

Worship at Home July 19th 2026

A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Jon Skeet.

Introduction Hello, and welcome to Worship at Home for Sunday July 19th. I'm Jon Skeet, and I worship at Tilehurst Methodist Church when I'm not out and about as a local preacher in the Circuit. My wife Holly will be joining us to read our Bible passages later in the service.

It's good to share worship with you today. I'm hoping that by the time you listen to this, things will have cooled down a little compared with the time I'm writing and recording it! As with my last Worship at Home service, I'll be leading the Church of the Living Stream service this Sunday too – we are joining together in worship from many different places, but with one faith, and one Lord.

Our call to worship this morning is from Isaiah 44:6-8.

Call to worship

⁶“I am Israel's King. I set them free.

I am the Lord who rules over all.

So listen to what I am saying.

I am the first and the last.

I am the one and only God.

⁷Who is like me? Let him come forward and speak boldly.

Let him tell me everything that has happened

since I created my people long ago.

And let him tell me what has not happened yet.

Let him announce ahead of time what is going to take place.

⁸Do not tremble with fear. Do not be afraid.

Didn't I announce everything that has happened?

Didn't I tell you about it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any other God but me?

No! There is no other Rock. I do not know even one.”

Hymn: STF 157: God has spoken by His prophets

1 God has spoken — by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word ;
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast :
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.

2 God has spoken — by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one ;

spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born ;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.

3 God is speaking — by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast ;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.

George Wallace Briggs (1875–1959)

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Prayers

We offer our prayers of adoration.

Lord God, we worship and adore you. As the heat of the summer reminds us of the power of your creation, we remember that you are the author of all things. As insignificant as each one of us is, we know you love and care for us individually, in ways we cannot grasp. We are in awe of your perfect love, and we long to serve you. We kneel at your feet, and offer our lives in your service.

Amen.

Reading: Psalm 86:11-17

¹¹ Lord, teach me how you want me to live.

Do this so that I will depend on you, my faithful God.

Give me a heart that doesn't want anything
more than to worship you.

¹² Lord my God, I will praise you with all my heart.

I will bring glory to you forever.

¹³ Great is your love for me.

You have kept me from going down into the place of the dead.

¹⁴ God, proud people are attacking me.

A gang of mean people is trying to kill me.

They don't care about you.

¹⁵ But Lord, you are a God who is tender and kind.

You are gracious.

You are slow to get angry.

You are faithful and full of love.

¹⁶ Come to my aid and have mercy on me.

Show your strength by helping me.

Save me because I serve you just as my mother did.

¹⁷ Prove your goodness to me.

Then my enemies will see it and be put to shame.

Lord, you have helped me and given me comfort.

Reading: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ Jesus told the crowd another story. "Here is what the kingdom of heaven is like," he said. "A man planted good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came. The enemy planted weeds among the wheat and then went away. ²⁶ The wheat began to grow and form grain. At the same time, weeds appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's slaves came to him. They said, 'Sir, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

“The slaves asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ the owner answered. ‘While you are pulling up the weeds, you might pull up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the workers what to do. Here is what I will say to them. First collect the weeds. Tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat. Bring it into my storeroom.’”

³⁶ Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him. They said, “Explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.”

³⁷ He answered, “The one who planted the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world. The good seed stands for the people who belong to the kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. ³⁹ The enemy who plants them is the devil. The harvest is judgment day. And the workers are angels.

⁴⁰ “The weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire. That is how it will be on judgment day. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels. They will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin. They will also get rid of all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace. There people will weep and grind their teeth. ⁴³ Then God’s people will shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom. Whoever has ears should listen.

We offer our prayers of confession.

Lord, when we hear your words of scripture which talk of sin, we know that we are included. We have hurt other people through malice, greed or carelessness. We have ignored the needs of those around us. We have put ourselves first, ahead of each other and ahead of you. We know that it not your will.

We are sorry. As we turn back to you, we ask your forgiveness, relying on your grace and mercy. We rejoice that we can be confident of that grace, proven through the power of the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Hymn: STF 255: The kingdom of God

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| <p>1 The kingdom of God
 is justice and joy,
 for Jesus restores
 what sin would destroy ;
 God's power and glory
 in Jesus we know,
 and here and hereafter
 the kingdom shall grow.</p> <p>2 The kingdom of God
 is mercy and grace,
 the prisoners are freed,
 the sinners find place,
 the outcast are welcomed
 God's banquet to share,
 and hope is awakened
 in place of despair.</p> | <p>3 The kingdom of God
 is challenge and choice,
 believe the good news,
 repent and rejoice !
 His love for us sinners
 brought Christ to his cross,
 our crisis of judgement
 for gain or for loss.</p> <p>4 God's kingdom is come,
 the gift and the goal,
 in Jesus begun,
 in heaven made whole ;
 the heirs of the kingdom
 shall answer his call,
 and all things cry glory
 to God all in all !</p> |
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Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

Sermon

Introduction: Both our readings today are about “good people” and “bad people”. Both can be read in an “us and them” way where the listeners are expected to think of themselves as good people who have to put up with the bad people all around them. I suspect that’s the way both passages have usually been read across the centuries, and may well be the way they were intended.

In this sermon I’ll be exploring an alternative way of reading these passages, hoping to see more of God’s love at work.

Psalm 86

In the psalm, David – assuming that he really was the author – expresses his love for God and asks to be taught how to live as God wants him to live. This is in comparison with the “proud people” who are attacking him. To David’s credit, this particular psalm *doesn’t* ask God to curse, destroy, smite or otherwise hurt his enemies. The closest it comes to that is “Prove your goodness to me. Then my enemies will see it and be put to shame.”

But I’m struck by how verses 14 and 15 can be read in two very different ways. Here they are again:

God, proud people are attacking me. A gang of mean people is trying to kill me. They don’t care about you.

But Lord, you are a God who is tender and kind. You are gracious. You are slow to get angry. You are faithful and full of love.

When David talks about God being tender and kind, who is he saying God should be kind to? I suspect I’ve always read this psalm as “Even though these awful people are attacking me, I know you, God, will be kind and faithful to me, and save me from them.” I’ll be honest, that fits in with the rest of the psalm. But what if... What if the verse about how kind God is, how God is gracious and slow to get angry, is about how God loves the “gang of mean people”? What if David is asking for God to show mercy *on David’s enemies* instead of on David himself?

As I say, I don’t think that’s the originally intended meaning... but I think it’s entirely reasonable to rejoice that it *could* be. If the David had gone on in verse 16 to pray for his persecutors and love his enemies, we might have been surprised – but the surprise wouldn’t be due to seeing a different side of God. We believe God *is* slow to anger, gracious, faithful and full of love. If God only loved “good” people, our faith would be very different. And that division is where we reach our passage from Matthew.

Matthew 13

Chapter 13 of Matthew’s Gospel is full of parables. As well as the parable of the weeds that we’ve heard today, it contains the parables of the sower, the mustard seed, the yeast, the hidden treasure, the pearls, and the net. Most of these parables start along the lines of “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this...”

While Jesus gives an explanation of the parable, explaining how the concepts of the parable map on to the Kingdom of Heaven, he doesn’t explain *why* he’s told the parable at all. I can see

two motivations. Firstly, it could be an answer to the question of why there is evil in the world. If God is omnipotent, why doesn't God just stop bad things happening? It's the sort of question often discussed in discipleship courses and fellowship groups. Alternatively, the parable can be seen as a warning: just because you don't see justice happening right now doesn't mean that it *won't* happen. Don't be a weed: you'll get thrown on the fire at the time of judgement.

The Son of Man appears in the parable, but only in the form of the one who sows the seeds. Nothing is said about the *other* roles played by the Son of Man – crucially, the aspects of redemption and grace. In the parable, there is wheat and there are weeds. They grow together, but no wheat becomes a weed, and no weed becomes wheat. Everything is *either* wheat or weed.

