

St Paul's Methodist Church, Crawley

Worship at Home

**A service to follow in your own place and at your own time
when you are unable to attend church in person**

24th July 2022

Theme: *What can we learn from Jesus' Parables?*

by Deacon Jenny Parnell



Call to worship

God of all creation, you hold the depths of the earth in your hands.
You are closer to us than the air we breathe.
Fill our souls with your wonderful love and light.
Give us strength and courage to reflect that love
and light in the world.
Let us never shrink back from who we are in you or hide our light
inside ourselves. Renew in us a sense of joy,
painting the dark shadows around us with your light, your love,
and your salvation.

Hymn StF 449 Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

1 Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

2 We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined
yet seeking hope for humankind.

3 Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own
not through some merit, right, or claim,
but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Jack Copley Winslow

Let us join in prayer

O God, how we adore you. We marvel at the depth of your love. We wonder at the waves of your grace and are astounded by the glorious balance of your creation. We are in awe of the vastness of the universe. Thank you that you are mighty, yet we can be called your children.

We are accepted and forgiven. You are almighty, above and beyond everything. You are victorious. Darkness, sin, and death are under your feet. You are Holy, beautiful, and full of love. Yes, how we adore you. Amen

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

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

Jenny's message

The Parables are full of imagery and familiar everyday scenarios. Or are they would have been for those who first heard them but maybe we have to stretch our imagination a little bit further! I come from a Cornish fishing family so am no stranger to nets and fish.

However, when Jesus asks his disciples whether they understand how the Kingdom of God can be likened to a net of fish in Matthew 13 :51-52 the disciples reply yes; but I automatically reply "Um... no."

I do know that to catch certain fish you need the correct net. The shape of the net, the size of the mesh, the weights around the edge, the tether that holds it to the fisherman are all there for a purpose, so it could catch fish. At a pinch perhaps you could use just a plain ordinary net to try and catch fish, but it would never be as effective.

What can we learn from this? How do we approach mission? What would have been obvious to the original hearers can be more complicated for us to eke out the meanings. We naturally translate our thinking and view things through the lens of our own experiences. The parables tell us about ancient methods of farming, fishing, cooking, hospitality, law and so on. To understand the parables and the New Testament in general we need to look a little deeper at the backgrounds of the stories being shared.

Let's read Matthew 7: 24-29

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

At first glance it would seem obvious to anyone to know where not to build a house! Why would you build on the seashore? This story is all about getting the foundations right. We should perhaps be mindful of the fact that this doesn't mean that Jesus is suggesting not to build a house on the seashore. This parable has nothing to do with sand on a beach.

Israel was, and still has a hot and quite oppressive climate. April sees the landscape lush and green. Matthew 14:19 tells us how Jesus tells the crowds to sit down on the grass, before he distributes the bread and the fish.... From May to September there is sunshine and no rain. The air is clear, and sound carries easily. The land becomes arid and dry, the sandy ground becomes hard. It is extremely hard to determine what is sand and what is solid ground as both are baked hard and so take on the same properties in the sweltering heat. When the rains came the low valleys and gullies are overcome with water causing things to be washed away as the sandy ground becomes loose again. This would obviously be disastrous for any misplaced building project!

So where did people build their houses? Towns grew up near to the plains where crops could be grown or near to seaports where travellers could be welcomed. Houses were usually built on the tops or the side of hills. Towns were often surrounded by walls to defend them against robbers. There was a town guard to monitor people entering and leaving through the town's gate. Houses were generally kept small so as to avoid the higher taxes that would be incurred if you were to show wealth. Towns were busy and usually not very sanitary places. Dogs were allowed to roam the streets to eat any scraps (Matthew 15:27). Families usually lived on the upper floor of their house and the animals occupied the lower rooms. This living arrangement possibly throws fresh light upon Luke 11:5-7 where we read:

“And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’”

The towns would have been a mill of activity and noise. When Jesus wanted peace and quiet, he often went out to the hills or to the seashore. Peaceful though it was nobody would have built their house on the seashore. Jesus told the parable of the foolish builder following the Sermon on the Mount. It's as if Jesus is saying that we have to do more than simply listen to his teaching, we also have to do our best to act upon in in thought, word or deed.

To think about:

Is there a parable that you find particularly helpful?

Are there aspects of some parables which you don't understand or find unhelpful?

Have you ever tried to place yourself in the narrative of the Scriptures so that you can be more immersed in the story? If you have, did you learn anything?

We speak of God's kingdom and pray 'your kingdom come' what is your understanding of the characteristics or values of God's kingdom?

Are there any personal choices we can make to demonstrate God's kingdom in our communities?

Let us pray:

Mighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the light of the World, a light which no darkness can quench.

Hear us today as we pray for a world too often darkened by hatred, evil, power and greed.

God of power and might, your broken world cries out from the depths, a world dominated by the darkness of war, terror, pain, and suffering.

We think of the on-going and deepening conflicts around the world. We share the pain and anguish of those who have had to flee from their homes, countries and livelihoods, who risk their lives, desperate for a new start free from fear and war.

May they see your light, feel your strength and power and know the truth of your promise that we shall not be overcome by the dark shadows of life or the darkness of human nature.

Christ, bring hope and comfort to those who are ill or in pain and the bereaved. God of all creation, you hold the depths of the earth in your hands. You are closer to us than the air we breathe.

Fill our souls with your wonderful love and light. Give us strength and courage to reflect that love and light in the world.

Let us never shrink back from who we are in you or hide our light inside ourselves. Renew in us a sense of joy, painting the dark shadows around us with your light, your love, and your salvation.

The Blessing

May the love of the Father,
the tenderness of the Son,
and the presence of the Spirit,
gladden your heart
and bring peace to your soul,
this day and all days, Amen.