

ZOOM service North Kirklees and Morley Circuit 12th July 2020
Action for Children Sunday

Welcome and short prayer

King of heaven, we your children are gathered here today in your name. Fill us with your overwhelming joy and bless us with your presence as we offer our worship to you and turn our eyes upon Jesus. Amen

Song: [Turn your eyes upon Jesus](#) (The glorious Christ Live)

Prayer

Dear Father

We turn our eyes upon Jesus as we meet to worship you as one united family.

We come in wonder at your amazing creation. We come joyful for all that pleases us.

We come sad for all that troubles us. We come thankful for all you have given us. We come happy to be amongst friends and in your company.

We come sorry for all that we have done wrong and to seek your forgiveness.

We come concerned and to offer prayers for other people. And we come to meet you, face to face, just as we are.

Amen

[Isaiah 55: 10-13](#)

[Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23](#) (YouTube Link)

As you will have gathered, this morning's focus of attention is the parable of the sower. Like some of you, gardening is one of my favourite pastimes, but unfortunately, I can't profess to be a Monty Don or an Alan Titchmarsh!

I'm sure you will all agree, however, there is something quite satisfying in watching a nurtured seed grow into something quite beautiful.

Jesus was a master of story-telling and every story he told had a hidden meaning. The parable of the sower is no different, in that it encourages us, his disciples, to sow the seeds of the gospel into the lives of others and then watch those seeds grow and mature into something even more beautiful than a flower.

Song: [How beautiful](#) (Twillia Paris)

Reflection (Matthew 13: 1-9 and 18-23)

Never underestimate the power of a seed!

For example, if you want to see a miracle, all you have to do is take a tiny sunflower seed, plant it under several inches of soil, give it plenty of water and light, and then sit back and get ready for blast off. In a fairly short space of time, a mountain will be moved! It doesn't matter if the weight of the ground is a million times heavier than the

seed, the tiny seed will simply push back the earth and produce a beautiful sunflower that will grow to almost 10 feet in height.

This morning's gospel reading, the parable of the sower, is a wonderful story that reminds us all, metaphorically, to never underestimate the power of a seed. In this respect, Jesus, the master of story-telling, is keen to tell us not to get too disheartened when not everyone takes heed of the gospel message. On the contrary, he simply tells us to spread the "word" as far and wide as possible, and then sit back, draw breath, and wait for the miracle to happen.

Jesus, as we know, always told stories that were relevant to the people of the day, and farming was just as important then as it is today. Farming in Palestine, though, back in the day, was slightly different to the farming of today in England's green and pleasant land.

Much of the hilly ground cultivated in the Middle East is of the steep, rocky variety that in Britain we wouldn't even consider for farming purposes. But cultivate it they did, painstakingly building little terraces to hold back the soil.

And when it came to sowing, one might expect they would have been very careful with the seed, making sure it was only sown where there was enough soil to give it a reasonable chance of survival. This, however, was not their preferred method. Instead, in what would seem a rather wasteful way of farming, the Palestinian farmer would scatter his seed indiscriminately, or as they say in the farming fraternity, "broadcast". "Broadcast" being the verb that was later adopted by the world of television and radio.

Appearances, though, can be deceptive and there was method in their madness. For where the soil looked sparse, there may in fact have been deep cracks between the stones, where the seeds could quite easily put down good roots. And where the soil looked deep and fertile, it may in reality have only been a thin covering over the underlying rock.

So, they took their chance and scatted the seeds everywhere in the knowledge that some of their crop would be eaten by the birds, some of it would wither, some of it would choke, but more importantly, that the remainder would fall on fertile soil and produce a good yield of between 4 and 10 fold.

However, in terms of this morning's reading from Matthew's gospel, Jesus says that God expects a yield of 30, 60 or even 100-fold from the seeds that we sow – a harvest, therefore, beyond our wildest expectations.

Jesus, as we know, was not selective in where he preached the good news of God's Kingdom. No conditions were so adverse that he would throw up his hands and say, "not here Father, this soil is barren".

His message was for everyone; the rich, the poor, the famous, the learned, the not so learned, the religious, the non-religious, the outcasts and the under privileged; all were included. Jesus offered no class, race, colour, creed or social distinction whatsoever. He simply, "broadcast" his message to all who were prepared to listen. And just like the

three unproductive areas in the parable, Jesus too came across unproductive areas in his ministry.

Firstly, the seeds that fell on the path, where the birds came and ate them up, this represents all those people who were too busy to listen. Maybe he meant the Romans, or perhaps his words were directed at the Scribes and the Pharisees who in their busyness had failed to notice who Jesus was and what he represented.

