

Dear Heaton Moor United Church,

Hope you are all doing well. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of Holy Spirit be with you.

Thanks to Carol for leading the service this Sunday at church and on our YouTube channel.

As we shared about our Faith Pilgrimage of reaching out to all the church members in our last week's newsletter, we have had our first phase of the pilgrimage on Thursday, the 10th June. It was such a delight meeting people face to face, and we as a team are grateful for the way you have received us on this pilgrimage. We will continue doing the pilgrimage, reaching out to our friends in the weeks to come. On this journey, it was encouraging to receive positive feedback on our services offered at church, on YouTube and also through the newsletters and written reflections.

Next week 14-20 June is observed as Refugee Week. Refugee Week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. The theme for this year 2021 is "we cannot walk alone" which is an invitation to extend our hand to someone new. The call for us as a church is to resist the fear of the stranger and to be a welcoming and inclusive place of sanctuary to all people seeking asylum and sanctuary in this country. Our actions striving for justice to asylum seekers and refugees is imperative of our mission engagements today.

On the 12th of June, there is a Global Campaign for Hong Kong, and there is an event happening at Manchester, where the United Stockport Circuit is represented by Mei Yuk, Jean and JoAnne from our church expressing our solidarity and

welcome for people coming from Hong Kong to the UK. We seek your prayers and support for this campaign.

Herewith I am sending you the reflection for this Sunday along with the worship resources for your kind perusal.

It has been reported this week that the cases of Covid19 are rising rapidly in Stockport due to the presence of the Delta variant, which is highly transmissible, and the advice has been to stay safe by taking sensible public health precautions to help curb the transmission.

It was sad that there was a break in at our Church building last weekend. Thanks to Sharon for working hard in reporting to police and also getting things fixed.

May God's peace and love be with you all.

Thanking you,

Regards,

Raj

10th June 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITOR

What another week of lovely weather - fortunately my work this week wasn't confined to the office so I was able to enjoy it.

COVID continues to affect events happening at Church which meant that on Wednesday we had our staff meeting outside in the sunshine but it has also meant that toddler groups will not be returning as planned next week. More information around this decision is further on in the notices.



On Thursday three members of the staff team completed day one of our pilgrimage. Unfortunately, Linda couldn't join us due to a hospital appointment, but she was with us in spirit. Despite in post for 9 months there are still so many of our members and friends that I have not met so it was lovely to chat with you, even for a short time, on Thursday. Our next walk will be on Tuesday 15th June and if your home is along our route Sharon will email you.

On Saturday myself and Jean James will be at an event in Manchester as part of a global campaign for Hong Kong. The event is taking place in Manchester Piccadilly Gardens between 1pm - 4pm and you are welcome to come along. As a Church we have signed up to be a HKUK Ready Church and more information on this can be found at <https://welcomechurches.org/updates/hong-kong-ready-churches/> and <https://ukhk.org/>

As always if I can be of any help please do not hesitate to contact me.

JoAnne

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 Heaton Moor United Church



Heaton Moor United Church

 heaton_moor_united_church

Office Opening The office opening times for next week will be:

Monday 10 - 2

Tuesday Closed

Wednesday 10 - 2

Thursday Closed

Friday 9-1

COVID NEWS

The rate of COVID infections across Greater Manchester has greatly increased in recent weeks, with Stockport now showing the highest rate of increase across Greater Manchester.

In an effort to stop or at least slow the spread of the virus, new advice has been issued for GM and similar areas. The MEN has presented that advice as follows:

“Here is the official advice from the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website for people living in Greater Manchester.

The advice states that people living in the region "should take particular caution when meeting anyone outside your household or support bubble".

The government says, where possible, you should try to "meet outside rather than inside" and "keep two metres apart from people that you don't live with".

The government is advising that everyone in an affected area should get tested twice a week for free.

This could be by arranging to get a PCR test if you have symptoms of coronavirus, or by using the rapid lateral flow tests at home if you do not.

Surge testing will also be taking place in local areas.

Ministers are encouraging everyone who is eligible for a vaccine to take the NHS up on the offer, advice that is being echoed across the whole of the UK.

The government has said that travel in and out of Greater Manchester should be "minimised" where possible.

