

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 26th July 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Curiosity is part of human nature. Young children are full of questions. And as adults we have our questions too. We are lifelong learners. As Christians, we sit at the feet of our Lord and listen to his teaching. As we worship, let us seek first the Kingdom of God.

Hymn/song

Opening Prayer

It seems to me that people find something.
Day after day, they find something –
something to motivate, something to live for – don't they?
Or maybe they don't think about it at all.
But I want to think about it.
I don't want to spend my life on what doesn't matter.
I don't want to go through, day after day, carelessly and heedlessly.
I want to catch glimpses of your kingdom, Jesus.
Glimpses so clear that they are like the pearl, the treasure.
Lord, help me to see. **Amen**

Introduction to the Bible Reading

During his life on earth, Jesus showed himself to be a matchless storyteller. Through parables he spoke of ordinary things and gave them deeper meaning. He made it his delight to bring heaven and earth together. His parables often packed a punch. There was an emphasis on judgment and his stories demanded a response from the listener. Would they choose to receive or reject the message? How will we respond to his parables we shall hear today?

Read Matthew Chapter 13 verses 31-33 and verses 44-52

Read Psalm 119 verses 129-136

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God we draw near to you in humble confession... *(Silence)*
Your teaching is true wisdom, but we have listened to other voices.
Your words give light, but we have preferred darkness.
You call us to love others as ourselves, but we have been selfish.
We are sorry Lord. In your mercy cleanse us from our sins and
make us the people you want us to be. Through Jesus Christ our
Lord who died that we might be forgiven and lives that we might be
free. **Amen.**

*Banish thoughts of sadness,
for the Lord of gladness,
Jesus, enters in;
though the clouds may gather,
those who love the Saviour
still have peace within.
Though I bear much sorrow here,
still in you lies purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!*
(Words: F J Franck / C Winkworth)

Hymn/song

Sermon

In today's Bible reading Jesus talks to ordinary people about ordinary things:

A mustard seed hidden in the soil

Yeast hidden in a loaf of bread

Treasure hidden in a field

A pearl hidden in an oyster

Fish hidden in the waters of the sea

Can you see what connects all these?

That's right – they are hidden.

And yet to our surprise each of these gives up their secrets.

The mustard seed hidden in the soil grows into a great tree for birds to nest in. The yeast hidden in a loaf of bread causes it to rise.

The treasure hidden in the field is discovered.

The pearl hidden in the oyster is found.

Fish hidden in the waters of the sea are caught.

What does it all mean?

I invite you to think about your life for a moment.

What is Jesus saying to you today?

The parables and stories of Jesus make us ask ourselves some big questions:

What is the most important thing in my life?

What or who do I love?

What really matters to me?

Where does my treasure lie?

Do my possessions possess me?

What am I living for?

What am I longing for?

What am I searching for?

What is life hiding from me?

Where is God?

Is God hidden from me?

Am I searching for God?

Sometimes life surprises us.

Sometimes it can be a nasty surprise.

When December 31st 2019 became January 1st 2020, who among us could have imagined this year would unfold like it has?

Who would have thought that a hidden virus could cause so much pain and damage?

Consequently, our world closed in, like that oyster shell.

As we wonder what is going on and wonder about our hidden future, perhaps we might be closed to God today.

The ways of God are often hidden.

When God seems silent we may doubt God's presence and God's plans. If only we could find God in ordinary life.

The good news is that in Jesus Christ, God's Son, God has come to us. God has lived an ordinary life among us.

Jesus noticed the hidden people, such as lepers and the unloved. He healed the sick and worked miracles. Crowds gathered to listen to his teaching. Women and men gave up everything to follow Jesus. He died on a cross and surprised everyone by rising from the dead. The best news is that this same Jesus is alive today and is still calling people with the words: 'follow me'. I answered his call on my ordinary life when I was 13 years old. I can witness to the ways he has led me and guided me through my life. Jesus has helped me open up my life to God and to other people.

And I have been surprised by the path my life has taken.

For sure, I have taken wrong turns and at times I've tried to hide from God. When my life has been hard and there have been losses, God's ways have been hidden from me. We live by faith, not by sight. My faith has been tested. There has been tears and regret. But God has never left me. Even in difficult times I have found treasure hidden in the darkness, treasures of grace and peace, which surpasses all understanding. I have always had a friend in Jesus. I am often surprised by God's love for me.

