

Morning Service 12th July

Thank you for joining us for this morning service, this might be the last in this form, as we now have plans to return to worship in Cudham Church on Sunday 26th at 11am, and will be live streaming church services too, Rev Richard Priest will be leading next week's recorded service and you'll find that on Cudham and Downe church youtube channel. I'm Rev John Musson, vicar of Cudham and Downe and I'm joined by Helen Musson, Ordinand at St Augustines college.

You'll find the words of the service on the church website pcd.org.uk

Today we hear Jesus tell the story of the sower.

The Greeting - with actions

Lord Jesus, as we gather today,
may we have eyes to see
and ears to hear
what you are saying to us.

**Make us ready to learn
from your stories.**

Amen.

Our Opening Hymn is Great is thy faithfulness

**Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.**

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

***Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!***

**Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.**

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

***Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!***

**Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!**

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see:

*all I have needed thy hand hath provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

Opening Prayer

Lord, we might not be sitting by a lake today.
However, as the crowds eagerly gathered
to listen to the stories and truths you told them,
we too await your word to us.

**With joy in our hearts, and anticipation,
we pray that you will give us listening ears,
and hearts open to receive your love,
your teaching, and your wisdom.
Help our lives to be full to bursting, bearing your fruit.
Amen.**

***We now spend time reflecting on our need to say sorry and to hear God forgive us.
Let us pray***

For the times we dash haphazardly into your presence,
finding it hard to leave behind our cares and worries:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we don't learn from our experiences:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we don't take care of ourselves,
or the people we share our lives with:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times we don't see what you want us to see
and just take things at face value:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we want our seed planted in neat rows,
when our own plans become more important than yours,
rather than letting the Holy Spirit prepare the soil of our lives
and blow where the Spirit wants to:
**forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.
Amen.**

May the God of love
bring us back to himself,
forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer for Today – 5th Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God, send down upon your Church the riches of your Spirit, and kindle in all who minister the gospel your countless gifts of grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Bible Reading Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

1 Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

18 'Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 when anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.'

Talk

I loved 'the Vicar of Dibley' – not so much Dawn French's portrayal of Vicar Geraldine Grainger, but much lamented Emma Chamber's character verger Alice, especially when the two of them got together in the vestry after the service for a story or a joke. Some are not suitable to repeat in an online service, but the one that sticks in my mind is the knock knock – who's there – interrupting sheep (baa), interrupting sheep (baa) – you get the point!?

Alice never did quite get the point and often had to have the story or the joke explained to her, much like Jesus seemed to have to do in our bible reading today. In case you didn't notice, it was in two halves, the story and then the explanation.

Jesus tells the story, or as the gospel writers call them – parables – short stories designed to make a point most often about the kingdom of God. Sometimes the meaning of the story is clear – each element is relatable, a bit like the one we looked at a few weeks ago, the prodigal son; sometimes the meanings are explained, sometimes not.

The first half of this week's reading presents this picture of someone 'broadcasting' seed, probably throwing it across each side of the ground as they walked along a path of beaten earth through a field. Jesus gives reasons why the seed falling in each of the four different places might be more or less productive. So far so good.

But is this story really about seed at all? Here's a brief summary of the seeds and where they fall:

- The seed that lands where the soil has become hardened from being repeatedly walked on simply sits on the surface, waiting to become food for the birds.
- The seed that falls on rocky soil has difficulty taking root because the soil inhibits the growth of roots, necessary for plants to access the nutrients in the soil.
- The seed that falls on ground covered in thorns must compete with already well-established, invasive plants and stands little chance.
- But the seed that falls on the soil that has been prepared, turned over and loosened until it is fine, replenished with nutrients from the decaying matter of leaves, thrives.

So, while the parable of the sower appears to be about the seed, I wonder if it's really about the soil. This means that the parable is really about us—those who hear the "word of the kingdom" We are the soil.

Jesus wakes us and the crowd up with verse 9&18 – listen – a bit like that old English word favoured by the bards – hwæt:-

Are you still listening? Did you know that both facebook and youtube give analytics that show exactly when people tune out – try not to for the next minute or two, listen to Jesus explanation...

We are the soil, and often like many bits of soil at once – complex beings that we are...

Soil, like us, is shaped by its environment. So, if soil is walked on over and over again, beaten down so that it becomes packed hard, it is no longer fit for the planting of seeds. If we've been walked on over, and over, and over again we often develop a hardened exterior to protect ourselves.

Rocky soil, says Jesus, describes those who lack the staying power to deal with—well, rocky ground – maybe we've found ourselves like that recently, or feel like that at the moment due to some crisis or anxiety that we feel might overwhelm us. When the going gets rough, we go into retreat.

The soil filled with thorns easily translates into our overcrowded lives; there is no room in an already overplanted plot for anything more; no room for God. I think many of us thought in March we'd have lots of spare time – more time for God – yet we've let other things take his place – so prayer and bible reading, developing our relationship with God has got squeezed out once again.

The good soil? It would be nice if it were as simple as buying a bag of 'good soil' at the local garden centre. A gardener will tell you, however, that good soil takes years to cultivate. In Jesus day even more so, it was a precious commodity, often being in the family for years, just like the best French grape terroir. It must be fed, nurtured by the remains of plants that have come and gone. It must be worked and reworked so that it becomes supple, but not worked so hard that its structure is broken down. And it must be replenished and allowed time to rest, as seeds grow and draw on its nutrients.

Remember that this is a parable of the Kingdom of Heaven – this Kingdom, says Jesus, belongs to the poor in spirit and the persecuted (Matthew 5:3,10), it is governed by humility (18:3; 19:14) and demonstrated in righteousness (5:10, 19-20; 6:33), which is to do the will of God (7:21). As we ponder the parable of the sower, this invites us to reflect on a number of questions:

- What does it mean to be good soil, prepared to receive the word of the kingdom?
- How do we assess what kind of shape our soil is in?
- What would we need to do for the seed to be able to take root in our bodies and souls?
- How will we know if this is happening?
- And how might we nurture good soil in those around us?

Poor old Alice, she never did quite get the point of the Vicar's stories – but what about us? Will we hear Jesus word: 'listen' and engage more fully with his story, and let it grow in us, so that we become that good soil that produces a good crop-signs of the Kingdom at work in our lives which then become nourishment to others around?

Song of Response –*Seek ye first*

**Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And his righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you,
Allelu, alleluia!
*Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.***

**Ask, and it shall be given unto you,
Seek, and ye shall find.
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you,
Allelu, alleluia!
*Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.***

**You shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord,
Allelu, alleluia!
*Alleluia, alleluia,
Alleluia, allelu, alleluia.***

The Creed

Let us declare our faith in God.
**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

The prayers - *the response is* 'May we see you, may we hear you, may we know you care.'

God of all seeds and all stories,
we pray for the wisdom to apply the truth of Jesus' parables
to our own lives
and to our life together in this place where we worship you
and this community where we serve you.
May we see you, may we hear you, may we know you care.

In the world, we pray especially
for places where climate change has brought drought...
for the places where it has brought floods ...
for those whose crops have been scorched...
for those whose livelihoods have been washed away.
We pray for the people of Japan –
for those caught in the heavy rains there –
and for the people of Australia
and their wildlife endangered by the forest fires.
We pray too for those in our own country
who face continual upheaval and heartache through repeated flooding.
May we see you, may we hear you, may we know you care.

We pray for those whose life's seeds
are being choked by anxiety, poverty and hardship...
for those who have lost their jobs...
for those unable to feed their families
or to pay their mortgages and rent...
for those living without basic facilities.
We pray for those given hope by the emergency budget
and for those who feel hope-less
and for foodbanks and charities that try to help all who are struggling.
May we see you, may we hear you, may we know you care.

We pray for those unable to thrive because of illness...
and those denied the opportunity
to plant the seeds of their dreams in fertile soil...
for those hospitalised with Covid-19...
for those whose journey to recovery is long , slow and painful...
for those who nurse them...
for those who love them...
for those whose treatment has been put on hold...
We pray for those robbed of the opportunity to go to school,
for children in war zones, those in refugee camps,
those who have to work to find their daily food.
May we see you, may we hear you, may we know you care.

And we pray for those whose seeds are watered by their tears...
those grieving the loss of someone close to them...
those who feel forgotten...
those who are neglected...
those who are victims of injustice, abuse, or cruelty...
**May they – and all in any kind of need today – see you, may they hear you,
and may know you care. Amen.**

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

After a moment to bring our own prayers to God:

Jesus taught us to call God our Father,
so in faith and trust we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

A final reflective prayer:-

Lord,

I don't want thorns or weeds in my life.

(shake head)

I have ears, let me hear you speak to me.

(cup ears)

I don't want to be without roots, and get scorched by the sun.

(shake head)

I have ears...

I don't want to shrivel up through not enough rain.

(shake head)

I have ears...

I need your sunshine and your rain to help me grow.

(nod head vigorously)

I have ears, let me hear you speak to me.

(cup ears)

Amen.

We sing our closing song – Lord of the dance....

Closing Song: Lord of the dance

**I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.
*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,***

*And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
They came with me and the dance went on:
*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a cross to die:
*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
But I am the dance, and I still go on:
*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die.
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.
*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

Thank you for joining us in worship today, thanks too if you've completed our questionnaire as we prepare for returning to church for worship. Please email admin@pcd.org.uk if you haven't received a copy and would like to fill one in. Details of our next services are found on our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/PCDChurches/> where you can watch the service live or catch up later, and you'll find this week's notice sheet and other useful information on the church website pcd.org.uk

*Please also contact the Vicar, Rev John Musson if you need any help or just for a chat! vicar@pcd.org.uk
01959540012*

Blessing

Lord Jesus, you are always ready
to share your story with us.
As we go out into the week ahead,
may we all have ears to hear
so that we might grow.
And may the blessing of God rest upon us;
The blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen

