

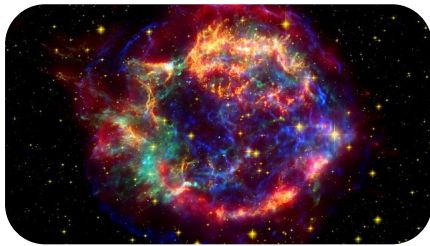


Sunday 16th August 2020
Welcome to our Sunday Service
Prepared by Mervyn Bedford

God of Beauty



Today the theme of our service is beauty. We are surrounded by beauty on so many different levels, and today we are going to enjoy some beauty that is clear for all to see, and some of the hidden beauty that is waiting to be discovered. As telescopes become more powerful we can see deeper into space, revealing beauty and colour way beyond our reach; on the other end of the spectrum, microscopes expose the patterns and order in every cell of life!



A picture from the
Hubble Telescope



A cats tongue through
a microscope

Dear God, creator of all beauty and all things good, we bring you our praise and adoration! We want to give you all the credit, and the glory for all the wonder in your creation, and we are in awe of your ability and power.

Thank you that you see things in a different way than we do. Help us to see each other with your compassion and grace.

Jesus, we worship you because just before you died for us, you prayed that you, "want us to see the glory, you shared with your father before the creation of the world." Help us open our hearts to your glory, afresh today. We bless you Jesus, our glorious King and Saviour. Amen.

We will be talking to two people in our service today, one person who loves to work with God to create a beautiful garden and artwork, and another who loves to find beauty in number patterns that most of us completely miss. He then likes to harness those secret patterns to create entertaining magical illusions.

The Bible in it's deep, immeasurable wisdom tells us that God has made everything beautiful in it's own time.
Ecc 3:11 What a hope filled, life affirming statement.

Let's take a moment to look at some bulbs; they're dry, dull, flaky and not a particularly attractive colour. We could easily dismiss them as uninteresting and dull, but oh how wrong we would be! In a different time and place they are loaded with life and colour. Like them, God has beauty and glory locked up in us that we are unable to grasp as yet.

C.S. Lewis says "Imagine the most dull and boring Christian you can think of... If you saw them in their heavenly glory, you'd be tempted to fall down and worship them!"



We have two contrasting bible readings today that both mention beauty, part of Psalm 27 that delights in the beauty of God, and part of Isaiah 53 that points towards the time when Jesus will set aside his majesty and beauty to take into himself the full ugliness of our selfishness and sin.

Isaiah 53:1-3

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no stately form or majesty to attract us, **no beauty that we should desire Him**. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Like one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

The depth of love in the heart of God is immeasurable, that Jesus would take all our sin and brokenness in all its ugliness at the cross, so we can exchange it for his beauty.

I'm reminded of the words from a song. **'Something beautiful, something good, all my confusion he understood. All I had to offer his was brokenness and strife, but he made something beautiful out of my life'**.

Some of us are really struggling with brokenness and confusion during this Covid 19 season - that is ok. However, if we keep taking our struggles to God, we can be confident that he is at work during this time and can bring beauty out of the darkest situation.

What a wonderful God we serve, let's join King David and worship him!

Psalms 27:4-5

One thing I have asked of the LORD; this is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the **beauty of the LORD** and seek Him in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will hide me in His shelter; He will conceal me under the cover of His tent; He will set me high upon a rock.

Song - Beauty for Brokenness by Graham Kendrick

Beauty for brokenness
Hope for despair
Lord, in your suffering
This is our prayer
Bread for the children
Justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset
Your kingdom increase!

Chorus

**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**

Shelter for fragile lives
Cures for their ills
Work for the craftsman
Trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed
Rights for the weak
Voices to plead the cause
Of those who can't speak

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

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

Interview given by Jane Parker with Mervyn

During Lockdown we have delivered written copies of our services to people who are unable to access them online, so for me that has meant a weekly visit to Janes garden this Spring and Summer.

I have loved it; even early in the season there was a lot of interest, but week on week there has been a crescendo of colour as different flowers have appeared and seemed to surpass the glory of the previous week!



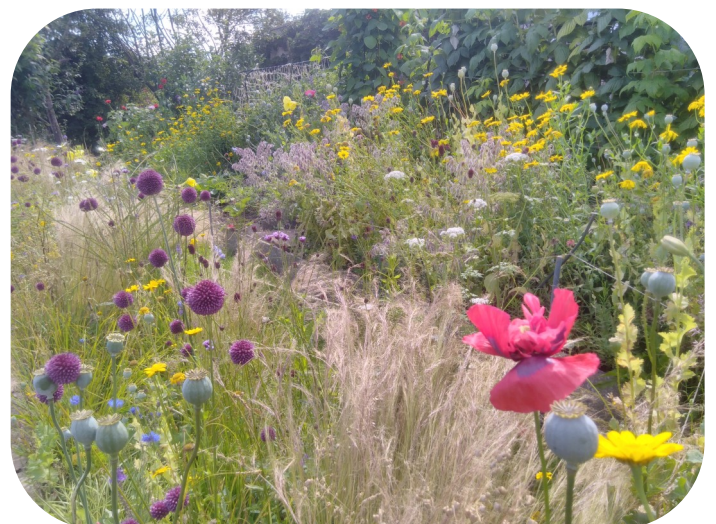
I started by asking Jane when she started to create the garden?

We moved in 12 years ago, and it was just leylandii hedge all the way around and grass, one border in the back garden and a few shrubs. I thought I probably wouldn't garden because I was getting too old!! But, I couldn't keep my hands off it, and gradually I started putting flowers and fruit, and my husband cut down the leylandii hedge.

