

North West Wiltshire Pastorate Worship for Sunday July 12th 2020
Led by the Revd Sarah Simpson

Good morning and welcome to worship today.
Let us join together as the people of God.

From the tales we learnt in childhood
That we recall with pleasure and ease,
To the harder life lessons
That root us in reality,
And all the stories in-between,
That often pass without comment
But remain lodged in our memory for when we need them.
God, the author of all our stories,
We worship you.

We will now sing together, 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind'.

Let us pray,
Eternal and enduring God,
The author of our life's stories;
We come to worship,
Eager for the next chapter to unfold.
Waiting to see what lies ahead –
Be with us as we seek your revelation;
Inspire us by its content and its context,
Root us where we are needed,
With everything that will encourage
Our potential
And maximise our witness.
So that when we look back,
We do so knowing we have
Done all you have asked of us.
Amen.

Our readings come from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 55, verses 10-13
and from Matthew's gospel chapter 13, verses 1-9 & 18-23

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return to it without watering the earth
And making it bud and flourish,
So that it yields seed for the sower
And bread for the eater,
So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
But will accomplish what I desire
And achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
You will go out in joy,
And be led forth in peace;
The mountains and the hills
Will burst into song before you,
And all the trees of the field
Will clap their hands.
Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree,
And instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord's renown,
For an everlasting sign,
Which will not be destroyed.

And from Matthew's gospel;

That same day 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, 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 who 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, thirty times what was sown.”

*This is the word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.*

A few thoughts...

Sometimes the set lectionary readings take on a relevance which reflects the events of the days leading to the Sunday – this is one such week.

Isaiah, very often a prophet read mainly during Advent is using natural images to illustrate how God’s word always achieves what God intends. Here, as in the psalms are reminders that all created entities may be understood as responding to God in some way and that in these times of increased environmental awareness there is a further component to the picture which makes clear the responsibility of all believers towards God’s created world. Indeed one of the upsides of recent months has been the environmental advantages of less use of cars, public transport, aeroplanes, even down to shopping for local produce and buying only what we need; an upside that will hopefully continue as new habits are formed, more thoughtful than some of the old ones we became so used to.

And our gospel picks up on an image that would have resonated with anyone with any knowledge of farming, the sowing of seed; when there would have been an allowance for seed that missed its intended bed and even some that started to grow but would not come to fruition, Jesus calls the crowd to listen and explains why that happens.

Parables are deceptively simple stories but they contain a wealth of meaning. The verses in-between see the disciples questioning Jesus’ use of parables; they’d prefer a more direct approach, but Jesus makes it clear that he knows what he is doing, how best to engage – he talks of life experiences, everyday

happenings and in so doing he grounds those listening, they are rooted by their understanding and the stronger the roots, the greater their impact may be.

Jesus' word was of course the seed – where it fell, some of the responses to it, and those were surprising; Jesus uses images, paints pictures to communicate deep truths about God and about his mission but those who respond and how they respond raises more questions than there are answers. The randomness of the seed planting may seem extravagant to us today but surely we wouldn't risk minimalizing the number of people our witness may reach?

I began by talking about relevance – on Monday I went home to see my parents in Llanelli, myself, David and our lab, I had been warned not to leave either behind. We returned home on Tuesday after a lovely reunion where my Dad and I managed to agree on pretty much everything, even current politics. We were on the 2nd Severn crossing when things went a bit wrong, my husband's incredible skill ensured not only did we avoid causing a major accident but that the three of us were unhurt, very shaken but unhurt. We were rescued by the AA and finally brought home.

We sat on the hard shoulder, with lorries racing past – the swirling depths of the river below – some intense prayer – and all the times I have read and heard and preached God's word were magnified a hundredfold and if ever proof was needed of God's love and care of His people it was in those few hours when our lives were, literally in His hands.

To be open to God's word and to hear and act on God's word are not one and the same, we can all hear but where the word falls and what we do with it depends on its impact. I fervently give thanks to God for the fulfilment of His promise to me that the seed of His word fell where it could grow and flourish not wither and die; and that it may long continue to do so.

Amen.

We will now sing together, 'You shall go out with joy'.

Our prayers of Intercession.

Let us pray.
Loving Lord,
Each one of us, in our own way
are charged with making known your word.
We do so in many ways,
Varied and creative ways,
We do so using images and picture,
We do so in plain, simple language;
But we do so - And in so doing
We hope to reflect something of
Our relationship with you.

We pray for the freedom we have
That expresses our faith;
We pray that such freedoms are forever protected
And that when called to account for our belief
We are able to do so
In ways that honour your name.

Living Lord,
In times of trial and testing
You send us those we need to get us through;
They come into our lives for the briefest of times
But by their actions
Remain with us forever.
So today, in grateful thanksgiving,
We remember Keith Bond and Carl Stewart;
Sometimes our heroes wear high vis jackets.

Eternal Lord,
Where ears have closed to your word,
Because we know it and we questions
What else it can teach us-
Remind us that we are forever learning,
And our full potential is yet to be realised.
Amen.

We say together the Lord's Prayer,

Our Father,

Who art in heaven,

Hallowed by 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.

Let us share remotely in the grace, to and for each other,

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The love of God

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

Be with us,

And remain with us,

Now and forever

Amen.

Until we meet again, see each day as a gift

And find within it something to be grateful for.

Amen.

Sarah x