

Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 12th July 2020

To be able to access the links, go to the bottom of this page and left click on the date. This will download the pdf in a new window, then simply click on the links as indicated.

Welcome

Today is the sixth Sunday after Pentecost. May the seeds of God's Word scattered among us this morning fall on fertile soil and take root in our hearts and lives, producing an abundant harvest for the Kingdom.

Call to Worship: Hebrews 13:15

Let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God,
that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

Song: [Let everything that has breath praise the Lord](#) [Click on the link](#)

Prayer of Praise, Confession, Assurance of Forgiveness and Lord's Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to you the source of all life and love.

We thank you for all your creation. We thank you for human life and for all that sustains us here on earth. We thank you for human friendship and compassion, for fun and laughter, for achievements and successes. We thank you for the senses you have given us to enjoy the wonderful world you have made. When look to the stars through a telescope we simply cannot imagine the expanse of your greatness. When we look at a tiny single cell through a microscope, we cannot grasp the care you have for detail. We wonder in awe of your creation and your power.

We thank for your unbounded and immeasurable love for us. We thank you that you sent Jesus Christ into the world and for all he taught through word and action. Above all we thank you for redeeming a fallen world through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We thank you that by his death and resurrection the gates of heaven are open to us. We thank you for living within your faithful people by your Holy Spirit. We thank you for all that sustains us in everlasting life. Heavenly Father we give you thanks and praise. Glory and honour and blessing be to you now and forever.

Yet, despite your magnificence, grace, mercy and love, we fail to love you with our whole heart. We fail to live according to you will, failing to love others as Jesus loves us. We are self-centred and uncaring. We fight and kill, maim and destroy. We pollute and damage the world by our



carelessness and negligence. We abuse, exploit and treat people with contempt because they are not like us, or because we seek to have power and control.

We fail to sow the seeds of your Word. We fail to be the fishers of men and women you call us to be. We fail to make Jesus known in the world and make disciples of others.

Loving Father forgive our sin and our weakness. Heal us, renew us and restore us.

We thank you that you promise that when we confess our sin you will forgive.

By the power of your Holy Spirit guide our thoughts and our actions that we may be the people you intend us to be, the people you call us to be, people worthy of the name children of God.

We pray in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Lord, who gave the church this prayer which is prayed daily around the world;

Our Father, in heaven, holy is your name. Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

A Prayer for this time of Coronavirus

Loving God we thank you that here in the UK the number of deaths from COVID-19 has significantly fallen over these past weeks. We are conscious that we still need to be careful with our hygiene and social distancing. Help us to keep one another safe. Restrain us from becoming lax, and fatigued by the measures we need to follow. Help us to be understanding and patient when we find there is a requirement for more stringent local measures.



We thank you that many businesses are open again and that we are freer to move around. We continue to ask for your care and support for all anxious about their livelihoods and household finances.

We thank you for all on the front line, working in hospitals and in care homes and alike.

Our hearts go out to all in developing nations who will find it difficult to maintain social distancing, good standards of hygiene due to lack of clean water and sanitiser.

Grant health authorities and governments across the world an insight into the nature of the virus and trends in the course the virus is taking. Help them make decisions that will help protect people. Help scientists find vaccines and medicines that we may be able to protect everyone in the longer term. May drug companies have public health at the forefront of their minds rather than financial gain.

Help us all to remember the compassionate actions so many have taken since March raising money, making PPE, checking on neighbours and friends, getting shopping and alike. As we move towards a new way of living together help us retain our desire to love and care for one another treating everyone with dignity and respect.

We pray in the name of Jesu our Lord. Amen.

Bible Passage

Our Bible passage is Matthew's account of Jesus' parable of the sower. Mark and Luke also record this parable of Jesus. Preachers like this parable because it's one of the few that Jesus explains!

Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23 (ESV)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear."

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Birds in the Bible a short excursion

Birds are an occurring theme throughout the Bible. They have both positive and negative connotations depending on the context.

The dove is a bird that only represents the positive. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove at his baptism. It conveys positive qualities of innocence, purity, peace, and blessings.

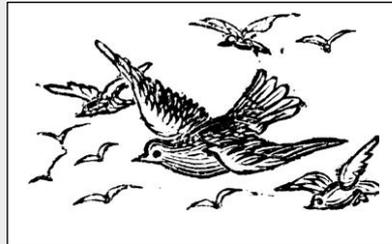
Similarly, the eagle portrays, strength, power, bravery, courage, renewal, and rebirth. In the Old Testament the eagle is often used as a metaphor for God's care of his people; "I carried you on wings like eagles." (Exodus 19:4)

Hens represent the maternal aspect of God's nature, see Luke 13:34. The sparrow is used to symbolize an offering despite being depicted as something of little worth; yet it is also depicted as something God deeply cares for.

Birds can also represent evil. We see that in our Gospel passage today.

