

## A service for 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 MHA Sunday (StF)

### Call to Worship: John chapter 13 verse 34

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Amen.

### Introduction

MHA is the largest charity care provider for older people in the UK, founded by members of the Methodist Church in 1943. Today MHA supports 18,500 older people. Today we give thanks for all that MHA, with the help of supporters, has accomplished; we pray for MHA's residents and members and for those who work and volunteer in the care of others; and we add our voice to helping all older people live later life well through advocating and lobbying for older people in society and those who work in the social care sector.

Our theme this year is work being done by telephone befriending to support people in our community who are isolated and lonely. It is about sharing a part of one another's life journey, of showing our care.

*Our opening hymn was written by Revd. Percy Dearmer, an Anglican priest who served with the Red Cross and YMCA in the Great War, was the joint editor of "Songs of Praise" 1925 & 1931 and became a Canon at Westminster Abbey. He wrote this hymn to introduce the melody, "Theodoric" to "Songs of Praise" and I am glad he did! We shall sing hymn number 403, 'God is love: his the care'.*

**1. God is love: his the care**

**Tending each, everywhere.**

**God is love – all is there!**

**Jesus came to show him,**

**That we all might know him: *Chorus:***

***Sing aloud, loud, loud!***

***Sing aloud, loud, loud!***

***God is good!***

***God is truth!***

***God is beauty! Praise him!***

**2. None can see God above;**

**Neighbours here we can love;**

**Thus may we Godward move,**

**Finding him in others,**

**Sisters all, and brothers: *Chorus:***

**3. Jesus lived here for men,**

**Strove and died, rose again,**

**Rules our hearts, now as then;**

**For he came to save us**

**By the truth he gave us: *Chorus:***

**4. To our Lord praise we sing –**

**Light and life, friend and king,**

**Coming down love to bring,**

**Pattern for our duty,**

**Showing God in beauty: *Chorus:***

© Percy Dearmer (1867 – 1936)

***Let us pray.***

Creator God, whose Word brought life to the universe, our life is in your hands. You are our Guide and Saviour, compassionate and faithful, who revealed your true nature through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the faith and power to seek and do your holy will. You give our lives purpose and meaning as you guide us through the darkness of the world with the light of your love. We rejoice that every day of our lives you care for us, nurture and protect us and though we sometimes stray from you, you don't abandon us, but seek us out and draw us close to you once more.

Help us feel your presence as we offer our worship today. Amen.

***Let us confess and seek forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Lord of time and space, we acknowledge our failure to love and serve you wholeheartedly, by limiting your loving concern for our neighbours, for our unwillingness to trust you when we are called to serve others, for allowing our worldly concerns to drive you from our consciousness. Forgive and increase our trust in you. O changeless God, so we may play our part in healing some of the brokenness we see around us.

Lord, in your mercy ..... **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your abiding wisdom, made available to us throughout the daily wonders of life. Lord Jesus Christ, you reveal to us the joy, challenge and opportunities of daily discipleship. Holy Spirit, help us to grasp in faith, the human and the spiritual within our journey full of years.

Lord, in your mercy ..... **Hear our prayer.**

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, without the burden of guilt. In trust and faith, we praise you for open ears and eyes to your voice of love. In trust and faith, we praise you for opportunities to bring comfort, consolation and courage to others. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service as we journey on, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

***We shall say the Lord's Prayer***

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

***Our next hymn is usually sung to 'Heanish' which I think is perfectly singable. However, the Chaplaincy Department suggests it is sung to the alternative setting, Beethoven's 'Ode to joy'. As I am a Beethoven fan, I shall go along with their suggestion. We shall sing hymn number 619, 'Thanks for friends who keep on loving'***

**1. Thanks for friends who keep on loving,  
finding ways to help us grow,  
celebrating our achievements,  
sharing in our pain and woe.**

**God is glimpsed where love is faithful:  
mirrored here in time and space.**

**Thanks to God for friends who love us:  
Christ revealed in every face.**

**2. Other people help to shape us when they take the time to share words of wisdom, honest actions through our journey in God's care.**

**In our faithful, honest learning we discover things unknown.**

**Thanks to God for friends who teach us: seeking talent yet ungrown.**

**3. When we find our friendships challenged through mistakes and different views, we discover deeper living as the love of God renews.**

**For in Christ we see forgiveness; know a strength still to embrace.**

**Thanks to God for friends who keep us: making real the gift of grace.**

**4. Praise to God for this great gifting of relationship and friend: imaging divine relating; found in heaven with no end.**

**Bless us Maker, Word and Spirit as companions on the way.**

**Thanks to God for friends who help us to fulfil our lives each day.**

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***We come now to our prayers of intercession.***

