

## Methodist Homes MHA Sunday Service 2021



Just before we have our 1st hymn, I'd like to invite us to pause with this reflection which really impacted on our residents when shared with them.

### **Call to worship:**

So now be still

Do not do or pretend to be, anything, just be.

Be still Calm those anxious, unruly whirling thoughts into stillness.

Be still and know As the flower knows the sun's rays, as the mouth knows bread

As the heart knows love, open yourself to knowing.

Be still and know that I am Here and now, around you and within you

Behind you and before you Wherever you are, I am.

Be still and know that I am God Your Father and Mother, your Companion and

Healer Your Life and your all.

Be, be still, be still and know. Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know that I am God.

Christine Odell 1990 Published by Churches Together in Britain 2002

Hymn: (Singing the Faith 55) Immortal, Invisible, God Only

Wise

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,  
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might,  
thy justice like mountains high soaring above  
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.  
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.

We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

4 Great God of all glory, great God of all light,  
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.  
All praise we would render; O help us to see  
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Good morning Christchurch and everyone else joining us digitally this morning, my names Katrina Myers and I am the Chaplain at Elmside care home. Thank you for inviting me to take this service today on MHA Sunday. It is an opportunity to give thanks and reflect on the support given to over 18,500 older people through MHA's care homes, retirement living schemes and MHA Communities schemes. It has been an incredibly challenging year for MHA as it has for many others. There has been an out pouring of prayers and support from the church community to MHA and that has really encouraged and helped MHA's staff, volunteers, residents and members. Thank you.

Part of MHA's vision is for people to find meaning and hope in later life and to tackle loneliness and isolation. MHA seek do to this through their chaplaincy service, providing spiritual for the happy and the darkest of times, music therapy helping people living with dementia and community groups partnering with the church to reach out in to our neighbourhoods tackling loneliness and isolation through MHA Communities. All of this has continued throughout the pandemic, and now a new digital service is offered, MHA Digital Communities, to connect people into a virtual community wherever they are – providing wellbeing, friendship groups, spiritual and religious care.

Its great to be part of your digital community too we regularly share this service with residents at Elmside and its meant alot to us. I am here in church with musicians Andy Searle, Mike Crowley and Rob Bryan Reader - Sue Herbert Technician - John Hamblin, thank you for your help and service this morning. I'd like to extend that thanks to all of you who have supported our residents during this last year or in the past, with letters, visits, services bible studies, Chaplaincy serving tea and coffee and anything else. I hope we may be able to see some of you again soon as start to open up again. You know who you are, so thank you.

Our theme today is relieving loneliness and bringing hope.

We have a video now, that just shows us a little bit of the work MHA does in supporting a resident

[mha.org.uk/Sunday](http://mha.org.uk/Sunday)

#### Opening prayers

- Adoration

God of all, we praise you for your loving presence with us through good times and difficult times. You know each of us by name and call us into communion with you and one another. Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth you welcomed the outsiders, your love is for all people and knows no bounds. You showed your ultimate love by coming amongst us as one of us, leaving behind all heavenly splendour to experience

the joys and hurts, highs and lows, laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. Yet you remained obedient and full of love, and lived, served and died for us. You were raised from the dead and offer us everlasting life. And so we declare your holiness, majesty and beauty that radiates from all that is around us. And we with all creation shout praise to you. Glory, power and praise be given to you O God.

- Confession

As we recognise your goodness and love, all that you have given to us, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your continued presence through your Holy Spirit, we recall in our minds the things we do, think and say that fall short of all that you call us to be.

As we reflect on loneliness and isolation, we ask for your forgiveness in the way that your church has contributed to others feeling un-welcome in our midst. We confess the things that we haven't done which could have helped others feel more included. We offer our confession for the ways in which people still exist on the margins.

*Silence*

Lord forgive us, and renew us in the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you.

- Thanksgiving

We give thanks for your faithfulness to us. For the outpouring of your love and grace and for all that you have promised to us. For your love that has guided us through life, and will continue to be with us. We give thanks for communities where all are included and made to feel welcome. We thank you that you call us to be part of your Kingdom in the here and now. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Please use whichever version or language you feel comfortable with, I'm using this one as its one most of our residents are most familiar with:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Your 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

Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil, thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever, amen

Hymn:(Singing the Faith 611) Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You

Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you;

Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,  
And companions on the road;  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you  
In the night-time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping,  
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven  
We shall find such harmony  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
Let me be as Christ to you;  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant, too.

Reading: Mark 5:1-20

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.[a] And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus[b] asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits[c] begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus[d] to leave

their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus[e] refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

### Sermon

"We are on the verge of, if not already living through, an epidemic of loneliness and if we do not start to take action, it will have huge consequences for individuals and for our health and social care systems". Paul Burstow MP, 'Summit on tackling loneliness in older Age', 15 March 2012

The pandemic has meant that many more of us have gained personal insight into what it means to be socially isolated, lonely, or both. Face-to-face interactions and social activities becoming obsolete, working from home became the norm and people had to remain within their post code unable to travel.

Our theme for today is relieving loneliness and bringing hope, and we see this in action in our bible reading today. There's much we can unpack from the reading: the nature of the exorcism, the location and just what happened with the pigs but at the heart of this story is Jesus extending defiant kindness to a man who had been forced to the margins of his society. It wasn't a national lockdown that contributed to his loneliness and we can speculate about what was happening to this man; with an awareness of modern psychiatry we might suggest he was suffering from schizophrenia or a personality disorder. The idea of being filled with demonic forces certainly made a lot of sense two thousand years ago. In a way, it almost doesn't matter what was possessing this man because the significance of the story is in how Jesus approached him and how that approach contrasted with the way the villagers dealt with him.

