

Salford Methodist Circuit



The Top Ten – 29th August 2021
John Brocklehurst

Welcome to worship.

First of all, let us just have a few moments of silent prayer as we bring all the troubles of the world that are going on around us to the Lord.

[Silence]

God of parables,
you teach by examples drawn from everyday life,
from the worlds of finance,
trade and business, and the realities of debt and money lending.
God of parables, teach us,
through the experiences of our lives,
to take up the challenges of discipleship,
to respond to the unexpected and to weigh up decisions of justice.

Hymn 'O Lord My God, When I In Awesome Wonder'

*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:
Then sings my soul...*

*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:
Then sings my soul...*

*When Christ shall come with shout 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:*

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Then sings my soul...

Let's pray

We praise you, Lord Jesus,
for the richness of the parables
that root our faith in the ordinary
and yet transform it.

Increase in us a sense of wonder,
that we might see signs of your kingdom wherever we are,
and bless us with the words to tell new stories
of your love and your grace to all we meet.

We pray in your name.

Forgive us, loving God,
when we stop looking for treasure
and give up reading your word.
Forgive us when we give up the yeast of our faith
and our lives go flat.
Forgive us when we don't cast out our nets,
but stay on shore, complacent and unenthusiastic.
Forgive us, inspire us and renew us in Jesus's name.

Jesus, of parable and prayer, grant us:
the courage of the mustard seed,
that we might not be overwhelmed by our smallness;
the patience of yeast,
that we might not try to rush that which needs time;
the vision of the man in the field,
that we might recognise treasure when we unearth it;
the wisdom of the merchant,
that we might give all that we have for that which is truly precious;
the strength of the net,
that we might bear all things in life and not be torn.
And may your kingdom come.

Amen.

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.*

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*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.*

Hymn: 'Tell Me The Stories of Jesus'

*Tell me the stories of Jesus
I love to hear,
Things I would ask him to tell me
If he were here.
Scenes by the wayside,
Tales of the sea,
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.*

*First let me hear how the children
Stood round his knee.
I shall fancy his blessings
Resting on me;
Words full of kindness,
Deeds full of grace,
All in the love-light
Of Jesus' face.*

*Tell me, in accents of wonder,
How rolled the sea,
Tossing the boat in a tempest
On Galilee!
And how the Master,
Ready and kind,
Chided the billows
And hushed the wind.*

*Into the city I'd follow
The children's band,
Waving a branch of the palm-tree
High in my hand;
One of his heralds,
Yes, I would sing
Loudest hosannas,
Jesus is King!*

*Show me that scene in the garden,
Of bitter pain;
And of the cross where my Saviour
For me was slain;*

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*And through the sadness,
Help me to see
How Jesus suffered
For love of me.*

*Tell me with joy of his rising
Up from the grave;
And how he still lives triumphant,
Ready to save.
Wonderful story
Jesus my friend,
Living and loving
Right to the end.*

The tradition of stories goes back to the beginning of time. People told stories by word of mouth and they were handed down in the oral tradition. And then in the end the stories were written down to what we have today. The stories of Jesus were no exception, they too were handed down by word of mouth and then put into the written word by his followers. So let us hear some of the stories of Jesus.

Bible Reading: Matthew 13 : 31 - 33, 44 - 45.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

"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.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Bible Reading: John 20 : 30 - 31

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Thanks be to God.

When we first started YouTube services on 22nd March 2020, little did we know it would last until today, the 29th August 2021. And in that time, Clare and the

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Salford Circuit Methodist Singers produced 154 hymns and songs. Now then, if you tried to make a top ten of the hymns, you would find it unlikely that any two lists would agree.

I remember once when I was a youngster, I used to listen to the top twenty on Radio Luxembourg in the bedroom. And then as I grew older it was on to other top ten programmes and Top of the Pops. And these programmes were compiled by the number of records sold to give the number one record of the week. These days it's all to do with streams and downloads and the top ten is compiled in a completely different way.

When we were young, our mothers used to tell us stories; generally fairy stories, and these stories always usually began with "Once upon a time" and then they would end with "and they all lived happily ever after."

What about the stories of Jesus? Are they fairy stories? Of course not! The stories that Jesus gave were lessons for each of us to learn. Jesus's stories are called parables and all the parables are contained in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and some in the gospel of Thomas. In total there are 38 parables, some are repeated in the other gospels including the gospel of Thomas but in a slightly different form. There are also 3 parables without parallels in the gospel of Thomas, making 41 parables in all.

But first, what is a parable?

At their simplest, they're defined as 'earthly stories with heavenly meaning'. The parables reflect Jesus' preference for indirect over direct communication in much of his teaching. Their beginnings and endings create space for the audiences to make their own responses. And so he would say:

'What do you think...?'

And he'd say again 'Which of you...?'

Jesus' parables are only one element in his wider use of parabolic speech which includes riddles, proverbs and taunts as well as narratives. The parables were so often examples of everyday life, things people could see or do everyday. Things people could understand.

Today I'm going to bring to you my top ten parables.

As in all good cases, I'll start in reverse order with number 10.

And my tenth parable would be the parable of the leaven or the yeast.

The whole point of the parable is the transforming power of the yeast. Yeast brings the whole character of baking; bread without yeast is like a water biscuit; hard, dry, unappetizing and uninteresting. But baked bread with yeast is soft, porous and spongy, tasty and good to eat. You see, just with introducing that transforming power of yeast to the dough, Jesus is saying that the coming of the Kingdom causes a transformation of life; of your life and my life.

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Moving on to the parable of the Pearl, which is only found in Matthew's gospel. And in many respects this is very similar to the parable of the yeast in that the pearl is so wonderful, that the finder sells all he has so that he could buy the pearl. And once again it is about the transforming power of God that changes life.

Then at number eight, the parable of the lost coin, found only in Luke.

What was so important about a little coin? Well it could have come off the lady's headdress which normally has 10 coins on it. It may have been sentimental and so she would have frantically searched for it until it was found. Jesus says "there is much celebration over one sinner who repents and comes back to the Father."

The parable of the talents is my number 7.

A talent was not a coin, it was a weight. It depended whether the coinage was gold, silver or copper. Because a talent of silver would be worth about 15 years of a working man's wage. So it was a lot! The one who had 5000 doubled his money, the one with 2000 also earned 2000 more, but the one with 1000 buried it. It earned nothing. With the first two servants Jesus says, "you have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness." The whole point of this is we all have different talents. And most importantly it is how we use the talents given to us. The parable tells us that whatever talents we have, great or small, we must lay it at the service of God and they will be increased for his Kingdom

At number 6, the parable of the mustard seed.

And I find this a most wonderful parable, that's something so small as a seed grows into a tree. In eastern countries, mustard, seed not a herb but a field plant and it literally grows into a tree. Whatever finds a home in the tree, it gives shelter and protection. The tree of our Father shows there is room for all beliefs, a wide variety of experiences, a wide variety of ways of worship, a place for a wide variety of all kinds of people and for all nations. There is room in the tree of life, in the city of God for all the world and much, much more.

We are half way our top ten and the next one is the parable of the two house builders.

As I have gone round the Circuit, I have often sung the chorus "the wise man builds his house upon the rock". And at Salford Royal Hospital recently I have watched as barren ground was drilled to reach a solid rock base for the building to be based upon. Sand is no good for a foundation. It needs solid ground. We must build our lives on the solid foundation of Jesus; and, in so doing, our lives will be sure and firm in the love of Jesus.

I suppose for most of us, the next parable would be top of the list, but I've put it number 4. It's the parable of the prodigal son, or sometimes called the parable of the lost son, the forgiving father.

The prodigal son, another parable unique to Luke. The parable of the prodigal son or the parable of the forgiving father; a well-known story, a story of a son asking for his share of inheritance and then he goes away and blows the lot. He

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comes to his senses and he goes back home. And I think the most important part of the parable is when Jesus says, "so he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, the father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." Even if we wander from God, he is watching for us to return, he meets us while we are coming back. This parable is about the loving father towards his son, it is about the love of God which is far broader than the love of man; it's about that God can forgive when men refuse to forgive. In face of a love like this, we cannot be other than lost in wonder, love and praise.

At number three: the parable of the lost sheep.

Just recently I've been away in Scotland and as we have been passing through the Scottish valleys, and in the Cumbrian mountains, we have seen many highland sheep and normal sheep just wandering around eating the grass. The terrain is quite bleak and it's no wonder than sometimes they wander off and get lost. This parable is simply that we too might be lost. We too might wander away from God. But in the end he will go out of his way, like a good shepherd, to find the lost person and bring them back into the family of God with great rejoicing.

Number two is the parable of the good Samaritan.

Another well-known parable unique to Luke. And we tend to focus on the Samaritan, but the whole point, surely, is about being a neighbour, being there to help in a time of need. The scribe generally asks Jesus "who is my neighbour?" Who is our neighbour? The person we help when he has brought troubles on himself, like the traveller. Any man of any nation is our neighbour. We must be practical in our help and not just feeling sorry. And Jesus says to us all, as to the scribe, "go and do likewise".

So finally, to my number one: The parable of the Sower. It's in all the three synoptic Gospels and also in Thomas.

I think this is a most wonderful parable. Not just for what it says, but also for the picture it paints. A farmer doing his work casting the seed onto the ground; the countryside; the sunshine. And the farmer just sows seeds and lets them grow; some on paths where birds ate it up, or it was trod upon, some fell on rocky ground it grew but withered because of no moisture, and some sown in the bushes which grew and the weeds choked them, but some fell on good ground and yielded an abundant harvest. The Sower spread the seed everywhere, we are the Sowers of the word of God in Jesus. We live in him and he in us and each one of us sows the seed of the word of God with the lives we lead. At the time it may not get a response, but years later that seed sown could yield an abundant harvest in bringing a person to the Lord Jesus Christ.

