

HIGHAM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Annual Civic Service

held on Saturday 21st September, 2024, *World Gratitude Day*



As you know, our church held a service on 21 September to celebrate and say thank you to people like you who contribute so much to our well being and to the sense of belonging and community in our village.

We are sorry that you were unable to join us for this celebration. We do not wish you to miss out on the way in which the service sought to recognise and appreciate your service to the community. We are, therefore, enclosing the Order of Service for the event, along with the text of the prayer of thanks that was offered in gratitude for all those who work tirelessly to help make this corner of the world a better place. We also include a brief summary of the sermon on the importance of being thankful.

Thank you for all that you do to serve and bless our village. We very much hope that you will be able to join us on future occasions.

Rev'd Peter Michell and David Mead

October 2024

<https://highamcongregationalchurch.org>

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Annual Civic Service

held on

World Gratitude Day, 21st September, 2024^{AD}

Father, we thank You for the opportunity to gather today to acknowledge the service given to our community by so many unseen and unrecognised organisations and people. God, we honour and recognise that everyone who works and serves their community is actually emulating your amazing acts of grace and love described in the Bible. *Jesus, we thank You.*

In the very act of creation, God, You brought order out of chaos. Father, we pray for all those who are working in our community in ways to bring order from chaos: for mental health nurses, firefighters, police and paramedics, intervening in difficult and chaotic situations. Jesus, we ask that You would provide them the strength and resilience that they need in each and every situation. *Jesus, we thank You.*

In the provision of night and day, land and sea, plants and crops, God, You provided for the needs of the very first people. Jesus, we lift to You all those who work to supply and provide our basic needs; farmers, supermarket logistics staff, shop workers, publicans, lorry drivers, and those who maintain power stations and essential infrastructure that keeps our lives moving, even those who manage the flows of data that we now rely on so much. God, may each individual remember that they are known by You, loved by You and valued by us as a community who rely on their service. *Jesus, we thank You.*

We pray for all those who create joy in our world, through creative arts, support and encouragement, those who visit the elderly or housebound, bringing smiles and relief from the mundane aspects of life. In the same way that You brought joy to Adam by ensuring that he was not alone, Jesus, we thank You for all of the societies and community groups that build relationships and invest into young people, and old, teaching hobbies, life skills and bringing pleasure. May Your creativity flow through them and Your joy be seen in their smiles. *Jesus, we thank You.*

We also pray for all those who preserve our world, working to cultivate and preserve beauty. Tending the garden was a God given task and Jesus we thank You for the ways in which we see people volunteer to tend the world we enjoy, restoring buildings and structures, keeping traditions alive and tending to green spaces for all of us to enjoy. For those working outside cutting grass, mending walls, and fences or tending gardens, we ask that they are equipped for each situation they face and safe as they work. *Jesus, we thank You.*

Lastly, we pray for those who enable a future seed to grow, for teachers, school and college staff, those involved in adult education and such groups as the Scouts and Boys Brigade, for those who serve in the council as councillors and officers who seek to facilitate the growth of a healthier, safer, more educated and better community for the future. We pray that they would be inspired and strengthened in their service, able to weather the difficult moments for the sake of a greater future. Jesus, may they in some sense emulate You, the one who gave His today on the cross to provide a tomorrow for all who would accept Your death, resurrection and forgiveness. Truly we pray together.... *Jesus, we thank You.*

Graeme Baldwin, *Chairman of Churches Together Gravesham*

Hymn

All people that on earth do dwell,

sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell,

come ye before Him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed;

without our aid He did us make;

we are His folk, He doth us feed,

and for His sheep He doth us take.

Oh, enter then His gates with praise,

approach with joy His courts unto:

praise, laud, and bless His name always,

for it is seemly so to do.

For why? the Lord our God is good,

His mercy is for ever sure;

His truth at all times firmly stood,

and shall from age to age endure.

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,

the God whom heaven and earth adore,

from men and from the angel-host

be praise and glory evermore. Amen.

W Kethe, Daye's Psalter, 1560

OLD HUNDRETH

The Gospel Luke 17:12-19

Hymn

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:

*Father, unto Thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and brain's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild:

For each perfect gift of Thine
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

F S Pierpoint, 1864

ENGLAND'S LANE

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession followed by

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

The Epistle 1 Thessalonians 5:16-23

Hymn

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

Teach me some melodious measure,
sung by flaming tongues above.
O the vast, the boundless treasure
of my Lord's unchanging love.

Here I find my Ebenezer;
hither by Thy help I've come;
and I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
interposed His precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy grace Lord, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to Thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it from Thy courts above.

Robert Robinson, 1758

NETTLETON

Sermon

Prayer of response

Hymn

My heart is filled with thankfulness

to Him who bore my pain;
Who plumbed the depths of my disgrace
and gave me life again.
Who crushed my curse of sinfulness,
and clothed me with His light,
and wrote His law of righteousness
with power upon my heart.

My heart is filled with thankfulness

to Him who walks beside;
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
and causes fears to fly;
Whose every promise is enough
for every step I take,
sustaining me with arms of love
and crowning me with grace.

My heart is filled with thankfulness

to Him who reigns above;
Whose wisdom is my perfect peace,
Whose every thought is love.
For every day I have on earth
is given by the King.
So I will give my life, my all,
to love and follow Him.

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, 2003

Thanksgiving & Doxology

Benediction

Thank you for sharing with us in this service of thanksgiving. Please join us in partaking of refreshments in the hall following the service.

Gratitude

A summary of the sermon preached by the Rev'd Peter Michell at the Annual Civic Service, on 21st September, 2024^{AD}, World Gratitude Day.

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 Thessalonians 5¹⁸)

There are particular days devoted to charitable causes and areas of concern, not to mention individual saints who have their own day. It is fortuitous that today is *World Gratitude Day*. We have this needed prompt to be thankful.

Our national culture sometimes seems to be one of grumbling. Whatever our conversation, we are capable of being negative. We complain about the weather, whatever it might be like; our talk about the economy is gloomy; we speak of contemporary morality and the state of the church with despair. Nothing is right. We whinge and grumble.

In contrast, the culture commended in the Bible is one of thankfulness. The Psalms are full of ***“His mercies endure forever”***. Even the Lamentations of Jeremiah include the words, ***His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*** The story of the gospels begins with the Magnificat: ***My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*** The apostles were imprisoned for the faith, but they rejoiced and sang praises to God. Paul exhorts us to be thankful, not least in our text: ***In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God.***

Strikingly, the Apostle Paul speaks of being ***in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*** and identifies a feature of the crooked and perverse generation as ***murmuring***. We are to be in contrast with the world about us by not whinging. The darkness of this world is evident in **grumbling**; the light of Christ is in **gratitude**.

What should we do? Let there be thankfulness with:

1. People Let us make a point of thanking people. The purpose of the Civic Service is for us to thank those who serve the community. So many labour tirelessly to benefit others and to make the village all that it is. Daily, let us pause and go out of our way to thank people we meet and who are around us. For example, had you ever thought of thanking the man who puts up a barrier closing the road? Albeit at the cost of minimal inconvenience to you, he is serving the community, effecting some repair or improvement. Surprise people by just thanking them for what they are doing for the village.

2. Practice When we are bombarded with negative messages on every side, we need to make a point of nurturing and expressing gratitude. It is worth, at the end of each day, recording, in some form, the good experiences and what has brought help, encouragement, and joy. *Count your many blessings; name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.* The exercise will develop a habit of gratitude.

3. Prayer This point I *must* add, given that the verse before our text reads ***Pray without ceasing.*** If you pray, you will have reason to thank the Lord. If you pray earnestly, He will answer, perhaps in remarkable ways, and gratitude will rise within you. If you pray without ceasing, you will perpetually have cause to thank the Lord.

By definition, Christians will be grateful. We have asked the Lord to own us as His people, to forgive us and to help us. All of that He has done and more. We cannot help but be thankful. We come to Holy Communion – the Eucharist, which simply means thanksgiving – and partaking of the bread and wine, we are so grateful that Christ's body and blood is given for us.

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. This is God's will: be thankful – *in everything.*