

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – 26 July 2020

This material was written before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Worship leaders can use the most up-to-date sources of information and take into account the experience of their communities for creating appropriate worship at this time.

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Jonathan Fleming, Minister of Cumbrae with Largs St John's, for his thoughts on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.

Our new online music resource is now live: [here](#) you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). The search function allows you to bring up a list of songs by keyword, tune, theme, author, composer and metre, covering all of the indexes in the hymnbook. The site features Weekly Worship and thematic/seasonal playlists, alternative settings and background information on the hymns.

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Introduction

July is always a complex time to prepare for worship because of school holidays and summer breaks in general! What is helpful about this week's selection of passages is that they contain a message that we all need to hear at all points in the year – that we are called to trust God in the good times and bad times as well as keeping our faith in God in things seen and unseen.

[Genesis 29:15-28](#)

In this passage, we read of the deceiver being deceived. Having not long tricked his brother Esau and father Isaac, Jacob flees to Paddan Aram in Haran, about four hundred miles away from Beersheba. It is here that Jacob agrees to work for an uncle, Laban, for seven years in exchange for his younger daughter, Rachel's hand in marriage.

What Jacob is unaware of is that the custom of the day was for the eldest daughter to marry before the younger one could. Of course, Laban chose not to make Jacob aware of such a custom, realising that he would get another seven years of work out of him after marrying Leah!

Jacob is, naturally enraged by Laban's trickery! He was able to marry Rachel shortly after marrying Leah, but fulfilled his obligations, nonetheless.

The fact that the writer chose to mention Leah's eyes (v.17) is of interest. In some translations, her eyes are described as 'weak', while others describe them as 'delicate' to precede the description of Rachel's beauty. Having tricked his father by taking advantage of his blindness, Jacob is in turn tricked by Laban, thanks to his inability to see clearly when consummating his marriage.

[Psalm 105:1-11](#)

This psalm reminds us of what God has done in bringing Israel to the Promised Land. We are encouraged in our faith through the miraculous deeds God has done, as well as being called to share such knowledge with others. In reading of the people that God has helped through the ages, including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of the promises that were fulfilled through them, our faith in a God who keeps promises remains strong, even today; a God who deserves our cries of Hallelujah (v.45b).

The first part of Psalm 105 also features in 1 Chronicles 16 as a celebratory hymn when the people are welcoming David and the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

When we are struggling in our faith and when God can seem so far away, these words from the Psalmist (v.4) remind us to never cease to “seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.”

Here we read of God keeping the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 17 and 22 as well as the oath sworn to Isaac and the decree made to Jacob. None of their journeys were straightforward, but they trusted in God, who provided for them all. As we read in Hebrews 11, God blesses each of them for their faithfulness.

[Romans 8:26-39](#)

In this hope-filled passage, we are reminded that believers are not expected to cope with life's problems on their own. There is a wonderful video on Social Media of a prayer on a peg letter board that begins with letters forming the words 'Dear God' and then all the letters are jumbled up in a chaotic fashion. Sometimes this is what it feels like when we take time to pray to God! But as Paul writes to the Romans, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” and “intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” (v.26)

This passage also reminds us that God works in all things for our good. This does not mean that we will always understand what happens, nor does it mean that we will always enjoy what we must face, but we do so, trusting that God's purpose is being worked out and that God never lets us go. As Paul writes in v.31, “If God is for us, who is against us?”

This leads on to one of Paul's best-known passages (besides 1 Cor 13 of course!), where we are reminded that **nothing** can separate us from the love of God – words that bring comfort in adversity and in times of loss. Through Jesus' death for us, we are assured that love conquers all – even death.

[Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

Both parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast tell the story of how something small and hidden becomes great in the fullness of time. Yeast is given a bad press in other parts of Scripture, where it is used to describe something evil or unclean. In this passage, Jesus uses it in a positive light as a sign of growth.

The focus shifts in the second part of our Gospel passage to what we should do when we discover the kingdom of heaven for ourselves. In these passages, Jesus says that we should be willing to give everything up to obtain the kingdom of heaven.

From here we move to the Parable of the Fishing Net, where we are reminded that it is not our place to decide who is a part of the kingdom of heaven and who is not. With striking similarities to the Parable of the Weeds, these verses remind us to cast our net and to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all we meet. It is not down to us to determine who is worthy or unworthy of hearing the Gospel.

This selection of verses concludes with teachers of the law being compared to a house owner who brings both new and old treasures out of their store. This reminds us of the importance of the Old Testament, which points the way to Jesus, the Messiah. As a Jew, Jesus always upheld the importance of the Old Testament and we are called to do likewise. Jesus' teachings are the new treasures being described in a time where teachers of the law are always referring to the teachings of the past. Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as the here and now, with judgment to follow in the future; while the teachers of the law of Jesus' time were focussed on a future kingdom, which was preceded by judgment.

Sermon ideas

There are a number of possible paths to take for a sermon this Sunday, but I have opted for the theme of **not seeing and not seen**.

In Genesis 29, having played on his own father's blindness, it is the turn of Jacob to be tricked into marrying Leah before Rachel and working an extra seven years as a result. The deceiver is deceived himself and appears to be blind to the injustice that he was guilty of in the face of an injustice being done to him.

God had a purpose for Leah, Rachel and Jacob, and God has a purpose for each of us, but while smarting from wrongs done to us, we sometimes lose sight of where things are from God's perspective.

We see this continue into Matthew's Gospel, where the teachers of the law are so blinded by the laws and traditions of the past that they are not prepared to open their eyes (and ears) to the new teachings of Jesus and see the spiritual significance of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus presents in the here and now.

This Sunday's parables also show how things that are deemed small and insignificant can often make more of a difference than we ever consider them capable of. How many people in our congregations and communities make contributions of time and talent that we take for granted or fail to see the significance of?

Can the same be said of us? Are we often blinded to the opportunities of the future by the rose-tinted spectacles of the past? Do we need to re-focus and look ahead rather than closing our eyes and hoping that everything will stay the same?

Paul's writings in Romans 8 reminds us that there are many things that we may not see happening around us, at which time we may feel out of control, alone or discouraged, but as we read in today's verses, God is always "working God's purpose out" in ways seen and unseen and that for those who love and trust the Lord, there is nothing that will separate us from God's love that is in Christ Jesus (v.39).

The Psalmist also calls us to look beyond what we can see and cast our minds back to the times when we have seen God's purposes being carried out and God's promises being fulfilled, particularly through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God makes promises to each of them and to us – particularly that God will never leave us nor forsake us and so it is good and right that we trust in God each day and proclaim, 'Hallelujah!'

Prayers

Continuing with the theme of the sermon, I have approached these prayers with a focus on seeking forgiveness for a lack of vision, seeking clarity for the future and keeping our eyes fully open to the realities around us in our world with a view to asking God to guide us in challenging injustice, pursuing peace and making a difference.

Prayer of adoration and confession

Gracious, Loving God,

We come this day to worship and praise Your holy name.

We gather with thanksgiving on our lips and love in our hearts

to sing to Your glory;

to be touched and inspired by Your word;

to dwell in Your house in unity.

Lord, forgive the times when we choose not to look...
Not to look out for those in need.
Not to look for glimpses of Your glory.
Not to look for opportunities to share Your good news with others.
Forgive us, Lord.

Pause

Open our eyes to You, O God...
May Your Holy Spirit reinvigorate us.
May we rub our eyes and focus on what You call us to do this day
and every day.
Open our eyes,
open our hearts,
open our mouths
and open our minds we pray,
Amen

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus Christ,
Words cannot express
how thankful we are that You consider us to be Your children;
Your treasure, Your pearl beyond all price.

Words cannot express
how grateful we are that nothing:
Angels, demons, death, life...
nothing can separate us from Your love!

Lord, we pray this day for all who are yet to hear this news.
May You continue to sustain all who seek to make You known across our world.
Be with missionaries, Bible translators, children and family workers,
chaplains, ministers, preachers and pastors.
Be in conversations, Bible studies, Alpha courses,
Christianity Explored and Emmaus courses.
Be in high churches, café churches,
messy churches, house groups and cathedrals.
Be in all that opens people's eyes to You,
Your love and Your call.

God of love and compassion,
We pray for all who seek to make a difference in the lives of others.
Be with carers and counsellors, medics and mediators,
Be with those with listening ears and those with caring hands,
Be in all that opens people's eyes to You,
Your love and Your call.

God of justice and peace,
We pray for all who seek to challenge injustices and stand up for what is right.
Be with the politician and the protester,
The activist and the pacifist,
The vocal and the silent.
Be in all that opens people's eyes to You,
Your love and Your call.

Hear us and help us to see You this day, we pray.
Amen

Prayer of dedication

Accept, O Lord,
these gifts of our time, talent and treasure.
However great or however small,
May they and may we be used to grow Your kingdom.
May our mustard seeds grow into bushes.
Amen

Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of Spill the Beans and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

Bible Notes

Abundant, Hidden, Everyday Kingdom – [Matthew 13:1-3, 44-52](#)

We are really going for the arable images as we once again find seeds and grain as an image of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus uses these images, however, he does not say ‘The Kingdom of God is like a such-and-such’, and leave it there. Instead he says, ‘The Kingdom of God is like a such-and-such, which...’ It is not the object itself that describes the kingdom but rather what happens to that object which provides the illustration of the Kingdom of God.

There is no shortage of objects to which something happens in this week’s passage. Matthew has applied the scatter gun approach here. One might even suggest there are four too many for any one service. It may be best to pick one and focus on that in your service.

Mustard Seed: In what way is it like the kingdom of heaven? A bit of background is probably necessary here. Mustard seed is hardly a mighty image and was seen to be a weed rather than a plant you grew on purpose. Without wishing to contradict what was said last week, the positive side of a weed in the Kingdom of God image is that it grows just where it wants. It is not cultivated and it is not always welcome. It is what happens to it, however, that is the image and it is a prosperous future both for itself and other wildlife.

It is not exactly a majestic old oak tree, but then the Kingdom of God is not meant to be one of those big cathedral images that fill up the landscape and takes over all else. It creates local space for real life and in doing so creates a home without putting out banners. It is subtle, intuitive, generous.

Yeast: In what way does the activity of yeast illustrate the Kingdom of God? Well, perhaps the Realm of God is like the work of a woman. It could be either gender who works but, interestingly, Jesus uses the image of a woman in a household doing the chores. This is

someone who readies the place and provides for others, and the result is always greater than the effort put in (hopefully). Whatever the kingdom of God is, it grows.

It is worth noting here that it is unleavened bread that is usually thought of as 'holy bread' as used in the Passover. Leavened bread on the other hand is associated with everydayness, there might even be a sense of corruption and impurity here. This is the context of the image of leavened bread and the image Jesus uses for the kingdom. The yeast, the kingdom, is hidden in the flour and it changes things unseen.

Treasure: The same image of the Kingdom being hidden is true here as well. You can just find it there. The Kingdom of God is not something that has steeples and websites and twitter accounts that lets you know it is there and does everything in a way to make you notice. You just find it in the everyday.

Once you have found it, however, you really ought to do everything to hold on to it. It becomes your focus in life and if that means selling everything to get it, then so be it. Though it does beg the question whether a peasant would have enough to sell in order to buy the field for would it not be peasants Jesus was talking to?

Pearl: The same is true here, also. I wonder how Jesus' original listeners heard this parable? Pearls? Riches? A wee insight into the lives of others perhaps, a bit like the TV soaps Dallas or Dynasty in the 1980s.

Net: This final image is again about something that works below the surface, unseen. More than that, it is not particularly choosy. Everything is brought in and when it comes to separation; flick back to last week's wheat and tares.

The kingdom is abundant, hidden, in the everyday. Go seek, knead, fish or whatever you do. It is there that you will find the kingdom.

Retelling for Young People

Here is a question: What is the Kingdom like?

Today we live in the United Kingdom and if we asked what that was like we might say it's like four countries.

If older children are present ask if they know the names otherwise tell young children the names:

- Scotland
- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom has a monarch as the head of state. This is our Queen, Elizabeth II.

Explain that it is sometimes a King hence why we talk of Kingdoms.

How would you describe each member country in the United Kingdom?

Here you could go for some obvious stereotypical images for each country, either with printed pictures or onscreen and make it a quiz.

- Scotland: kilts, bagpipes, haggis
- England: Big Ben, red buses, London Eye
- Northern Ireland: street art, Rory McIlroy, Titanic, marches
- Wales: male voice choir, leeks, dragons

But there is a lot more than just these images. There are stories of the kingdom's history and its people and how it came to be a kingdom and what the people of that kingdom are like today and what its values are. There are many stories that explore these things for our own United Kingdom.

Jesus told stories about another Kingdom. He did not say it was like how much land there was, or how many people there were. Instead he talked about things like fishing nets and pearls and treasure and yeast. And we can look at these things altogether in a picture and see them just like we can look at a map of the lands of the United Kingdom.

But there is more. These stories are meant to tell us about how the kingdom comes to be and how the people can make it grow and what its values are. Jesus gives us many short stories to explore what that means and to help us understand things you cannot see clearly.

And this Kingdom is not headed by Queen Elizabeth II. It is headed by God, the King of Love. It is not a separate place, because it could be anywhere. We know when we are close to God's Kingdom when we are loving to each other. We know it and can feel it. And when we feel loved and accepted, we also feel God's love and acceptance.

Activities

Gathering Activity

Offer people a post it or piece of paper with the words “The Kingdom of God is...” printed or written on it and invite them to write something to complete the sentence then to talk to a neighbour about what they have written.

Kaleidoscope Pictures

You will need: cellophane pieces, card cut into diamond shape, PVA glue, glue spreaders, hole punch, ribbon, scissors.

Give each child a diamond shape. Punch a hole near one of the points of the diamond and thread a length of ribbon through the hole so that the picture can hang up. Stick pieces of cellophane onto the card, covering the card with some of the cellophane going over the edge of the card so that light can shine through. Suggest hanging their diamonds on a window.

Talk about how Jesus gives us lots of different colours, pictures, ways to see and understand what God’s way is like. Choose one of the parables to talk about in more detail.

Reflection

A tiny shard of coloured glass
through which to view the kingdom:
each shard lending
a different colour,
a different perspective.

Seeds that grow into sheltering trees,
yeast that ferments
and leavens the dough,
treasure and pearls and nets,
all worth ditching everything else
in order to secure.

So many ways
of describing the indescribable,
putting the pieces together
still doesn’t produce a whole
but perhaps the knowledge

of such a multi-layered phenomenon
will serve to remind us of the enormity
and the mystery
of the Kingdom of God.

Take Home Ideas

Look out for signs of the Kingdom of Heaven this week.

Say to yourself each morning: “Today I will pay attention to moments when I witness or experience the Kingdom within myself, within others and in the world all around me.”

Keep a journal called ‘Kingdom Moments.’

Notice when you find glimpses of the Kingdom in unexpected places or in unexpected ways within yourself, within others and in the world all around you.

Take a quiet few minutes to be still before you sleep.

Imagine that you are shining a light on all that has reminded you of the Kingdom during each day within yourself, within others and in the world around you.

Give thanks for all the bright Kingdom moments of the day.

Prayers

Call to Worship

God, your kingdom is...

among us all

in surprising places,

hidden in the everyday,

small but precious,

above us and below us.

Your kingdom is here

and we gather as part of it

to worship and adore you, O God.

Responses

Leader: The Kingdom of God is..

All: **within us all.**

Leader: The Kingdom of God is...
All: **found in the most surprising of places.**

Leader: The Kingdom of God is...
All: **hidden in the everyday things of life.**

Leader: The Kingdom of God is...
All: **small but very precious.**

Leader: The Kingdom of God is...
All: **here and now.**
Let us worship God
who reigns over the Kingdom.

Sending

Take the smallest seed
and produce life.

Add yeast to the bread of life
and it will grow.

Find the hidden treasure in your life,
invest all you have in living for God.

Cast wide your net
and haul in the catch.

All these blessings and more are yours
from God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
there for you today and always.

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Musical suggestions

You can hear samples of these suggestions in the 'Weekly Worship' section of <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/>. This new online music resource will allow you to listen to and search the breadth of music available in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4). You will find hidden gems and alternative arrangements to familiar songs that will inspire creativity and spark fresh curiosity about how we best use music in worship.

- CH4 142 – “A small thing like a hazelnut” – A beautiful and simple reminder to trust in the God who made us, loves us and will always care for us.
- CH4 153 – “Great is Thy Faithfulness” – Particularly apt for both the words and the story behind the hymn itself.
- CH4 154 – “How Great Thou Art” – Another wonderful hymn telling of all God has done and continues to do for us.
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah” – Brings in a lot of the themes from Psalm 105 in particular.
- CH4 533 – “Will you come and follow me” – Will we trust and follow?
- CH4 555 – “Amazing Grace” – A hymn of personal experience for many.
- Mission Praise 545 – “Open our eyes, Lord” – A gentle opening hymn, seeking illumination and clarity
- “To What Can the Kingdom of God Be Compared” – *from* www.carolynshymns.com Set to the tune of ‘To God be the Glory’ (CH4 512)
- “God, Whose Love Is Always Stronger” – *from* www.carolynshymns.com Set to the tune of Beach Spring (CH4 252)

NB: Please refer to the copyright permissions on the website for these 2 hymns:
http://www.carolynshymns.com/to_what_can_the_kingdom_of_god_be_compared.html
http://www.carolynshymns.com/god_whose_love_is_always_stronger.html

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