My faith has become so valuable to me it has become like that precious pearl. Anything I have given up pales into insignificance compared to what I have found in Jesus.

Jesus found me and I found Jesus.

But the quest goes on – my adventure of faith continues.

I have much more to surrender to God to have open hands and heart that I make room to receive even more of his treasures.

I have caught a glimpse of the kingdom of God and I journey on as a pilgrim traveller seeking to know and do God's will. In some ways my search goes on. I pray that you will join me in this great adventure. All that Jesus has been for me he can be for you.

Don't hide from God today. Don't let bitterness keep you from God. Don't think you don't matter to God. Don't think you are too lost or too messed up for God to find you and love you.

You are like that precious pearl.

God gave up everything to make you his own.

Think for a moment how a pearl is formed.

A pearl is the only precious stone that is produced by a living organism.

In the sea, a grain of sand or other irritant gets underneath the skin of the oyster, hurting and injuring it.

The oyster responds by covering the injury with a substance called nacre, commonly known as mother of pearl.

Layer after layer is poured on until the pearl is formed as a beautiful jewel. The pearl is the response of the injured to the injury done.

That is a beautiful depiction of God and us.

Imagine God as the oyster, the living organism, we, like that grain of sand, have hurt and injured God, by our sin and our frailty, and we have hurt and injured ourselves.

Yet God has responded by covering the wounds with his love.

He is changing us into something beautiful.

We are being changed from glory into glory.

This is what God does; God brings about changes for the better – in you and in me. That is why the cross of shame and punishment is changed into a symbol of love and forgiveness.

I believe God is doing some hidden work in your heart today.

Be open to God; surrender to God. Jesus is calling you.

In closing, in this week ahead remember that you are God's precious treasure, bought with a price.

You are precious to him and as you give your life to God nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. May you know that the Kingdom of Heaven is truly among you, within your reach.

Amen.

Hymn/song

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Life-giving God,

For the signs of your kingdom,

in gestures as small as tiny mustard seeds,

in simple kindnesses that can mean so much:

We give you thanks and praise.

For the way your kingdom takes hold

and grows like yeast in a batch of dough,

with the determination and persistence that good will prevail:

We give you thanks and praise.

For the way we see your kingdom in surprising places,

such as the discovery of treasure in a field,

and unlikely people doing unexpected things:

We give you thanks and praise.

For the price people pay for your kingdom,

like a pearl, more costly than all the other jewels in the world,

because it asks for commitment and sacrifice:

We give you thanks and praise.

For the way your kingdom spreads

like a net catching enough fish to feed the world,

irresistible, powerful, with a love that overcomes all:

We give you thanks and praise. Amen.

We pray for all who are searching;
For those responding to our Pioneer Prayer Project
That they may talk to God and know He is near.
We pray for all Churches seeking new direction...
We pray for those searching for peace...
We pray for those longing for reconciliation...
We pray for those yearning for freedom...
We pray for those aching for forgiveness...
We pray for those who need acceptance...
We pray for the sick who need healing...
We pray for those exploring new medicines...
We pray for those longing for comfort...
We pray for those we love but seldom meet...
We pray for our own needs...
Life-giving God, hear our prayers that we may love you with our
whole being and willingly share the concerns of our neighbours.
We pray through Jesus Christ, our Teacher and our Saviour, **Amen.**
Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray
The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

Let us bring our gifts and talents, old and new, into God's service.
Go in peace; live the kingdom; share its treasures; keep the faith.
And may God the Father bless you, God the Son inspire you
and God the Holy Spirit enlighten you now and always. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- How did your search for God begin?
- Name some of your own precious discoveries of faith.
- Read Matthew Chapter 13 verses 47-50 again.
Jesus speaks of the final separation of the good from the bad.
What warning is there for us and for our world here?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsBpM9IcBts>

Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf11rReeWIs>

All for Jesus – all for Jesus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LApJK3ug_c0

Be Thou my vision

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg

More Contemporary Music:

All I once I held dear

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxpPla-BskY>

When the music fades

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0a9T0UtJBQ>

What a beautiful name

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUBBIddm_rM

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.

Keep your heart fixed on Christ and His Kingdom.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

You are missed!

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter