

HIDDEN RIVER CIRCUIT DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES

Edition 13: SEPTEMBER 2025

Please take these articles week by week and read them slowly and reflectively, and may your life be enriched by God and by His Spirit who helps us understand more about God's love and presence. We welcome our new Superintendent minister Rev Gary Hall and his wife Fiona to our Hidden River World. We ask God to shower us all with blessings as we seek to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in every way we can.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this September edition

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Week 1: 7th SEPTEMBER 2025: FORGET ME NOT

A Reflection by Joanne Clarke, Worship Leader at Pelsall Methodist Church

In late June, I was preparing a service that mum and I were going to deliver at Shelfield Methodist Church together. Alas, it was not to be. Mum and I found comfort in discussing the service even from her hospital bed – a good distraction for us at the time. I find comfort in it now as I can read her handwritten notes, hear her voice echo in the words and of course the theme of it was as the heading says – forget me not, and I will certainly never forget my wonderful mum. I have prepared a short part of the service we prepared for a devotional as it seemed a fitting tribute to my mum whose faith was so central to her life. The prayer was written solely by mum for the prayers of intercession for that service.

Reading Luke 17: 11-19 Jesus Heals Ten Men With Leprosy

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy^[a] met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Ten men were healed but only one was so grateful and praising God for what happened that he went back to Jesus, knelt at his feet and thanked him. The other nine were nowhere to be seen.

They had what they wanted and forgot (or maybe didn’t think it was necessary) to go back and say thank you. How many times have you had a prayer answered? Did you remember to say thank you?

Sometimes it is easy to be caught up, forget or perhaps not even realise an answer to prayer because we are distracted by the next thing, in a rush to get on. We don’t always take time to take stock and count our blessings. Easier to moan about our woes as we go along instead.

Mum remembered to me an answered prayer when she was part of a youth group at church called the Questers. She said that she naively prayed to test God asking for someone to come and talk to her about becoming a true Christian. Moments later one of the Quester leaders Christine knocked on her door saying that she had a sudden feeling she should visit. Mum said that she was always grateful for that prayer answered as it became the foundation of her lifelong faith.

Christians are privileged to be able look at life through not rose-tinted glasses but ‘God tinted’ glasses; seeking God first, putting service for others first, being grateful, remembering what we should prioritise in life. As those of us who wear glasses know all too well, the challenge can sometimes be remembering where we left them!

What reminds you of God and keeps Him close to you? Quiet places perhaps, the cross on the church wall, looking at creation, sitting on a mountain top or in a beautiful garden. Times of reflecting on His love, guidance and grace.

In our gardens there is a little flower often looked upon as a weed – the forget me not. Its name means ‘true love, hope and remembrance.’ We need to remember the Lord because He still pleads to us all today – forget me not. God is our true love – unconditional, everlasting love. He is our hope – He will bring light into our darkness. His light will never be put out. He is worthy of our remembrance – we remember all He has done for us, His sacrifice, His blessings, His promises.

I am privileged that faith in God is so engrained in the memories of my mum that I will always be led back to God wherever my life takes me by my mum’s love for me. As gardening was one of her passions in life, flowers like forget me nots will always remind me of her; I will be reminded of her true love, the hope she inspired and I will be encouraged to remember to put on my God tinted glasses. Amen

Prayer

Lord of all hopefulness we thank you that no one can destroy our trust in you. You are there constantly supporting and guiding us at the start of every day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith we dare to ask for your strength and grace to see us through our day.

Lord of all kindness, you welcome everyone. There are no barriers with you. May we pray that we too can find love in our own hearts for everyone we meet. Never judging and criticising.

Lord of all gentleness, may we know and feel your peace and calm. Be contented in our tasks for you, willing to take up the challenges that face our church family.

Lord of all, we know areas of the world that have no peace, innocent people are made homeless, children are orphaned, people have lost loved ones. The world seems to have lost its conscience and direction in solving issues that bring pain and hostility.

So we pray for the leaders of governments and politicians that a better way to live is developed, harmony and not division.

Lord of all we bring to you the people on our hearts – our friends and family and within our church fellowship within the Hidden River Circuit. In a moment of quiet, we bring them to you.

May the people on our hearts and ourselves feel the hope of knowing that you love us and feel your presence in every situation – both bad and good.

Lord of all we pray for our ministers and local preachers and worship leaders in the Hidden River Circuit. May they continue to be led by your holy spirit in their worship preparations to praise and glorify your holy name and lead us all forwards in fellowship.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn Singing the Faith 81

1. Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love
and still is ours today.

2. O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills,
in this world, and the next.

3. All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The son and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore,
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart

WEEK 2: September 14th: “You’re Free!”

A Reflection by Karen Drayton, Local Preacher

Luke 13. 10-17, 31-33

I love this passage – the story of the woman Jesus healed after 18 years of being bent over - being unfolded, standing straight and tall and full of courage and self-esteem and confidence.

Jesus says to her– “Woman, You’re free!”

Can we imagine her joy, her sense of wonder, her delight and disbelief, her gratefulness as the fact of her liberation becomes real? Can we feel her unfolding, finding her proper view of life?

Apart from the usual confusion and debate about – why don’t we see this type of miraculous healing so often now? -metaphorically it is a lovely image for what Jesus wants to help us be.

The healing of the woman who was bent over for eighteen years represents the coming of the Kingdom of God – a person liberated from the cares of the world, a distorted view of life, able to stand tall and free and confident in her body, feeling known and loved by God, whether bent over or standing tall.

Surely this is our goal – to help all people to be as God meant them to be, including ourselves.

We know what **is** good, what is right and true and lovely.

We hate news of the war in the Ukraine, and Gaza and Sudan, of the senseless cruelty and untimely deaths, the greed for land and power and possession.

We know what **could** be good and right and true and lovely.

The cessation of war, the rebuilding of communities, the acknowledgement of land rights and the right to work and grow and develop and study in peace.

Jesus knew what his goal was, his plan for healing and peace for all people.

At the end of this passage some good Pharisees (they weren’t all bad – despite the negative press they get in the Bible) ran to Jesus and said – “Herod is out to get you! You’ve got to leave!”. But Jesus said – I’m too busy to leave – I am healing people and driving out demons today and tomorrow and on the third day I will die in Jerusalem.

Jesus had a plan – first 30 years of living life in obscurity, observing the world around him and how people behaved,, then 3 years to demonstrate what he believed in, knowing that his story would not go unremarked, but puzzled over and imitated, and then leaving the world to his disciples.

So he had two more days of demonstration of how to bring in the kingdom of God, of destroying the obstacles in the way of bringing in the Kingdom of God, then leaving it to all his followers to carry on... for all the years ahead.

I have been working on and off in India for the last three years, and today’s thinking has made me consider the plan we are working on in India. Maybe we can learn from Jesus way of working? We too have a goal that I believe is aligned with the goals of the Kingdom of God – to improve the care of women in pregnancy and childbirth, and to reduce the number of babies dying in the first month of life.

We too have spent a lot of time observing the current situation, and we too have been looking at all the obstacles in the way of keeping them alive – finding out - why did they die? Where did they die? How did they die?

Most of the deaths happen in the first 24 hours of life – either during labour, at birth, or soon after. They are either born too soon and have complications of prematurity, they have difficulties breathing immediately after birth, or they soon get infections – sepsis.

So we have considered all the reasons that contribute to bad outcomes, and try and mitigate them. Why does everyone – nurses, doctors, birth companions, the family, and the woman herself - want to speed up birth so much with artificial drugs? (Because no one believes women these days can give birth anymore without this “help”) Why does no one understand how harmful this and other bad practices of speeding up birth is for the baby? (because health professionals copy others’ practices and no one believes in evidence based practice... because nurses can buy a certificate without ever attending a nursing college...because nurses and doctors don’t choose these professions because they want to look after people, but because they can make a living out of it). Mainly, it is because it is **nearly** impossible to get people to change their behaviour!

In our Bible story this morning we find another reason for a lack of good health– it is the Sabbath and rigid Jewish religious ruling says that people cannot be healed on the Sabbath....

The president of the synagogue says furiously– to the crowd !! – he is too scared to speak to Jesus face to face – there are 6 days to get healed – why did you heal this woman on the sabbath? But the woman maybe was part of the congregation, she probably came every week, to praise God despite her infirmity.... Jesus finds a way to turn this around, he challenges their way of looking at women and care and what the Sabbath is for. “You want better for your animals than what you want for this woman!” You can be sure that president of the synagogue would expect some nursing care on a Sabbath if he was laid low with disease and fever! He would expect more than 6 days a week care if he was sick !

Jesus was adamant that nothing should come in the way of helping people into the Kingdom of God. Let’s keep observing the places we live in, to find the obstacles that stop people becoming the people they could be, as God intended, and pray and work that all may rejoice in being part of the Kingdom of God.

Singing the Faith Hymn 255 by Bryn Rees

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|---|---|
| 1. The Kingdom of God is justice and joy | 3. The Kingdom of God is challenge and choice |
| For Jesus restores what sin would destroy; | Believe the good news, repent and rejoice! |
| God’s power and glory in Jesus we know, | His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross |
| And here and hereafter the Kingdom shall grow. | Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss |
| 2. The Kingdom of God is mercy and grace, | 3. God’s Kingdom is come, the gift and the goal, |
| The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place, | In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole; |
| The outcast are welcomed, God’s banquet to share, | The heirs of the Kingdom shall answer his call |
| And hope is awakened in place of despair. | And all things cry glory, to God all in all! |

WEEK 3: September 21st FOOT WASHING AND INTERNATIONAL TOWEL DAY

A Reflection by Pete Kelsall, Local Preacher

Reading Gospel John 13:1-17

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

There are many International Days to be observed - by those who care to – and International Towel day is one of them. It's observed as a tribute to Douglas Adams the writer, especially to remember his trilogy in five parts, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Yes, I know a trilogy has three parts but this one has five. This started out as a radio series, then became a series of books and has been made into at least one film.

The story is about two friends who end up having adventures in space. A man called Arthur and his friend who turns out to be from a star system many light years away. Arthur finds out early in the adventures that having a towel with you is important. A towel has many uses. As Douglas Adams describes in his work:

"You can wrap it around you for warmth as you bound across the cold moons of Jaglan Beta; you can lie on it on the brilliant marble-sanded beaches of Santraginus V, inhaling the heady sea vapours; you can sleep under it beneath the stars which shine so redly on the desert world of Kakrafoon; use it to sail a miniraft down the slow heavy River Moth; wet it for use in hand-to-hand-combat; wrap it round your head to ward off noxious fumes or avoid the gaze of the Ravenous Bugblatter Beast of Traal (such a mind-bogglingly stupid animal, it assumes that if you can't see it, it can't see you); you can wave your towel in emergencies as a distress signal, and of course dry yourself off with it if it still seems to be clean enough." (Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams)

Our gospel reading today has the only mention of a towel in the Bible, but what a significant event that is. The symbol of total servitude; Jesus, dressed in undergarments, wrapped with a towel that he used to dry the feet he'd just washed.

Jesus washed the feet of those who had walked with him for around three years. Up and down the country, over borders, into places of welcome and places where they were scorned, into the homes of the wealthy and the squalid back streets, through paved city avenues and dusty country tracks.

Jesus washed the feet of all those around the table. Some were bemused, some were outraged but Jesus washed their feet anyway. Jesus even washed the feet of the one who was about to betray him.

And then, Jesus had a question: "Do you understand what I have done for you?"

It's a good question to stop and consider. Do we understand what Jesus has done for us? It's easy to drop into a regular way of doing things and even the determinedly Christian activities in our days, the times we stop to pray or read the Bible or listen to some worship music or join in with a Bible study or a church service – these can become routine. These activities, however good, can become the things we do at particular times and in particular ways.

So pause for a moment and consider afresh, what do you understand that Jesus has done for you? There will be all sorts of answers to that. I hope, you can identify so many different ways Jesus has been alongside you at different times in life. We can identify what Jesus has done for each of us on a cosmic, eternal scale. We are saved our sins can be forgiven. And on an intimate, personal level we are welcomed into the family as sisters and brothers. I hope you can also identify occasions when you have seen prayers answered, problems dissolved, unplanned meetings with people that turned out to be so good for both of you.

Every time we approach Jesus to ask or to pray for someone or something, we should recognise that he has made a way possible for us to do that. Jesus has opened up the way for each of us to approach him, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, through whom all things are created, seen and unseen. This Jesus accepts us as friends and washes us free of the sin and mistakes of day-to-day life, just as he washed the feet of his disciples. They were his disciples so they did not need that life changing full bath wash down of baptism again. As we are, they were already alongside Jesus, aligned to doing his will, but their feet needed to be washed.

And Jesus clothed himself with a towel, the symbol of a servant. So let us think about how we present ourselves as Christians. As Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

We may not be called upon to wash feet. But we are often in a position to listen with a caring heart, to share our time or space or possessions with others, to consider others before ourselves and be gentle with those who are feeling fragile, taking time to show love and support. For that is how Jesus treats us and how, through us, Jesus will treat other people.

So maybe when you're drying pots or after washing your hands and you have a towel in your hands, remember that right there you hold a wonderful reminder of Jesus' servant heart that he longs to share with us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago you walked the paths we walk. You walked amongst your people, seeing need and reaching out, bringing healing and wholeness, comfort and release.

We bring our prayers for those we encounter as we walk hopefully and in your steps. For those who we meet face to face, those who we had planned to meet and those we encounter unexpectedly. For those we hear of near and far, and those for whom life is not plain sailing, comfortable or care free. We bring our prayers for those whose situations and needs challenge and change us, and for those who stir us out of our comfort zone as we step out in faith.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer **Amen**

Hymn from Singing the Faith 249: A song from North Ghana

Jesu. Jesu, fill us with your love

Show us how to serve

The neighbours we have from you

1. Kneels at the feet of his friends

Silently washes their feet,

Master who acts as a slave to them.

2. Neighbours are rich folk and poor,

Neighbours are black folk and white

Neighbours are nearby and far away.

3. These are the ones we should serve,

These are the ones we should love

All these are neighbours to us and you.

4. Kneel at the feet of our friends

Silently washing their feet,

This is the way we should live with you.

WEEK 4: September 28th 2025: MAMMON

A Reflection by Mike Smith, Local Preacher in the Hidden River Circuit

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|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Scripture: Luke | ch 12 vv 13-21 | The Rich Fool |
| | ch 16 vv 10-13 | Jesus warns about Greed |
| | ch 16 vv 19-31 | The Rich Man and the Beggar |

How much is a woman worth?

Not an acceptable question in today's culture! However it was seriously asked in past times, and often in crude terms of her "sale value": what would a man pay to a girl's father, in property or service, to possess the woman as his wife (and thereby as his property!)? Genesis chapter 29 relates how Jacob met and fell in love with Rachel; her father Laban was a prosperous sheep farmer and agreed to give Rachel to Jacob in return for seven years' service. After the seven years, the wedding took place, but Jacob discovered he had been tricked into marrying Rachel's elder sister Leah, and angrily went to have it out with Laban. The father asked Jacob to go through with the marriage with the elder daughter Leah, and offered Jacob an immediate second marriage to Rachel, only on condition that he "signed on" for a further seven years for her - a trade which Jacob happily accepted! The two ladies were not consulted!

Before the invention of money as we know it, trading was usually done by bartering, exchange of one form of goods or services for another; this was OK until merchants found that receiving payment in the form of a herd of sheep was not always convenient! It was much better to carry a few lumps of precious metal in your purse, which you could then use to buy other goods and services – including wives! Jane Austen reminds us that as late as the 18th century a woman in “civilised” Britain was unable to vote, or be anything much other than dependent upon a man for economic stability; for most, in the middle classes at least, the recognised route to respectability was via a “good marriage” or to remain supported by other male relatives (i.e. those who had money).

All of which brings us to the concept of our title: “Mammon”. The word appears only rarely in the New Testament. Borrowed from the Aramaic language, it simply means “money”, but money in itself is neither good nor bad and is not the problem; however, in the teaching of Jesus, Mammon acquires a sense of “wrongness” – the power that money has to become an obsession with some people – often at a ruinous cost to themselves and to others. St. Paul uses the Greek word *philarguría*, a relentless pursuit of wealth for its own sake: “Those who want to be rich fall into temptations and snares and into many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction. The *love of money* is the root of all evil, and in pursuit of it some have wandered and spiked themselves on many a painful thorn. (1 Timothy ch 6 vv 9-10)

Once upon a time I came across a poster, one of a series of provocative bits of (alleged) wisdom you could buy and hang in your den. This one was a picture of a magnificent mansion with a majestic sweeping approach driveway, on which was parked a gleaming Rolls-Royce. The caption beneath read: “I’ve been poor, I’ve been rich. Rich is better”. Really? Well, up to a point, perhaps; there is nothing good about being so poor that you are underpaid, undervalued, undernourished, unhealthy and unable to better yourself; but beyond that point, we need to ask an important question: **How much is “enough”?** There is a major problem with the way the earth’s resources are shared out, and the problem is caused by the people who don’t know when they have enough. The vast personal fortunes owned by some people (the “oligarchy”, “rule of the few”) must have come from somewhere, and the answer to that is that the absurdly wealthy are often so because many others are having to go without. In his parable about the Rich Fool, Jesus is not condemning the man for being rich – he has presumably worked hard to gain a just profit – but he is a fool because he did not recognise the point at which he had enough; greed took over from industry, the kind of greed that explains why human society consists of a few winners and many, many losers. The parable of the rich man and the beggar at his gate is a story too often repeated; even Jesus knew this is part of the human condition which will not be changed easily: “You will always have poor people with you” he told his disciples.

Wealth, as such, is neither good nor bad, and Money itself, honestly acquired and wisely spent, is a useful, convenient and necessary means to a comfortable life, and is recognised (especially in the Old Testament) as one of God’s blessings. (See, for example, Job ch 42 v 12!) So why does Jesus warn us against it? Reading his words we become aware of his reasoning:

Firstly, money doesn’t keep its promise of happiness. People may pin their hopes on a big lottery win or a tempting scheme to make a “fast buck” in the belief that a win would be a dream come true, ending all worries and allowing freedom to follow any desired pathway to pleasure and self-indulgence. But the Rich Fool is actually missing the point of his life: he has neglected the things that are good for

his “soul” – true inner peace that comes from realising he has enough and can also afford to be generous to his neighbours. Instead he has nothing worthwhile to show for his life when it comes to judgement. In our own society, the advertising media are continually feeding us with the idea that being rich is the key to happiness, and too many people are like Oscar Wilde’s cynic, who “knows the price of everything and the value of nothing”.

Secondly, in the race to become wealthy, a person will find many competitors – “where thieves break through and steal”; the wealthy man makes more enemies and often they include people he thought were his friends. The quest for wealth attracts some of the cleverest and cruellest of criminals – scammers, burglars and crooked traders make a profession of taking away the earnings of honest people. Often this is carried out on a grand scale too. In 2020 the statue of Edward Colston was torn from its plinth and thrown into Bristol harbour by protesters: the statue had been erected to honour the memory of a wealthy supposed philanthropist who gave large amounts of money to charitable causes. What motivated the protesters was the fact that Colston made his fortune as Deputy Governor of the Royal Africa Company in the 17th century – a company whose business was the forced transportation and sale of black slaves from their African home to work in the plantations of the colonies in America. The controversial act of protest came as an uncomfortable reminder that the prosperity of us, the British people, was substantially built on black slave labour. Promenaders sing enthusiastically on the famous Last Night, “God, who made thee mighty, Make thee mightier yet”; perhaps they are now more cautious about celebrating the history of our “land of hope and glory”. Across the world, national leaders past and present may speak of “liberation” or “the spread of civilisation”, but the truth is that every time a country is invaded by another, the motive of the invader is to use conquest to acquire the natural resources of the invaded country for its own use, and thereby become wealthier at the expense of others. There, too, is Mammon.

One final thought. The rich man who ignored the need of the beggar at his gate ends up in the fiery torment of Hell. Thinking people have sometimes asked whether the idea of Hell is consistent with the idea of a loving and forgiving God. But nowhere does Jesus suggest that God “sends” people to Hell as a sentence for their sins. The truth is that Hell is the inevitable, *self-imposed* consequence when a person is wilfully determined to call evil good and good evil, and thus put himself or herself beyond the possibility of forgiveness – the sin against the Holy Spirit (see Mark ch 3 vv 28-30). The torment begins when a bad person finally becomes totally aware of what he or she has done to damage the lives of other people – and is it maybe possible that, in the perfect justice and mercy of God, this belated and painful remorse is what, for some at least, saves their eternal soul from being written off forever?

Reflection

Heal your children’s warring madness;
Bend our pride to your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
Lest we miss your kingdom’s goal.

Harry Emerson Fosdick
Hymns & Palms 712
Singing the Faith 682