

North West Wiltshire Pastorate

Worship for Sunday July 19th 2020 - Led by the Revd Sarah Simpson

Good morning and welcome to worship today.
Let us join together as the people of God.
Whatever the name you use,
Or the title we give you-
However great our understanding
Or how lacking our knowledge;
We come with open minds, ears and hearts,
Waken our senses,
Make us the co-workers and kingdom-builders
You need us to be.
We worship you.

We will now sing together, 'Praise and thanksgiving, Father we offer'.

Let us pray,
God of all,
In our minds we paint pictures,
Of the world as we wish it to be.
Colourful, bright, idyllic.
Colours of love and justice and freedom
Colours that bring joy;
The colours of pain and darkness we prefer
To omit, but they are an ever-present reality
That cannot be ignored,
They too have a place,
They too have a part to play.
Forgive for seeing only that which we like,
And understand, that which makes us happy;
Encourage us to confront all that threatens,
All that has the potential to destroy;
So that the pictures we create reflect
The power of your love and the strength
Of our witness to you.
Amen.

Our readings come from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 44, verses 6-8 and from Matthew's gospel chapter 13, verses 24-30 & 36-39

From Isaiah

"This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people,

And what is yet to come –

Yes, let him foretell what will come.

Do not tremble, do not be afraid.

Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.

And from Matthew's gospel

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

"An enemy did this," he replied.

The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are the angels.

This is the word of the Lord,

Thanks be to God.

A few thoughts ...

There are a few words that previous generations would have used that are no longer part of our everyday language for whatever reason, usually a desire not to cause offense, but also, increasingly it seems to mask life's realities, among them we find the word evil. Rarely used today it is a word that is emotive and powerful. It is a very strong word but the context of its use is for those events which absolutely shock and horrify us, extreme times when that particular word is the only one that seems to accurately convey corporate feeling.

However, in both the Old and New Testaments evil was often used and accepted as an ever-present reality of life, albeit on something of a sliding scale; but both the Prophets and Jesus knew and understood that all their teaching needed to include the repetition that God could and would defeat evil, in whatever form it took.

In our first reading the prophet describes God as a rock, unmoveable, unbreakable, eternal; in our gospel reading we continue the theme of sowing seeds but in this case the seed that grows, are the children of the kingdom who are at risk of attack from the weeds, the ongoing enemy action that ceases to undermine and harm. The solution of letting both grow together may seem strange but the very real risk of damaging the wheat before it reaches its potential calls for an element of risk to be taken.

Are you a risk-taker? Perhaps even a risk-maker?

Or are you risk adverse, even striving to eliminate it from your personal life?

Taking a risk right now is deemed foolhardy at best, and downright irresponsible and selfish at most; yet life includes risk and for a people of faith the risk we take is always held alongside our understanding that we do not do so alone, taking a risk in Jesus' name is a part of our work and witness.

Sometimes the wheat and the weeds seem almost interchangeable to those with no knowledge of crops, sometimes the weeds are attractive and we think they cannot be harmful; the quest for discernment is life-long, anyone can be taken in by plausibility, charm, supposed knowledge ...

And sometimes we are called to live alongside those to whom we are a threat, because of faith or lifestyle or standards – they mightn't be as extreme as to be classed as evil, but their threat is no less real for that.

Now, more than in recent years we need to be alert, to understand the nature of evil and to have the strength and determination and means to oppose it, there will always be the tension between good and evil, that is life, but that should not, cannot stop us from doing what we can to limit evil's power to grow.

Amen.

We will now sing together, 'God is working His purpose out'.

Our prayers of Intercession come from the ROOTS lectionary resource.

Let us pray.

Lord God, we pray for our world and its people.

So many different cultures, colours, languages – but we are all your children,
All special in our own right. Whatever our gender, race, colour or creed,
We all belong to you, we all need your love.

We pray that we may learn to live in harmony with each other,
To recognise that even someone halfway around the world is still
Our neighbour in your sight. Far or near we all belong to you,
We all need your love.

With today's technology we have access to news from afar,
Almost before it happens. Help us not to become blasé about
The situations we see, but to pray and care faithfully for all
Concerned. In war or peace, we all belong to you,
We all need your love.

We pray for those near and dear to us: protect them, wrap them
In your loving arms, and in sorrow and in joy, be with them.

Near or far, we all belong to you,

We all need your love.

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.

I am on holiday this coming week, so our Service next Sunday will be taken by Sara Crabb, an Elder at Malmesbury URC.

Until we meet again, learn anew the power
Of truth over evil, good over bad, love over hate.
Amen.