

June 6, 2021 – Online, MHA – Bonni-Belle Pickard with Ben Alcock (MHA Chaplain)

Psalm 138

Luke 12:27-31

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father (StF 51)

Seek Ye First – StF 254

When we are living – StF 485

Neither death, nor life (StF 474)

==

Pre-service music:

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord (StF 89)

We will walk with God (StF 484)

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship – BBP

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father (StF 51)

Prayers -- Psalm 138

Luke 12:27-31

Seek Ye First – StF 254

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

Dialogue Sermon – Ben Alcock and BBP – Lilies of the Field and Grace Abounding

When we are living – StF 485

Intercessions – MHA

Neither death, nor life (StF 474)

Benediction

MHA website <https://www.mha.org.uk/>

DONATE AT <https://donate.mha.org.uk/>

Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.
The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

A prayer based on Psalm 138

As we come before you this morning, Lord God of the universe,
We are reminded to say Thank You!

With our whole being, we want to thank you
For creating us and all the wonders of the universe;
For your love and grace, for your blessings,
For your presence with us in difficult times.
For building us up when we have felt weak
For continuing to work for good in and through us –
Even when we make mistakes.

We thank you, Lord God of the universe, that though you are high above us,
You still have time and regard for us.

As we gather for worship, we're reminded of the saints who have come before us
And how they taught us to praise you.
We remember that those who come after – and those with us right now –
Might only learn to recognise and praise you from hearing our voices lifted.

Thank you for being a God who looks after even the least of us,
even the ones that everyone else seems to overlook.
You are a God who hears and heeds our prayers
With love and grace that lasts forever.
Keep loving us, God: keep showing us your love
And how we can share it with others. Amen.

Luke 12:27-31

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;
yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.
But if God so clothes the grass of the field,
which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,
how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!
And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink,
and do not keep worrying.
For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things,
and your Father knows that you need them.
Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—
'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak,
because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus,
and will bring us with you into his presence.
Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people,
may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart.

Even though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed day by day.
For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us
for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,
because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen;
for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.
For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,
we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Considering the lilies...

This coming week at Union Street, we're participating in an EcoChurch project
Called 'Churches Count on Nature' –
We're dividing the lawn up into sections
to take a kind of census on what's living there...
And we're inviting members of the community in help us explore
What's actually living in that grassy expanse!
At first glance, there's just a lot of grass –
and some of it inadvertently got mowed last week by a conscientious church member!
But looking more closely at our green patch, we're realizing there is quite a bit going on!
Most of it might be termed 'Weeds', but I've preferred to use a biblical term:
The 'lilies of the field'.

When Jesus tells us to 'consider the lilies',
I'm reminded that he wasn't talking about beautifully cultivated flowers
But about what we consider weeds...
The things we think we need to get rid of... in order to keep 'order'...
And one thing I keep learning about weeds is that they love to grow – and proliferate!
Some of my earliest memories are of my mother
out on the front lawn of our Florida parsonage
in the early morning, before it got too hot,
digging up dandelions...
Especially before they would go to seed and spread everywhere...
I admired her determination,
But I knew – and she did as well –
That no matter how much she dug,
More dandelions would come up soon...
Weeds just keep growing and expanding...

And while I grew up thinking that weeds were something to get rid of
The environmentalists are reminding us
That what we might consider weeds are actually often beneficial –
That dandelions, for instance, are one of the first plants to flower in the spring
Providing an essential food source for bees ...
Perhaps the environmentalists are reminding us of a biblical truth:
That God loves and cares for weeds...
That they have a purpose beyond our own sense of what's important for good order...
God cares that they have what they need to grow and thrive –
But also that they might only last for a short season –
Still they are precious

I haven't quite had the courage to explain this to my mother yet:
That God loves dandelions...
She's in her 90s now, and dementia is gaining hold,
And her first response to any request or observation is 'NO!'
But perhaps that's exactly the point:
God loves dandelions,
And God loves my mother who only really remembers how to say NO!
And God loves me
And God's love keeps expanding wider and wider like the universe....

Expanding like the universe...

Though some Christians are uneasy with the 'Big Bang' theory, I like it!

To me it's like, from the very beginning, God's great love

Was just too big for God to keep to Godself,

So it just exploded! BOOM! And the created universe began!

Immensely bigger than I can ever imagine

Immensely more intricate that I can wrap my head around

And yet the fact that I can 'consider' it with my own little brain is another miracle!

How God got the universe started

And how it continues to expand is simply amazing!

And how it kept evolving and mixing and refining

In just the right ways.... So that you and I were created –

That's incredible!

Like weeds and the universe,

Paul (in 2 Corinthians) describes God's love and grace as continually growing—

*'Yes, everything is for your sake, so that **grace**, as it extends to more and more people,*

may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.'

Like those dandelions and 'lilies' in the field,

God's grace extending to more and more people –

Grace abounding – like dandelion seeds!

Going where the wind blows...

Growing wherever God's love and grace is shared...

And the fact that God invites us to be part of that constantly expanding grace and love –

By the deeds we do, by the love we share ...

Again: that's Incredible!

Thinking about the dandelions and the lilies of the field and God's grace

Also makes me wonder if we are too quick to try to get rid

Of the less-than-glorious parts of ourselves –

Whether we're too concerned with putting out a very cultivated sense of ourselves

That we end up digging up all the dandelions –

Putting ourselves and so many others in peril...

Trying to hide away not only the less-than-glorious parts of ourselves

From ourselves, from others, from God –

Thinking that we will somehow make ourselves and our situations more glorious.

But perhaps in the process blocking the very ways God wants to be with us.

Perhaps we try to hide away people and situations we might consider less-than-glorious.

That 2 Corinthians scripture mentions the way God's grace continues to work with us

In our less-than-glorious situations.

It says that even when our bodies, our 'outer nature' are dying away,

"our inner nature is being renewed day by day."

Ben, I know you have been a chaplain with the MHA care homes during this pandemic --

Probably working with folks very much like my parents

Whose bodies and sometimes minds are dying away...

What has that been like for you?

How have you seen God's grace at work with these 'lilies of the field'?

an 'inner nature being renewed even as the outer nature is wasting away'?