

5th Sunday of Trinity 2020

Welcome

Welcome everyone to our website worship. We gather together in God's presence with expectation, hungry for an encounter with God who gives us life and peace. We gather this morning as one faith community whether at home or physically in church. We gather like the crowds, we will hear about in today's Gospel, to hear the words of Jesus. We prepare ourselves to observe His instruction to 'Listen!' and respond. We welcome the riches of God's Kingdom to take root and flourish in our lives.

Today's Collect

Almighty God,
send down upon your Church
the riches of your Spirit,
and kindle in all who minister the gospel
your countless gifts of grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 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."

Reflection

Teachers have been using new ways of teaching during this pandemic. During lock-down our household has experienced a learning roller coaster. Our boys have had to adapt and try to keep on learning. We have found some teachers really engaging and have valued their innovative approaches. Our Gospel today reminds us that Jesus is an amazing teacher who engaged the crowd and still captures our attention. The parable of the sower helps us to explore our response to His words. Jesus is disciplining His flock, helping them to learn to follow The Kingdom Way and flourish.

Jesus begins with a call to listen. Listening makes such a difference. Oliver has been using an online Math question resource and each section has a teaching video. At times he has just ploughed on without listening to the video. When we did sit and listen first, the task become so much more manageable. Listening led to flourishing.

Today's Old Testament reading is from Isaiah 55. It describes the way that God's Word goes out and accomplishes God's purposes. Verse 12 describes God's purpose- His heart for creation. His Word goes out so we, "shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands". Jesus is teaching us that the Kingdom is about vibrant flourishing and joy. The sower scatters the seed of the Kingdom, the Good News, liberally as he walks the field. Jesus uses what would have been a familiar four-part pattern of teaching to explore how people respond to God's word. Brad Young writes how, we must listen to Jesus as he tells the parable and see the story in light of rabbinic literature and the rich heritage of the first-century Jewish people. The focus therefore is on Torah learning and discipleship.

In a Jewish instruction text, Avos 5:18, there is an exploration of learning like in our Gospel. There are four types of students among those who sit before the Sages/teachers - a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sifter. The sponge absorbs everything. The funnel is like those who hear and allow information to go in one ear and out of the other. The strainer lets out the good wine and retains the lees - the incorrect or insignificant points. Finally, the sifter retains the fine flour - the significant material and discards the dust - the inconsequential details.

Jesus uses a similar pattern to explore discipleship but offers us a different parable. Rather than a legally binding, knowledge-based teaching, Jesus offers us words of life. Longing for us to flourish He describes the way seed falls on four types of soil. We are the soil; we are the disciples who hear God's word. How do we respond to it?

Does it fall on the hard path and get stolen quickly by the evil one before we can understand? Does it land on rocky ground? The word is received with joy but due to shallow roots, fails to flourish when life gets tough. Or is the word sown among thorns, representing the cares of the world, which choke us and prevent flourishing. Or maybe it falls on good soil where the heart receives it like the hills and the trees and clap with joy and burst forth with life.

Those who listen are like the good soil. Listening to Jesus results in us bearing fruit - a massive yield. Those familiar with the Jewish instructional texts would have learnt about sponge, funnel, strainer and sieve-like students. They would have grown to want to be sieves who filter the good teaching and allow it to shape them. We are to be people, who with the whole of creation, receive the Word as Good News and welcome it into our hearts. If we do so, faithfully trusting Jesus, we can flourish and joyfully burst into abundant life.

May we choose today to listen to Jesus and prepare the soil of our hearts, digging it over and letting it be the good soil that allows the fruit of God's word to flourish and bring us much joy.

Prayers of Intercession

God of wisdom and understanding,
be with your Church as we seek to understand your purpose and will

Nurture and tend all new to faith...

By your Holy Spirit, bring to fruition the seed of your word

Open our eyes and ears to the presence of Your Holy Spirit.

May the seeds of Your Word, scattered among us this morning fall on fertile soil

May they take root in our hearts and lives,

and produce an abundant harvest of good words and deeds

God of endurance and reliability be with your world burdened by many cares during this pandemic

Renew the face of the earth

By your Holy Spirit, inspire all people to sustainable living, and keep us mindful of the positive impact lockdown has had on the environment

God of seedtime and harvest. be with all who tend and manage the land for food to nourish and spaces for recreation

By your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to share the fruits of the field in their seasons

In this time of financial hardship bless the work of our Foodbank and help us to share with those in need

God of hope and consolation deal tenderly with all for whom life is full of struggle.

Give them strength and patience in their sufferings

By your Holy Spirit, bring us to rejoice in your presence

We give thanks for those who are at rest, for those whose suffering is over and are restored and renewed in your kingdom.

We pray for the souls of Dorothy Rooks, Percy Higginbottom, Barbara Edwards, Walter Williams and Arthur Worsley. We also pray for Paul Knott and Donna Rex who died recently.

May they and all the departed know the rest and refreshment of your presence.

Lord, in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We join all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who 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.

Closing prayer

Eternal God,
comfort of the afflicted and healer of the broken,
you have fed us at the table of life and hope:
teach us the ways of gentleness and peace,
that all the world may acknowledge
the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.