

# MHA Sunday Service June 2020



**Call to worship Psalm 66:1-4**

**Hymn (Singing the Faith 76) Give me joy in my heart**

## **Introduction**

Today is MHA Sunday and it is an opportunity to give thanks and reflect on the support given to over 18,500 older people through MHA's care homes, retirement living schemes and community groups. Together with 7,000 staff and over 4,000 volunteers and countless supporters, MHA enables older people are able to live later life well. MHA's vision is for people to find meaning and hope in later life, to tackle loneliness and isolation by facilitating community, and for people to continue to learn and grow in their faith, or indeed rediscover faith. MHA seek do to this through their chaplaincy service, providing spiritual care for residents, their families and for their staff. MHA also provides music therapy for people living with dementia, helping to alleviate the common symptoms of dementia like anxiety. And their work in the community, partnering with the church to reach out in to our communities to ensure that loneliness and isolation does not have to be part of growing old.

## **(Optional video: 'We are MHA')**

The theme this year is kindness, inspired by the kindness of MHA's staff, volunteers and supporters shown daily to those in later life. This coincides with the book of Ruth, where Ruth becomes a blessing to her mother in law, and in turn they both are blessed.

Ruth showed kindness to her mother in law and found blessing in doing so.

There are examples of kindness being shown every day at MHA. We've chosen to focus on two people who we will hear from later. Erika shares how she wanted to do something positive for others. So she volunteered for MHA, giving her time, as well as her skills that she was able to use to set up a dance class and a walking group. Both of which, enable people to later life to live well in the Rothwell area.

She found that in giving in this way, she felt rewarded by seeing the joy that was being brought to others.

We see some of that joy being received by one of MHA's residents, called Ruth, not to be confused with the Ruth in our Bible story. But like Naomi, Ruth became widowed but has found kindness and blessing from MHA volunteers and staff, particularly the chaplain. She found a home, a place to belong. For her it's been

really important to be able to continue with her faith journey and it has been MHA that has enabled her to do that.

Can you think of times over the last week when someone has been kind to you?

Can you remember something kind that you did for someone this week?

What did it feel like to be given kindness?

What did it feel like to show kindness?

Kindness is a choice we make. And it's not always an easy choice; it can sometimes be quite tough. But the more we practice it, the more of a habit it will become. Imagine if everyone showed kindness, imagine what our church would be like, what our community would be like and imagine what school would be like or our work places.

We can pray and ask God to give us opportunity and the strength to show kindness.

### **Opening prayers**

- Adoration

God of all that is, we praise you for your goodness and your kindness that you bestow on your people. Throughout your word we read stories of the lowly being lifted up, the outsiders being included, your love is for all people and knows no bounds. You showed your ultimate love by coming amongst us as one of us, leaving behind all heavenly splendour to experience the joys and hurts, highs and lows, laughter and tears, hopes and disappointments. Yet you remained obedient and full of love, and lived, served and died for us. You were raised from the dead and offer us everlasting life. And so we declare your holiness, majesty and beauty that radiates from all that is around us. And we, along with all creation shout praise to you. Glory, power and praise be given to you O, God.

- Confession

As we recognise your goodness and love, all that you have given to us, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, your continued presence through your Holy Spirit, we recall in our minds the things we do, think and say that fall short of all that you call us to be.

As we reflect on kindness, and remember you and your words, and our experience of the past days, forgive us for times when we have chosen not to be kind, and times when we missed an opportunity to offer kindness. We think of our relationships, those close to us who we let down; those who we might not even know their name but to whom we could have been kinder; the world we inhabit and the needs of this planet and ways in which we have been unkind in caring for it.

*Silence*

Lord forgive us, and renew us in the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you.

- Thanksgiving

We give thanks for your faithfulness to us. For the outpouring of your love and grace and for all that you have promised to us. For your love that has guided us through life, and will continue to be with us. We give thanks for communities of kindness, where all are included and made to feel welcome. We give thanks for individuals who through their words and actions are a blessing to those they meet. We thank you that you call us to be part of your Kingdom in the here and now, and that you choose to work through us so that others too may be blessed.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn (Singing the Faith 256) When I needed a neighbour**

**Reading Ruth 2: 1-13**

*(Optional gospel reading Matthew 5: 1-12)*

**Case studies MHA Video of Ruth and Erika**

**Hymn (Singing the Faith 504) May the mind of Christ my Saviour**

**Sermon**

**Offertory Hymn (Singing the Faith 611) Brother, sister, let me serve you**  
*(offering taken now for the work of MHA or alternatively a retiring collection)*

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord God, we bring before you our prayers for the world. For its leaders and for those people and places where hope is diminished and peace can feel elusive. For...

Lord in Your mercy,

*Hear our prayer.*

We pray for our nation and for our community. We pray for the work of MHA and all who champion the cause of those in later life. We pray for decision makers involved in social care. We give thanks for carers, volunteers and supporters that enable MHA do what it does and has been doing for the past 77 years. We pray for those caring for loved ones at home, give to them strength and patience.

Lord in Your mercy,

*Hear our prayer.*

We pray for the young and old. For those who feel lonely and isolated. We pray for those who are going through great changes. Those starting work, moving home, and those moving in to care homes or retirement living, may they find a sense of belonging. We pray for those who can't keep up with change and who feel lost or disillusioned.

Lord in your mercy,

*Hear our prayer.*

We pray for those who are suffering. For those who are widowed, for families who have lost a loved one. For those who are frail and in need, and for those who struggle to get the care they need. We pray for those in our community and those known to us...

Lord in your mercy,

*Hear our prayer.*

Lord God, hear our prayers, for those spoken and those on our hearts. May you show us how to be an answer to our prayers, may you use us as catalysts of your love, blessing and kindness to others.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

### **Hymn (Singing the Faith 51) Great is thy faithfulness**

#### **Blessing**

May the blessing of the God of Ruth and Naomi, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with us now and always.

Send us out equipped by your Spirit to live out your blessing and kindness.

In the name of Christ,  
Amen.

## Sermon

There is so much in life that we don't have control over, like the weather. There's so much that happens to people, to you and me, all the time that aren't under our control.

We grow old, we can't control that. Even so, there is huge business for those who want to buy into looking younger. No matter how much we spend, or how many products we use, we grow old and at some point in our lives we rely on other people to help us.

One thing we all welcome, and one thing we can all choose to give, is kindness. When you pass a stranger, give them a smile. Or help someone carry their shopping, or let someone out in front of you when you are driving, or buying a homeless person a hot drink.

There are so many daily, small acts of kindness, and when we see it, it gives us hope against the backdrop of continuous bad news stories that fill our screens. There are ordinary people, all of the time, going out of their way to show kindness to others.

Kindness is not only a good thing to do, it has other benefits too.

Studies have shown that if you perform just one random act of kindness a day you will not only reduce your stress, anxiety and depression but your body is flooded with the same hormones that make you and the person you helped calmer, healthier and happier.

The story of Ruth is about kindness, it is about being a blessing, but in turn being blessed.

We heard from Erika earlier, someone else who has chosen to give her time to help those in later life. 'Where you go, I will go...' She herself understood loneliness and isolation as she felt this after moving back to the UK, so she could recognise and see others in her community experiencing the same. Using her skills to help bring older people together and help them find community. And in so doing she found her own community, but also finds blessing as she sees people who might otherwise be lonely and isolated themselves become relaxed as they come through the doors, with a smile on their faces.

In the book of Ruth, Naomi, Ruth's mother in law, had moved to Moab from Judah with her husband and two sons. Her husband died and so Naomi was left with her

two sons, who both married - Ruth and Orpah. Ten years on, the sons died too. Naomi chooses then to go home back to Judah.

Ruth, Orpah and Naomi become widows. Now in ancient times being widowed brings with it a great deal of vulnerability. As such the Torah taught that widows ought to be treated with honour and compassion and offered protection so that no one takes advantage of them.

In ancient times if a widow has no heir to carry on the family line then not only does she have no husband to provide for her and protect her, but there is no one to care for her in old age. She may have even been considered a disgrace to her family and left in a precarious position.

God recognises the widow's plight and rises to her defence. In Psalm 68:5 it says, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling". How blessed will the orphaned and the widowed be in God's house.

Naomi says to her daughters-in-law to go back to their families, to return home and kisses them goodbye. Orpah returns home, back to her family, back to her own country, her own culture. But Ruth decides to stay with Naomi, going to a foreign land, choosing a way of life where there is no recognition, no promise of a better future and she goes as far as saying to her mother-in-law; "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth 1:16.

What an amazing statement, what powerful words of commitment and loyalty. She didn't owe Naomi anything; she didn't need to say that. But, in saying that, in her condition is even more powerful, so kind, so loving. Here is a grieving young woman, choosing to honour, care for, and be with her older, widowed, mother-in-law.

Earlier we heard the story of a different Ruth, an MHA retirement living resident who became widowed, and like Naomi also experienced her own homecoming. Because of the warmth and the kindness of the staff, volunteers and the chaplain, she immediately felt a sense of belonging that she was home, this is where God wanted her to be. She feels so blessed that she is able to keep touch with her faith and believes that God has led her to that place, and she wants to give something back, baking for others and flower arranging for example. She knows blessing because of her faith but also because of the kindness that has been given to her, through the care she receives, the community she has found, and in turn she is a blessing to others.

Back to the Ruth we read about in the Bible, at harvest time, widows, together with foreigners and the fatherless, could glean in the fields of grain and gather left overs. Deuteronomy 24:19, "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands".

Ruth is a widow and a foreigner, and it is through this act of gleaning that Ruth is introduced to Boaz. Boaz as it turns out is a distant relative of Naomi. We see in the reading that Boaz is acting according to the law laid out in Deuteronomy, but more than that, he has taken a deeper interest in Ruth. He shows abundant kindness to Ruth. And as we go through the short book of Ruth, we know that Ruth marries Boaz, they have a child Obed, who becomes the father of Jesse, who becomes the father of David and the line follows to Jesus (Matthew 1).

What an amazing story! A desolate widow Naomi is offered unswerving and selfless devotion by her widowed daughter-in-law, and kindness is bestowed upon them by Boaz. Individuals are blessed and become a blessing to others. Blessed and are a blessing.

For Naomi she moves from despair to happiness, from emptiness to fullness, from destitution to security and hope.

MHA's hope is to see people moving from loneliness into community, finding a sense of belonging. Whether that is part of a community group, in one of the care homes or retirement living to live later life with hope and meaning.

Each of us can know something of that blessing which Naomi experiences, through our own relationship with God and one another in the life of our church and in our communities. There is great joy in knowing that you are blessed.

Each of us is known, loved and held by a kind and gracious God, who seeks us out and calls us by our name. A God who shows us through Ruth, that being part of the kingdom of God is not decided by your birth, or your parents, but it is through joining in with God's purpose and will. That in that joining in, we can know blessing and be a blessing.

Ruth - young, foreign, destitute, a widow.

Boaz - middle aged, well to do Israelite, securely established in his home community.

Both offering themselves in selfless acts of kindness, through their blessing of Naomi, in their care for her, and as she journeys from emptiness to fullness. Ruth and Boaz too find blessing themselves becoming part of the genealogy of Jesus.

MHA staff and thousands of volunteers and supporters give blessings every day of the year to those in later life, to those who feel lonely, to those who are frail, and those who are confused. For over 75 years, MHA have sought to bless those in later life, through the care they give, in supporting their spiritual needs through chaplaincy, through music therapy for people living with dementia, and through facilitating and reducing loneliness and isolation in our communities.

In so doing people like Erika, and thousands like her find themselves and those being served, like MHA's Ruth, blessed.

Through your support of MHA you become part of this blessing too.

We are blessed, we become a blessing.

This MHA Sunday, will you join in having an impact on those in later life?

What blessing can you be today?

What act of kindness might you choose to do?

Could you hold someone's hand in their time of great need?

You might choose to pick up the phone to an elderly relative, or pop in to see a neighbour living on their own.

Will you also consider supporting MHA – through a donation, either as a one off or a regular donation. Or even as a gift in your Will, through giving your time by volunteering at your local home or scheme, or by becoming a representative and championing MHA in your church and community.

There are so many ways to be a blessing to those in our families, in our churches, and in our communities who are lonely, and in need. There are plenty of Naomi's out there, wanting to move from emptiness to fullness, wanting a friend, wanting someone's hand to hold through difficult times, wanting somewhere to belong.

What part can you play in showing God's blessing to those in need?

May we know the blessing of the God of Ruth and Naomi, and may we be a blessing to others by what we do and what we are able to give.

Amen.