you that there is more love there than you had ever imagined. **Amen.**

Hymn: Show Me How To Stand For Justice (StF 713)

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 by 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:

Merciful God, You call us and challenge us to live in the world, to be part of the world, to belong the world for which we now bring our prayers.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for the world's people who go hungry through failure of crops, through bad land management or climate change, flood and drought, heat and cold, through the greed of others, through lack of money and resources. We pray for those who offer training and support to train others in food and farming, for those who run soup kitchens and food banks.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for those who hunger for more than food, for those who are hungry for love, care, support and shelter. For those who are hungry for justice and fairness, dignity and worth.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for those who are hungry for peace and stability, security and safety. We pray for those who fear the enemy who walks with them, who lives among them, who tries to influence and change them.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for those adversely affected by ongoing and seemingly never-ending strikes to transport and health services. Those who can't travel to places they need to get to. For those who can't get the care they need, whose illnesses get worse, whose pain increases and who frailty becomes harder to recover from.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for young people, growing up in a digital age where good and bad, truth and falsehood, right and wrong seem hard to navigate with so much on-line influence, and for those who see the world as a frightening uncertain place and wonder how they will step out and navigate it themselves.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

We pray for ourselves that we may tread the world carefully and seek what is right, good and truthful. We pray that we may be the scatterers of good deeds and words, kind thoughts and love in action. We pray that we may do our best each step of the way, that we may be the best followers of Jesus that we can be, that we may seek and find the Kingdom of God.

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

And in a moment of stillness, we offer our unspoken prayers for ourselves and others...

Merciful and loving God,
hear our prayers.

Today, we give thanks for the ministry of Revd. Liz Singleton as we prepare for her Farewell Service this afternoon. We thank You for the commitment, love, kindness and encouragement she has shown us and we pray that You will continue to guide her and Peter through the next chapter of their lives, continuing to discover more of You in new opportunities and challenges. **Amen.**

Hymn: Lord I Come To You (StF 471)

Lord, I come to You,
let my heart be changed, renewed,
flowing from the grace
that I found in You.

And Lord, I've come to know
the weaknesses I see in me
will be stripped away
by the power of Your love.

*Hold me close,
let Your love surround me;
bring me near, draw me to Your side.
And as I wait,
I'll rise up like the eagle,
and I will soar with You,
Your Spirit leads me on
in the power of Your love.*

Lord, unveil my eyes,
let me see You face to face,
the knowledge of Your love
as You live in me.
Lord, renew my mind,
as Your will unfolds in my life
In living every day
by the power of Your love.

*Hold me close,
let Your love surround me;
bring me near, draw me to Your side.
And as I wait,
I'll rise up like the eagle,
and I will soar with You,
Your Spirit leads me on
in the power of Your love.*

Geoff Bullock (b. 1956)

Blessing:

Lord God, thank You for meeting with us today. As we leave this time of worship, quiet every anxious thought. Fill us with the peace that only You can give and let that peace guide us through the coming week. **Amen.**

Sunday 26th July 2026 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mr Ryan Davies

Call to Worship:

God knows all that we do, our intentions and our actions.

Let us bring all that we are to him today
so that he can grow his kingdom through us.

Opening Hymn: Over All The Earth, You Reign On High (StF 63)

Over all the earth You reign on high
Every mountain stream, every sunset sky
But my one request, Lord my only aim
Is that You'd reign in me again.

*Lord reign in me, reign in Your power
Over all my dreams, in my darkest hour
You are the Lord of all I am
So won't You reign in me again*

Over every thought, over every word
May my life reflect the beauty of my Lord
'Cause You mean more to me than any earthly thing
So won't You reign in me again.

*Lord, reign in me, reign in Your power
Over all my dreams, in my darkest hour
'Cause You are the Lord of all I am
So won't You reign in me again.*

Prayer of Praise:

Father, you looked upon the hearts of your people.

You saw our messy, chaotic lives
and loved us enough to send your Son, Jesus.

Father, we give you thanks and praise.

Jesus, you came, a treasure from heaven to walk this earth,
teaching and serving before suffering,
for the love of those you came to save.

Jesus, we give you thanks and praise.

Holy Spirit, through Jesus, you reside in and with us.
You remind, prompt and help us with all that we need
to navigate our days in integrity and love.
Spirit, we give you thanks and praise.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord,
for when we've got things wrong and chosen the easy way out,
deflected blame instead of owning up:
Lord, please forgive us.
When we've neglected to show love,
hurting others with our words and actions:
Lord, please forgive us.
When we've retreated behind our masks,
denying ourselves and others:
Lord, please forgive us.
Amen.