People should also work from home where they possibly can.” (precis of slightly longer piece)

In light of this the staff team will be adapting current work practices, for example all meetings will take place either outside the building or over zoom. It also unfortunately means that our toddler groups will not be returning next week.

For information on how to get regular rapid tests visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/regular-rapid-coronavirus-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms/>

Tests can also be collected from a local pharmacy

Break in

You may have heard that the Church was broken in to again over the weekend. Unfortunately, the safe was stolen out of the office. This means that the locks for the main door, back door, kitchen, patio room and the office will be changed. If you are down as a key holder you will have received an email about when you will get new keys. If you haven't received an email please contact me.

There was some money and cheques in the safe too, if you have given me a cheque in May, and it hasn't appeared on your bank statement please cancel it.

If you have any other queries please contact me, Sharon



Heatons Open Gardens

Sunday 27th June 12:00 – 17:00

The Rotary Club of Stockport will be holding their 9th open garden event on Sunday 27th June. This year there are 15 private gardens of varying sizes including one alley garden, one back yard, one wine bar and two allotments.

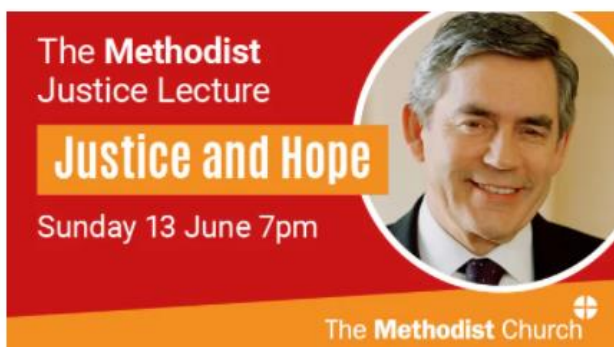
Programs are £5 per person/couple in advance and can be obtained from Church member Shirley Megram.

For more information please visit <https://www.rotary-ribi.org/clubs/page.php?PgID=741803&ClubID=1503>



Church On The Market

On Sunday 20th June Raj will be resuming his Church On The Market. Those interested should meet at Tiviot Dale at 13:00. Church On The Market purpose is to show our presence in the town centre by speaking with those we come across whilst we are walking around. For more information, please contact Raj directly.



Justice and Hope

In the face of Covid-19, the climate emergency and global inequality, where are justice and hope to be found?

In the first Methodist Justice Lecture former Prime Minister Gordon Brown will argue that change is possible and that people of faith have a role to play. All are welcome to join us for this event.

Register for your free ticket at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/justice-and-hope-with-gordon-brown-tickets-156065316563>



MHA Sunday is an opportunity to give thanks and celebrate the specialist care and support MHA homes provide, enabling people in later life to live well across Britain.

There will be a live MHA Sunday Service on the MHA YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGVbAhstJ8M>) on 13th June at 4pm. The service, hosted by TV and radio presenter Pam Rhodes, is on the theme '*relieving isolation and bringing hope*' inspired by the book of Mark 5:1-20.

Churches growing to nest and shelter the birds of the air: The parable of the mustard seed

Reflecting on Mark 4:30-32

Jesus spoke to his disciples in parables about the mysteries of the kingdom of God as 'they were able to hear it' (33v). In this given text Jesus shared the parable of growth of a seed which grows without the knowing of the farmer who has scattered the seeds and the parable of the mustard seed. Over the years many have interpreted the parable of mustard seed in terms of size, that mustard seed is a small seed and grows to become a big tree, and so is it with the Christian faith. But if we get the facts right, we know that mustard seed is not the smallest of the seeds for there are many other seeds smaller than mustard seed. Also, mustard seed grows to become a shrub and it never grows to be a tree, leave alone to be the greatest tree. Why then does Jesus shares this parable? Yes, I know many will then argue that parables are allegorical and are told to share a message, and any literal reading of seeking facts might undermine the essence of a parable. As I re-read this parable for our times today, I find that Jesus was sharing this parable with a certain degree of abnormality in mind, that the mustard seed will grow to be a greatest tree nesting many birds on its branches. However, through this unimaginability, Jesus is conveying a message of critique and a message of hope to his audience then and now, which is a message that the kingdom of God is 'beyond' normal.