We read, "*He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.*" This poor man has been chained up, he has been locked away, he has been shunned. He is isolated, he is alone. He spends all day and all night howling in anguish, beating himself with stones, perhaps copying how the villagers treated him as, of course, stoning would be precisely how that village would respond to this man.

Rejected by a society that couldn't or wouldn't engage with him, this desperate man comes to Christ in search of peace. And Christ heals him. He mends what is broken, he eases his torment. He will not allow this man to suffer alone, in isolation any longer. Jesus provides a model for all of us involved in pastoral care. Jesus asks his name and gives him identity. He is clothed and given dignity. Jesus spends time with him and offers support, and Jesus trusts that the community will show him hospitality. Jesus is relieving loneliness and bringing hope, and at the same time challenging the cultural norms. And we too are called to do the same.

MHA, not just in our care homes, but in retirement living and in community schemes, staff, chaplains and volunteers have been working tirelessly with people who have been forced into extreme isolation. Not just 'rule of six', 'keep two meters apart' isolation. In care homes, residents had only PPE wearing staff to see. And when an outbreak occurred you might imagine how it felt to be in the most vulnerable category when the person who lives in the room next you has died from Covid. And when the person who lives in the room opposite you has died from Covid. And when the

carer who helps you get changed in the morning is now in Intensive Care on a ventilator, with Covid...It's a lonely, isolated place.

Whilst church doors were closing, MHA chaplains were going into those rooms wearing PPE, holding hands, praying, raising the spirits of residents who were alone. And just as residents were scared, so were the chaplains, so were the carers. But they did it anyway.

We have all been challenged by the loneliness and social isolation that we see around us. Tanya, the MHA Communities manager from our story earlier, churches and services across MHA have responded to where the need is. We've befriended, picked up prescriptions, gone shopping for others and we continue to find ways to relieve loneliness and bring hope.

Earlier we met Anthony, through incredibly hard experience he had lost his confidence. Inspired by her own faith, Tanya was there, with volunteers in her scheme, supported by the church able to give dignity and worth back through providing a new community of friends. It's a story that is replicated across the whole country through churches and MHA Communities.

The pandemic brought the issue of loneliness and isolation into the public domain. We have seen the effect of loneliness and isolation and following Jesus requires us to take action, to be radically inclusive and offer generous hospitality. It may also require a time of reflection as a church where we have knowingly or otherwise been the cause of others isolation.

The work of MHA, both in care homes and those living in the wider community, haven't just continued as they always have and nor has the church. We have learnt to adapt. New ways have been found to bring peace to the fretful, new fresh expressions of faith have been uncovered. MHA chaplains brought technology into their services very quickly. The carers used the same technology to break down those boundaries that kept residents feeling isolated. And MHA's new Digital Communities are relieving loneliness by reaching out to people in their own homes. A 92 year old using Skype for the first time to talk to their family; someone at end of life being prayed with and for through video call; or someone isolating at home but being able to join their closest friends at a virtual coffee morning.

There is hope. Together we can ensure that the work of MHA Communities can thrive so that more people like Anthony can be supported, our chaplains can continue to be alongside our residents and staff as they continue to heal and today your support has helped us reach thousands of others through MHA Digital Communities, meaning that those in our churches and in our communities can be connected.

This pandemic has been horrendous for so many. So many lives lost, families grieving, so much horror and so many tears. Yet out of this horror new ways of worshipping have been found, new ways of breaking down the walls we put up around each other have been discovered. Comfort has been given to those who most needed it, in the darkest moments.

Your actions, however small or large, have made a huge impact in reducing loneliness over the pandemic. Today, If you'd like to support MHA in any way you could consider giving, volunteering or becoming a befriender? Please get in touch with Elmside via myself or Archers Court via Sue Stillwell.

May God continue to guide us, inspire us and be with us as together we seek to relieve loneliness and bringing hope to as many people.

Amen.

### Prayers of Intercession

Lets take a moment to remember those in our own community who are lonely or isolated or both.

This prayer is offered by Les, a resident of MHA Harwood Court care home in Newcastle upon Tyne:

We pray for those on the margins of our society and those in our communities living alone without loved ones to support them.

We pray that You will open our eyes to the needs of older men and women within our midst, open our hearts to accommodate them and our minds to understand how what we do affects them.

We pray, especially today for the work of MHA and all it does to enhance the life experience of older people, including people living with dementia.

We pray for the work of MHA Communities as they seek to relieve loneliness and isolation, and particularly for the new work of Digital Communities reducing loneliness and bringing hope to people everywhere.

We pray that all people may learn of Your Love and Grace which are available to all and that reminds us we are never alone.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Friend. Amen.

Lord we also pray for carers and managers ad church members , volunteers family members and visitors, meet them and their families at their point of need today.

Hymn: (Singing the Faith 410) Lord, Your Church on Earth is Seeking

1 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking  
your renewal from above:  
teach us all the art of speaking  
with the accents of your love.  
We would heed your great commission  
sending us to every place-  
preach, baptise, fulfil my mission;  
serve with love and share my grace.

2 Freedom give to those in bondage,  
lift the burdens caused by sin;  
give new hope, new strength and courage,  
grant release from fears within.

Light for darkness, joy for sorrow,  
love for hatred, peace for strife-  
these and countless blessings follow  
as the Spirit gives new life.

3 In the streets of every city  
where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
let us show the Saviour's pity,  
let us of his mercy tell.  
In all lands and with all races  
let us serve, and seek to bring  
all the world to render praises,  
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

#### Blessing

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with us now and always.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.  
In the name of Christ. Amen