



Readings, Collect and Reflection for Sunday 12 July 2020
The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 65.8-13

- 8 You visit the earth and water it; ♦
you make it very plenteous.
- 9 The river of God is full of water; ♦
you prepare grain for your people,
for so you provide for the earth.
- 10 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; ♦
you soften the ground with showers and bless its increase.
- 11 You crown the year with your goodness, ♦
and your paths overflow with plenty.
- 12 May the pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness ♦
and the hills be girded with joy.
- 13 May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep ♦
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.

May the richness of your creation, O God, and the mystery of your sovereign rule,
lead us to that heavenly city where all peoples will bring their wealth,
forsake their sins and find their true joy
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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.
Amen.

Romans 8.1-11

There is therefore 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.

Matthew 13.1-9,18-23

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.'

Reflection by Peter

This week's readings make a kind of sandwich: Psalm 65 celebrates the richness of God's creation and the sense that everything is poised to reach its potential and overflow with fruitfulness – so that's one piece of bread! Then, the Gospel reading (continuing our journey through St Matthew) gives us the familiar parable of the sower and the seed. Here again, the focus is on the natural world, seed and soil, sun and weeds; but again it is full of confidence that seeds have the potential for life and abundance – the second slice of bread. So what's the filling? For that we have part of Paul's letter to the Romans. As is so often the case, Paul is focussing on being human. From his own experience he knows that, no matter how hard we try, we often end up in places we don't want to be; doing things we deeply regret; saying things that cause hurt and distress. In other words, Paul is only too aware that human beings don't simply grow up good! What then gives Paul hope? Here Paul makes a distinction. It is, he says, possible to think of human beings just like sophisticated animals, creatures of the flesh, as he puts it. But, he says, that is not how things are. Becoming a Christian is to discover a new life – rather like Lucy stumbling on Narnia as the fur coats gave way to fir trees. It is, Paul tells us, 'life in the Spirit' and now the limitations of being human are no longer the end of the road. Now, with the help of God's grace – the power of God given freely to us through Jesus – our very limitations can become the stepping stones to new growth, freedom and life. And with great exuberance Paul says, '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...' Or, as he puts it when writing to the Church in Galatia, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!"

With Paul's insights in our minds we hear the parable of the sower in a new light: yes, seeds have potential, but they do need the right conditions, the right soil, the right amount of sun and rain – and so do we. We too have potential, but we need to acknowledge that the 'right soil' for us is not achieved by a new regime at the gym (when it opens again); not about giving up swearing or doing the crossword... Jesus and Paul together ask us to admit our need of God's grace that we may bring forth fruit abundantly. Not only do we not have to 'go it alone', - if we do we shall certainly get things wrong – but God is ever pouring out his love and grace to help us become the people God alone knows we can be.