And today in 2020 it isn't difficult to categorise those who are too busy to hear the gospel. Before this awful pandemic, life was lived at a frantic pace, with people filling every minute of every day as though there were no tomorrow. And perhaps we too in our churches were too busy doing the unimportant things that we failed to step back, reflect, focus on the things that matter and offer Jesus the time he deserves.

Secondly, the seeds that fell in rocky places and sprang up quickly, but which subsequently got scorched by the sun and withered, this illustration represents all those who at first were excited by the message, but when trouble arrived, they lost their faith.

Perhaps some of the Disciples fell into this particular section. Thomas and Peter certainly struggled with their faith when the going got tough. And today there are those who hear the message, come to faith, but fall away when other things in their lives take over. I know for a fact that there have been difficult times in my life when my faith has "withered" and faltered, and perhaps you too can relate to similar situations in your life.

Thirdly, the seeds that fell into the thorns and ultimately choked. Here, Jesus relates to those who hear the message, but prioritise material wealth and possessions as far more important. The New Testament example that springs to mind is that of the Rich Young Ruler who simply could not leave behind his wealth to follow Jesus.

In our present times materialism is a false God that is worshipped by so many people. Spiritual growth becomes choked by greed, and the message of love and hope that Jesus brings becomes entangled in monetary desires. Again, therefore, we need to take time out and reflect on our lives. In the materialistic world in which we live it can be so difficult to put money and possessions to one side and focus solely on Christ.

Finally, at last, we come to the good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Here Jesus recognised, and was perhaps foretelling what was to come. The early Church, for example, began to increase at a rate of knots following Pentecost. And today, in many overseas countries the church is growing at a rapid rate. God knows that losses are always going to be inevitable, but he is totally confident about his final harvest.

Through my experience as a leader on the Alpha course I can relate to all of these illustrations. There have been those who have just been too busy to attend the course in the first place, unable to find the time in their hectic schedules to learn about Jesus. Then there have been those who have come for one or two weeks, appeared enthusiastic at first, but then dropped away as other things in their lives took priority. But thank

God, there have been so many who have seen out the course, come to know Jesus, and have become a part of God's rich harvest.

As Disciples of Christ we are all called and empowered to carry on the ministry that Jesus started all those years ago. We are entrusted with passing on the good news of the gospel and we shouldn't hold back in "broadcasting" the message as far and as wide as we possibly can.

Yes, sometimes the message will fall on barren, stony and thorny ground, but like the farmer, we must never be discouraged. For without doubt, many of our sown seeds will reach a rich and fertile soil and change the lives of those around us for ever.

By way of conclusion, I'll finish as I started, "never underestimate the power of a seed!" And, as the prophet Isaiah instructs, may we all "go out in joy and be led forth in peace; for the mountains and the hills will burst into song before us, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands".

Amen

Song: [May the peoples praise you](#) (Getty/Townend)

Prayers of intercession (response)

God of growth, give us the inclination to do your will, and the means to carry it out. In allowing us every opportunity to respond to your call you have shown your love and we have tested your patience. May the roots of faith that you have planted in us bear fruit in our lives and multiply your word. May we go out in joy and be led forth in peace, confident that you are always there to receive us, whatever our failings and inadequacies.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the great mission of your Church; in the hope and contemplation of every denomination; in the pastoral presence of our ministers; in the inspiration of those who lead worship; in the day-to-day actions of Christians working in your name. Help them all to make a difference to people's lives and to open eyes to the joys of spiritual life.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the charity, Action for Children, and the work they do to help vulnerable children and young people, and their families. Every child deserves to be loved, supported and cared for, so we pray that through this charity and their connection with the Methodist church your message of love and reconciliation will reach out into their needy lives.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

Let all those who love you share your love for the world. Just as you shed a tear for Lazarus and felt pain on the death of your Son on the cross, so may we mourn for any part of your creation threatened or wiped out by the greed and selfishness of humanity;

and enable and empower us to take action, with others, to redress injustice, relieve hardship, and confront oppression.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

In our own communities we pray for all who are struggling at this time, for whatever reason. In the quietness of our hearts we remember them and bring their names before you.....

May they feel your presence and encounter your hope and love in their lives. Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

Finally, we pray for all who have died, especially those close to our hearts. May they know your closer presence in your eternal kingdom. Bring comfort to loved ones, that they may remember and give thanks.

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

The Lord's prayer

Song: [Jesus shall reign](#) (Keith and Kristyn Getty)

Blessing - Heavenly Father, as we take our worship, praise and prayer from this place and into our daily lives, may we be sustained through your unconditional love. May we feel the presence of our Saviour walking beside us and know the power of the Spirit in both our actions and our words. **Amen**

Song to close: [May the peace of God the Father](#) (Kristyn Getty)