

St Swithun's Church Family

Trinity 5

Sunday 12th July 2020

Ordinary Time



Sowing Seeds
Bearing fruit

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** – ideally at 10am on Sunday so that we know we are joining our prayers together but any time is good. Use a candle and a cross if you can find them to give your worship a focus.*

The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.

This is a Service of The Word. It doesn't matter if you are one person or a family together – use the booklet and go through the words – stop and reflect as you need to. We are going to record this service again and add it to the website www.saintswithuns.org.uk There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.

Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.

You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...

**Great is thy faithfulness
This little light of mine
We have a Gospel to proclaim
I the Lord of sea and sky
All are welcome**

<https://youtu.be/dTKlqmdfHsK>
<https://youtu.be/QCN893hzueQ>
<https://youtu.be/B2FX0-kS7wA>
<https://youtu.be/mgLwH5RdtPk>
<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

Introduction

Today is the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

Hopefully for most of us, this is the last time we are worshipping remotely as we are able to get back to our church for public worship now and we are planning to return next Sunday for St Swithun's Day in a careful, if a little restricted way – please take notice of the information at the end of this booklet.

Our reading today is the parable of the sower which is a reminder for us to be receptive to God's love and to share that love generously with others. This parable is about growth, and so is a reminder that our faith is to continually change and develop over time and needs to be nurtured. Emerging from lockdown – things will have changed... as we come to worship together this Sunday – may we pray for our own faith and the faith of our church – that the seeds we have sown will bear much fruit.

The Gathering

The Greeting

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you

Opening Prayer

We come before you, God of ancient times,
acknowledging your presence with us,
We come before you, God of the present,
Believing in your presence with us,
We come before you, God of the future,
Hoping for your presence with us.

Saying sorry - prayers of penitence

As we prepare to say sorry to God let us take a moment of quiet to recall our behaviour, our relationships, our attitude over the past few days – what do we need to repent of? What have we ignored or stayed silent on that we should say sorry for?

Loving God, our maker and our redeemer,
this is your world and we are your people:
come among us and save us.

We have seen the ill-treatment of others
and have not gone to their aid;
Lord in your mercy

Lord in your mercy

We have condoned evil and dishonesty
and failed to strive for justice;
Christ in your mercy

Christ in your mercy

We have not loved you with all our heart,
nor our neighbours as ourselves;
Lord in your mercy

Lord in your mercy

We know that God forgives us when we say sorry

We are forgiven

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us
from our sins,
heal and strengthen us
by the Spirit,
and raise us to new life
in the risen Christ.

Amen.

Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to all people on earth.

Find a way to rejoice knowing that God loves us and makes us whole. Today as we focus on the parable of the sower – let us rejoice at our growth and development.

- Go outside or look out of a window and reflect for a moment on something that has grown from a tiny seed – something that is flourishing and beautiful.



Spend some time noticing with joy the many ways we have grown and developed, perhaps our physical selves, maybe focussing on our faith, or possibly notice how you have grown in your learning...

Reflect / discuss...

What has nurtured your faith?

What has nurtured you as a person?

What has helped you to expand your horizons and learn and develop?

- If you are able to - sow a seed – maybe plant some herbs, or some cress, or anything which you can make grow....
- If you can - take a photo of the beautiful plant you have noticed outside or from your window – either stop and notice this plant everyday this week or use your photo of it. In your prayers this week reflect - what will nurture you and your faith?



The 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.

Amen

The Liturgy of the Word

Listen for the Word which God has spoken

Speak, God of life,
to our speaking,
Speak, God of justice,
to our listening,
Speak, God of love,
to our souls' deep understanding.



The Gospel Reading

Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew
Glory to you, O Lord.

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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon *Mother Juliet*



This is one of Jesus' best known parables. Part of the reason for its fame must be that it is the only one of Jesus' parables that he ever explained. Jesus almost never gives answers to questions, he gives puzzles. There are some truths so profound that you cannot simply be told them, you have to work them out for yourself.

