



Sunday 12th July 2020

Call to Worship

The Lord sows his seed among us, but do we let it root and grow?
The Lord provides us with all we need, but what is the harvest we yield?
As we hear Christ's message let us welcome it with joy that it may take root within us and yield a rich and plentiful harvest.

A Prayer of Approach

We draw near to Jesus; Lord we are listening
We calm ourselves and prepare; Lord we are listening
We seek to root out the debris of our lives; Lord we are listening
We cast aside the weeds that would choke your seed; Lord we are listening
We seek to root your word deep within us; Lord we are listening

Amen

Hymn: StF 685 In Christ there is no east or west

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3TiiH1nV17w>

In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

Join hands then all the human race,
whate'er your nation be;
all children of the living God
are surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north;
all Christlike souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

John Oxenham, pseud. (1852-1941)

Let us pray together

When the seeds of new life are sown, let us praise the Lord.
When crops ripen in the field, let us exalt our maker.
When the wind blows, or the snow falls, let us draw close to God.
Lord, for all your gifts in creation, for the gift of each other and the gift of the Church we offer our thanks.
Most of all for the gift of Jesus who went about among us as teacher and friend, who lived, died, and rose again we offer our deepest gratitude and amazement. In Jesus' name. Amen.
Let us take a time of quiet to bring to mind the ways in which we feel we have let God or ourselves down during the last week...

Lord, when we are slow to listen, forgive us.
Lord, when we are hasty in our actions, forgive us.
Lord, for the things we have done, that we should not have done, forgive us.
Lord, for the things we have not done, that we should have done, forgive us.
Rejoice, for in Christ we know our sins are forgiven. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Today's Reading from the New Testament: Romans 8.1-11 - Life in the Spirit

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 13.1-9 & 18-23 - The Parable of the Sower

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'



“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Hymn: StF 553 I am a new creation

I am a new creation,
no more in condemnation,
here in the grace of God I stand.
My heart is over-flowing,
my love just keeps on growing,
here in the grace of God I stand.
*And I will praise you, Lord,
yes, I will praise you, Lord,
and I will sing of all that you have done.
A joy that knows no limit,
a lightness in my spirit —
here in the grace of God I stand.*

Dave Bilborough (b. 1965)

Time to Reflect

Over the last few months, we have begun to look at the world in a new way. Certainties are no longer as certain as they once were. This time last year no one imagined being in lockdown, although the possibility of a serious virus pandemic was not unimagined.

When I read the parable afresh the first thing I noticed was that for his own safety, and perhaps in order to be better seen, Jesus gets into a boat and puts some distance between himself and the crowd. The Bible does not tell us if it was more than 2 metres! Jesus sits down to teach indicating his authority to teach. Jesus takes practical steps to be heard and communicates in ways the crowd were used to and addressed them in ways they would understand. The image of a sower was common in first century Palestine.

And when the seed is scattered not all of it bears fruit, some falls on the path or on stony ground. Some is in shallow earth and fails to mature. Amid much bearing of fruit there is also the failure of hearing and not understanding. Jesus recognized that even with the best news in the world there would still be setbacks.

The disciples have the parable explained to them. They have the benefit of the expertise of Jesus who told this parable and was by definition best placed to explain its meaning.

As we move forward together and plan the activities of our local churches in a world that has been changed we should be encouraged by this parable.

Encouraged to work in ways that we discern are appropriate in our current situation. Perhaps an extra line on the plan for the Circuit's online worship and resources for those not online and unable to attend a building.

Encouraged to keep trying even if the seed we cast does not always bear fruit straight away or in ways we may expect.

Encouraged to gather as much wisdom as we can from others and glad to listen to those who are called to teach and explain, even when this might move us out of our comfort zones and takes us in unexpected ways.

Amen.

Take a time to sit quietly

Hymn: StF 395 Spirit of the living God

Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me
Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me
Break me, melt me
Mould me fill me
Spirit of the Living God
Fall fresh on me

Daniel Iverson (1890-1977)

A time of prayer

Let us pray for our world; for the worldwide effort to create a vaccine for Covid-19. For all the peoples of the world and for cooperation as we continue to live with this virus.

As we pray for our world we pray especially for those in government and industry whose decisions effect the lives of so many. And we pray for wisdom for those in power.

We pray for our own land. For the NHS and for all those involved in social care and all keyworkers, giving thanks for the work they do for us. We pray for local communities as we continue to move towards what has been called the new normal.

We pray for the whole Church throughout the world, especially churches in countries with unsympathetic regimes.

We pray for the Methodist Church, both at the local level and also the Connexional Team.

We take a time of quiet to remember those who have died, especially those who have been important to us on our own journeys of life and faith.

We make all our prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: StF 415 The Church of Christ in every age.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3vTdkbuFKGA>

The Church of Christ, in every age
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise,
a caring Church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating Word

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

A prayer of blessing

Dear Lord.

When times are hard, walk beside us.

When we are unsure of which way to turn, dwell within us.

When we need to listen to others, encourage us.

When our lives and work bear fruit, rejoice with us.

So may the blessing of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with us all today and forever more.

Amen.

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After the service, please be prepared to talk briefly about things (plants, ideas, events, projects – anything!) that you've been involved in that have either flourished or withered, as in the parable?