

## 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020 10 am The Great Treasure

Service led by Val Whiteman, reading by Julie Swards, talk by Phil Swards, prayerful response by Val Whiteman, intercessions by Denise Coomber

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### **Introduction**

[Val Whiteman:]

Hello everyone. It's lovely to see people. Phil Swards is going to be speaking to us in a minute. I'm Val Whiteman. I'm a reader at St. John's and today our theme is going to be the great treasure and Phil who is my fellow reader (who I thought was going to be here a minute ago), is going to talk about it later in the service and Denise who's here will be doing the prayers.

Denise, can you tell us about [your son] Josh, because I'm sure everybody wants to know.

[Denise Coomber:]

He's much better, thank you: he had his appendix out last Saturday night quite late. He spent until Monday in hospital and then he came and stayed with us for the rest of the week. He's gone back home now. He says thank you everyone for your prayers and well-wishes. So thank you everyone for your prayers and well-wishes!

[Val:]

That's brilliant, well done, hurray! A good answer to a prayer. So I'm going to do a notice before we start. Tonight, there's going to be a virtual team meeting for 6pm, which starts at 5pm. Felicity Hawke has a link to it. So if you haven't already had the message, perhaps you could contact her. And then at six o'clock Chris and Andrew Haines are going to be teaching and leading Evening Prayer.

And Denise has sent around the notices, including a very interesting looking treasure hunt, and colouring pages as well for the children and also elderly persons. So do have a look at that. And strangely, the Rotary Club of Kenilworth are also doing a treasure hunt, which is fund-raising. If you'd like to go, then contact them. And can you remember also to email Denise - there was a banner going across the front of the screen before we started - if you feel that God is calling you and you know where you want to be called to, or you think you do, then email Denise and tell her. If you feel that you're being called, but you're not sure where, then also email her and let her know.

So what you'll need for today, you need a Bible: open up Matthew 13, verse 44. And also, there's a cross outline which Denise sent round so if you've got that, you'll need that and a pen, or just a simply a blank piece of paper you can draw a cross on.

So let's start our service. Let's come into God's presence, as we always are, and remember what it is we're about to do. in John's Gospel, it says, "God is

spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." So let's spend a quiet moment or two thinking about God, in Whose presence we live.

Thank You, Lord, for Your loving presence with us always, right to the end of the age.

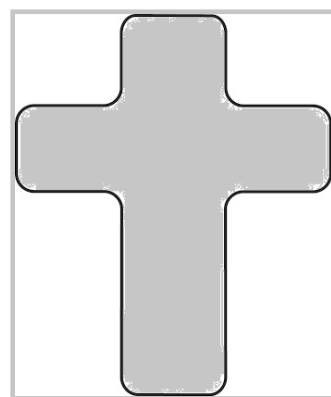
### **Confession**

So let's think about the things that we might have done wrong in the last week, the things that we know are displeasing both to ourselves and to God. And can we bring them now to our loving and forgiving Father. So we pray.

Father God, we thank You that when You will forgive us when we bring our shortcomings to You. We pray that we'll feel Your Spirit within us, and that You'll help us to live in You for the coming week. Thank You that You are a forgiving God and we are now Your forgiven people. Amen.

### **Activity**

So as I started in the introduction, if you have the cross piece of paper, or if you have a piece of paper, can you draw a cross on it much like that: cross in the middle with white bits around the outside. And around the bottom of the cross there can you write down or draw pictures of the things that you treasure the most? All the material things that you have, you value. It may be your garden, it may be things you like doing, like in my case, watching birds, going for walks, all the things that you think are really good, that you treasure in terms of possessions, or of things that you love to do. So just write those on for a minute.



And then at the top, in the top two sections, if you write down the people you treasure the most. So the people that you love, the people that you value. It may simply be the people you see every day. If you write down the names of those people around around the cross, so the cross itself is blank.

So you can see, as you write, and as you think, all the things that you've written are really good things in themselves. They're not at all evil or wrong. They're good and they're very often good gifts from God Himself. So as we sing this next song, or as we listen to it, because you may not know it, think about the things that you could write in the middle in the cross. What is it about Jesus that you value? So we're going to listen to the first song, after which Julie will read the lesson, and Phil will speak to us.

### **Song: How Vast the Love**

1. Come gaze upon your Saviour  
Behold your great High Priest  
Draw near in awe and wonder  
His cross has spoken peace
2. Come rest from sin and striving  
Find endless stores of grace  
The heart that turns to Jesus  
Is cleansed from every stain

#### *Chorus:*

Oh, how deep, how wide, how long  
Oh, how vast the love of Jesus  
Oh, how sure, how sweet, how strong  
Oh, how vast His love for us

3. So lift your eyes to Jesus  
Arise from doubt and shame  
His blood cries, 'It is finished!'  
Our life is in His name

#### *Chorus*

4. What now can separate us?  
Can death or pain or fear?  
We have this strong assurance  
In Christ we've been brought near

5. And in His strength we'll labour  
His promises our hope  
Thus far His love has led us!  
His love will lead us home!

