



## Service for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020

*A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.*

### CALL TO WORSHIP

'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.'

We are the people of the kingdom. Come now to worship the Son of Man.

Come seeking new understanding of all that he has done for us,  
and of all that we are called to do for the building of the kingdom.

HYMN: New every morning

*If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

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|---|--|
| 1. New every morning is the love<br>our wakening and uprising prove,<br>through sleep and darkness safely brought,<br>restored to life and power and thought. | 3. If on our daily course our mind<br>be set to hallow all we find,<br>new treasures still, of countless price,<br>God will provide for sacrifice.                   |
| 2. New mercies each returning day,<br>hover around us while we pray;<br>new perils past, new sins forgiven,<br>new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.      | 4. Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,<br>as more of heaven in each we see,<br>some softening gleam of love and prayer<br>shall dawn on every cross and care. |
| 5. The trivial round, the common task<br>will furnish all we ought to ask.<br>Lord, help us, this and every day,<br>to live more nearly as we pray.           |  |

*John Keble*

### PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Lord, sometimes we are just so impatient, wanting to get on with our lives, wanting everything better. But we know, our ways are not your ways.

We come to you today rejoicing in the knowledge that you can transform our lives and the lives of those around us – starting exactly where we are.

Thank you, Lord.

Lord, we confess to you today that we are not very patient with the weeds in our lives. We try to yank them out, without thinking of any harm that may cause, to ourselves or others. Sometimes, we are so frightened that those tangles will overcome us that we try to ignore them, pretending they're not there.

Please forgive us, Lord, and help us to trust you to show us your way.

Mighty God, we come to you in humble adoration.

You take us, such very imperfect people, and give us the chance to prove that, when we place ourselves in your care, we can be the people you want us to be. We bless you, Lord. We praise and adore you. **Amen.**

#### 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.**

#### SCRIPTURE READING: St Matthew 13: 24-30 & 36-43

Here is another parable that he put before them: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like this. A man sowed his field with good seed; but while everyone was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel among the wheat, and made off. When the corn sprouted and began to fill out, the darnel could be seen among it. The farmer's men went to their master and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? Then where has the darnel come from?" "This is an enemy's doing", he replied. "Well then," they said, "shall we go and gather the darnel?" "No," he answered; "in gathering it you might pull up the wheat at the same time. Let them both grow together till harvest; and at harvest-time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the darnel first, and tie it in bundles for burning; then collect the wheat into my barn." '

He then dismissed the people, and went into the house, where his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the darnel in the field.' And this was his answer: 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed stands for the children of the Kingdom, the darnel for the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed the darnel is the devil. The harvest is the end of time. The reapers are the angels. As the darnel, then, is gathered up and burnt, so at the end of time the Son of Man will send out his angels, who will gather out of his kingdom whatever makes men stumble, and all whose deeds are evil, and these will be thrown into the blazing furnace, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth. And then the righteous will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. If you have ears, then hear!'

#### ADDRESS

##### **On Wheat, Weeds and Ambiguity**

If there was ever a parable that helped make the faith we preach on Sunday useful to our people Monday to Saturday, this is probably it. Before jumping into the parable itself though, I should probably say a word about what I mean by "useful".

Some, I know, may object to such a pragmatic, even utilitarian word to talk about the faith. After all, shouldn't we believe just because, well, we should, without seeking any tangible benefit and outcome? Maybe, at least in an ideal world. But one of the things I think is true, in the actual world we live in, is that faith needs to be useful – that is, connected to our daily lives.

We live, as you know, with so many choices, so many obligations, so many demands and opportunities that we increasingly must exercise our discretion to wend our way through all these choices with limited time and resources. For this reason, we typically – and increasingly – choose to invest ourselves in those activities and commitments that make a difference. Which is why fewer and fewer people will continue giving an hour a week to church if that hour doesn't in some way help them make sense of their lives: the other 167 hours of the week.

Which is where this parable comes in. At heart, this parable isn't about the nature of evil and provides little material for constructing a coherent theodicy (if there even *is* such a thing). Rather, I think this parable is about ambiguity. Yes, the sower planted with good seeds. Yes, there are now weeds strewn among the wheat, which put the ideal harvest the sower had imagined at risk. Ideally, the servants could just rip out the weeds, but the sower knows that to tear out the weeds now risks ruining the maturing wheat as well. So the sower must wait, living with both the wheat and the weeds until the day of harvest when they may be separated in due time.

How often do we face similar dilemmas? If not with wheat and weeds (although there may be a few gardeners in our congregation who sympathize with the sower!), then with a multitude of other difficult choices: like between getting a job to support the family or staying at home to spend more time with the family; or between supporting someone who consistently struggles at work and pulls the quality of your team down, or sacking that person; or between two different treatment options in responding to a grave illness; or between staying in your current job, where things are comfortable, or choosing to move on to newer but unknown pastures; or between giving into peer pressure because it hurts to be left out, or choosing to stick to your values and risk isolation; or...

Do you see what I mean? Our lives are littered with situations where there is no clear or easy answer. Yet we rarely talk about these things in church. Maybe we don't know what to say. Or maybe we ourselves aren't quite sure how the faith relates to this. But I hear in this parable Jesus' promise that in ambiguous, challenging situations we have the promise that, in the end, God will sort things out.

Which doesn't mean everything will turn out just fine. Sometimes we don't choose well. Sometimes things go wrong. The promise here isn't that Christian faith prevents hardship; the promise is that we are not justified by our right choices, but rather by grace through faith. Knowing we have God's unconditional regard, in spite of our poor choices, frees us to live in the moment.

The thing is, we don't live in an ideal world and each week we're faced with a myriad of challenging decisions, some small and others large, to which there is no clear answer. Some

decisions we'll get right, others wrong, and still others we won't know whether we were right or wrong for months or years to come; but we still need to make them. Then, each week, no matter how we fared, we can come back to church on Sunday to be reminded that God loves us anyway and promises that, in the end, God will hold all of our choices and all of our lives together in love.

David Lose, whose commentaries I read, says that in a world coloured as ours is by ambiguity, the only absolute is to be found in the absolution. I think those are powerful words, and supply one of the main reasons I go to church: because I want to be able to join with others and acknowledge that life is hard, sometimes really hard, and the choices in front of us are not always clear or easy. Because not only do we have the support of the community in making these difficult choices, and no matter how they turn out, we can return each Sunday and hear again words of absolution, forgiveness, grace, and commissioning as we are sent once again into the world to make difficult choices and compromises, trying to be the people God has called us to be.

So perhaps this week, after opening up this parable about ambiguity and laying it beside our daily lives, I ask you to take a few moments to think about some of the difficult choices you have made recently, or will soon have to make, and then have a time of silence in which to pray for the choices we and those around us are facing. Then close by praying a prayer like this one....

*Dear Lord, our lives are coloured by ambiguity and we don't always know the right or best thing to do. But we do know that your love is guiding us and that you have called us to live as your people in the world. When we face hard choices, give us eyes to see the best path forward and the courage to follow it. When we make mistakes, forgive us. When we are hurt by our choices, comfort us. When we hurt others, help us to reach out to them in love. Above and beyond all these decisions, remind us that you still love us and call us back to this place, that we may be forgiven, renewed, called, and sent forth once more as your beloved children. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord God, we pray for our world and its people.

So many different cultures, colours, languages – but we are all your children, all special in our own right. Whatever our gender, race, colour or creed, we all belong to you.

**We all need your love.**

We pray that we might learn to live in harmony with each other, to recognise that even someone halfway around the world is still our neighbour in your sight. Far or near, we all belong to you.

**We all need your love.**

With today's technology we have access to news from afar, almost before it happens.

Help us not to become blasé about the situations we see, but to pray and care faithfully for all concerned. In war or peace, we all belong to you.

**We all need your love.**

Today we especially pray for our former Minister, Wilbert, and his family as they bear the grief of Irene's death. Support and strengthen them at this time and hold them in the palm of your hand.

We pray for those near and dear to us: protect them, wrap them in your loving arms, and in sorrow and in joy, be with them. Near or far, we all belong to you.

**We all need your love.**

**Amen.**

HYMN: Thou whose almighty word

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment*

1. Thou whose almighty word  
chaos and darkness heard,  
and took their flight,  
hear us, we humbly pray,  
and where the gospel day  
sheds not its glorious ray,  
let there be light.

2. Thou who didst come to bring  
on thy redeeming wing  
healing and sight,  
health to the sick in mind,  
sight to the inly blind,  
now to all humankind  
let there be light.

3. Spirit of truth and love,  
life-giving, holy dove,  
speed forth thy flight;  
move o'er the waters' face,  
bearing the lamp of grace,  
and in earth's darkest place  
let there be light.

4. Holy and blessed Three,  
Glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might,  
boundless as ocean's tide  
rolling in fullest pride,  
through the world, far and wide,  
let there be light.

*John Marriott*

BLESSING

Lord, thank you that we have been able to spend time with you today.

We have felt ourselves grow stronger as we have been blessed with your presence.

Send us out to spread your love, in your precious name.

**Amen**