

Dear friends,

As we move on through the year hopefully we can find enjoyment in each season for what it brings us – and for the great differences we see in the countryside around us. This week our lectionary brings us to the parable of the sower and the conditions needed. Further from that perhaps we should think about the conditions we need to produce a harvest from the seed of God's word. Blessings, Margaret.

Call to worship:

The Lord sows his seed among us – but do we let it root and grow?

The Lord provides us with all we need – but what is the harvest we yield?

As we hear Christ's message let us welcome it with joy, that it might take root within us and yield a rich harvest.

Loving Creator, as we come to worship you, we offer you our whole lives.

Soften the soil of our hearts:

that as the words we hear and the words we speak take root, they may change the way we are;

that we may worship you not only with our minds and our mouths but in every circumstance and in every action.

Loving Creator, as we come to worship you, we offer you our whole lives. Amen.

The word of God is living and active. As he speaks his word to us today may we open our hearts to his message and the promise of life that it brings. Amen.

The words to 'Morning has broken' written by Eleanor Farjeon [1881-1965] Singing the Faith 136

1 Morning has broken like the first morning;

blackbird has spoke like the first bird.

Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!

Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!

2 Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,

like the first dewfall on the first grass.

Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,

sprung in completeness when his feet pass.

3 Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning

born of the one light Eden saw play!

Praise with elation, praise every morning,

God's re-creation of the new day!

Prayer:

Lord God, you are full of blessing and faithfulness:

as shown in your Son, Jesus, whom we choose to follow;

as shown in your Holy Spirit, residing in and with us.

You are God, full of blessing and honour, continuing to promise much today.

Even if we must wait a while, you are faithful – your timeline is not ours.

As we wait, we hold close your blessings and promises, treasuring them as you treasure us. Amen.

Lord, we chase after many things – money, possessions, even relationships – things we feel we need, must have, should have and are entitled to have.

We act on impulse, wanting things now.

In our instant world, waiting is a struggle.

Lord, we are sorry for chasing such things, for being selfish and for making poor choices.

Help us to look to you first and to trust and wait for your guidance.

Lord, we are sorry. Amen.

Jesus' sacrificial blood has been poured out so that we can be forgiven, our sins washed clean.

We are dead to sin and alive in him – forgiven and free. Amen.

Lord, we give you thanks. Even when we are bruised by poor life choices we thank you that you do not condemn us. Your love and blessings soothe and heal and you help us to remember what is important – to cherish the things we have been given which root us in your love and guide us by your light.

Thank you, our loving Lord. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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.

Matthew 13: 1-9 and 18-23 taken from the Holy Bible, The New Testament [A New Translation] by William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968

One day went out and sat by the lake-side. Such crowds gathered to listen to him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the crowd stood on the shore. He used parables to tell them many things. 'Look!' he said. 'A sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some seeds fell by the side of the road, and the birds came and snapped them up. Others fell on ground where there was only a thin skin of earth over the rock, and, because the soil was so shallow, they sprang up immediately, but when the sun rose they were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Some fell among thorn bushes, and the thorn bushes sprang up and choked the life out of them. Others fell on good ground and produced a crop, some a hundred times, some sixty times, some thirty times as much as had been sown. If a man has ears, let him hear.'

Listen, then, to the meaning of the parable of the sower. If anyone hears the message of God's Kingdom, and does not really understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in such a man's heart. This kind of person is represented by the picture of the seed sown on the side of the road. The picture of the seed which was sown on the ground which was only a thin skin of earth over the rock represents the man who hears the word and who immediately receives it enthusiastically. But he has no inner root, and is at the mercy of the moment, and so, when trouble or persecution comes, he at once stumbles and collapses. The picture of the seed which was sown among the thorn bushes represents the man who hears the word, but the worry of this world and the deceptive seduction of wealth choke the life out of the word, and it never gets chance to produce a good crop. The picture of the seed which was sown on the good ground represents the man who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears a crop which produces sometimes a hundred times, sometimes sixty times, sometimes thirty times as much as he received.'

Meditation of James taken from A Most Amazing Man year A – written by Nick Fawcett. Copyright 2010 Nick Fawcett

Some on the path? Some on the rocky ground among thorns?

That's not how I'd do the job if I were a farmer.

I'd do the job carefully, preparing the ground first and scattering as much seed as possible on fertile ground to ensure a bumper yield.

Why waste it? It's a hard enough job working the land, so why not maximise the harvest?

Only, of course, with people it's different, as Jesus understood.

You can sow the seed of his word as carefully as you like, but there's no telling if they're ready to receive it – no way of knowing if it will take root or shrivel up – grow strong or be choked by temptation. It can bear fruit in the most unlikely of folk, while those from whom you'd expect much remain barren, the whys and wherefores hard to fathom.

So then, don't take it for granted it will bear fruit in you, for you may be wrong – and don't give up on anyone else, assuming that they'll never respond.

Sow the seed in others, and with God's help nurture it in yourself – then leave the harvest to him.

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Loving God,

We trumpet the importance of mission, of witnessing to you and making known your goodness – but so often all that is only words, contradicted by the feebleness of our actions.

We come up with all kinds of reasons why people will refuse to listen, and we use those as an excuse to keep things to ourselves, hiding our light under a bushel.

Intentionally or otherwise, we limit the scope of what you can do to our own expectations – judging by human yardsticks instead of taking into account your divine power.

Help us, simply, honestly and faithfully, to sow the seed of your word, keeping faith that even in the most unpromising of ground, you can bring forth a harvest. Amen.

Prayer: Gracious God, you call us to support one another, to offer comfort in times of need, reassurance in times of fear, inspiration in times of challenge and confidence in times of doubt. Forgive us for so easily doing the opposite – finding fault, running down, criticising and condemning. Forgive us for seeing the worst instead of the best – for believing the bad instead of the good – for so often pulling down and so rarely building up.

Teach us to recognise people's gifts and to nurture them – to understand their problems and to walk alongside – to acknowledge and applaud their successes – and always to affirm the efforts of others. Teach us to help people believe in themselves – to discover their abilities, appreciate their worth and fulfil their potential. Teach us, through the faith we show in people, to help them attempt great things and expect great things – to look at life seeing not the obstacles but the opportunities – not the things they can't do but the things they can. As you encourage us, Lord, so may we encourage others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Close: Thank you, Lord, for all your gifts and especially for the seed of your word planted in our hearts. May we take your message of love and use it to bear good fruit in our lives, serving others for your name's sake. Amen.