Hymn: Let Love Be Real, In Giving And Receiving (StF 615)

Let love be real in giving and receiving
With-out the need to manage and to own
A haven free from posing and pretending
Where every weakness may be safely known
Give me Your hand along the desert pathway
Give me Your love wherever we may go.

*As God loves us so let us love each other
With no demands just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real not grasping or confining
That strange embrace that holds yet sets us free
That helps us face the risk of truly living
And makes us brave to be what we might be
Give me Your strength
When all my words are weakness
Give me Your love in spite of all You know.

*As God loves us so let us love each other
With no demands just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real with no manipulation
No secret wish to harness or control
Let us accept each other's incompleteness
And share the joy of learning to be whole
Give me Your hope
Through dreams and disappointments
Give me Your trust when all my failings show.

*As God loves us so let us love each other
With no demands just open hands and space to grow.*

Genesis 29:15-2 (N.R.S.V)

Jacob Marries Laban's Daughters:

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely,[a] and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' ¹⁹ Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵ When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' ²⁶ Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.' ²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

Thought of the day:

Today's passages help us remember that God understands life is and will be messy. We might not be able to escape the mess, but we can learn to navigate it with God. It might not always be obvious, but God is working in the midst of the mess to bring good out of tricky situations.

Who do you identify with most in this story from Genesis? Jacob? Laban? Leah or Rachel? With Jacob as the main character we have followed from his father's house, it can be tempting to see him as the one being cheated with the 'wrong' daughter being brought to him after the feast and having to work those extra seven years to earn Rachel's hand. However, Laban explains his deceit by explaining that, if Jacob married Rachel before Leah was wed, Leah would be seen by other men as rejected and spoiled. It was culturally unheard of for the younger daughter to be married ahead of an older one. Laban's deception preserves Leah's dignity and gives her hope of a life with purpose and financial security. Laban obscured the truth of his daughter's identity at the wedding feast, but he secured justice for her.

Standing up for justice can feel like a messy subject. Throughout the years, civil disobedience has been put forward as an appropriate response to unfair structures in society and yet action of civil disobedience can cause consternation and raise questions of who it is okay to inconvenience. For example, environmental activists have come under much criticism for blocking roads that may stop ambulances from getting through to hospitals.

But God also calls us to work against injustice. When it's complicated and messy, we are more aware of needing the Spirit's guiding to help us navigate the right action. Perhaps we should start by reflecting on the situations we are involved in to make sure that we are not unthinkingly perpetuating injustice on others and ask God's guidance for how to respond. Amen!

Hymn: Best Of All God Is With Us (StF 610)

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, but death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Prayers of Intercession:

Almighty God we are but one minute speck in your created order, but you care for each speck that you have made, for each of us and for all those who we bring our prayers for now.

For those who feel they do not belong in the place in which they live, house, town or country, feeling isolated, unsettled, unwanted or unloved. Feeling adrift from others and maybe from themselves, seeking and searching for answers and somewhere that feels like home.

Bless all those for whom we pray with your presence.

Bless them Lord, bless them.

Bless those surrounded by war, violence and upheaval, living in now derelict and destroyed areas that were once comfortable places to live. Bless them in their distress, in their pain, in their loss and confusion. Bless them in their searching for new ways, new hopes, new dreams, new homes. Bless them in their search to make sense of life and love.

Bless all those for whom we pray with your presence.

Bless them Lord, bless them.

Bless those families who will struggle to cope during the summer school holidays, those struggling to feed their families without extra school support, those who struggle with lack of indoor space and precious little, if any, outdoor space to healthily wear out the children before bedtime. Bless those who have had poor experience of being parented and who now repeat the same with their own children.

Bless all those for whom we pray with your presence.

Bless them Lord, bless them.

Bless those living in the midst of immediately visible effects of climate change, excessive heat and flooded grounds, wildfires, landslides, parched ground. May we all seek to find a way to live more fairly and sustainably for this generation and the generations to come. May we all be prepared to sacrifice something for the good of future generations.

Bless all those for whom we pray with your presence.

Bless them Lord, bless them.

Bless those in pain and anguish, physical and mental. Bless those who seek to care for them. Bless those who teeter on the edge of life, those who feel their lives are pointless and those for who life draws to an end, give them peace, security and comfort.

Bless all those for whom we pray with your presence.

Bless them Lord, bless them.

For these and all your people, Lord we pray.

Amen.

Followed by the Lord's Prayer

Final Hymn: Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah (StF 465)

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream shall flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield,
Be though still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

Blessing:

Lord God,
you know the complexities and messiness of the world we are living in.
Help us to make good choices, to be aware of our impact
on others and to use the gifts you have given us to bless those around us.
Amen.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648) e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.