

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 24th September 2023

Prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

Welcome.

Our theme for today is 'Hidden Treasures.' We are going to be asking the question, where has God hidden treasures for us to find? Do you recognise treasure in the words of our first hymn?

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 82

[How Great Thou Art \(O Lord My God\)](#)

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the works thy hand hath made;
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
How great thou art! How great thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I
wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

When Christ shall come with shouts of
acclamation,
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989)

Prayers of Approach

Generous God,
Whose hidden treasures surprise us
As we journey through life and faith,
Open my eyes, Lord, to the splendour all around,
There to be seen, if I have eyes to see;
There to be heard, if I have ears to hear.
Open my will, Lord,
to perceive you, in the glory of everyday things
and the intricate design of creation.

Open my will, Lord, to be eager to follow your
command and do all I can to guard and protect
all that you have given.

Open my mouth, Lord, let me sing your glory and
speak your praise. Amen.

(Andy Fyall, Chair, Nottingham and Derby District)

Read Matthew 6.19-21

Read Isaiah 45.1-8

Reflection

*“There’s a pot of gold at the end of every
rainbow!” That’s the legend we’ve all grown up
with, isn’t it? But where does it come from? History
tells us that Vikings invaded Ireland in the eighth
century and were known for looting and then
burying gold – in places where they hoped it
wouldn’t be found! When they left Ireland, they left
some of their stolen gold behind and the legend
began, suggesting that Irish leprechauns found the
gold and buried it again so that humans could
never find it!*

*And so, the folklore suggests there is a pot of gold
hidden where the rainbow touches earth. But of
course, we know that’s an illusion, and rainbows
usually seem to move away as we move towards
them. How frustrating! And a reminder of how easy
and tempting it can be to look for treasure in the
wrong places!’*

These words were used by the President of the
Methodist Conference, Revd Gill Newton, in her
President’s address this June. Together with the
Vice President, Kerry Scarlett, they took the theme
of ‘Hidden treasures’ for their Presidential year.

If you are not that familiar with the workings of
Methodism, a new President and Vice President of
Conference is elected each year. They help in
oversight and leadership of the church and visit
many Districts and Circuits, encouraging and
supporting, preaching and presiding. Their theme
for the year is often an inspiration to churches
across the Connexion.

We are encouraged to pray for them during a busy
and important year– and for the issues they raise
as they travel across the Connexion and share their
findings with us.

Hidden treasures! It is an intriguing theme. Children are often captivated by stories of Pirates and treasure – X marks the spot. If you have ever visited the beach and seen people walking up and down with metal detectors, you will know that this desire to find hidden treasure doesn't go away as we grow up. For many of us, our definition of treasure changes. We learn that real treasure cannot be bought and sold. Personal treasures may include things like precious photo albums, or gifts made for us by children or grandchildren, nephews or nieces. And our greatest treasures are often the people who we love the most.

When Jill and Kerry chose the theme 'Hidden Treasures', they were not thinking of precious gold or gems but something far more precious, *'the treasures offered to us by the Creator of the World, the King of kings.'* As Gill said in her address, *'Why spend time looking for worldly treasures when there are untold treasures awaiting us through a deepening relationship with God in Christ, and when there are undiscovered treasures in our churches and communities, treasures we've not dreamt of or imagined hidden for us by God!'*

There are lots of stories in the Bible about treasure. I wonder if you can name some? Apparently there are 77 verses in the Bible which mention treasure. We might remember the parables of Jesus about the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl of great price (Matthew 13) and his encouragement to us to store up treasure, not on earth, but in heaven. The passage which Gill and Kerry chose when considering their theme was a verse found in the prophecy we read about today in Isaiah 45 verse 8:

'I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.'

The cities of Judah had been overtaken by the nation of Babylon and lay in ruins. The Temple had been destroyed, the leaders of Judah and many of the population taken into exile in Babylon. They lived among a nation who worshipped other gods and often led them astray. Where was God – and

where could they find hope in such an apparently hopeless situation?

The Jewish people were in exile for probably about 70 years. But God had not forgotten them. In Isaiah 45, Isaiah prophesied that Cyrus, King of Persia, who conquered Babylon, would free the Jewish people. God spoke through Isaiah and said to Cyrus and promised him the *'treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places'* so that Cyrus would know it was the God of Israel who had called him by name and anointed him for his task. Apparently Jewish records confirm that Cyrus did find hidden treasure. When he announced the rebuilding of God's Temple in Jerusalem, soldiers uncovered vast amounts of treasure that the King of Babylon had hidden under the Euphrates River. Cyrus did indeed find treasure, riches hidden in secret places.

But if we are honest, we are not that interested in treasure dug up many years ago – be that pirate treasure or that found by Cyrus. The words of Scripture in Isaiah remind us there are treasures for us too. We find treasures in the wonder of the gospel and as we grow in our relationship with Christ, each day, new treasures, new blessings as we walk with him. There are also treasures in our churches and communities, blessings for us to discover and name.

