

Prayers

Let us confess our sins.

Loving God, we have sinned against you in what we have thought and said and done. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong. Forgive us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray for the Church of Christ throughout the world

For all the nations and people of the world

For those we know and love, including our families, friends and neighbours

For all who suffer, especially those who have suffered pain or loss during the coronavirus pandemic

In remembrance of all who have died, giving thanks especially for those who have died in the faith of Christ

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn [StF 545 / H&P 378](#) **Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart**

Benediction

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge of God and his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon us and all those whom we love, this day and for evermore. Amen.

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Worship Darlington District

Sunday 26th July 2020

Every Church Growing



Come, let us sing to the Lord and rejoice in the Rock our Saviour.

Come, let us kneel and adore, let us worship the Lord our Maker

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Hymn [StF 255 / HP 139](#) **The kingdom of God is justice and joy**

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation

and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen. (Psalm 51: 10-12)

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your Holy Name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Gracious God, we thank you for all your gifts to us. You have loved us from the beginning of time. You are with us in times of trouble and celebration. We thank you, for coming to us in Jesus Christ, who redeemed the world and saved us from our sins. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth. You are our comfort in times of trouble and your mercy endures for ever. Amen.

Our worship sheet this week was compiled by Ian Warburton

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

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

I want to concentrate on the first two verses of the Matthew reading and write a little about growth. Where does the Methodist Church come into all this? It got started with very small numbers and then grew, just like the mustard seed. But lately there's been a lot of concern over declining numbers of members. At the 2017 Methodist Conference, those who were there were told that for the first time in around 200 years, we now had under 200,000 members in the UK. I think the actual UK number was given as about 188,000 and might be down to about 174,000 now. But world-wide the picture is more positive, with examples of growth. So our numbers in the UK are declining. Should that worry us? Or might it be, as the late Dr Donald English, a one-time President of Conference, once put it, a matter of God shifting his weight from one foot to the other to make us ready for the next step? I truly believe that our present numerical decline should be treated as a temporary setback rather than a permanent disaster, so I warm to comments like this quite strongly. Also, let's not forget that growth isn't necessarily a case of getting larger numbers. It can mean the same number drawing closer to God than before.

But it's clear that change is often needed if we're to grow effectively. I sincerely believe that Methodism has so much to offer. But don't let's forget that sometimes it really is better to leave some things to God. As we travel the inevitable path of slow but sure change and, one hopes, growth, there are certain to be times of trial, setback, problems, things we don't understand, times when we want to move perhaps faster or perhaps slower than we actually are. If we read on in our Bibles we'll see that sometimes things moved very slowly or were subject to setbacks or that great suffering sometimes had to be endured for the ultimate good. You don't have to go too far forward in Christ's ministry to come to Jesus trying to explain to the disciples that he'll have to suffer and die before his work on earth can be said to be accomplished. After the disciples experience the coming of the Holy

Spirit, they go out into the world and to face rejection, imprisonment and even death itself as they go about spreading the Good News of the King and the coming of his kingdom. Doubtless we shan't have to go through anything quite as drastic as that as we seek to grow in our faith and aspects of our church life but it seems unlikely that absolutely everything that we try to accomplish will be plain sailing. If we run fundraising events, it seems likely that some will be more successfully financially than others. No matter how tirelessly we work for God, there are bound to be hiccoughs from time to time. Our patience is likely to be tested at times. There could be a sleepless night here and there now and again. We may sometimes even wonder why we ever got involved in whatever we're doing. But don't let us get too discouraged or even particularly surprised if one or two of these things happen. Let's deal as quickly and decisively as we can with issues that we can solve ourselves and try to be patient and sensitive when



we encounter situations where their resolution is less within our control.

Above all, don't let's forget to take our situations to the Lord in prayer. I'm sure that, with God's help, we can do a tremendous amount. And, if we keep praying, if we keep our nerve and we love and support one another in time to come, what we shall ultimately have is a church well equipped to serve the Lord as the 21st century continues on its way and the ability to minister to the communities in which we are situated all the more effectively, to make a real difference to communities that have so much to offer but sorely need to put God back into the centre of their lives. Yes, it's as big and important a job as that but I firmly believe that God and we can do it.

Hymn [StF 557/HP 698](#) Let him to whom we now belong