

REFLECTIONS

This is one of Jesus's best known parables, offering as it does a vivid visual image that would have been so familiar to Jesus' listeners as well as being easily imagined by contemporary readers. Even without the interpretation offered in the second part, the point is clear. Or is it?

For me, this has always been a story calculated to challenge. 'What sort of soil am I?' I ask myself. Is my response to God's word one that is shallow, or easily choked by other concerns? What depth is there to my faith? We can see that the word of God is differently received by different people – indeed even perhaps by one person at different points in their life. There have been times when my understanding has been poor, or when the cares of everyday life have threatened to choke the word of God that I hear. For the crowds gathered to listen to Jesus by the lakeside, this challenge was an important one. Would they really hear the good news of the Kingdom that he came to bring? Will we?

Yet I believe that the God who sows his word also gives his Spirit to improve – even to transform - the soil of my heart. In our epistle reading, Paul reassures us that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' In the preceding passage (which we heard last week), he admitted his own tendency to do what he did not wish to do, when left to human devices. The gardener who tends the soil may not be part of the parable, but is surely part of the hope we have in Christ.

A further point of the parable lies in the stress put on the abundance of the harvest from the seed that fell on good soil. In the days of Jesus, ten per cent was reckoned a good harvest. So thirty, sixty or even a hundred fold signified a bumper harvest indeed. Read in this way, the parable is a message of thankfulness and encouragement to faint hearted disciples, both then and now.

Both points are useful for us. God sows abundantly – even wastefully. The parable brings us encouragement as well as the challenge of listening attentively. It challenges us also to present the message of God in ways that people can understand, and to support new Christians as they grow in faith.

Going deeper

Whilst the parable itself was delivered to a large crowd, the verses missing from our gospel passage make it clear that the interpretation of the parable was for the disciples alone. Scholars suggest that this interpretation (found in Mark and Luke as well as Matthew) was an early Christian insertion when the gospels were written. Whether written later or remembered words spoken by Jesus at the time, we do not know. Either way, they reflect experience of the variety of ways in which people respond to the good news of the Kingdom.

I wonder What you can do to be more receptive to the word of God?

THIS WEEK'S SERVICES SUNDAY IN CHURCH

St Marys, SW 8am Holy Communion BCP
President: Andy Colebrooke
Ashdon 9.30am Holy Communion President:: Caroline Curren
Debden 9.15am Holy Communion President: John Saxon
Wimbish 11am Service of the Word. Leader: John Saxon

THIS WEEK'S SERVICES ONLINE

SUNDAY

9.30am Holy Communion President: Paula Griffiths
Preacher: Robin King

9.30am Morning Prayer Leader: Tim Hardingham
Youtube Act of Worship Leader: Alex Jeewan

TUESDAY - Zoom 5.00pm

Evening Prayer Leader: Sue Walker

WEDNESDAY- Zoom 9.30am Holy Communion.
Caroline Curren Alex Jeewan

The Grapevine

COVERING THE PARISHES OF SAFFRON WALDEN, WIMBISH,
DEBDEN, ASHDON AND HADSTOCK.

Fifth Sunday after Trinity
12th July 2020

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

First Reading: *Romans 8.1-11*

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel: *Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23*

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.'

Post Communion

Grant, O Lord, we beseech you, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by your governance, that your Church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.



See St Mary's church, SW, website at
www.stmaryssaffronwalden.org to find out more.
Please 'Like' our Facebook page so we reach more people! Click on the link on our website, or go to:
www.facebook.com/saintmaryschurchsaffronwalden

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

Churches Together Prayer Cycle: In July please pray for:
Saffron Walden Salvation Army Corps, Katherine Semar Schools

The family and friends of those who have died recently:
Christine Wood, Marjorie Sharman

NEWS

TEAM RECTOR UPDATE Whilst there were some encouraging applications, the selection panel agreed that there was not a sufficient field to proceed to interview this month. We therefore propose to readvertise in the autumn.

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends

This is a momentous week, when many of our churches are opening for services again for the first time in several months. The logistics are not easy, and we are all very mindful of guidance that helps us to stay safe. This will mean some changes: there will be reduced numbers of services, and we will miss the singing, coffee and hugs. Yet I think that - for those able to return - there will also be a sense of joy at being together once more, praising God in the sacred places that we love.

We can of course praise God anywhere – and everywhere. One member of my village community replied this week to my query about how much they might use the church building by saying that they very much see their open spaces on their farm as their church, even more so at this current time. For many of us, this time has enhanced our awareness of the beauty of nature, and a sense of the countryside as hallowed space. But if we believe that God is everywhere and can be worshipped anywhere, what is special about our church buildings?

When I was recently Priest-in-Charge of four small rural parishes in Sussex, each with a church building that dated back to the 12th, 13th or 14th century, the Bishop asked all clergy whether our buildings helped or hindered our ministry as priests. My answer was 'Both'. Old buildings need a lot of upkeep, and many are not fit for purpose nowadays. Yet these buildings have seen prayer and celebration and sadness over hundreds of years – and this is often palpable. In towns and villages, they are signs of the presence of the church, and often a focus for community life and activity. People who do not worship with us may support the building, and those who attend only once or twice a year may fill the Christmas services. Those of us used to worshipping in a particular place often feel a sense of security and 'coming home' when we are in church.

So what will it mean being able to return to at least some of our churches for worship? Different things for different people, I imagine. For some, perhaps simply one more sign of a return of 'normality'. For others, a much deeper sense of being with God in company with his people. Whatever it means for you, I hope that the return to at least some of our buildings will bring joy and thankfulness. Where a building is not open, and for those unable to attend in person, be assured that zoom and online services will continue – all part of our travelling in fellowship together as the people of God.

With love and prayers
Caroline

PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK

Julian of Norwich wrote:

'The best prayer is to rest in the goodness of God, knowing that that goodness can reach right down to our lowest depths of need.' Father God, in the business and anxieties of life at the present time, help us to rest in you. **Amen**

NEWS

CHURCH SERVICES Some of our churches will reopen for services this weekend. Please see the list of services on the back page. In order to book your place at a Sunday Service at St Mary's, please email or telephone the Parish Office before noon on the previous Friday.

PRIVATE PRAYER **St Mary's Church, Saffron Walden**, is open for private prayer on Wednesday and Sunday 12-4. **All Saints, Ashdon** is open for private prayer on Wednesday and Sunday between 11am and 6.00pm.

EMAIL BULLETINS are issued each week that highlight information from the website, attach the Grapevine and service sheet and provide the Zoom links for live services that weekend. Please email Dawn at office@stmaryssaffronwalden.org if you would like to be added to the distribution list.

WORSHIP ONLINE will continue as shown on the back page. There are several ways of joining in our team worship which can be accessed from links on St Mary's Church at Home webpage. <http://www.stmaryssaffronwalden.org/churchathome>. You can watch pre-recorded services and you can participate in live Zoom Services around the team. The service sheets and Grapevine are also available on the webpage.

YOU CAN NOW JOIN LIVE WORSHIP BY PHONE - you don't need a computer or tablet. If you would like to know more please contact Steve Hasler 01799 525041 s.hasler@btopenworld.com

ST MARY'S C OF E VA PRIMARY SCHOOL in Saffron Walden is looking to recruit 2 volunteers as Church Governors. We can offer an enthusiastic, dedicated staff and existing governing board and a primary school with a nurturing learning environment. A teaching background is not necessary and most of the current governors have different career backgrounds. We are currently all working remotely due to COVID19, so access to a computer/tablet and some basic knowledge of how to use Zoom/Microsoft teams is helpful, but training can be provided. If you are interested please contact Vicky the Chair of Governors on chairofgovernors@st-maryscofe.essex.sch.uk

I am pleased to let you know that I have been **APPOINTED VICAR OF THE PARISH OF ST PAUL** in the Jewellery Quarter in the city centre. The church is intercultural with many who have Farsi as their first language and identify as Persian, and has some significant financial and building challenges. Besides being a very stimulating and stretching post, it's also within cycling distance! I have since April been chairing the community regeneration arm of the diocese that has a turnover of £500,000, have continued with my writing - my next book, 'Knowing Christ: Christian discipleship and the Eucharist' is to be published this autumn – and with this post am now feeling established here. As my future has taken shape, I have been very conscious of your prayers. Thank you. Be assured that you remain in mine as you navigate your way through the easing of lockdown, and look to the future. With love, David.

MINISTRY TEAM

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