

**Written Service Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup>**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
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Charity number 1134226

**Call to worship**

We look for God in the dramatic.  
We discover God in the ordinary.  
Invited by God to slow down,  
we freshly open our eyes to slowly see  
God's life breaking into our awareness, all around.

**StF 17 With gladness we worship** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRGX1DWykck>

1. WITH gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,  
Free hearts and free voices how blessed to bring,  
The old, thankful story shall scale Thine abode,  
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.
2. Thy right would we give Thee—true homage Thy due,  
And honour eternal, the universe through,  
With all Thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,  
In one acclamation we celebrate Thee.
3. Renewed by Thy Spirit, redeemed by Thy Son,  
Thy children revere Thee for all Thou hast done.  
O Father! returning to love and to light,  
Thy children are yearning to praise Thee aright.
4. We join with the angels; and so there is given  
From earth Hallelujah, in answer to heaven.  
Amen! Be Thou glorious below and above,  
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

**A gathering prayer**

Loving God,  
thank you for the wonder of our interconnected universe,  
sustained and held in being by your love.  
Tiny seeds nurtured by earth, that grow into great shrubs,  
sheltering creatures.  
Barely visible yeast cultures leavening flour for bread.  
Treasures that make life precious and joyful.  
Wisdom handed down to us, freshly understood.  
Your reign breaks in around us in so many ways;  
help us to see it and rejoice.  
**Amen.**

**Approach / Confession / Repentance / Forgiveness**

Loving God,  
You give wisdom to those who are wise enough to ask for nothing more.  
We gather in Your presence seeking to discern  
what You would do through us in the cause of your Kingdom.

We confess that we let the concerns of the world often weigh us down.  
We worry about our needs, our wants, how others perceive us.

We are so overwhelmed that we fail to sift out the gold from life's dross.

Forgive us that too often we turn to You with impossible demands...

Asking the God of justice for more than our fair share...

Draining from others that which they need to survive...

Putting our trust in the passing, flimsy things of this world when we should trust You.

We turn to you, now, seeking assurance that your kingdom is with us and among us;

Please help us to discern where it lies,

so that we may turn our backs on everything else that is less important.

Grant us the patience to seek you and your ways

with the forbearance you show as you wait for us.

Almighty God, although we take forever, you have forever –

you are the God of Eternity.

We are slow to seek you,

slow to learn, slow to grow in faith;

but when we are faltering,

you wait sure and steady to forgive us;

when we are lacking in trust,

you forgive us and persist in working out your ways despite us.

Thank you, O God of forgiveness and forbearance.

As a new week opens may we take from this service

small seeds of insight to plant them in the world

that in those places where our feet pass there may be signs of the Kingdom's growth.

Let your Kingdom grow among us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**StF 481 The Lord's my Shepherd (Townend)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-elQQayhpak>

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;

He makes me lie in pastures green.

He leads me by the still, still waters,

His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,*

*And I will trust in You alone,*

*For Your endless mercy follows me,*

*Your goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,

And He anoints my head with oil,

And my cup, it overflows with joy,

I feast on His pure delights.

*And I will trust ...*

3 And though I walk the darkest path,

I will not fear the evil one,

For You are with me, and Your rod and staff

Are the comfort I need to know.

*And I will trust ...*

### **Reading - 1 Kings 3: 5-12 NRSV**

<sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup> And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

<sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

### **Reading - Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52 NRSV**

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup> it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

<sup>44</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### **StF 164 Your words to me are life and health** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXCS39KWeDE>

1. Your words to me are life and health;  
pour strength into my soul;  
enable, guide, and teach my heart  
to reach its perfect goal!
2. Your words to me are light and truth;  
from day to day they show  
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,  
as in their truth I grow.
3. Your words to me are full of joy,  
of beauty, peace, and grace;  
from them I learn your blessed will,  
through them I see your face.
4. Your words you have fulfilled on earth,  
yourself, the living Word;  
within my heart your image print  
in clearest lines, O Lord.

### **Relection Pt 1: Solomon's wisdom**

There are lots of legends and folk stories where someone is granted a number of wishes, (often 3) and the sad results of them not thinking through the consequences of what they ask for.

1. A 90 year old man married a 20 year old woman, and a genie granted him one wish. He said "I wish I was the same age as my wife" ...and there was a puff of smoke... and in a flash the genie changed his wife into a 90 year old woman. Not what he expected at all!
2. A married couple was granted 3 wishes, and the man, being hungry, immediately asked for a large pork sausage. It appeared. His wife annoyed at his foolishness exclaimed "I wish that sausage was on the end of your nose" and it was. The man said "How stupid... I wish the sausage was gone". It disappeared. Their 3 wishes had been wasted,

You may think their choices were foolish, but in their situation, would you have been any wiser?

Lesson from Kings is an old story, recounting how when Solomon was asked what he wanted from God, he chose wisdom.

He sought an understanding mind to govern and care for God's people. He wanted the ability to discern between good and evil.

He could have asked selfish things for himself. But realised that that would not help build his kingdom. He recognized that a selfish "me me me" attitude could not sustain the kingdom. He describes himself as "a little child," one who does "not know how to go out or come in." His concern was for the kingdom not himself.

Solomon asked for wisdom : a listening heart, a heart with ears, a heart that would hear the pain of the world, the needs of the people, and the voice of God. He did not ask for himself long life, riches, or even the defeat of his enemy.

And it pleased the Lord.

And that's not where the story ends. If you read a couple of verses past today's text you will read, "Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream" (1 Kings 3:15).

It was a dream but not *just* a dream.

That it was a dream doesn't mean it wasn't real and it doesn't mean that when Solomon woke up it was the end of the dream. To the contrary, his awaking was the beginning of a new reality. He awoke to a new possibility, for himself and for the people. That reality and possibility would be realized every time Solomon had a choice to make about how he would govern his kingdom.

God was pleased with Solomon because he had put the welfare of his people first. Solomon wanted their good and prosperity before any material benefit for himself, before any personal pursuit for power, before any desire for popularity.

And the choice Solomon had to make is one we all face.

Many of the situations of conflict in our world, our communities exist because of selfish motives, choosing a self-centered attitude over one that is more costly but for the common good.

Whether you consider the recent economical collapses, or the harsh treatment of migrants and asylum seekers by this present Government and those who press to keep our borders closed... in fact in many decisions the government makes, one must question whether selfishness is at the heart of it. It seems to me that often decisions are not made for the good of all the people but for the vested interests of the rich and powerful.

Oh that the wisdom that Solomon was granted would have extended further...to this time and place.

For Solomon, Wisdom was about putting **others** first (vv10-14)

And of course this was a key message in the gospels about what God requires of us. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, love your neighbour as yourself." (Mt.22:37-39)

And to love our neighbour we need those gifts that Solomon was given, a heart to listen to God, a listening ear to the cries of those in need, so that we can find ways to respond.

So how can we listen to God, how can we respond to the needs of the world and our community?

## Reflection Pt 2: The mustard seed

I want to move on now to the gospel lesson. I am especially interested in the two parables at the start of this passage.

It is important to note that Jesus does not say the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

Instead, He goes on to say that "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed *that someone took and sowed*."

It is the seed when it is sown that illustrates how the Kingdom, which began small and in secret will one day bloom.

Equally in 13:33 the parallel is not simply that the Kingdom is like yeast (or leaven) instead it is yeast that *“is taken and mixed with the flour”* which forms an illustration of this new community which, when mixed through, leavens the whole.

It is the taking and the planting that allows the tiny seed to germinate and the mixing together that enables the pinch of yeast to do it's work.

What does planting and mixing mean for the situations we face in our lives, our community and our church?

It's about doing something. It is our actions which make the difference, turning potential into results.

Around the time of Jesus, A Roman author and philosopher, Pliny the Elder, wrote that mustard seeds, with their pungent, fiery taste, were valued for being good for the health – and that they spread like a weed. Once sown, it was difficult to stop them, because the seeds germinated almost at once.

Isn't it a powerful image Jesus uses of planting the tiny mustard seeds of the reign of God, tipping them into the world like a contagious weed.

My garden is full of weeds and I always seem to be fighting a losing battle to keep them under control. Not helped by the fact that dandelion heads are so much fun for children to play with.

We might ponder what sort of contagious seeds Jesus was planting with his message and his ministry of healing and teaching. Each story Jesus told, and each story told about Jesus, gives us an image of one of these seeds germinating in the soil and spreading God's reign.

And those seeds planted all those years ago have flourished and spread, just as the kingdom has flourished and spread and continues to.

What do we need to do? What decisions do we need to make? How can we with our limited abilities and meagre resources help the Kingdom to grow?

Two of the other parables about the field full of treasure and the pearl of great price, perhaps give a hint, because they speak of giving up everything we have in order to gain the treasure and the pearl.

And giving up everything is hard.

Perhaps we have given all we are able to, and our energies are spent. Maybe we face difficult choices and maybe we do not know the answers. Sometimes we need to just trust in God to guide us.

Two key points from today's lessons:

1. The Kingdom will continue to flourish regardless of what we do. Like a contagious weed it cannot be stopped.
2. Solomon asked for wisdom, a heart to listen to God, and listen to the needs of others. We should ask for the same.

**Hymn StF 255 The Kingdom of God** <https://youtu.be/vavK1736mQM>

1. 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.
2. The kingdom of God  
is mercy and grace;  
the captives are freed,  
the sinners find place,  
the outcast are welcomed  
God's banquet to share,  
and hope is awakened  
in place of despair.

3. 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.

4. 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.

### **Thanksgiving / Intercession**

O God, If You are with us and for us, who can stand against us?  
You have given us Your Son and through Him  
You give everything else as well.  
We have a shelter from the storm,  
we have nourishment for body and soul,  
we are held for ever in the love of Christ  
from which nothing can separate us.  
So, for all the signs of Your care and favour  
we bring our thanks in word and gift and promise.

And now we pray for others.  
We pray for our wonderful and troubled world.  
In some places the violence of war tramples and crushes  
the seeds of peace.  
In others the bread may rise but it is not shared  
and people go hungry.  
We seek the growth of reconciliation and the flowering of justice.  
We pray for our Church in these days of stretching and straining.  
Afraid of the future and of those around us  
we sometimes keep the seed of the Kingdom rather than planting it,  
sometimes we store the rising yeast instead of stirring it through.  
Help us to be the sowers of the word and the sharers of blessing  
that in our place and our time all whom we meet  
might encounter the living God.  
We pray for our nation in all its diversity.  
We ask for those who must make decisions on our behalf,  
wise and discerning minds  
that the right paths may be chosen  
and the whole people may be served.  
We pray for those we know the best and love the most.  
For some of them these are days of fretfulness or fearfulness,  
confusion or despondency, emptiness or addiction.  
Help us, where we can, to ease their burden and share their load.  
Even when it seems there is nothing we can do  
we still hold them before You in the silence of our hearts.  
Eternal God, throughout the centuries  
You have called people into service  
and have equipped them with gifts  
for using and sharing in the Kingdom's cause.  
We give thanks for their faithful service  
and we remember in particular  
those who sowed the seeds of faith in us.  
Keep strong our faith and enliven our witness  
that the Church of Jesus Christ may prosper  
and that many come to find for themselves the love of God

from which nothing can separate us.  
We ask things through Jesus Christ our Lord  
**Amen**

**StF 610 Best of all is God is with us** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig7qfNleGuQ>

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Best of all is God is with us,  
hearts are challenged, strangely  
warmed,  
faith is deepened, courage strength-  
ened,
4. Best of all is God is with us,  
in our joy and through our pain,  
till that final acclamation :  
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'
5. Best of all is God is with us  
as we scale eternal heights,  
love grows stronger, undiminished ;  
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Andrew Pratt (*b.1948*)  
Based on John Wesley's final words.

### **Benediction**

May the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to Himself;  
may the power of the Lord Jesus  
strengthen us in His service;  
may the joy of the Lord Jesus fill our souls:  
and may the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and abide with you always.

**Amen.**