

**Good morning and welcome** to our morning worship from Christchurch Hitchin. My name is Christine Warren and I am a Methodist Local Preacher. Before we begin our worship, I should like to thank Paul, our musical director, David who will be reading and John who is dealing with all the technical stuff behind the scenes. I should also like to thank Katherine who will be sharing our Christchurch community moment later in our worship.

We begin with **some words from Psalm 119** as written in The Message

'Break open your words O Lord; let the light shine out,

Let ordinary people see the meaning.

Mouth open and panting we want your commands more than anything.

Turn our way; look kindly on us as you always do to those who love you.

Smile on your servants; teach us the right way to live.'

So as we enter God's holy presence this morning,

Are you ready to hear again about God's kingdom?

Come let us open our hearts and minds

To see the kingdom around us and within us

Come and worship the living God. Amen

So we join now in a song based on another of the psalms, Psalm 42. A song of worship and adoration

[STF 544 As the deer pants for the water.](#)

### **Let us pray**

Lord God, as we gather together, we thank you for your presence.

Thank you, Lord that each one of us is unique, yet we share a common bond in you. So even though we cannot meet physically together, we come as your church family knowing that we all learn and experience things in different ways.

We thank you for your amazing word and world that gives us so many pictures of your kingdom.

Something for everyone, something to feed our hearts and minds. Be with us Lord and bless us richly as we call upon your name in worship and praise.

But as we worship you, we are aware of our shortcomings so we pray Lord forgive us our half-hearted attempts to follow you.

We confess that at times there is a coziness for we like our faith to be nice and gentle and often we keep it in its place in a corner of our lives. Our commitment can be lukewarm.

*Silence*

So Lord comfort us when we are disturbed but please disturb us when we are comfortable.

*Silence*

Let us love you with passion, seek you single mindedly and follow you as if our lives depended on it, for indeed they do.

May we hunger and thirst for your kingdom above all else. Amen

**Introduction to the Reading** - If you were able to join us for our worship last week, you would have heard Kieran refer to what we often called Jesus' manifesto which starts with the words 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor'. Kieran talked about how through this pronouncement, Jesus turned the known world on its head. These are often referred to as kingdom values. Throughout his preaching and teaching, Jesus shared the exciting news of God's kingdom, sometimes through parables. He shared that determination and patience, humility and love rather than power and strength were key qualities. Today we are going to hear some of this teaching as recorded in Matthew's gospel. **David** will share this reading with us.

**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

**[Picture of seed]** Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

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 birds come and perch in its branches.'

**[Picture of bread]** 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.'

**[Picture of metal detector]** '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.'

[Picture of pearl] Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

[Picture of fishing net] Once again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you understood all these things?' Jesus asked. 'Yes' they replied.

[Picture of treasure] 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 – Glimpses of God's kingdom**[Picture of Uluru for first paragraph]

Fifteen years ago my husband and I were fortunate to go on a holiday to Australia. And one of the highlights of the holiday was a visit to Uluru, the enormous rock formation in the Red Centre of that country. We travelled from Alice Springs by coach across the vast flat desert and that day we were very fortunate because we assigned the front seat in the coach and so we had the best view. From miles away we kept getting glimpses of what we thought was the giant rock. Our guide explained to us that yes sometimes that was what we were seeing but often we were being fooled, because the rock formation we were seeing was not Uluru at all. And this went on for miles and miles, just glimpses until suddenly we knew that we were seeing the right thing for there was this splendid rock, red and glowing in the sunshine in all its glory. You might wonder why I have told you this story but please bare it in mind as we explore today's reading. For what Jesus taught 2000 years ago and teaches us too is that we should always be looking out for glimpses of God's kingdom in our world and we should be ready to act when this happens so that others may experience these glimpses too.

Down through the years there has been a lot of discussion about the 'Kingdom of God' or as Matthew refers to it in his gospel as the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. Was it there in Christ's time, is it here with us now, is it something that will only happen in the future? The answer to all these questions is yes. Jesus himself proclaimed the kingdom of God at the start of his ministry, in Matthew 4:17 it says 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' God's kingdom is his rightful reign over everything he has made and Jesus came to show us this so that if we follow him, we will be part of this kingdom through showing and sharing those kingdom values. So we cannot relegate it to some far off time and place but we must understand that the full and final consummation of God's purposes will come in the future, when God's rule will be acknowledged by all. In the meantime, as I said, we catch glimpses

of this kingdom, we experience glimpses of understanding and we too are able, each in our own unique way, to help fulfil God's kingdom here on earth.

So let us reflect on these parables that Jesus told- much shorter than some but still requiring us to ponder on their meaning. And they fall into 3 groups.

Firstly the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast show the miraculous growth which can start from something very small but which eventually develops into something much bigger. These parables illustrate that a little can go a long way- that tiny seed which grows secretly in the ground into a very large shrub and the yeast within the dough when it is left to prove. Of course both plant and dough need some human intervention to achieve a healthy plant or a tasty loaf. These parables tell us never to underestimate the power of small beginnings. So many times people will say [and you may be one of them] -'Oh I can't do much, what I can do to help is very small.' These small beginnings for Jesus can grow and flourish and as you nurture an idea, an action – you too will grow in your relationship with Jesus. We have seen so many examples in our time of lock-down of things that started as a seed of an idea- [Sir Tom is the most famous example but there are many, many more] which grew and benefitted and touched people's lives. So never underestimate the power of small beginnings for Jesus.

And now turning to the next two parables about the treasure and the pearl. We have to remember that in the society in which Jesus lived , there were no banks, the best way to keep a possession safe was to bury it. So that when the man stumbles across the treasure buried in the field, he hid it again and went and bought the whole field so that it was his. Likewise the man with the pearl of great price who sacrificially gave up other things so that this wonderful gem was his. These two parables remind us that to follow Jesus, we will often have to give up something in our lives that was important to us, choices may have to be made, it can be costly, there will be sacrifice if we live our lives for Jesus but the reward of following him and sharing and showing Christ to others will be great.

And thirdly, in the last parable of the drag net and the separating of the fish, Jesus reminds us that we must take his teaching seriously. We may feel uncomfortable with the words that we read here but they cannot be ignored. The message is for today as it was for those who listened in Jesus' time. The consequences of how we lead our lives here and now are not temporary or a matter of personal tastes. It is much bigger than that. But we are promised that if we live our lives for Christ, we will eventually see the full glory of God's kingdom.

To see the full treasure of God's kingdom on earth and in heaven we need patience. Over the last few months, we have all had to learn much patience, I know I have. Patience to be able to go out to the shops , to see family and friends, to get back to work, to resume our studying at school and university, to go on holiday, and patience still to hug , to physically worship. And some people are still at the very first stage. We need patience to see the

fruition of some of the new ideas for our church but patience is part of belonging to God's kingdom.

As we travelled along that road to Uluru, the glimpses we sometimes had were mistaken but often we had a real and tantalising peek, we needed patience to see the full and complete landscape in all its beauty. So let us pledge next time we catch a glimpse of what God is really like and how incredibly wonderful he is, we commit ourselves to doing something for him even it seems small, or costly or needs patience so we can enjoy the treasure of living in peace and love with him every day.

**David**

'The kingdom may appear insignificant, but watch how it grows!

The kingdom may appear to be hidden, even lost,

But all the time it is working quietly, effectively, to transform the world.

And the kingdom is ever reaching out to enfold you, and like a net, it catches fish of every kind;

So be warned you may find yourself in some very strange company.

Recognize the kingdom for what it really is

And you will allow nothing to stand in the way of possessing it.'

**Christine**

If there is one thing that is clear Lord, it is that we cannot pin down,

We cannot possess or define limits for the kingdom.

But the kingdom can enfold us, filling and enriching our lives.

Draw us, we pray into that kingdom and hold us there in your love for ever.

*Edmund Banyard*

[STF 255 The Kingdom of God \[no announcement\]](#)

And now I will have over to Katherine Harris who will be sharing our Christchurch community moment with you.

**Prayers** – I hope you have seen the request to have a seed ready for our prayers for others.

So now hold your seed [if you have one] in your hand. If not just use your imagination.

First enclose the seed in your hand. Let your fingers protect it, let your palm secure it as the soil does the seed.

Loving Lord we pray for all those who at this time especially need your protection and care. We pray for families recently bereaved, for those who are ill, for those awaiting an operation or treatment which has been postponed because of the COVID pandemic. We pray too for those who are still shielding and the isolation and challenges this can bring especially as they see others moving into a time of more normality. And so we pray especially for John and Kathleen Brooksbank and for Katherine Harris and all others known to us who are coping with this situation. Prompt us to show the light and love of your kingdom.

Look again at the seed in your hand. Imagine it growing as a young plant, a plant that needs nurturing. And so today we pray for our Christchurch Holiday Club which will be taking place on-line during this coming week. We pray for all the children and families who are involved, also those who will be leading the various activities. We pray dear Lord that seeds will be sown in these young hearts which may grow and flourish over the years so that in time they will know Jesus as their Saviour. Prompt us to pray for this wonderful activity so that your kingdom values may be shared with those who come.

And now imagine again that your seed has grown into a plant, a plant that can flourish or a plant that struggle to keep growing. We hold before you all who are on the first steps of their journey of faith or those whose faith is not as strong as it used to be. Help us even in these times of isolation to be sensitive and tuned into the need to others, to provide a listening ear, a safe place for honesty so that we can help one another to grow and share the message of the treasure of God's kingdom among us.

So now we join these prayers together we share in the words of **the Lord's Prayer** using whatever version or language you feel comfortable with.

[STF 407 Hear the call of the kingdom \[no announcement\]](#)

Go in peace: live the kingdom; share its treasures; keep the faith.

And now may God the Father bless you, God the Son inspire you,

And God the Holy Spirit enlighten you now and always. Amen

