

## A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 26 July 2020 ('Eighth after Pentecost')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for 26 July, the eighth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica, Margaret and Olive for sharing in the preparation of this week's edition.

**Music<sup>1</sup>** – *The heavens are telling the glory of God*  
From *The Creation*, by Franz Josef Haydn  
sung by Dame Emma Kirkby, Anthony Rolfe Johnson,  
Michael George, Choir of New College Oxford,  
Academy of Ancient Music Chorus, Academy of Ancient Music,  
conducted by Christopher Hogwood

*The heavens are telling the glory of God* – from Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*. From a setting of Psalm 19 we turn to verses from Psalm 119:

**Call to Worship:** Psalm 119.129-133

*Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them.  
The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.  
I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.  
Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name.  
Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Amen.*

Last Monday saw the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination. I usually indulge myself by choosing one of the hymns from that service in worship close to the date. And here is this year's reprise, courtesy of the Huddersfield Choral Society:

**Hymn:** *Lord for the years*  
Huddersfield Choral Society and Joseph Cullen  
from their album *The Hymns Album*

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this hymn in this transcript, although they can be found online if you are so equipped.]

## Prayers

*Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.*

We thank you for all your care of your Creation, the indescribably vast work in which we occupy a small space and yet seem to loom large in your own thoughts. We thank you that you have made us and the environment in which we live. Help us to understand it more and more as we continue to respond to you in gratitude.

*Lord of the Word, receive your people's praise.*

We wonder that you value our praise but you have inspired us to worship and praise you – to live our lives in line with your rules as a tribute to you. May our words and thoughts in this time of worship be acceptable and sincere. May our thoughts be of you and not just of our own transitory concerns.

*Lord of our land... Lord of the world...*

We lay before you the needs of all your people and pray for fresh lessons from your Word to shine a light on our path forward. May the mustard seed, the yeast of faith, hope and love be planted in the darkest places and grow to cover our land and our world.

*Lord of our lives...*

We return to your house in our thoughts, even if we are still unable to gather as congregations, each in our preferred way and our special buildings. Forgive us when we connect our Christian mission too closely with our churches and are tempted to put it on hold. Forgive us when our concerns for ourselves overwhelm our instincts to do good for others, and inspire us once again to bear fruit for you.

We gather all of these prayers together in the prayer Jesus taught us:

### **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.*

**Scripture<sup>ii</sup>:** 1 Kings 3.5-12

<sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'

<sup>6</sup> Solomon answered, 'You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. <sup>7</sup> 'Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. <sup>8</sup> Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. <sup>9</sup> So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?'

<sup>10</sup> The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. <sup>11</sup> So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, <sup>12</sup> I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.'

### **Reflection (1)**

Again it is interesting to read of the interaction between God and one of the great figures of the Old Testament. The passage combines the good opinion in which the Jewish nation traditionally held David and his son Solomon. David the faithful and victorious king, Solomon proverbially wise. We still speak of the *wisdom of Solomon*.

And in the passage Margaret read for us Solomon backs up his reputation with his modesty, telling God he doesn't feel old or wise enough to be king. So God promises to fill in the gap.

This is one of those weeks when the compilers of our lectionary are having a bit of a joke with us poor preachers who come to the week's scripture and hope to find a way of integrating the message of both the Old and New Testament passages.

What has the story of Solomon to do with the Kingdom parables of Jesus, that we shall hear more of in a few minutes? Frankly, not a lot! And it is in the nature of the lectionary that at this time of year we shouldn't expect it, either. But here, near the beginning of the story of Solomon, which had its ups and downs, we have Solomon seeking to be, above anything else, wise. And so it turned out. And it is what he remembered for.

Being wise didn't insulate him from his problems.

The first part of this book of the Bible is spent describing how the dynastic problems of the offspring of King David were sorted out – basically by a number of people including Solomon's brother Adonijah and various mutinous generals being put to death. Then this gift of wisdom, and for a time all goes well for Solomon. He reigns for forty years, the first half of which is spent building the Temple and a luxurious palace, and generally being very wise. People come and see him, he gives inspired and wise judgements and answers questions from everyone including the Queen of Sheba.

But he strays away from faith in God and God alone. He seems not to be so wise after all. He has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (My lips are sealed on whether that was wise or not). He allowed his religious practice to become diluted, the recurring downfall of Jewish kings. And so he dies, knowing that his kingdom will be in trouble. And of course it is just after that that the kingdom is split into northern and southern parts, Israel and Judah, with different lines of kings and different fates, different destinies.

Of course we would all like to be wise. And it is still good, all these centuries later, to prefer to have the knowledge and wisdom to do the right thing, than to have whatever material gifts and wealth we might think of. And in the knowledge of the rest of the story of Solomon, it is still right to pay attention to what we know of what God requires of us, despite the conflicting demands of what the world, our families and sometimes even our wives might suggest we do differently. It's a balancing act. And it always has been. And it always will be.

Before we return to the parables we are going to hear, as an anthem, a piece of music from the 16<sup>th</sup> century – 'Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake', by Richard Farrant. [Sung by the Cambridge Singers, conducted by John Rutter, from the album *Faire is the Heaven - Music of the English Church*]

**Music:** *Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake*

*Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake,  
lay not our sins to our charge,  
but forgive that is past  
and give us grace to amend our sinful lives;  
to decline from sin and incline to virtue,  
that we may walk in a perfect heart  
before thee now and evermore.*

**Scripture** Matthew 13.31-33 and 44-52

<sup>31</sup> He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. <sup>32</sup> Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it

grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

<sup>33</sup> He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

<sup>44</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

<sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> 'Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> 'Have you understood all these things?' Jesus asked. 'Yes,' they replied. <sup>52</sup> He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'

## Reflection (2)

We stand here once again in Matthew 13, at verse 31, in a passage that actually falls in the middle of the recounting and then the explaining of the parable of the wheat and the weeds. See last week's podcast for something on that.

Today's parables seem a bit more positive.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."*

and then again,

*"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

I cannot avoid going back to the parable of the wheat and the weeds. For there in the field of the earlier parable we have the small beginnings of seed sown. Small beginnings, but ultimately a successful harvest, ultimately many things coming from the few.

So it is with the mustard seed and the yeast.

This was a big message for the small number of folk who were to form the core of the early church. Small beginnings, and yet out of this came great things, the Church.

Three parables, all together – parables about growth. insignificant or completely invisible beginnings and then a worthwhile outcome – the harvest, the mustard bush, the risen dough that would bring about good bread.

The mustard seed was not, of course, the smallest seed around – but it was a proverbial representation of something vanishingly small.

And the yeast is even more intangible. Modern science knows its chemistry – its biology – inside out. The ancient world must have seen it as almost magical. Something so small, being so invaluable, so vital. Literally vital, giving life.

The message for the ancient listeners, therefore, was that the mission of Jesus might seem a string of small events and minor happenings, certainly in the face of great opposition and requiring great effort. But great things would come of them. They had **potential**. From the small things could and would come great things. And the potential is already there. In the seed. It requires the right environment, the right soil, the right care and nourishment. But it can get there.

The message for the modern listeners must be almost the same. Don't fret if the next thing **you do** to bring the kingdom closer is a small thing. Small things can be important. I won't say "Look after the pennies, and the pounds will look after themselves". But I like the idea that "tall oaks from little acorns grow". Once upon a time, every tall tree I can see on the fringes of Kenilworth Road and the Memorial Park from my desk was just a seed. An acorn, a chestnut, a sycamore helicopter thing.

What about the other parables here? Every time you see in the gospel "The Kingdom of Heaven is like this..." you know there is going to be a little gem, a shining nugget, a fresh idea about God's purpose and God's invitation to us to share in it.

Sometimes the idea seems a bit suspect.

<sup>44</sup> *'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.'*

Is that moral? Is that even legal? It's certainly not the way that folk with metal detectors would be encouraged to behave nowadays. I think that the message here is not in the detail but in the motivation. The kingdom of heaven is something that encourages people who have a glimpse of it to want more, and to want all of it. To be a part of it.

They will invest – this is the point – they will invest **all** of themselves in pursuing the goal. Because it is so worthwhile. And the irony of this story is that in the end the kingdom of heaven is not something that you show off to your friends and say, *look what I have got*. It is not, in fact, a valuable pearl that you put on display to the envy of the world but something you want to share, to share access to and experience of.