*Chorus x 2*

### **Talk (including reading of Matthew 13:44-46)**

[Julie Swards:]

So now Phil's going to bring God's Word to us. So I'll just pray for him as he speaks.

Father God, we thank You for our brother Phil, for the words that he is about to bring us this morning. We pray that every word he speaks will be from You. And that we will not only have ears to hear, but we will have minds to understand and hearts ready to receive and act on all that You have for us this morning. So bless him as he speaks, we pray, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

[Phil Swards:]

Thank you.

Very good morning to you, whether you are a regular member of the church family at St. John's church, whether you drop into the service occasionally or whether you've just simply found us on the internet this morning, you are all very welcome. Let's perhaps reflect on those words from Matthew's Gospel [Chapter 13].

<sup>44</sup> '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.

<sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

So what is this treasure? What is this pearl of great value? What is worth such a radical life change, such an investment? In these two parables that's represented by selling everything that the man or the merchant [does], and the answer is something that renders everything material as worthless by comparison and brings great joy as well as value. Matthew describes this as the Kingdom of Heaven, the other gospel writers describe it as the Kingdom of God. We might define it as acknowledging that God is sovereign in our life, and all that that entails. It's worth remembering that God is in control. He is the creator of the universe, and He designed the earth to be a place where mankind could be in relationship with Him, but mankind allowed sin to get in the way. Sin is anything that stops us from being in a proper relationship with God. It's part of our human nature. Paul tells us this in the letter to the Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

But God didn't let it rest there. He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, fully human, yet fully God, to pay the price for our sin, to remove that barrier between us and God. And the price He paid was His death on the Cross. But as a result, He offers us a restored relationship with God that lasts, that starts now and lasts for eternity. If you like, that treasure, that great pearl is an investment which pays out after we die in the form of eternal life. But it

also pays out interest payments in this life too. And it's free. All we have to do is accept it. It's a bit like receiving a birthday present, freely offered to us by God through Jesus Christ. All we have to do is accept it and unwrap it. And it gives us that certainty that we are looking for. Now, evidence suggests that during the COVID-19 pandemic, more people have been looking to God and looking for God, looking for some certainty in an uncertain environment. Faced with an unseen peril, which could strike at any time, they're asking, "Is this all there is to life? When will my number be up? Is this the meaning of life?"

The Office for National Statistics reported at the end of June that 47% of people said their well-being had been negatively affected by the pandemic. 42% want to make a change to their work, 35% want to move home and perhaps sadly 38% want to move on from their existing relationship. Uncertainty indeed. A separate survey conducted for Tearfund reported that 24% of people in the UK have watched or listened to a church service since the start of lockdown, on the radio, on TV or the internet. 24% - nearly one in four! And again, of UK adults, 44% said they're praying. Of those, 56% agree that prayer can change the world, 5% of people say they started praying specifically during the lockdown and 18% have asked someone else to pray for them.

People turn to God in times of uncertainty. And uncertainty is a way in which God gets our attention. Now, some people who are looking will have had some sort of church background and something in their past, but perhaps they stopped going because their parents stopped going or their children stopped going or they moved house or some other form of circumstance happened. But there's something in there which is causing them to think about renewing their relationship with God. Some people might know exactly where this great treasure is, this pearl of great price, this relationship with God, but they don't know where to start looking for it. Some people may be looking for something but they don't know where to look, or are not even sure that that great treasure exists.

George Herbert (1593 to 1633), a great Christian poet-writer, all-rounder, clever chap, he wrote a poem called *The Pearl*, which is about the second of these two parables that we've had read to us this morning. And it describes his life and in the... er, it's quite a complex poem, but in the last stanza, he compares his life to a labyrinth, to a great maze and he compares his efforts to go through life on his own as his "grovelling wit". He couldn't do it on his own, but God led him through it, conducted him through it.

Perhaps if you've logged on to this service this morning, your life is a labyrinth, a bit of a maze with no clear path, no direction to get out of it. What if that's you, then what can you do about it? Well, first of all, you can make contact with us. After this talk, Val is going to lead us in a time of reflection and response. But you could make contact with us: you can email us, go onto the internet and Google St. John's Church Kenilworth and find the website [[www.stjohn316.co.uk](http://www.stjohn316.co.uk)] where the details of phone numbers and you can contact Andrew, our vicar, or Denise, our parish administrator [at [admin@stjohn316.co.uk](mailto:admin@stjohn316.co.uk)]. So have a look at that.

