

12th July 2020 – Morning Service

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship

Jesus said 'The Kingdom of God is like the smallest seed that when it is planted in the earth grows and becomes the biggest of all plants.' As we come together to worship let us open ourselves up to the limitless potential of God's Spirit bringing life and growth to us and let us also be open to the signs of God's Kingdom among us and within us.

Today is a special Sunday in our church year - it is Action for Children Sunday, and although our service is not based on Action for Children I want us to think about all the seeds that are sown in the minds of our young people by those working with Action for Children. It began many years ago under the name of National Children's Home & Orphanage. Then they dropped the 'Orphanage' bit and it was just known as National Children's Home - then NCH Action for Children - and now just Action for Children. I remember, as a child, as I'm sure many of you do, selling the Sunny Smiles pictures to raise money for the organisation. We then went along to Dudley Town Hall for the 'Festival of Queens' at some time in February, when the queens and their retinue would process up onto the stage to hand over the money raised by each particular church. Happy days - long since gone.

StF 137 – New every morning is the love

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| 1) New every morning is the love
Our waking and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life, and power, and thought. | 4) The trivial round, the common task
Will furnish all we ought to ask:
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God. |
| 2) New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven. | 5) Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
For perfect rest with you above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray. |
| 3) If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice. | |

John Keble CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning to worship you and to offer you our thanks and praise for the many wonderful gifts that you have given to us. We thank you for the gifts with which you flood our lives:

for the gifts of friends and laughter that lighten the darkest days

for the tears we can shed as we share the pain of others

for the smile that offers the stranger welcome

for the hand of peace that brings hope to our troubled world

for the kiss of love that breathes courage into broken hearts

for the word of forgiveness that unlocks the way to reconciliation

for the arms that offer security and peace to those who are afraid

for the word of faith that points an uncertain world to Christ

and for the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables us to demonstrate the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. Lord we praise you that you have called us to be your faithful people to remember the story of our faith and to hold fast to all that is true. We praise you that you have not called us to be your faithful people within the safety of the closed doors of the church or inside locked minds and barricaded hearts

Each day you require us, your people, to live out our faith beyond the doors of protection. You have appointed each of us to speak of Christ and to do so in words and ways that everyone, anywhere can understand. We praise you that you are calling us now to be always listening, always pilgrims, always relying on your Spirit to enable us to be faithful to Christ. By your grace and for your glory may we live for him in our fast changing world

Prayer of Confession

Lord we confess that we have tried and failed
We thought that we could follow Jesus and do it in our own strength
that we could serve our neighbours without relying on you
that we could live the Christian life without turning to you in prayer,
without reading your Word and without listening to your voice
Forgive us Heavenly Father and by the power of your Holy Spirit refine, reform and renew us
We ask this in Jesus name. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 36 – There's a quiet understanding

- 1) There's a quiet understanding
When we're gathered in the Spirit,
It's a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.
There's a love we feel in Jesus,
There's a manna that he feeds us,
It's a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.
- 2) And we know when we're together,
Sharing love and understanding,
That our brothers and our sisters
Feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
For the way you love and feed us,
For the many ways you lead us;
Thank you, thank you, Lord.

Reading: Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23

Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop - a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one that received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Sermon

Some of you may have heard me say before that I feel very blessed to live in our house. We are on the edge of Aldridge and we can look out of our windows across farm land - across fields - towards Cannock Chase. It fascinates me, as the seasons change to see which crops will be planted in the fields nearest to us. We've had sunflowers - which was an amazing sight. We've had what appeared to be weeds - not so impressive - We've had maize - grass - and this year we are back to what appears to be weeds again - although the sheep seem to enjoy them.

As I'm sitting up in bed with my morning cuppa I can look out over the fields and marvel at what is happening - The farmer plants the seeds and I sit waiting for them to grow - but neither of us can do anything about it - We can't speed up the process - We just have to wait for the growth to take place in God's good time. It reminds me of a song that we sang as children - See the farmer sow the seed up the field and down - God will make the golden corn grow where all is brown - God will make the corn grow - not us. We can't force people to become Christians - We have no control over the 'Harvest of Mankind' - but we can plant the seeds and nurture them. Many great things begin in small and often hidden ways - A building begins with one brick upon another - A book begins with one word upon a page - A journey with the first step - A giant oak from a tiny acorn - A river from a small spring - I could go on.

In the Gospel stories we have a collection of parables many of which begin with the growth of seed - and these stories were meant to encourage the early Church which was worried about the slow growth of the Kingdom - These parables were telling the disciples to be patient - to trust - and not to expect instant results. Through the power of God and from small insignificant beginnings the Kingdom will grow into something great. The prophet Ezekiel foretold that God would take a twig from the top of a cedar tree and plant it in Zion. Under God's protective power that twig would grow into a great tree which would give shelter to every kind of bird - In other words from seemingly small beginnings the Kingdom of God would grow into something that would protect and nurture all those who seek shelter - and we have similar sentiments in the parable of the mustard seed.

