

The Bride Valley Service for Sunday 26th July 2020 Trinity 7

*At the beginning of our services in church today we will light a candle,
you may wish to light a candle at home too.*

“Break open your word, let your light shine out, let ordinary people see the meaning.”
From Psalm 119 v 130 (The Message)

Seeing we have a great high priest, who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, and make our confession to our heavenly Father.

Prayer of Confession: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own individual fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.

Absolution: Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect: Generous God, you give us gifts and make them grow: though our faith is as small as a mustard seed, make it grow to your glory and the flourishing of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

1st Reading: Romans 8 verses 26 – end

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes^[a] with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God,^[b] who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit^[c] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.^[d]

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good^[e] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.^[g] ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13 verses 31-33, 44-52

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds^[a] of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.

Reflection: What is the kingdom of heaven like?

The people gathered on that beach listening to Jesus wondered if this working-class carpenter who hung out with fishermen could possibly be the Messiah. In the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast, Jesus reminds us that “The kingdom, which has already begun with Jesus, does not come with a glorious bang; rather, it comes unexpectedly, almost unnoticed. But all that is necessary is already there, and the end is present in the beginning.”

The next pair of parables focus on another aspect of the kingdom of heaven. They describe its value. Yet here again, there is an element of surprise in the example Jesus chooses to use. He talks about someone finding a treasure in a field, burying it again and going to sell all he has, in order to buy the field. But what was this person doing, digging around on someone else’s land to begin with? The kingdom of heaven is like a trespasser?

Well, maybe not. Jewish law about found treasure could get confusing, but it basically followed the logic of “finders, keepers.” Perhaps the person had a legitimate reason to be digging in another person’s field – maybe he was being paid to remove a tree stump. We don’t know, and Jesus doesn’t seem to think such a detail is important. Jesus is focused on the joy that goes with

discovering an unexpected treasure trove, and recognizing that it's worth everything you have to become its rightful owner.

Just like the merchant who was searching for good pearls and came across one that he recognised as having great value, we should be looking for evidence of the kingdom of heaven. Whether you find it by surprise, or after diligently seeking for it, the fact that it is hidden from view makes it all the more precious, all the more worth our total investment. It's worth everything you have.

So far, we have a pair of parables that show how the kingdom of heaven might seem small and insignificant in the beginning, but it grows into something that can't be contained. And we have another pair of parables that describe how valuable the kingdom of heaven is. All four of these stories hint that the kingdom may be hidden from plain view, for those who do not have eyes to see, or ears to hear.

Let's consider the last set of twin parables. We heard the parable of the weeds last week, and you might have recognized some of its details in the story of the dragnet full of fish. These are parables about judgment. Both parables describe what will happen to those who ignore Christ's message. They both speak of angels who will separate the righteous from the evil, throwing the evil into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We aren't comfortable talking about God's judgment in today's world. We don't want to offend anyone, or scare them away with stories of unquenchable fire, gnashing teeth, and wailing cries. Yet, just as surely as we are saved for the kingdom, we would have no need for salvation if there weren't something to be saved from. As the kingdom of heaven grows into its fullness and immeasurable value, evil must be pulled out from it and destroyed.

Yet, it's important to recognise that Jesus did not labour this point. For every parable of judgment, he tells five parables about joy, abundance, and uncounted treasure. Jesus tells stories that "envision God in every nook and cranny of daily life, from kneading dough to ploughing fields. Jesus transforms human life not by scaring the hell out of people, but by helping them see the heaven close at hand."

Seeing the heaven close at hand, finding the hidden treasure of the kingdom and devoting ourselves completely to it – these are signs of discipleship. All of these parables in Matthew 13 are a call to follow Jesus into the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus asks us, just as he asked his first disciples, "Do you understand this?" Do you have ears to hear and a heart that is open to understanding what you hear? Are you paying attention, and letting this kingdom of heaven, which is already present and at work, change you? Are you willing to be transformed and have your life turned around 180 degrees? If you can join the disciples in saying simply, "Yes," Jesus has one more parable for you.

"Therefore," he says, "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

A scribe was someone whose life was devoted to copying down the words of scripture, and teaching them to others. Being trained as a scribe for the kingdom of heaven involves devoting our lives to the truth of the gospel, and sharing it with others. Jesus encouraged his listeners to accept him as the new treasure, which fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament. He offers us the same invitation.

Following Jesus may not seem at first to be what we hoped or expected it to be. Sometimes it appears to be an invasive plant, like mustard, growing and spreading unchecked. Sometimes it might smell like stinky fermented bread dough, hidden among enough flour to feed a hundred people who are hungry for the love of God. Sometimes we will stumble upon it like a treasure buried in a field, and sometimes we will only discover it after diligent searching.

These parables urge us to abandon whatever we think is most important in life and focus entirely on what God is doing in the kingdom that is already here, already active. The gospel we proclaim must both deserve and explain the label “treasure,” and our lives must express the ultimate value that is found only in Christ.

The kingdom of heaven is a promise that evil will one day be destroyed, and righteousness will shine – and in the meantime, it is working in us, changing us, calling us to let ourselves be broken open like a seed that dies in order for a plant to grow from it.

Prayers of Intercession

May the Spirit pray through us as we try to put into words the longing of our hearts for the Church and for the world.

Father, we thank you for all who have helped us to pray and to grasp something of your great love and power. We ask your blessing and empowering on all who teach and minister in your name: we ask for Sunday worship to be an overflowing of our daily walk with you, an expression of deepening love.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father, we thank you for the beauty and diversity of the created world we inhabit. We ask for the wisdom to tend it carefully, respecting the natural laws and sharing the resources, listening to the weak as well as the strident, the poor as well as the affluent and powerful.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father, we thank you for the innocence of the very young and for the joy of friendship; for all with whom we share our daily life and those we love but have been unable to meet. We ask for hearts that are skilled in listening, so that we discern and respond to the real agendas, and remember that a conversation is a two-way event.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father, we thank you for the advances in medical knowledge and the hope of new treatments for many diseases including Coronavirus. We pray for all in medical research and all whose lives are crippled or disadvantaged by illness, frailty or damage. Give comfort and reassurance, healing, wholeness and peace.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Holy God, we pray for all who cry out for rest and relief, all who are carrying heavy burdens that weigh them down, all whose poverty denies them the chance of healing, all whose wealth denies them the chance of knowing their need of you.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father, we pray for the families and friends of those who have died recently, be especially close to them in their grief.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Father, we thank you for your wisdom and truth, your understanding and generosity. We acknowledge our total dependence on you, and praise you for providing us with all we need.

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

Let us pray the Lord's Prayer together

**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.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.**

Final Prayer

**In darkness and in light, in trouble and in joy, help us, heavenly Father, to trust in you alone, to trust your love, to serve your purpose and to praise your name: through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Blessing

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace
in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**