In our Lord's Prayer we affirm that God's kingdom comes as his will is done. Everyone has a part in it. Everyone has the potential I spoke about a minute ago. And so, when it comes to looking at the image of the end of all things being this time not about separating the sheep and the goats but about separating the good and the bad fish...

Everyone has the potential to be numbered among the good fish.

Unlock the potential that is within us all. Be a seed ready to grow into something big and worthwhile, planted in the good soil and responding to God's nurturing. Be like the man with the treasure, the man with the option on the pearl, *desperate* to make the purchase and take the big step. *Itch* to get it right. Be assured, God is with us every step, and God wants us to succeed.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We bring before God our needs and concerns, those of the world and of the Church:

Lord, in every age your people have turned to you in times of trouble, when danger threatened the nation and the individual, when the normal disappeared and everything changed for the worse. Even in the darkest times there has been a residual trust that you were present and would come to help us.

Sometimes the answer to prayer is 'not yet'. And you rely on the right people doing the right thing. So we pray for a sense of justice and equality, and a desire for all to live in peace, to motivate those whose decisions govern what we do now and can do next. We pray for patience to overcome our frustration at the list of things we cannot do.

Lord, we know that isolation in comfortable homes, with access to online shopping and food delivered to our doors is not suffering. Be with those who have maintained the mission of the Church and of humanitarian organisations throughout the pandemic, challenging our consciences and our values. Give them strength, and keep them safe.

Lord, we thank you for all those who stand ready to look after us when we fall sick, and acknowledge that not all illnesses are visible; some affect the mind more than the body. Keep **us** safe, but when we are in need of care, strengthen those hands which care for others and help us to show our gratitude in meaningful action when we are well again.

Lord, you know better than we can express what our needs are. With your ancient people we trust that even if we walk in the darkest places you are still there alongside us. Clarify for us once again what is urgent and important and align our purposes with yours.

In Jesus' name we offer these and all our prayers. Amen.

**Hymn**                      Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go (Charles Wesley, 1707-88)  
                                      sung by the St Michael's Singers,  
                                      conducted by Paul Leddington-Wright,  
                                      from the album *The Hymn Makers, Charles Wesley*.

*Forth in thy Name, O Lord, I go,  
my daily labour to pursue;  
thee, only thee, resolved to know  
in all I think or speak or do.*

*The task thy wisdom hath assigned,  
O let me cheerfully fulfill;  
in all my works thy presence find,  
and prove thy good and perfect will.*

*Thee may I set at my right hand,  
whose eyes mine inmost substance see,  
and labour on at thy command,  
and offer all my works to thee.*

*Give me to bear thy easy yoke,  
and every moment watch and pray,  
and still to things eternal look,  
and hasten to thy glorious day.*

*For thee delightfully employ  
whate'er thy bounteous grace hath given;  
and run my course with even joy,  
and closely walk with thee to heav'n.*

## **Blessing**

May God who sent Jesus to be our guide send the Spirit to be our helper in these confusing and complicated days.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all today and for ever. Amen

**Music:** Liebestraum No. 3 in A-Flat, by Franz Liszt  
performed by Daniel Barenboim  
from his album Liszt: Liebesträume and Consolations

Thank you for listening to our podcast. [on <https://revdbill.uk>] Feedback and comments are always welcome, as are volunteers to record themselves reading our scripture, and suggestions for appropriate pieces of music to punctuate and enhance our worship.

## **Credits**

*The heavens are telling the glory of God* from *The Creation*, by Franz Josef Haydn was sung by Dame Emma Kirkby, Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Michael George with the Choir of New College Oxford, the Academy of Ancient Music Chorus and the Academy of Ancient Music, conducted by Christopher Hogwood

The hymn, *Lord for the years* was sung by the Huddersfield Choral Society conducted by Joseph Cullen, from their album *The Hymns Album*

*Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake*, by Richard Farrant was sung by the Cambridge Singers, conducted by John Rutter, from their album *Faire Is the Heaven - Music of the English Church*

*Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go* was sung by the St Michael's Singers, conducted by Paul Leddington-Wright, from their album *The Hymn Makers, Charles Wesley*.

And

*Liebestraum No. 3 in A-Flat*, by Franz Liszt was performed by Daniel Barenboim, and taken from his album *Liszt: Liebesträume and Consolations*

---

<sup>i</sup> All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

<sup>ii</sup> Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition