

Mothers' Union Thursday Prayers, 20 July 2023

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“Understanding God’s Word”

Welcome everyone to our Thursday prayers.

Introductory Prayer.

Lord, speak to us that we may hear your word.

Move among us that we may behold your glory.

Receive our prayers that we may learn to trust you. **Amen**

We say together the Mothers' Union Prayer

Loving Lord, We thank you for your love so freely given to us all

We pray for families around the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life.

Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world. In Jesus' name . Amen

and the Monthly Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us grace in all relationships.

May hope be stronger than struggle, celebrations more frequent than trials,

may kindness prevail over judgement, equality dissolve oppression,

may love break walls of hate. Amen

Our Reading Today is taken from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 13 vv1-9, 18-23, using the New Living translation

Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. ² A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. ³ He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. ⁴ As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. ⁸ Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! ⁹ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

¹⁸ “Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: ¹⁹ The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. ²⁰ The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ²¹ But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. ²² The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. ²³ The seed

that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"

This morning our Reflection is entitled "Understanding God's Word".

I imagine that we all would like to think of ourselves as the good soil on which the good news of God's kingdom falls, to be those who truly hear and understand God's word, and to be those who produce a plentiful harvest from what has been planted in us.

The truth is probably that we have all, at some time, been the footpath, the rocky soil, the weed-filled ground choked by thorns, as well as the good soil. Human life is like that.

Even though our society, environment and lifestyle are far removed from those in which Jesus lived, we remain close enough to the land – through seeing nearby farms, having an allotment, garden, courtyard of pots, window boxes, herbs on the kitchen window sill, or house plants – to be able to connect with the picture Jesus painted with his words. We understand what seed needs to germinate, grow and flourish.

Between the story that Jesus told about the sower, and the explanation that he gave for the parable, are verses we didn't hear today. Those verses focus on Jesus' reply to his disciples' question, 'Why do you always tell stories when you talk to the people?'

Jesus replied that people see what he does, but they don't really see. They hear what he says, but they don't really hear. They hear what he says, but they don't understand. This, he says, fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah, who explains that the hearts of these people are hardened, so their ears can't hear and their eyes can't see and their hearts can't understand – which in turn means that they cannot turn to God and let him heal them.

Those who do see, hear, and understand are blessed to know the hope of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven; that peace, hope and truth will restore the relationship of the whole of creation with God, bring us to salvation and eternal life. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, nothing and no-one will remain separated from God through sin, rather, by faith, will be reconciled with him and share fellowship with him, as his children and heirs.

And those who do see, hear and understand are not to keep this hope to themselves. Like good soil, they are to nourish the seed and let it spread its growth across the earth. That way, the harvest can be huge, thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as is planted.

So, the sixty-four-dollar question: what makes good soil? What is it that helps us to see, hear and understand God's word?

Jesus knew that the story wasn't easy, he wanted people to think it through, talk about it with each other. Some might have thought that after all the kings, prophets and priests who hadn't succeeded, Jesus was saying that he would be the one to lead them out of oppression. Others might have thought that God was having difficulty with bringing in his kingdom so they'd have to wait even longer for their promised freedom. How would Jesus bring success about?

What they couldn't have missed was Jesus' assurance that God's promise, what they'd been longing for and praying for, was really going to happen. Did they hear the BUT coming? Jesus said that they need to persist, to be resilient, to listen, to figure it out - and keep coming back to hear more, to deepen their understanding.

Just like them, we need to continue to read scripture and think about what God's work is today, here and now in our generation. We need to figure it out and join in with what God's already up to. It's not always easy to understand or to do, but we know what God's already done through Jesus, and he wants to continue that work through us. We need to put in the time, the hard work, and the effort to remove stones from the soil, to uproot weeds and thorns. Only with that determination will we be free to give proper care and thought to hear the word of God, to let it fully take root in our hearts, so that our hearing brings understanding. Then, success will not be for our own sake, but for the kingdom as we in turn bear fruit.

What stories do we have that we can tell?

Where must we be so that we can tell them?

How can we spread the word so that it can do its work in people's hearts and lives, as it has done in ours?

Thursday Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

In our Intercessions today we pray for –

The Worldwide work of the Mothers' Union and our worldwide president Sheran Harper, our chief executive Bev Julian and all who work in Mary Sumner House. Our province of Canterbury and Kathryn Anderson, our Provincial President. For our Diocesan President Hazel Williams and Trustees and all task group leaders and MU members and all Clergy within the Ely Diocese.

In our Worldwide Links of the Mothers' Union we pray for:- Lusaka in Zambia; Shyogwe in Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka in Nigeria; Karimnager in India; plus diocese to diocese with Kigali and Velore.

Our Wave of Prayer today is for Gitega in Burundi; Murag'a South and Mbeere in Kenya; Enugu North in Nigeria; Tonga in Diocese of Polynesia and Jaffna in Diocese of Church of South India.

We give thanks for the sacrificial love of Christ with deeply grateful hearts.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the joy, peace, help and blessings that you give to us each day.

Thank you for this wondrous world filled with all the wonderful gifts you have given to us.

Thank you for our families, friends and the fellowship of your Church.

Help us to be mindful and hold in prayer before you:

those who do not yet know the love of Christ;

those whose lives today will be a struggle to feel joy, find peace, seek or engage with help;

those whose lives do not feel blessed;

those who cannot see beyond the shadows and darkness of unhappiness, hunger, loneliness, isolation, poverty, fear, trauma, oppression, conflict, to see the beauty and wonder of the world you have created for us;

for those who are separated from families and friends;

for those who feel unable or unwelcome to share the fellowship of your church;

and anyone known to us who is ill or unwell, in situations that need our prayers. **Pause**

And we thank you for the most wondrous gift of all – the forgiveness of our sins, bought for us by the love of your most blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

We say together in confidence, 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

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.
Colossians 2:6-7

All Stand for our Hymn: We have a gospel to proclaim

We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for men in all the earth;
the gospel of a saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem,
not in a royal house or hall
but in a stable dark and dim:
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary,
hated by those he came to save;
in lonely suffering on the cross
for all he loved, his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free;
he broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified;
he sends his Spirit on his church
to live for him, the lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him king:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
this gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your holy word. May it be a lantern to our feet, a light to our paths, and strength to our lives. Take us and use us to love and serve all people in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An Australian Prayer Book

All say The Mary Sumner Prayer together:

All this day O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee, and every life I touch. Do thou by thy spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe or the life I live. Amen

May the blessing of God strengthen and encourage us as we go from here to live lives of gratitude and service. Amen

All Stand and say the Grace together:

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more. Amen