I find parables about judgement to be hard. I can't easily reconcile the God whose love I experience with the idea of perpetual damnation. I also find the idea of "the evil one" and people belonging to that "evil one" to be challenging, but that might be a topic for another day. When I look around the world, I generally don't see "good people" and "bad people" – I see humanity in its God-created glory, but with flaws in every individual. None of us is a perfect stalk of wheat – so must we live in terror of the judgement day, when our weedy aspects condemn us to the flames? I don't think so.

God *is* faithful and full of love. God *does* come to our aid, and *does* have mercy on us. The same Jesus who tells this fear-inspiring parable also promises us grace, and salvation through his sacrifice on the cross.

Interpreted by love

I don't want to pretend the parable *is* all about mercy and grace. However uncomfortable I am with the theme of judgement, it's clearly there in the text. However difficult I find the idea of "the evil one" who plants seeds of sin, instead of it just being part of human nature, again, that's in the text. But I believe we can carefully and prayerfully interpret the text using knowledge of God's nature from elsewhere.

One of my favourite hymns is "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" with this beautiful third verse:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

What does it mean to interpret this parable by love? Perhaps it highlights our *need* for grace. Perhaps it reminds us that however much we might like to hear the words and think we're the wheat, we can be quite weed-like too. On our own, we cannot become wheat. That requires the grace that only Jesus can offer.

What the parable says to me is that we should expect to see bad things happen in our lives. We should probably expect that some of the time, we are the cause of bad things happening – and we should repent accordingly. We should expect that *some* form of justice – God's justice, which may not align with our own ideas or desires – will be fulfilled eventually. But rather than accept that "things are the way they are" we should work to be better people, more closely aligned with God's love. Relying on the grace of Jesus for salvation is not an excuse to continue hurting others or ourselves.

Conclusion

Sometimes we are wheaty. Sometimes we are weedy.

Lord, where we see evil in the world, let us be guided by your love. Help us to be aware of our own shortcomings, while remembering the promise of salvation through Christ. May we welcome your Spirit to transform us and guide us into wheatiness.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We offer our prayers for God's people and the world. You may wish to pause to offer your own prayers for people and situations you know of.

Lord, we pray for your church. We pray that religious leaders may be true to their calling, and that Christians everywhere may find deeper faith in you. We pray especially for those who are taking their first tentative steps of faith: may they find communities of love in which to grow, exploring the wonders of your grace.

Lord, we pray for the nations. In an unstable world, some wars seem eternal while others stop and start on a weekly basis. We ask that you speak words of peace in the hearts of the leaders of nations, that they may find paths through centuries of conflict, so all may flourish. May your presence be felt in the lives of all those who are suffering through conflict, poverty and natural disaster.

Lord, we pray for your creation. As heatwaves remind us of the climate emergency, we pray for your inspiration and judgement, that we may find better ways of valuing this abundant planet, and of caring for life in all its richness.

Lord, we pray for each other. For those we know who are ill, and those who care for them. For those who are struggling in other ways – through stress, financial hardship, loneliness, difficult family and social relationships, or bereavement. May they feel the strength and comfort of your love in their lives.

All of these prayers we ask in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

You may wish to say out loud the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation you prefer.

Hymn: STF 440 Amazing grace

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| 1 | Amazing grace — how sweet the sound —
that saved a wretch like me !
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see. | 4 | The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures ;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures. |
| 2 | God's grace has taught my heart to fear,
his grace my fears relieved ;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed ! | 5 | And, when this heart and flesh shall fail
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
a life of joy and peace. |
| 3 | Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come ;
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home. | 6 | When we've been there ten thousand
years
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun. |

John Newton (1725–1807) (*alt.*)

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Blessing

When we are like wheat, may our lives demonstrate God's love for all. When we are like weeds, may God show mercy and transform us through the Spirit. And may the blessing of God the Creator, God the Sustainer and God the Redeemer be with each of us, now and for ever. Amen.

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