You might also want to think about reading the Bible. If you've got one lying around the house, pick it up, have a look at it, or go online. On the internet, there are plenty of places. [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) is the one that I use. And there are plenty of different versions and translations of the Bible from which you can choose. And in your Bible, locate the Gospels in the New Testament, there are four of them and find Mark's gospel. Mark's is the shortest of the four gospels - 16 chapters, and it'll take you probably an hour or an hour and 15 minutes in one session to read that, so you can do that in an evening. Or you could read 15 minutes a day and easily get it done in an hour, hour and 15 minutes, but if you want to read it more slowly and more thoughtfully, perhaps an hour, an hour and a half. Read it through, and then go back to the end of chapter eight, about halfway through Mark's gospel [Mark 8:27-30]. And this is a passage where Jesus is talking to His disciples at a place called Caesarea

Philippi. And He says to his disciples, "Who do people say I am?". And his disciples say, "Well, some say you're John the baptist or Elijah or one of the one of the prophets." And Jesus says, "Who do *you* say I am? Who do you say *I* am?" And that's a question we all have to answer at one point or another in our lives.

And then you might want to flip to another part of the Bible and go to the book of Psalms. This is a book of songs of praise and prayers, written to God. And then there you'll find just about every sort of emotion that it is possible to go through. So plenty there to cater for all the difficulties of COVID-19. A friend of mine once called it the book of hand-gestures, because sometimes the psalmist is lifting his hands in prayer saying, gosh, "You're amazing, Lord God Almighty, You're fantastic!" Other times, he's saying, "Look at this brilliant world, isn't it great!" Other times he's saying, "Thank You, Lord, for all You've done for us." Now the time see saying, "Lord, please, please help me I am in real difficulties." Other times he's tearing his hair out saying, "How can You let these things happen? What's going on?" And sometimes, he's just sitting there saying, "Lord, I love You and You're in control." You might want to read a Psalm a day, just to see what God is saying to you and your life. Now - spoiler alert - when you get to psalm 119 you may want to divide it up. But generally speaking, try reading a psalm a day.

And then you might want to talk to somebody you know who is a Christian, find out what this is all about. Or you may even want to pray to God, to seek God in prayer. And we'll come on to that a little bit later on with what Val's going to say in our response reflections.

What about if you already have that pearl of great value in your life? What about if you already have that relationship with God? Well, you have good news to bring to people in these uncertain times. Now, I have been conducting my own sort of unofficial survey with people and, okay, a small sample size: 15, 20 or 25 people, but it seems to me there's more uncertainty for people coming out of lockdown than going into it. For a start, the virus is still out there. People are afraid for themselves, afraid for their friends or their family or their loved ones. People are anxious about jobs as the full impact economically of the pandemic starts to hit. People are worried about their jobs, people are worried about their savings. To a degree the lockdown has provided security: people have been within their own four walls. But now, when people have to start going out again, now there is a certain amount of social anxiety. For a start, every shop, every business seems to have their own rules and regulations for social distancing. Do you wear a face mask? When do you wear it? How close do you get? And that can be quite difficult.

So, what can we do? Well, we can offer to pray for people. Perhaps you could think about the 6, 8, 10 or 12 houses around you. And you could pop a little message to people saying, "You know I'm here. If you want a prayer about anything, I can do that." Drop a Psalm down on a piece of paper. Give it to them as a comfort in these times. Or you could invite people around to a party or a cup of coffee in your in your garden. Obviously, observing social distancing and numbers. But yeah, invite people around to something in your garden. Go onto the Kenilworth town website and find out which outlets and cafés are doing takeaway cream teas in the town, and invite someone to a cream tea. Or you can go for a walk with somebody. But take the opportunity to be a witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

The 19th century American evangelist, D.L. Moody said this: "Out of 100 men, one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian." Well, here's a chance for people to read us as Christians: here's a chance for us to show the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ to people in action in uncertain times. So pray about what God might be calling you to do to help others in this situation.

So I just want to finish with a short prayer for all of us at this time.

May God bless us with His light to lighten our path as we step into a future that is uncertain, except for the great pearl, the pearl of great value, the love of God, in Jesus Christ, and all that goes with it. Amen.

## **Prayerful Response**

[Val Whiteman:]

Thank you, Phil, for your amazing words. There's so much in there that we have to think about that we can take into the week with us. As we respond, I'd like us to spend some time in quiet, thinking about the two areas that Phil mentioned. First of all, if you don't know Jesus, then Phil's question that Jesus asked of His disciples, "Who do you say Jesus is?" If you don't know Him, then spend a moment starting to think about that: something that you can then take into the week. If you do know, then review, where is your treasure, and what do you think God wants you to do in the future? So let's spend a few moments, just now, having a quiet time thinking about what Phil has said.

[pause]

This is obviously just the beginning of thoughts. So take these thoughts away with you, spend some more quiet time before God, asking Him what it is He wants you to do.

Before I hand over to Denise I was reading this book which is called *The Resurrection in your Life* by Mike McKinley<sup>1</sup> that somebody lent me. And it takes the story of the Resurrection, and I've reached the Ascension just for today. And I was struck by one of the things that might McKinley said which was,

We might be tempted to make finances or success or family or our physical appearance the thing that controls our time and emotional state. But none of those things are worthy of our worship like Jesus. None of those things should be on the throne of our hearts. None of those things deserve to be seated next to the Majesty in heaven.

So the next time you're tempted to worship something else with your love and your life, remember that there is One who ascended to heaven. He is wearing the crown of the universe. Heaven revolves around Him; the earth revolves because of Him. If he will not be the center of your life and your affections, who or what will be? Are these things being worshiped right now by millions of angels? Have they been exalted by the Father? When you put it that way, they all look like sad and pathetic little substitutes for Jesus. We have only one King who is worthy of worship.

Amen.

## **Intercessions**

[Val:]

So now I'll hand over to Denise for our intercessions.

[Denise:]

Let's pray.

Father God, thank You that You love us so much that You sent Jesus to save us. Thank You that we can find the greatest treasure, the pearl of great

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1 <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/the-resurrection-in-your-life>

price. We pray that our priority will always be You and all other things will not be as important to us as knowing You. As a songwriter said,

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.

We pray that our heart's desire will be to know You or to be found in You, and known as Yours. Help us to turn aside from the things of this world, and to focus on You, so that we recognise that You are worthy of our worship.

Thank You for the time we've had during lockdown to think more about how we spend our time, and how we can know and serve You more. We pray that You will be sovereign in our lives, in control. Thank You for the price You paid, so that we can have a relationship with You and so that we can call You Lord. We thank You that lockdown is easing slightly at the moment. But help us not to lose the focus we've found as our lives become more busy again. Help us to keep time with You as our first priority.

We bring to You some of the problems we've encountered over the past week.

Thank You for the work of the various missionary societies and groups with whom we're in touch. And we pray especially for Children's Homes in India, especially Babu and his team, that they will be able to continue with the work You've called them to do. And we pray that others will be able to cover for Babu while he is restricted because of COVID.

We pray for the work of Flourish and Taste Life, especially during these times when people's mental health is suffering. We pray that they'll be able to continue helping those in need and that You will help them to be effective in what they do.

And we pray for those who are anxious because of the uncertainty of life. Give them Your comfort, and help us to be the people who can comfort others. Show us how we can help those around us so that we can make a difference in their lives and share Your love with them. Help us to remember to pray for those that we know are in need of You. And give us Your peace as we step into an uncertain future.

We pray for those who are ill, that are known to us. We especially remember Josh, Mark and Diana, Iris, Chris and Daphne, Geoff, Laurie.

Please bring to the Lord anybody else that's known to You and lift them up before the Lord now.

We bring to You those who are mourning, especially the friends and family of Eileen and Ralph. Comfort them, Lord, and be to them a refuge in these troubled times.

We pray for wisdom for our leaders and for society at large as we negotiate the road ahead. We pray that You will be a shield about us and will protect us and those who are dear and near to us.

We're sorry for when we've taken things for granted. Thank You that we have enough food, that we can socially distance, the wonderful countryside around us, the shops, the National Health Service, for our friends and family, and this weekend for the opportunity to be able to go swimming or to the gym again. Father, we know that we live in a very privileged society and we pray

that we will be sensitive to the needs of those around us and be able to help where we can.

We pray that we will be salt and light in the world, and that we will be able to lead others to the place where they can find the greatest treasure. Thank You for saving us. Thank You for Your Spirit. And make us the people You want us to be.

In Jesus' Name,  
Amen.

So just before we go, I'm going to read some words from scripture from 2 Corinthians 1 [NIVUK 1984]:

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God

So the Lord bless us (from Numbers 6) and keep us, the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us. The Lord turn his face towards us, and give us peace.

So as we listen to the words of *In Christ Alone*, help us to remember that Christ is the greatest treasure and to think of ways in which we can share that great treasure with others in this next week.

### **Song: Cornerstone (In Christ Alone)**

*Verse 1:*

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

*Repeat Verse 1*

*Chorus:*

Christ alone, Cornerstone  
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love  
Through the storm He is Lord, Lord of all

*Verse 2:*

When darkness seems to hide His face  
I rest on His unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale  
My anchor holds within the veil.  
My anchor holds within the veil.

*Chorus*

*Verse 3:*

When He shall come with trumpet sound  
Oh may I then in Him be found  
Dressed in His righteousness alone  
Faultless, stand before the throne

*Chorus*

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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