These parables from everyday life would have been understood for what they were by the people, to some they were just a pleasant, easy to listen to story, to others they would have understood the deeper meaning of the parables. So the disciples asked Jesus a leading question, which is found in Matthew 13, 10 - 16. Then the disciples said to Jesus "Why are you speaking to them in parables?" He answered, "because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for

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you to know, but it has not been given to them. For whoever has, he will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but whoever does not have, even that which he has will be taken away from him. That is why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. And Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

You will listen and listen,

But never understand;

You will look and look,

But never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown hardened;

Their ears are hard of hearing,

They have shut their eyes;

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

And hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

And turn back—

And I would heal them.

Blessed are your eyes because they do see, and your ears because they do hear."

We are fortunate as we have hindsight and theological commentators that give us an insight into what they think the parables mean. But to the people that Jesus was telling the stories, either just took them as nice stories about everyday examples of life or maybe they did understand the hidden meaning. So as we read the parables of Jesus, let us take the parables to hearts to see and hear the meaning and take them into our lives and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

We are reminded that the past Presidents of the Methodist Conference have urged us to tell our stories; to tell our stories of what Jesus means to each one of us. Jesus told his stories. We must tell our stories of how Jesus helps us and in telling that story, people may come to Christ and follow him.

Just a rundown now of my top ten:

At number 10 - The parable of the leaven or the yeast

9 - The parable of the pearl

8 - The parable of the lost coin

7 - The parable of the talents

6 - The parable of the mustard seed

5 - The parable of two house builders

4 - The parable of the prodigal son,

Followed by number 3 - The parable of the lost sheep.

Which brings us to number 2 - The parable of the good Samaritan

And finally at number 1 - The parable of the Sower

So what are your top ten parables? Or maybe even your top ten miracles? I will let you in a spare moment reflect on the parables of Jesus and make them your top ten. May I remind you that in John's Gospel it says there that 'these things were written down that we might believe.' And so we believe in Jesus.



Amen.

Hymn: Beauty For Brokenness

*Beauty for brokenness,
hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
your kingdom increase!*

*Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for all people,
trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak.*

*God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray:
melt our cold hearts,
let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame.*

*Refuge from cruel wars,
havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary,
freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields,
scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness,
his cross for the pain.*

*Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned -
our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with
the things that we need.*

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God of the poor...

*Lighten our darkness,
breathe on this flame
until your justice burns
brightly again;
until the nations
learn of your ways,
seek your salvation
and bring you their praise.*

God of the poor...

Let us join in the fellowship of silent prayer.

[Silence]

We pray for the ministry entrusted to the Church to pray for all people,
that they may discover the treasure of faith and communion with God.
Lord hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you.

We pray for all Christian people that they may hold their faith dear
and continue to love according to the Gospel.
Lord, hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you

We pray for all people, everywhere,
that they may open their hearts and mind to the good news of the Gospel.
Lord hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you.

We pray for the leaders of the nations as they work for progress and prosperity,
that they may not lose sight of the poor and their needs.
Lord hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you.

We pray for the sick and for those in need
that in their suffering they might find care and compassion from those around
them.
Lord hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you.

We pray for all ministers on the move to new Circuits
And the congregations that will welcome them.
Lord hear your people,
and let our prayer come before you.

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Loving God, we thank you that in your Son Jesus we have found the treasure which makes our life worthwhile.

Keep us in your love and care, now and always,
and bring us at last to the joys of heaven.

Amen

As we've heard the stories of Jesus so let us go forth and tell our stories to those we meet day by day.

Hymn: "Go Forth and Tell"

*Go forth and tell! O church of God, awake!
God's saving news to all the nations take;
proclaim Christ Jesus, saviour, Lord, and king,
that all the world his worthy praise may sing.*

*Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all;
he will in grace respond to all who call:
how shall they call if they have never heard
the gracious invitation of his word?*

*Go forth and tell some still in darkness lie;
in wealth or want, in sin they live and die:
give us, O Lord, concern of heart and mind,
a love like yours which cares for all mankind.*

*Go forth and tell! The doors are open wide:
share God's good gifts with people long denied;
live out your life as Christ your Lord shall choose,
your ransomed powers for his sole glory use.*

Before our closing prayer, a big thank you:

Thank you to the Rev Clare Stainsby for setting us on the road of online services and producing 76 weeks of hymns and songs.

Thank you to the Salford Methodist Circuit Singers who brought the hymns and songs alive and led us in worship.

Thank you to all those who contributed to the services in any way.

Thank you to Matt for editing the services and enabling us to join in worship week by week.

And so we pray:

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Go in peace,
live the kingdom;
share its treasures;
keep the faith.
And now may God the Father bless us,
God the Son inspire us,
and God the Holy Spirit enlighten us
now and always.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
And the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all.
Today and for Evermore
Amen

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