Over the past few years there has been little talk about treasure and blessing. Following the global pandemic, we find ourselves frailer, knocked by the impact it has had on our own lives, our church families, our finances. We are faced with a climate emergency, cost of living crisis, we could go on..... it is easy to talk about struggle and decline. But what if we change the story? What if, instead of seeing only the difficulties and challenges, we ask God to help us to see where there is treasure hidden for us to discover?

Where do you look for treasure? Gill speaks of treasure even in times of frustration, pain, anger or disappointment, of knowing that God has treasure for us if we dig deep into him, recognising that God is at work, even in the darkness.

We have treasure in God's word, always new and speaking into our lives, whatever joys or challenges we are experiencing. Let's not forget to keep reading, to keep listening for God to speak through the written Word and for the Spirit to guide us.

What about treasures hidden for us in the church - God's blessings and treasures which we haven't recognised? We may need others to help us see them - people, gifts and opportunities given by God. If you have access to the internet, listen to Gill and Kerry speaking about this important theme. You can also find their Conference address's on the Methodist website.

[Hidden Treasures | An update from the President and Vice-President for the new Connexional year - YouTube](#)

To look for treasure is to place our trust in the God who is our greatest treasure. Gill ended her Presidential address with these inspiring words which also end our reflections today:

'The pain that we are experiencing within the church now may be the very sign that something new is emerging. The treasure that God has hidden for us is waiting to be discovered and used, not hidden away in a museum or a cabinet only to be used on special occasions or buried again for others to find.

But as we open our eyes and attune our ears to be more alert to where God is placing treasure in the darkness, let us never forget that we ourselves are God's treasure. Scripture reminds us that we are God's chosen treasure and that he has called us out of the darkness into the light. That means that others we encounter in our communities are treasure too...

*As his treasure, God longs for us to discover the treasure that he has **hidden for us, not from us**, even when life is hard, painful and confusing. No, there isn't treasure at the end of the rainbow but maybe the rainbow itself is the treasure – that reminder to us of God's continuing faithfulness.*

So, may we be a Church that traces the rainbow through the rain, discovers the treasures in the darkness and fulfils the expectant potential that God has placed within us, his people.' Amen.

Prayer of confession

Lord, sometimes the best treasures are those that are hidden in plain sight. Forgive us when we ignore or take for granted the treasures you offer and instead focus on what we are missing, on what we do not have, rather than on your amazing grace.

Forgive us when we miss the angels you put in our paths – the neighbour with a friendly smile who reminds us we're not alone; the stranger who nods their head as we walk past them in the park, acknowledging our existence; the person who gives up their seat on the bus or train despite having had a weary day themselves; the child who reminds us of the joy of play; the artist or poet who captures all our feelings where words fail us...

And thank you, Lord, for the greatest treasure of all, hidden in our hearts – the knowledge of your love and forgiveness. A treasure which changes lives and which, when shared, grows stronger and not weaker.

May we always be thankful for all your treasures, hidden and visible, made known to us in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ruth Childs, presbyter, Black Country Circuit

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 489

[All I once held dear - Robin Mark - YouTube](#)

All I once held dear, built my life upon,
all this world reveres and wars to own,
all I once thought gain I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you;
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness
and I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
to be found in you and known as yours;
to possess by faith what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift of righteousness.

O to know the power of your risen life
and to know you in your sufferings;
to become like you in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of Intercession

You are invited to take a few moments, in the quiet, to bring your prayers to God, for those nations, communities and people who are in need of hope, healing, justice or peace.

For all these people and situations, we pray:

Heavenly Father,

In the darkness of grief,
may the light of Christ shine.

In the darkness of suffering,
may the light of Christ shine.

In the darkness of oppression,
may the light of Christ shine.

In the darkness of captivity,
may the light of Christ shine.

In the darkness of our lives,
may the light of Christ shine.

When all seems lost, when hope is hard to find,
When we cannot understand the way things are,
May the light of Christ shine. Amen.

Andrew Charlesworth, District Chair, Wales Synod Cymru

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy 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.

And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

As we offer ourselves to you anew O God, so we thank you for your many gifts given to us. Help us to be wise in sharing your blessings. Take the gifts we have given for your glory, and use them and us for the work of your Kingdom. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

This last hymn reminds us to focus on God, the High King of heaven, our greatest treasure. Although this version speaks of us as God's true son and of man's empty praise,

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

[Be Thou My Vision - Audrey Assad - YouTube](#)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word,
I ever with thee, and thou with me Lord;
thou my great Father, I thy true son*;
thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man's* empty praise:
thou mine inheritance now and always;
thou and thou only first in my heart;
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Irish, ca. 8th century; trans. Mary Byrne (1880-1931) versified,
Eleanor Hull (1860-1935)*

Closing Blessing

Thanks be to God, who has called us to be a people of faith and hope, and who leads us on to discover treasures old and new, as we walk with him. May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always. Amen.

* * *

*Please forgive the non-inclusive language – a reliance on YouTube for the music has limited the ability to find a more suitable version, although this one is beautiful despite this. The Singing the Faith version of this hymn says, 'thy child let me be' and speaks of 'earth's empty praise.'

Prayers in this service were taken from the Methodist Prayer Diary, 'Hidden Treasure.'

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