But here is an exception. After Jesus told this story he explains its meaning. In some ways this might make a sermon on the topic defunct. But I think there is more to be revealed by an explanation of the explanation.

In Palestine the fields were in long narrow strips, and the ground between the strips was a right of way, the earth beaten hard by the feet of countless travellers. This is what Jesus meant when he referred to the 'wayside.' A seed could never root in this solid, unyielding earth.

The stony ground was not earth filled with stones, of the sort I seem to find every time I go camping. This was a thin layer of earth on top of a shelf of limestone rock. The earth may only be a few inches deep. The limestone meant that the ground would heat up more quickly in the sun than solid earth, which meant that a seed would actually germinate more quickly on this kind of ground than anywhere else. It would grow rapidly at first, then when the roots hit the rock, and were not able to gather the necessary moisture the plant would wither in the sun as quickly as it had shot up.

Weeds and thorns need no further explanation. Earth that has been turned over, not properly cleared of its weeds will produce them again faster than almost anything else you want to grow. Richard and I were only discussing last weekend how our poor removal of weed roots means the weeds grow quickly – perhaps this parable has something to teach our gardening skills as well!

And then, there is the good soil, where the seed takes root and produces a rich harvest.

THE PARABLE



OF THE SOWER

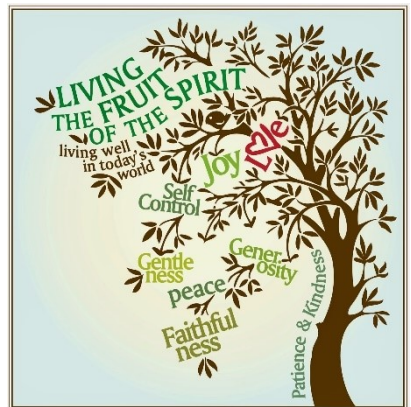


This parable has two applications, and I believe Jesus deliberately told it with them both in mind. The first and most obvious places *us* as the earth. We have to consider whether our heart is fertile soil for the Gospel. Are we too hard and cold to let it really take root in our lives? Does the gospel lie like a seed on top of our toughened lives, waiting to be snatched away by the crows?

Or does our faith only have shallow roots, making it stunted and withered instead of growing and changing and maturing every day. Is our faith only on the surface, our rock hard hearts giving no space for the Gospel's roots.

Or is our faith surrounded on all sides by the weeds of possessions, worries and cares and other demands that keep our faith from living?

Or, is our faith living, growing, changing and maturing and bearing fruit. The fruit of the spirit, which Paul describes to the Galatians as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Is the soil of our hearts receptive and fertile, and is the plant of our faith growing, and producing fruit.



How is your faith growing?

It is a good time to think about this question as next week – hopefully we will be able to meet together in church for communion – even though it will be in a different way with restrictions – it does still mark a point of change and hopefully the end of an era...

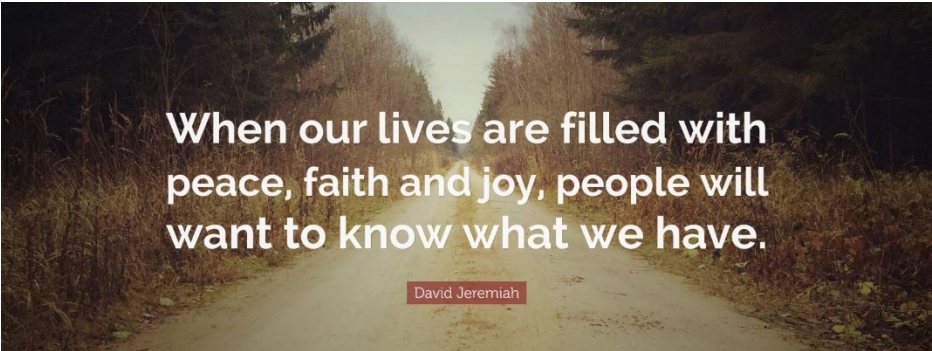
A living faith develops and does not stop. A living faith grows and bears more fruit. A living faith is always moving, changing, inspiring, challenging. One thing lockdown has done – is to force us to grow – to force us to change – to force us to move – to force us to find new inspiration. I know from so many of you that this time of isolation has enabled new learning and development of faith – and this is brilliant.

Of course – there are some of us who are feeling a bit lost and are desperately looking to find the best place for our faith to grow – don't give up – keep searching. With God as the gardener, if we see God and pray for growth – it will come.

Now we return to the parable. Jesus was not only placing us in the role of *soil*, he was placing us in the role of *the sower*. The parable is not only told to encourage self-examination (which kind of soil am I?) but also to encourage evangelism.

As Christians we have found the Gospel – that we are loved by God, and life has a meaning. To keep it to ourselves feels wrong. We are called to scatter the seed far and wide.

We know during this strange year that our church is not a building, our church is not an abstract concept, our church is all of us, and all of us have a responsibility to help it grow... Our evangelism isn't about not listening to other ideas, or pushing a concept onto someone, or quoting endless bible verses at those who don't believe – evangelism should flow naturally from our enthusiasm and joy for our faith.



**When our lives are filled with
peace, faith and joy, people will
want to know what we have.**

David Jeremiah

I am passionate about many things – perhaps my biggest and most enduring passion is for food – if I find an amazing recipe, or a brilliant restaurant I will share my enthusiasm with others – because I love it. I'm sure you know my enthusiasm for Caribbean food – and especially Patricia's food – because I have found it hard not to share this joy with you...



We need to have the same natural, easy enthusiasm for our church and if religion comes up in conversation we should not be afraid to say we are Christians and that Christianity is a way of life that brings meaning and inspiration and hope into our daily life.

Alongside that I really think our conversations about faith *should* be more listening than talking - Jesus did a lot of listening, he regularly threw questions back to the questioner - "what do you think?" But perhaps we need to open up the questions too when we sow the seeds of faith.

Perhaps the first time we share the gospel there will be no response at all.

Perhaps the next time someone will show an interest, maybe come to Church, but their faith will not be deep and they will soon lose interest.

Perhaps the next time we share the Gospel (and in my experience of modern life, this is the most common soil today) someone will be very interested, want to pursue it, but they are just too busy to come to Church, too busy to pray, too busy to look at the Bible.

Most of the times when we share our faith there will be no visible result. But Jesus tells us to keep sowing and throw the seed far and wide. Because we cannot tell what kind of soil it is until we let the seed fall on to it. We must not be discouraged by how much infertile soil there is out there, in fact that should make us want to sow all the more, because we know that among the rocks and byways and shallow earth there is the soil where our seeds will bring 'forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty'.

And perhaps as we begin to re-enter our lovely church the seed scattered via our website and via our zoom meetings and via our booklet deliveries and via our audio recordings and via our you tube efforts and via our care and nurture of each other remotely – perhaps that seed might root and nurture our faith. Some of you might be sitting on the edges of church and are dipping your toes in – perhaps after this lockdown you might be ready to come more often or more keenly to our worship, more open to developing and deepening your faith through new teaching.



Whatever our situation - we have all been in the wilderness – we haven't celebrated communion for months – we have been unable to meet physically in church or at all – we have been wandering around in isolation in a new and distant land of church. BUT in our Bible stories we know that after wilderness experiences amazing things happened – Jesus started his ministry after his 40 days in the wilderness. What amazing things are going to happen for us at St Swithun's? Whose ministry is ready to begin?

Hopefully the seeds sown for our own faith will grow and develop and flourish as we change again in these coming weeks.

Amen



Profession of Faith

Let us profess our faith together:

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.
We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**



Prayers

God of the harvest, let us pray
that we will be fruitful in all that we do to share your love
and to build your kingdom:

We pray for our world.

We especially remember those places where harvests are failing,
where crops are not growing, where disease is causing harm,
and where the climate change is having a devastating impact.

We thank you for all those who grow, produce, package and
distribute our food, so that we can shop so easily. We pray for
our global neighbours who are hungry.

May we share what we have with others.

God of the harvest

May we grow in hope, faith and love.

We pray for our church.

We especially remember our Saint Swithun's family as we
prepare to return to our church building to worship. May the
seeds sown in this wilderness time bear much fruit in our ministry,
in our common life, in our outreach and in our love. We especially
pray for those who will still be unable to join us in our building as
we worship together.

May we seek to grow in faith, hope and love.

God of the harvest

May we grow in hope, faith and love.

We pray for our parish and our community of Hither Green.

We especially remember all those who work in gardening and
land management. We pray for our green spaces and our parks
that they will be a positive space for many.

We give thanks for those who volunteer to make our environment
so beautiful.

We especially pray for those who are housebound and unable to
enjoy the outdoors.

God of the harvest

May we grow in hope, faith and love.

We pray for all those who are not able to flourish.

We especially remember those who need support or a change in their circumstances to enable their lives to be fruitful.

We also remember those who are suffering with loss – grief, economic instability, unemployment, incapacity and ill health.

We especially remember those who have asked for our prayers: David, Don, Ruby, Rossy and family, Taneisha, Talabi, Kevin, Elisabeth and family, Ivy, John, Lena, Shonette, Susan, Margaret, Sydney, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen and any known personally to us. We remember them now in a moment of silence.

God of the harvest

May we grow in hope, faith and love

We remember before God those who have died.

We remember Gladys, Edward, Oscar, George, John and Roy and all who we have loved and who are now no longer on earth...

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord

And let light perpetual shine upon them

Merciful Father

**Accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**



The Prayer Jesus taught us

Rejoicing in God's new creation, we pray as Jesus taught 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.**

The Peace

God is love
and those who live in love
live in God
and God lives in them.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Who could you share God's peace with?

Spend some time planning a deliberate act of peace.



Dismissal and Blessing

The Blessing

May God our Creator,
nurture us with care and goodness,
that we may flourish, grow and develop in faith, hope and love;
and the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Spirit
Be with us all, now and always
Amen.

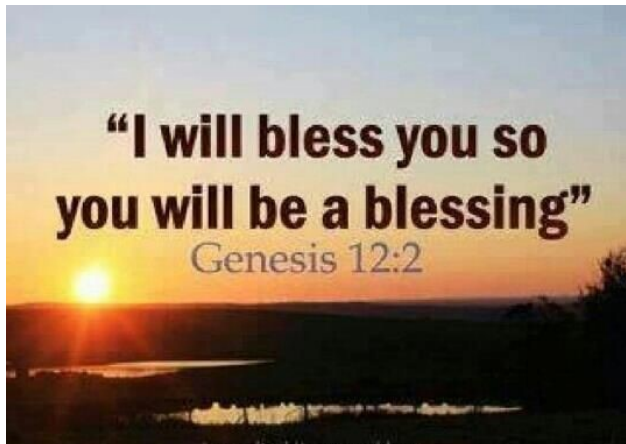
The Dismissal

We go from here blessed for the journey that lies before us,
and strengthened for the challenges we may yet face.

Let us go in peace
to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ

Amen



Notices:

- Next Sunday, 19th July, we are celebrating St Swithun's Day – by going back to church! There will be two Eucharist services to ensure we can maintain social distancing – the first service will be 9.30am and the second at 11am. These will be first come first served – as keeping safe is essential. We recommend those who can manage to – come to the earlier service as we anticipate that one to be a little quieter. If you have children – families will be invited to sit in a pew – the service will be short (no more than 40 minutes). Children will need to be able to stay in their place. There will be many restrictions in place – for example – no singing... but we can meet together now and focussing on all the positives is important. Booklets will continue to be uploaded to the website. Deliveries will continue to those who are not able to get to church. If we have a small number at church we might go to one service – but obviously monitoring for safety is important.
- The Church will continue to be open for private prayers 10-11am on Wednesdays and Saturdays – thank you to those who are helping with this.

Birthdays / celebrations:

Happy Birthday to everyone who has had a birthday recently...



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