Our age could be called 'The age of the push button' All we have to do is press a button or turn a switch and things happen. All those labour saving devices - washing machines - dish washers - vacuum cleaners - take some of the monotony and drudgery out of life and work - but there is a danger in living in the world of the push button because encourages the minimum amount of effort - the least cost - the shortcut approach to everything. It may lure us into always seeking the easy option even when there is no easy option - at least - not if we want the genuine article.

There are some things that can't be rushed. To grow to maturity as a human being is the job of a lifetime. To build a good relationship with someone takes time. To get to know and understand our children - or for many of us now - our grandchildren - takes time. There are no short cuts. In Jesus' story the farmer did his part - He sowed the seed. All he could do was trust - be patient - and wait. These are not easy virtues for any of us and yet life calls for a lot of trust, patience and waiting.

Some people feel that they must always be up and doing - as if everything depended on them - and I must admit that I am one of those people. I have friends who go on holiday and lie on a sun lounger for a couple of weeks simply reading a book - and that's fine - but not for Roy and me. We have to see everything there is to see. We are no good at relaxing and that is not really good for either of us, but that probably explains why we don't come back with a suntan as we don't stay still long enough for the sun to catch us.

But, joking apart, we have to acknowledge that we can't do everything - Spiritual development - and indeed - human development - is a process - and it will go on - provided that we don't resist it. In the course of our lives we hear an enormous number of words. Most of these go in one ear and out the other, and so have no effect on our lives. But some have a profound effect - Why? Because they go straight to our hearts.

How many words were spoken to us when we were young. How many seeds were dropped into the soil of our minds and hearts during the springtime of our lives. Those words came from our parents and from many others. We heard words of greeting and welcome, words of encouragement and affirmation, words of advice and guidance, words of correction and chastisement, words of warning and caution, words of comfort and consolation. At the time we may not have appreciated those words, but we needed to hear them. Only God knows how many of those words took root in our lives, but, one thing is clear, our lives would be immeasurably poorer without the sowing of those words.

As adults we still need the sowing of the word and happy are those who hear words of encouragement, love and peace. Some people seldom hear a kind word. But human words, no matter how necessary, will never fully nourish us. We need God's word because we are God's children. Jesus compared the word to a seed. A lovely image because a seed has the power to enrich - but for that to happen it needs to fall on favourable ground. So the word of God has the power to enrich our lives - provided that we receive it favourably.

Clearly the parable applies to all words but Jesus was talking about specifically about the word of God. The ground in which the seed of God's word is sown is the human heart. Just as there are some kinds of ground that are conducive to growth and others that are not - so it is with the human heart. The seed that fell on the trodden path represents those whose hearts are hard. Sadly God's call makes no impression on them. The seed that fell on stony ground represents those whose hearts are resistant. God's call is heard alright but doesn't make a deep impression and when difficulties occur, it fades away. The seed that fell among thorns represents those hearts that are so full of worldly concerns that the call of God gets drowned out. It is not that God is deliberately excluded but there is no room for God. And the seed that fell on good ground represents those who receive God's call with open and generous hearts, and in responding to it, produce a harvest of goodness.

Through his word God guides and corrects us as a parent does a child. God's word is never a negative word it is always spoken in love and just as food nourishes the body so the word of God nourishes the spirit. The word of God gives us guidance in times of doubt, reassurance in times of difficulty, comfort in times of sorrow, correction in times of foolishness, challenge in times of laziness, warning in times of danger and hope in times of despair. Some grains of wheat were found in the tomb of one of the ancient kings of Egypt. Someone took some of the seeds and planted and watered them. To the amazement of everyone the grains came to life and began to grow after five thousand years of lying in a tomb. The seed of God's word, once dropped into the human heart never dies. It is never too late to act upon his word.

Reflection

The word of God is to the human heart what a seed is to the earth, and just as a seed needs favourable soil, so the word of God needs a receptive heart.

Lord soften our hearts with the rain of your grace, and warm them with the sun of your love, so that the precious seed of your word may take root in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives. **Amen.**

StF 161 – Speak, O Lord, as we come to you

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

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Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray that the word of God may take root in our hearts and bear fruit in our lives

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For the Church that it may continue to proclaim the word of God to the world

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For world leaders that they may seek the help and guidance of God in all their deliberations

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For parents, teachers and preachers that they may go on sowing the word, even when results are not forthcoming

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For the work of Action for Children that they may receive your strength and guidance in the work that they do

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For the members of this community that we may receive the word of God with noble and generous hearts

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

For our loved ones who have died that the Lord may keep them safe in his love

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

And for our own special needs and the needs of those known to us

L: Lord in your mercy: **R: Hear our prayer**

Lord grant that what we have said with our lips we may believe with our hearts and practise with our lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

StF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness

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| 1) Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with thee
Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail
not;
As thou hast been thou for ever wilt be: | 2) Summer and winter, and springtime and
harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love: |
| Ch) Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me. | 3) Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to
guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! |

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Closing Prayer/Blessing

May the word of God be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

May the message of Christ in all its richness find a home in you.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. **Amen**