

June 7, 2026 – MHA Sunday online

Pre-service Music (Any or all can be used)

All Are Welcome – StF 409 -- All Are Welcome

When I Needed a Neighbour (Singing the Faith 256 / StF 256) (Sydney Carter) with lyrics and singing

The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy | Epiphany Hymn | Bryn Rees (1973)

God is Love, His the Care (Tune: Personent Hodie - 3vv & chorus) [with lyrics for congregations]

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord - 3vv+refrain) [with lyrics for congregations]

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship – MHA Sunday – **GMT20260528-093820 – start at .18 to 1.44**

Romans 12:5 – So in Christ, we, though many, for, one body,
and each member belongs to all the others.

All Are Welcome

Intro to MHA Sunday **GMT20260528-093820 – start at 1.55 TO 4.40**

Loneliness, isolation, injustice of not noticing
Second cup video

When I Needed a Neighbour (Singing the Faith 256 / StF 256) (Sydney Carter) with lyrics and singing

Luke 14:15-23 -- **GMT20260528-093820 – start at 4.53 TO 7.02; 7.34 TO 9.46**

The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy | Epiphany Hymn | Bryn Rees (1973)

Reflections -- **GMT20260528-093820 – start at 9.52 TO 29.17**

God is Love, His the Care (Tune: Personent Hodie - 3vv & chorus) [with lyrics for congregations]

MHA prayers of intercession – **GMT20260528-093820 – start at 29.28 TO 36.03**

Benediction

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord - 3vv+refrain) [with lyrics for congregations]

MHA was founded in 1943 by Rev Walter Hall and the Methodist Church, at a time when many older people had limited support and the Welfare State did not yet exist.

From the beginning, our purpose was to improve the quality of life for older people by providing care, support and accommodation built on compassion, dignity and respect.

Over the decades, MHA expanded from a pioneering charity into a national organisation, opening residential care homes across Britain and developing services that respond to the changing needs of older people.

As our work grew, so did our ambition.

We began providing not only residential care, but also housing and support that helps people live well in later life, wherever they call home.

Today, MHA is one of the largest and well-respected care providers in Britain, supporting older people through a wide range of services designed to help people live later life well.

Apart from care homes and support to those living in their own homes,

Current MHA support in the community includes

- [MHA Communities groups](#), providing friendship and support for older people in their own homes
- [Befriending services](#) to help older people feel connected and less alone
- Volunteer-led activities and practical help to reduce loneliness and isolation
- [MHA Active](#), our lifestyle app helping older people keep their mind and body active
- The [Later Life Hub](#), our online knowledge hub offering practical support and expert guidance on the topics that matter most in later life.

MHA's focus on the whole person includes

- Person-centred dementia care shaped around individual needs
- Wellbeing services and meaningful activity
- [Green care](#), supporting wellbeing through nature-based activities and time outdoors
- [Music therapy](#) to support residents, including those living with dementia
- [Chaplaincy and spiritual support](#), supporting people at end of life and beyond.

We are open to people of all faiths and none,

while continuing to value our Methodist roots

and the support we receive from Christian communities across the UK.

Even as we've grown, our purpose remains the same. We believe later life should be lived with:

- Dignity
- Independence
- Comfort and wellbeing
- Connection and community.

And that leads us to examine a major society ill in today's world which is loneliness

Loneliness amongst British public in general and older persons in particular.

During the period from October 2023 to March 2024,

approximately 3.1 million people in England reported that they felt lonely often or always.

Risk factors that can lead to loneliness tend to increase and converge as we get older – key factors associated with older age include:

- Facing bereavement
- Living alone
- Living with limiting disabilities or illnesses
- Caring for a partner
- Physical and mental health difficulties
- Low fixed incomes (e.g. pensions) making activities unaffordable
- Digital exclusion
- Reduced mobility

With these thoughts in mind, I want to show you a short video from MHA
Called ‘The Second Cup’...

[When I needed a neighbour...]

Most years when I’ve done an MHA service, it’s been with a congregation,
But I’m aware that many of you viewing this online service
Find yourselves mostly confined to your homes.
Perhaps you can really identify with the loneliness of the woman in the video
Or you know of someone like here.

The scripture we’ll be exploring in this service speaks in a different way to that loneliness.

It comes from Luke’s gospel – a gospel in which Jesus is often eating with people
This particular reading is about a banquet to which all are invited –

But it follows a story of another banquet
in which people were invited to a wedding banquet
and came dressed in their best clothes
and hoping to be seated in the best seats – near the wedding couple!

This is the scripture in which Jesus admonishes his listeners
Not to assume the highest honour but humble themselves ...

And he also urges people to make sure that everyone is invited to the banquet –
Much like the sentiment of the hymn we sang at the beginning –
The one we’d like to model our churches after –
Where ‘all are welcome!’

Let’s hear the story of a further banquet now from Luke 14:15-23:

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this [that all should be welcome], said to him,
‘Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!’

¹⁶Then Jesus* said to him, ‘Someone gave a great dinner and invited many.

¹⁷At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited,
“Come; for everything is ready now.”

¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses.

The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it;
please accept my apologies.”

¹⁹Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out;
please accept my apologies.”

²⁰Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.”

²¹So the slave returned and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave,
“Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town
and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.”

²²And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.”

²³Then the master said to the slave, “Go out into the roads and lanes,
and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.”

[The Kingdom of God is Justice and Joy]

I wonder how you heard that story ...

Did it make you remember a time when you guiltily gave an excuse for a dinner party

You couldn't attend?

Did it make you remember a time you weren't invited?

Did it make you think of a time when you'd hosted a party
and not everyone could come?

Did it make you think of times you'd invited folks to church
And they hadn't come?

Each of these memories could make us feel a bit uncomfortable –

And perhaps that's just what Jesus is getting at with this story:

There are unwritten rules about parties:

Who's invited

Who's not

Which of those invited actually comes

Which gives excuses

Which doesn't bother to respond...

As we explore this story from the perspective of the work of MHA,

We're invited to consider who is *not* invited –

Who is overlooked

Who is ignored.

In this story, the invitations are sent out.

The food is prepared.

The table is laid.

And then the excuses begin.

One person has property to attend to.

Another has business commitments.

Another simply has other priorities.

None of these excuses are shocking.

The problem is not hostility.

It is distraction. Comfort. Busyness.

And the host is angry.

Not because his pride is wounded, but because he refuses to accept an empty table.

In this story, absence is the scandal.

The banquet has been prepared for people,

and when the expected guests will not come, the invitation goes wider.

The host sends his servants out again, first into the streets and lanes of the town,
and then even further, until the table is full.

In this story, absence is never treated as normal.
This is where the parable turns towards us.
Because the question it raises isn't simply, "Who is welcome in God's kingdom?"
It's, "Who is missing?"
And more uncomfortably, "Whose absence have we learned to accept?"

In Jesus' world, there were people who were routinely left out.
The poor. The disabled.
Those who did not fit the social or religious expectations of the time.
Their absence from the table was normalised.
Jesus refuses to accept that normal.
Absence is rarely accidental.
It is shaped by loss, exclusion, and neglect, as people are quietly pushed to the edges.
Many of the same traits we were describing earlier
In observations about loneliness in British society
And especially with older persons.

When people disappear from our shared life without anyone noticing,
something has already gone wrong.

The kingdom of God is not simply about gathering those who already belong.
It is about noticing who is not there,
and refusing to let that absence be the end of the story
In every era, there are absences that are easy to explain away.
People we stop expecting to see.
People whose disappearance feels almost natural.
I wonder who has disappeared from your social circle...

In our own time, one of the most normalised absences
Is the loneliness of people in later life.
Loneliness in later life is rarely dramatic.
It grows through bereavement, declining health, reduced mobility,
limited income, and shrinking confidence.
In England today, over three million people say they feel lonely often or always.
That is not a marginal issue.
It is a quiet reality for millions of lives lived largely out of sight.
But loneliness is not, at heart, a statistic.
It is the experience of days without meaningful conversation.
Of being known once, and no longer.
Of sensing that your presence or absence would make little difference.
And that is why loneliness is a matter of justice.

The most important thing about the parable is not who refuses the invitation.
It is what the host does next.
He does not cancel the banquet.
He does not lower his expectations.
He does not accept that this is simply how things are.
He sends his servants out.
First into the streets and lanes of the town.
Then further still, beyond the usual boundaries, until the table is full.

It's an active, deliberate, and persistent welcome.
God does not wait for people to find their way in.
God goes looking. The kingdom of God advances not by accident, but by invitation.

I wonder – are your tables full?

And notice this: the servants are not asked to judge who deserves a place.
They are sent to make room.

It's the turning point in the story.
The problem of loneliness and exclusion
is not met with explanation or sympathy alone,
but with movement.

With action.

With people willing to be sent.

God's response to empty seats is not resignation.
It is commissioning.

God's hospitality continues wherever someone is willing to pour a second cup.
At this table there is the cup set before us, and the cup we choose to share.

This is where the story meets our own time.

In the parable, the servants are sent out to make the invitation real.

They bring the promise of the banquet to those who had assumed it was not meant for them.

I wonder who that might be for you.

In other times and places, this sermon would be about inviting others

To join us in our Sunday worship at our church.

But most of us viewing today can no longer ourselves get out to church.

And yet, we've found a way to stay connected.

Who else might need such a connection?

During COVID, there were a few brave souls in our congregations

Who managed to be in touch with persons who lived on their own

And actually went to be with them –

Do you remember when we were only allowed to choose a limited number of people

To be with?

I remember some who deliberately chose to be with lonely people

To share their laptop or tablet or video screens with them for worship...

They all report being very blessed by the experience!

Seeking out the lonely – noticing who hasn't been included –

Or hasn't been able to be included

And finding a way to include them...

In terms of MHA, their work focusses on responding to this commissioning of God

To seek out those who need to be included.

Across our care homes, retirement living schemes, and community services,

MHA works to create community where isolation has taken hold,

and connection where loneliness has become normal.

One expression of this is our befriending service.

Through regular phone calls and visits,

volunteers offer something that sounds small, but is anything but:
presence. Attention. Relationship.

One person who receives befriending through MHA put it like this:

“I love the calls from my volunteer. We hit it off from the very start.

She’s given me confidence to go out again and meet my friend for coffee once a week.

I look forward to the calls, and so does she.”

That is not just companionship.

That is dignity being restored.

A life widening again.

I wonder if there’s someone you know who needs a phone call today –

Or even once a week?

MHA also offers chaplains who work day by day in care homes

and retirement living schemes,

offering pastoral presence, noticing who is struggling,

and helping to ensure that no one is left unseen at the edges of community life.

It is the servant stepping out again, saying: there is room at the table.

Are there activities you are able to attend that others might need as well –

But they haven’t been invited?

I’ve heard several stories recently of teas and lunches for older persons at churches

But the churches are struggling to find enough to people to serve –

Perhaps we’ve grown blind to who needs to be included…

Back to our story, we notice the servants moving through streets and lanes,

carrying an invitation that feels almost too generous to be true.

With a table filling slowly, unevenly, unexpectedly.

The banquet does not fill itself.

It fills because the invitation keeps being carried.

And that raises a question the parable never answers directly.

Not whether the invitation is generous.

But how it continues to be offered.

Sending servants costs something.

Time. Energy. Commitment. Provision.

A banquet that keeps its doors open must be sustained.

The measure of this banquet is not the beauty of the host’s intention,

but whether the invitation keeps reaching those who have not yet heard.

This is where the work of MHA belongs and where we’re encouraged to join in:

Not outside the story, but within it.

Befriending, chaplaincy, community life – these are not side projects.

They are ways the invitation continues to be carried to people

who would otherwise remain unseen.

But like every act of sending, this work relies on shared commitment.

The work of MHA is always looking for volunteers --

With their befriending service,

With those who pray regularly for the work

– holding before God those who feel lonely,
With those who go out week by week carrying the invitation.
With those who are able to give financially
 to ensure that the invitation keeps being offered,
and that the table remains open to those who have stopped expecting a place.

The banquet in Jesus' parable does not end with perfection.
It ends with fullness.
A table crowded with unexpected guests.
People who did not expect to be there, discovering that the invitation was real after all.

This is the vision of the kingdom Jesus offers.
Not a community formed by similarity, but by welcome.
Not a gathering defined by status, but by grace.

At this table, there are two cups.
The cup poured for us.
And the cup that says: there is room at this table for you too.
May we be people willing to share that second cup.
Willing to pray, to give, and to serve, so that the invitation keeps being offered.
And somewhere, even now, someone who has stopped expecting an invitation
is waiting to hear that it is true.
Let us be people who help carry the invitation. Amen.