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your Creation and for the great gift of life, but more than these we thank you for loving us so much that you came to save us through Christ Jesus, your Son. In response to your grace, help us to play what part, however small it be, to build a better world by seeking justice for all-comers, by striving to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources rather than fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, rather than being divided by them. Help us to stand up against prejudice in any of its forms, remembering that Jesus in his own ministry was open to both outcasts and Gentiles, offering them his love.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who hold authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace. Hear our prayer for peace; in particular we pray for an end to the war in Ukraine, the appalling conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and to civil strife in both Haiti and Sudan. We pray for victims of war, terrorism, prejudice and persecution: families and friends of people who have been killed; those who have suffered life-changing injuries; others who are broken in mind and spirit; widows and orphans who are struggling to survive and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant them much needed support and steadfastness of spirit, so they may begin to rebuild their lives. Help us spread the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, so all lives are precious.

Lord of shalom, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief, trouble, or bereavement, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families. Grant them comfort in their distress,

reassurance in their need and a sense of being valued for who they are. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them....., Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love which offers healing, courage, strength and an enduring peace.

Faithful, all-embracing Lord, we pray for people, full of years, yet empty of peace: intimidated by unfamiliar walls, faces and routines, haunted by loose threads and unfinished business, fighting to hold together, body, mind and spirit. God of all peace, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of calm. We pray for those, full of years, yet empty of purpose: unable to fill the void, left by absent friends and grown-up children; facing the losses of health, home and independence. God of all purpose, through the service of MHA, restore to such as these, a sense of worth.

Lord, we pray for those, full of years and overflowing with joy: at one with beauty and inspired by love; whose hopes have, weathered many a storm and whose faces bear the wrinkles from countless smiles.

God of all joy, through the example of our elders, grant us the courage to model contentment, resilience and grace for a new generation. Hear our prayer for all who access MHA's outreach and services, for those who lead and guide MHA, for the managers, staff and volunteers who run homes and schemes day by day and for everybody who supports its aims through giving and prayer. May the fullness of your blessing be theirs now and always.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide. Make us all one in Spirit, love and truth, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world, by our words and deeds of love.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to shine the light of your love upon our selfish, sin-darkened world in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

### **The Gospel reading is Mark chapter 4 verses 30 to 32**

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." Amen.

*We continue with a hymn about sharing life's journey. It was written and composed by New Zealander Richard Gillard. It took him more than a year to complete, for he wrote the first verse in 1976 and the remainder in 1977. I think it was worth the wait! We shall sing hymn number 611, 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'.*

**1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you:  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.**

**2. We are pilgrims on a journey,  
And companions on the road;  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.**

**3. I will hold the Christ-light for you**

In the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping:  
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
Till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,  
We shall find such harmony;  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you:  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.

*Richard Gillard © 1977 Scripture in Song*

### **Sermon: MHA 2024 – *The Mustard Seed***

Whilst gardening experts like Alan Titchmarsh or Monty Don might quibble about the mustard seed's size – there are smaller seeds than mustard – and that it grows into a tree rather than a very large shrub, Jesus was not speaking in horticultural terms, for he was a carpenter, not a farmer. His parable of the mustard seed was meant to show how a small amount of faith can grow exponentially with the might of the Holy Spirit, or how a small group of followers were able to grow into a huge, unstoppable Church, equivalent to a **large shrub or tree** that allowed birds to shelter in its branches – in other words, a church that accommodates all-comers, not just an exclusive few. However, if that mustard seed represents our gifts, graces and talents, small though they may be, when combined with the offerings of others, they will make a big difference. Perhaps the parable's greatest point is that the Church is – or certainly ought to be – a place of welcome for all, irrespective of age, colour, gender, beliefs or lifestyles. If we don't reach out to people who are different to us, we exclude them from the good news we are commissioned to spread throughout the world. Remember who early Methodists sought to save. John Wesley preached: **'all need to be saved; all may be saved; all may know themselves saved; all may be saved to the uttermost.'** The aim was and is to help people live life as fully as they can.

MHA is an example of a mustard seed that grew into a huge shrub. It was founded in 1943 as "Methodist Homes" by a Methodist Minister, Revd. Walter Hall, three years after he was due to sit down. Revd. Hall and a group of fellow - Methodists were concerned about the wholly inadequate provision for older people in the UK, who lacked the means of self-support in their retirement. In those days between workhouses and before the Welfare State was born, they would have been admitted to bleak Old Folks' Homes, or if they were living with a dementia, incarcerated in Mental Hospitals. Revd. Hall and his friends were convinced that all people are entitled to a decent quality of life at any age, including their declining years, so they opened their first residential care home for twelve older ladies, Rylands, in Wallington, Surrey, during 1945. They encouraged residents to be as independent as possible, to follow their interests as fully as they were able and to feel valued for themselves, irrespective of their physical or mental conditions.

In the past eighty years, MHA has expanded dramatically and now runs eighty-six residential, nursing and specialist dementia care homes and sixty-five retirement living

homes, some with twenty-four-hour care, caring for approximately 6700 older people. In addition, it operates MHA Communities, formerly Live at Home Schemes, across the country, catering for more than 11000 people over fifty-five, making the total of service-users nearly 18000. As a retired chaplain, I am proud to advocate for MHA, for I know first-hand about the quality of care, physical, emotional and spiritual that it offers service users and it is a source of tremendous frustration for me that successive governments have promised to fix social care for older people, only to fail to do so. It is scandalous that many of the approximately million who are living with a dementia have neither specialist homes nor home-carers, or even day-centres to support them or their families. It is a national disgrace that tens of thousands of older people, especially ones with mobility issues, are so isolated that they often go for a week or more without having somebody to talk with. Therefore, I am joyful that this year's appeal concerns **MHA's telephone befriending scheme**.

The campaign video is about two women, the first called Dot, a lady in her late seventies, living in Staffordshire. Dot lost both her husband and sister three years ago and her son lives and works in Wales, so she has become isolated and lonely, her plight exacerbated by the lockdowns in the COVID pandemic. The second is a volunteer befriender called Grace, a woman in her mid-twenties who lives in London. She became aware of how lonely people like her grandparents were during the lockdowns and since her grandparents had passed away, she felt she would like to support older people who were isolated and lonely. A search on Google led her to the MHA telephone befriending scheme which effected the DBS and safeguarding checks and giving Grace essential training, before contacting Dot to ask whether or not she would like Grace to call her once a week by 'phone. Dot was very willing, so Grace called her and introduced herself.

Grace asked Dot what music she liked and, although Dot said she didn't like music, a little probing revealed that Dot actually likes AC/DC. Grace also discovered that Dot likes football and has her nails painted blue every week. Within a few weeks Grace was talking to or texting Dot more frequently and a strong bond was formed. In the video MHA arranged for Dot and Grace to meet in a chapel where both described how much they valued one another's friendship and how each had benefitted from their chats over the 'phone. The benefits are mutual, as is the joy and laughter in their friendship, so the potential for this scheme to end the loneliness of many older members of our society is enormous. They can be matched with a befriender and, whoever we are, we can volunteer our time by becoming a befriender, too. We would only give an hour or so of our week, but we can make a huge difference to somebody's life – the mustard seed and tree, once again.

If the scheme is to expand, MHA needs volunteers from all walks of life, from any location, so if you feel the Lord nudging you to help, please contact the befriending team to find out more. Moreover, MHA, like other charities, needs your financial support, as the budgets to local authorities have been cut to a point where their support for social care is at crisis levels. Whatever you are able to offer will support the telephone befriending scheme, so that it is properly and safely managed, but even if you aren't able to make a donation, please pray for MHA, its workers, volunteers and service-users. As we have a General Election next month, you can lobby candidates by asking what plans their party has for social care provision and press them for details. Perhaps if enough people do so, somebody will really act to meet the needs of our neighbours. I shall finish with a spoiler warning: don't believe any candidate who declares that he or she has 'an oven ready solution' sorry, Mr. Johnson, but yours is the most memorable of glib answers. If any candidate gives a reply like that, it almost certainly indicates he or

she will renege! The care crisis is too serious for a quick fix and will take time, commitment and prayer to resolve – so please pray! Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written in January 1965 by Revd. Hugh Sherlock for the Synod service for the Jamaica District of the Methodist Church, of which he was the current Chairman. The theme of the Synod was church renewal. He later became President of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas. WE shall sing hymn number 410, 'Lord, your Church on earth is seeking'*

**1. Lord, your church on earth is seeking**

**Your renewal from above;**

**Teach us all the art of speaking**

**With the accent of your love.**

**We would heed your great commission:**

**Go ye into every place –**

**Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,**

**Serve with love and share my grace.**

**2. Freedom give to those in bondage,**

**Lift the burdens caused by sin,**

**Give new hope, new strength and courage,**

**Grant release from fears within:**

**Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;**

**Love for hatred; peace for strife.**

**These and countless blessings follow**

**As the Spirit gives new life.**

**3. In the streets of every city**

**Where the bruised and lonely dwell,**

**Let us show the Saviour's pity,**

**Let us of his mercy tell.**

**In all lands and with all races**

**Let us serve, and seek to bring**

**All the world to render praises,**

**Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.**

© *Hugh Sherlock (1905 – 1998)*

### ***Benediction***

May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who calls us to grow together in truth and love, descend upon us and remain with us forever.

Amen