1. The critique against the norm of empire:

The parable of the mustard seed is recorded in all the four gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and also in the gospel of Thomas as a parable shared by Jesus about the Kingdom of God. The audience of these gospels were well aware of the first century Jewish kingdom narratives, particularly the metaphorical usage of trees representing the rulers and the empires. In the Old Testament, Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar are depicted as large trees providing shelter to many birds on their branches in Ezekiel 31:6 and Daniel 4:12. In both these instances Assyria as an empire provided shelter to many other neighbouring nations and Nebuchadnezzar as a king provided shelter to his people in his kingdom. When Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which grows to be the greatest tree in the field nesting birds on its branches, though it was not normal for the mustard seed to grow that way, Jesus picked that unimaginability to critique the norm of empire by warning the colonial powers that such an abnormal will be the 'new' normal. The kingdom of God grows in an (ab)normal way, defying the norm of an empire, not in the normal way of growing to be a shrub but in a sub-version way of growing to be a tree from a tiny pungent mustard seed. The norm of the empire is that the powerful becomes the tree and under the patronage of the powers and principalities, the rest of the nations and ethnicities seek their shelter. But the norm of the kingdom of God is that out of powerlessness, out of smallness the mustard seed grows to become an unimaginably greatest tree so that the birds of the air can nest on its branches. The parable of the mustard seed becomes a lens to understand that Jesus' kingdom of God is unimaginable to the known empires of Assyria or Rome, yet in that (ab)normality those that are different from mustard seeds find their shelter. Jesus shared this parable of the mustard seed as a critique to the norms and normalisations of the empires.

2. The hopeful aspiration 'beyond' normal:

Who would have thought that the mustard seed would grow, become a plant, become a shrub and then turn to be a big tree, greatest of the shrubs? Jesus by sharing this parable was explaining that the kingdom of God begins as a small seed and then grows unimaginably and

(ab)normally beyond normal. This parable expresses a hopeful aspiration of the kingdom of God, for it grows unimaginably, beyond the expectations of the sower, beyond the expectations of the mustard seed, beyond the expectation of the field in which it grows, beyond the expectation of all the hearers and audience of this parable. As is the normal, the kingdom of God which is like a mustard seed growing up, the expectation is to grow as a plant and a shrub. But that edge or notion of growing into a tree and into a greatest tree conveys the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God, which is not limited to the normal, which is not limited to the expected, but which transcends and outgrows the normal. By sharing about the unimaginable growth of the kingdom of God like a mustard seed, Jesus is conveying that the kingdom of God is not what we think as normal where business is as usual, but kingdom of God is 'beyond' normal, with unexpectedness, with surprises, with some shocks, and with no limitations. In that (ab)normality, the kingdom of God provides a hope for the mustard seed to become a greatest tree, which was unthinkable and unimaginable. Hope is not knowing the future, but trusting in the God of the future, for God will lead from the known normal to 'beyond' normal, into the (ab)normal walking and working with us.

3. The opportune space for a different purpose:

What would be the ultimate purpose of an apple tree? To be fruitful and yield a great harvest of apples. Similarly, what would be the purpose of a mustard tree? To grow mustard seeds and yield a great harvest of mustard seeds. These understanding of the purposes of the trees is a very human-centred view of the trees, where we selfishly think that trees grow fruits for the benefit of humankind. But when Jesus narrated this parable, he said that the mustard seed will grow to be a greatest tree, and never mentions about the harvest of the mustard seeds, but Jesus said "so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Jesus presents an ecological vision of the kingdom of God, where the mustard seed grows into a tree to nest the birds of the air. The (ab)normality of this parable grows to a greater height when Jesus narrates that the mustard seed not only outgrows from a shrub to a tree, but also outgrows to nest the birds of the air. The (ab)normal growth of the mustard seed to become a hopeful greatest tree is not to enjoy the privilege of being the greatest and biggest tree yielding a great harvest, but to be a space of shelter for a variety of birds of the air to nest on its branches. The (ab)normal comes with an ecological vision of trees being grown not to meet the selfish desires of human beings, but to become a space to nest the birds on its branches. With the trees being cut down because of human greed, we can understand how much it affects the housing of the birds.

So, seeking a relevance of this parable today, as we prepare for a re-turn to our churches, the call for us is to engage in a spirituality of the unimaginable and (ab)normal growth of the kingdom of God. Such an engagement requires not to re-turn uncritically to the things we have always done, but to re-envision what God wants us to do at a moment like this. In the present context I see the church as a mustard seed, and the kingdom of God is where the church grows (ab)normally to be a tree nesting the birds of the air as its ecological missional calling. No one would expect the church to grow into a tree, but if we want to be part of the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated, it might look (ab)normal, but it is the need of the hour, to become a tree to shelter birds, save them from extinction and save the planet.

Secondly the (ab)normal growth of the church like the kingdom of God happens as a critique of the empire which comes to us in the forms of capitalist understanding of growth for whom

numbers and profits are all that matter. The (ab)normal growth as a church is recognised not in the yield of the mustard seed harvest, but in providing shelter to many people who do not have shelter, becoming a space of hospitality to all those who are on the move, crossing boundaries and oceans, and by offering to be a Christian presence of sharing love, peace and justice with people in our communities. These outcomes certainly sound abnormal to many people for whom church is all about filling the pews, but the parable of the mustard seed speaks to us to think of the kingdom of God growing (ab)normally to be a tree addressing housing issues for birds, for people and to all those that are in need of shelter.

Thirdly, the (ab)normal growth of the church as the kingdom of God happens in the unknown, the unexpected and the unimagined ways of doing church. The mustard seed growing to be a shrub was a normal phenomenon, but growing to be a tree, and to be a housing tree is that extra edge that Jesus was pushing the boundaries, which is but the very meaning of the kingdom of God. We cannot follow Jesus without following this 'edginess.' As churches today the calling for us is to allow God to push our boundaries to do things that are different from what we have always done, and to be prepared as churches to grow (ab)normally, 'beyond' normal, so that we become relevant for our times today.

Allow me to reiterate, for Jesus, the growth of the mustard seed is in it growing to be a greatest tree by sheltering the birds of the air, and so it is for the church in the design of the kingdom of God. Jesus in a way was abnormalizing normality and normalising abnormality. Jesus elsewhere in Matthew 17: 20 said that if we have a faith like a grain of mustard seed, we can do the impossible. May God grant us such a faith like the grain of mustard seed so that we can grow as a church (ab)normally by sheltering those needy people in our spaces. May this parable of the mustard seed inspire us as a church in our reimagining to (ab)normally grow as a church being a church with an ecological vision, and with a communitarian vision with a preference to those on the margins. Perhaps in growing (ab)normally we as a church will find our relevance today. Post-lockdown is an opportune time for us to discover and explore our (ab)normal ways of being a church.

Raj Bharat Patta
10th June 2021



Prayers from the office

A Prayer for Methodist Homes Sunday

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.

A prayer for refugees

God creator of all,

For people who are displaced, may they find a safe refuge.

For people who have lost control of their lives, may they know a sure foundation.

For people who live in fear, may they be given a strong fortress.

For people who are disillusioned, may they have hope in a future.

Loving father in times of crisis, sorrow and uncertainty we ask that you draw near.

Amen

If anyone would like to share a Prayer with the church family, please call Linda on 07564839380 or E-mail lindawfleming625@gmail.com.



No names required because
God Knows.

Sunday 13th June 2021 – Rev Nutan S J Suray

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

(With psalm 92: 1-5)

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!” **Amen.**

Hymn: Seek ye first the kingdom (Singing the Faith 254)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

[Seek ye first the kingdom of God \(StF 254\) \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://methodist.org.uk)

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
allelu-, alleluia!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto to you;
Allelu-, alleluia:

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)

Let us pray together

Lord, I come with thanksgiving and praises in my heart for your love and faithfulness. You are worthy of my heartfelt worship today.

Lord, thank you for sending your Son Jesus who inaugurated your kingdom on earth and for the continuing power of the Holy Spirit, which helps the kingdom to grow.

Forgive me Lord when I fail to see your will in my life and in others.

Forgive me when I am overcome with anxiety, when I become impatient and when I lose heart in times of suffering and prevailing evil in our world.

Help me to be confident in your faithfulness even when things seem bleak and to know that you are in control of all things. **Amen.**

Today's Gospel Reading: Mark 4:26-34

Time to Reflect

Jesus' parable of the mustard seed reminds me of my own journey – the time when I was called to ministry. I had asked the question – how can I, such a small, insignificant person be called to serve the church? I was not convinced that God *had* the power to use me. How wrong I was! Little did I know that God was going to use me outside of my little village, even outside of my country of birth, to serve the church! It is perhaps human nature to judge things by appearance or capability, forgetting that God *does have* power to use whatever He sees fit for a purpose!

Jesus teaches that the growth of a seed is a mystery just like the growth of the Kingdom. We know that a seed needs soil, water and an adequate amount of sunshine to grow, but the question still is - who makes it grow? More importantly, a seed needs to be planted in the ground because a seed, if left alone on a windowsill will not grow. The Seed that Jesus talks about is God's word being sown in people's lives where it will take root and grow. Although for a time the seed seems inactive, Christians must not be anxious but trust in God's timing and sovereignty.

Likewise, the Kingdom of God will grow when the Gospel is shared with others as Romans 10:17 says: "So faith *comes* from hearing [what is told], and what is heard *comes* by the [preaching of the] message concerning Christ." I read online the testimony of a woman, who during this current pandemic was feeling utterly worthless – disappointed with life and did not want to live anymore. However, she decided that she would visit a church before making any final decision, and the turning point came for her during worship when she realised that God loved her deeply. She experienced total peace despite her life having been turned upside down! This woman did not know that her aunt had been praying for many years for her to come to know Jesus as her Saviour! Christians must continue to spread the gospel through prayer, word and actions, even when they do not see the results!

The other important thing to note in this text is that the Kingdom of God starts small, just like the mustard seed. No wonder Jesus' disciples and his contemporaries did not understand that he was not here to establish a 'political kingdom'! In fact, God's kingdom is so contrary to earthly kingdoms in every way that it requires only what are probably seen as the lowest of human standards, such as, humility, servanthood and willingness to serve. However, even though it starts small, it grows beyond expectation. God's word has far-reaching outcomes. In our world, there is

on-going persecution for Christians in every continent but the church never seems to die, it is never dulled and it is almost un-stoppable in some places. This is because the power of God helps the Kingdom to spread and grow strong. And so the disciples of Jesus must continue to do whatever they are called to do.

The final thought for us to consider is whether the Kingdom of God is a living reality (here and now) or it is some futuristic notion (eschatological). It will be unfortunate for us to assume that only when Jesus returns as judge and King, will he start his Kingdom too. The New Testament clearly tells us that Jesus already began the work of the Kingdom when he was on this earth. And it is so small, so hidden and invisible in places that we do not have the faintest idea that God is already doing the work. Christians must not lose heart when they feel that God is inactive or absent, when they see so much suffering, evil and the power of darkness taking over this world. God is present and that He will bring justice for each evil perpetrated in His own time. This is my experience that God also brings peace and comfort to all who trust in Him.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Lord God, we pray for all pastors, church ministers, missionaries and Aid workers who risk their lives for sake of spreading your gospel in word and deed.

We pray for those who have been overcome with struggles of life, doubt and fear and for whom faith means nothing.

We pray for the persecuted Christians in our world, for whom following Christ may mean much suffering.

We pray for those who have been bereaved, those who are in physical, mental or emotional pain.

Faithful God,
Be with us as we seek to serve you so that we may reflect kingdom values rather than worldly

values. We ask these prayers through the powerful name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Hear the call of the kingdom (Singing the Faith 407) OR Listen to

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL-UdwB0Qvc>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

King of heaven, we will answer the call ...
*Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart
Townend (b. 1963)*

A prayer of blessing

Father God, as we look forward to the new week, may your discerning knowledge fill our hearts and minds to see your will. May we play an active part in extending your kingdom. Help us to bring you praise and glory by being in your service with our words, deeds and thoughts. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Original Materials & all prayers by Rev. Nutan S J Suray

Mark 4: 26-34

26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.