Three years after my husband died, I knew I needed to keep myself occupied and I decided that the garden would be one of the things I would do. I got stuck in and basically, the grass got less and less, and the flowers got more and more! I love colour and the form of plants, of not being able to see the soil and lots of things growing exuberantly. I particularly enjoy plants that bees and insects love and so I've made it more wildlife inviting.



I just love sitting everyday about 4:30pm and having a cup of tea, and I notice and breathe in beauty. I had to do a description of the garden when I was first invited to join Ulverston in bloom and I thought well, it's three gardens -it's a romantic front garden, a vegetable fruit and wild-life side garden and a back garden where you're just surrounded by plants and very secure. I thought, it's like the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The front garden reminds me of Jesus, the side garden which has nine kinds of fruit represents the fruit of the spirit and the back garden represents God the Father, the creator and that's a really safe place to be. So that's my garden. I love being in it.



Mervyn: You don't only enjoy growing flowers, you like painting them too!

I love painting. I started by painting little flower cards to send to people to encourage them, or birthdays and things like that. And then gradually I started doing some cartoony ones because I noticed people quite enjoyed that, particularly if I put *them* into the cartoons. Then Mervyn came along and asked me to illustrate some of his children's activities which has stretched me, but I've really enjoyed doing it and it's kept me busy during the lockdown.



Mervyn: So you feel very close to God in your garden, when did you meet Jesus?

I met Jesus when I was 31. I was a bit of a hippie, a mess, hedonistic and left wing in my politics. My marriage had broken down and I was an atheist. My family became Christians, my dad had become a Christian and changed, but I was a bit scathing about it really, and I wasn't interested.



But something happened and I became aware that I was somehow wrong, which was a really unusual feeling for me! I felt I needed to do something good to cancel out the feeling of being wrong, so I decided to go to church, but went at the wrong time when the church was closed. I sat on a wall outside the church smoking and laughing to myself at what my atheist friends would think of me, but God met me there, told me he was real and that I was going to believe in him.

Eventually, I read a Christian book my dad had given me by David Watson. The book began by saying that there is a lot of injustice in the world and that the world needs justice. That spoke to my politics straight away, but then it went on to ask if I wanted justice or mercy for myself? I knew that I needed mercy in my life, the book also explained that grace was undeserved love, and I knew that was the only kind of love I could qualify for.

In this book there was a prayer that I prayed and I believed that Jesus died for me. The words of the prayer said 'I'm going to follow you now' I had to stop and think, because I knew it would mean a completely different way of life and I knew it would be social and intellectual suicide in terms of my friends, but I wanted to do it, so I said it.

I didn't really expect anything to happen, but God just threw his arms around me and hugged me really, really tightly but I wasn't squashed! I had never experienced love like that before. My life was different from then on and God helped me with practical issues.

My young son, Tom wouldn't settle at night, this had gone on for a long, long time and I was exhausted. In my desperation I called out to God and he gave me a vision of what to do. He instructed me to settle Tom in bed each night and tell him that I would stay in his room and read The Bible until he went to sleep, but that he must not talk. Tom would drop off to sleep really quickly each night, but I would lose track of time and spent hours with my bible and notebook! God had met Tom's need and drawn me deep into his word.



Mervyn: Was it easy to give up smoking?

I always say it left me really!! I remember kneeling down to ask God to help me give up, but I needed to light a cigarette to give me the courage to ask for his help! I knew after that that he would help me give up and a couple of months later I got the flu and they tasted horrible. I thought perhaps this is the time, I got rid of the open packets of cigarettes and washed all the ash trays and never smoked again! It left me and I had no withdrawal symptoms at all, but I did have to be aware of the triggers and all the ways triggers work. That was quite useful really because I worked a lot with addicts so it gave me some experience.



We finished our conversation by reflecting on one of Jane's favourite bible verses, Proverbs 8:30-31

**I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world and
delighting in mankind.**

The second conversation in our service is with Adam Hudson

Adam and his family came to our church a few times before lockdown and I really enjoyed this opportunity to get to know Adam some more. Adam sees beauty in the subtle ways that number patterns work together, he then likes to use these patterns to create entertaining magical illusions. He's written books to share these 'secrets' with likeminded people and during lockdown he's been doing some of his magic over the phone and on the radio to raise money for the heart unit in the hospital that supports his daughter.



Adam's faith in the face of complex and challenging issues is inspiring. In the on-line service Adam did some magic which won't work in this written service, but we can let you know how he met Jesus!

Adam went to Sunday School as a child but drifted away from church as a teenager. He was a talented footballer and had schoolboy form with Sheffield Wednesday, but as his football dreams faded he lost his way and got involved in the drinking culture. At age 20, his relationship with his parents had broken down - he was not in a good place and living by himself in Barrow.



One night he was out with some friends and he was spotted by Karen, who he had known from when they were in Sunday school together. Although he had known of Karen for years they had never had any meaningful relationship. When Karen saw that he was the worst for wear along with the group of friends he was hanging out with she felt concern for him. Later that night she prayed for him, and the opportunity to contact Adam, without implying any romantic motivation!

At this same time Adam was aware that things were not right in his life; he contacted his dad to talk about going back to church, and his dad recommended he go to a different church with a more vibrant youth work. His dad gave him Karen's phone number and suggested that Adam call her to talk about her church! Karen came home a couple of days later to find a message saying Adam Hudson has called, can you give him a ring!!! What a great story of God answering prayer.



Adam attended Spring Mount Church with Karen and met Jesus in a meaningful way. Shortly afterwards, he was at a baptismal service at Spring Mount and felt prompted by God that now was the time to make his faith public, so he got baptised there and then. The church managed to rummage around to find him some dry clothes!

Karen and Adam eventually got married on 1st February 2003 {123} A perfect day for a guy who likes numbers!

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.