Also, in Revelation 18:2 an angel says,

"called out with a mighty voice,
"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast."



The Parable of the sower

The stories Jesus told are often vivid. We can easily recall the general gist of the stories. However, the stories had a deeper meaning that ran alongside. That's what the word 'parable' means. You can see it's similar to the word parallel. The origins of these two words are the same.

Think of the whole world as a field. God's Word is like seed and it is sown in the world.

The sower broadcasts it, throwing it from the hand as they did in the days before mechanisation. So, the seed goes everywhere.

The parable tells us something about people and about God.

The first is about people. We can explore what the parable tells us about where the seed lands. What is Jesus saying about those who hear the Word of God?

Jesus identifies four different kinds of soil that the seed falls on, on the path, in poor soil, among weeds, and some falls onto good fertile soil. Jesus says that people are like these different soils. So, we might more accurately call this story the parable of the soils.

I am sure we all know people who we can neatly fit into one of the four boxes.

However, are we not all like each of these soils, or behave like them in response to different parts of the Word that are sown? God sows his word in us but part of it takes no root. We find part of God's Word difficult to understand. It doesn't fit with our understanding of the world. We are influenced by a social and political narrative about being autonomous and self-reliant, an economic narrative about happiness through consumption; the twitter of the birds around us telling us to remain within our comfort zones and avoid the challenging counter-cultural nature of the Gospel. It's as if part of the seed has fallen on the path. Can you identify part of God's Word that you find very difficult to accept?

There will be part of God's word which we find intriguing. It fits with other aspects of the Gospel we've heard and have found to be true. But as time passes it's not deep rooted within us. Events that make us question our faith, the ridicule of others, the secular society in which we live, the desire for proof rather than belief, scorches that part of the word and it withers. It's as if it's fallen among stones and gravel where the soil is poor.

There are parts of God's word that takes root but is choked by the weedy and thorny cares and worries of earthly life - the "love for riches, and all other kinds of desires" as the Good News Bible puts it, things that crowd in and choke the message. We fill our lives with other activities - God, and our faith, we fit around the edges, until God is squeezed out completely, just like the seed struggling to grow among the weeds. The stress of the world strangles what we've heard, and nothing comes of it.

Of course some of God's word falls on the good soil within us and bears fruit, thirty, sixty or even 100 fold. It bears fruit beyond our wildest dreams, and yields far more than the seed that is wasted on the path, among the rocks on in amongst the weeds. Can you identify that part of God's word that has been fruitful in you?

Secondly, the parable tells us something about the nature of God.

The sower broadcasts the seed. It goes everywhere, not just into the good soil.

God isn't stingy or picky. He doesn't choose who is good enough to hear the word. He sent Jesus into the world for everyone, Jew, gentile, slave or free, Roman centurions, rich young men, blind paupers, lepers and prostitutes. Remember Jesus taught in public, anyone could hear him. Indeed, Jesus told the parable of the sower from a boat to large crowd that had gathered by the lake.

Regardless, of the soil, all receive the same seed. There's no discrimination which kind of soil, what kind of people, can receive God's word. No soil is so underserving it is left unsown. God wants to sow his life into ours regardless of who or what we are.

Seeds are scattered everywhere. God is extravagant. Seed landing on the path, among the poor rocky soil and in amongst the weeds is costly, wasteful, and reduces profitability. Well, sowing the Word did indeed cost God the life of his son, but that

was a price worth paying. In his world wastefulness becomes hope; inefficiency, love; and profitability, generosity.

There are implications of this parable for how we engage in mission. In the name of good stewardship, particularly when our financial and human resources are small, we hold them tightly, wanting to make sure that nothing is wasted. We sow only where we believe it will be well received. We can be critical of initiatives that fail in terms of seeing more people on a Sunday morning, people who might contribute financially to the church and, we hope eventually, human resources. We only want to sow where this might sustain the institutional church. It's about Kingdom building that is the goal. Jesus' encourages generosity in sowing, promising that the end result will be a bumper crop. Remember, when Jesus fed the five thousand on the hill side everyone was fed, regardless of who or what they were. All had enough and there were 12 baskets left over.

Whether or not the seed bears fruit depends on the soil into which it falls. So the questions we need to ask ourselves are:

So, how can I improve the soil that I am?

What are the rocks and the weeds and the birds in my life?

What can I do to move the rocks and the stones, keep my soil free from weeds and birds, and well fertilized, so the seed germinates, takes root and bears fruit?

I believe we can do that through Christian action, demonstrating our love and compassion for others, but also through prayer and the study of God's Word, through meeting together to give praise to God, by talking to one another about our faith, what's good and also what we find difficult, because sometimes the rocks are just a little big for us to move on our own and we need a little help.

That leads me to my last two questions, both to us as individual disciples and as the church. First, how do I, and we as the church, help others with their husbandry? And, perhaps the biggest question of all, am I, and is the Church, a good sower?

Finally, as I reflected on this parable I was struck with how seed will struggle to grow. Seed will prout and germinate and pierce through tarmack and even break down concrete. Seeds can lay doment for many years, we often see poppies blooming when a new road it built and the soil has been turned over. Similarly, the seed of God's word is a seed that is determined to sprout and grow and blossom and bring beauty to the world. Even in the cracks of the granite on Bennachie seed is determined to grow. Sometimes, we look out and all we see is grey desolation, but when we look closely we find a seed struggling to grow and be fruitful. It's a metaphor that God will never give up on us however much we seek to ignore or stamp out the Word.

An active prayer

Re-read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9.

Go outside into your garden, park, or local footpath.



(If you are not using a mobile device, you may want to print-off this page and take it with you.)

As you walk notice the different kinds of surfaces under your feet, gravel, tarmac, earth, grass (best not to walk on any crops!). Observe the birds and the thistles, or weeds, any stones or hard surfaces, and any crops, garden vegetables, fruit or farmer's barley. The crop may be the grass of a playing field (something deliberately seeded and intended to grow).

Pray,

God of life and growth, you are so generous.

You sow extravagantly

You sow your Word

your promises

your justice

your mercy

your forgiveness

your hope

your salvation

your self.

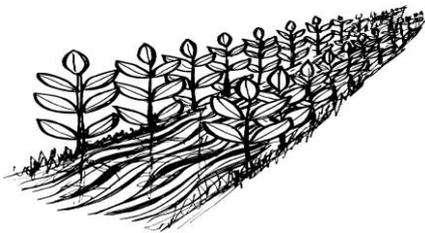


You save us from the birds of worldly desires, attitudes and values, that snatch our faith away.

You save us from the rocky places that makes our soil shallow with little to nurture your seed of faith.

You save us from the choking thorns that strangle our immature faith.

You make us good rich soil, ready for planting.



We rejoice in bearing your good and lasting fruit and being your harvest

God of growth, within each of us you have planted seeds of hope that are tended by your care and nurtured by your Spirit within us. Help us to share the buds of faith that wait for you to burst into life, that they may bring the fruit of justice, mercy, forgiveness, hope and salvation to the world in which we live.

Praise a glory be to you, who made the garden of creation, and for whom the world is your field.

Amen

Song: [Good Soil Song](#) *Click on the link*

Prayers of the People for the People

Loving God, we see the world trying to stop people dying from COVID-19 yet we also see people taking life in countries broken by war. We see people hurt, disfigured, orphaned, widowed. We see so many people made homeless, livelihoods destroyed, and many going hungry.



We pray for peace, for an end to the conflicts in the Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and Israel, Libya, many countries in the Lake Chad region of Africa and in Central America

May the seeds of peace be sown in the world that a fruitful harvest of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation grow may be reaped.

Loving God, COVID-19 has highlighted for us the interrelationships between peoples. We are conscious that if we fail to keep others safe and well we place ourselves at higher risk. We understand the importance of caring for one another and we applaud those who devote their lives to the care of other. However, we see so many people who face suffering, injustice, hardship and death. We see people abused simply because of the colour of their skin, their customs and traditions and because they are not like us. We see people imprisoned for their political ideals or their faith in Christ.

Help us, your church, to speak out against the injustices of the world. And to speak up for the poor, weak, and marginalised.

We ask you blessing and strength for all who make a stand for justice.

May seeds of tolerance and understanding be sown in the world that a fruitful harvest of welcome, acceptance and unity may be reaped.

Loving God we place before you the needs of those racked by illness, weighed down by anxiety, tormented by depression, crippled by debt, wrecked by alcohol or drug abuse, broken by unemployment, devastated by bereavement,

We lift to you in prayer such people known to us; our family, friends, neighbours, members of our church and our community.*(name those you know are in need today)*

May seeds of compassion, practical and emotional support, together with seeds of hope, be sown in their lives that a fruitful harvest of renewal and life may be reaped .

Loving God, we pray for your church.

We pray for those who are serving you in many different ways. We thank you for people reaching out in true faith, proclaiming the good news by word and action.

Grant them your wisdom, strength and courage.

Sow the seeds of your love across the whole world.

Cast the seed of your Word to all who will listen that it will yield a fruitful harvest for the Kingdom.

Sow your seeds within us, so that we may be fruitful and yield a bountiful harvest.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Benediction and Blessing

Isaiah 55:10-12

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
¹²“For you shall go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Song: [You shall go out with joy](#) **Click on the link**

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face to shine
upon you and be gracious to you.
The Lord turn his face towards you
and give you peace.

Amen.



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One of the consequences of us not being able to worship together is that the church anticipates a fall in income. However, we will continue to incur costs, of insurance etc. There will be little financial saving to our not meeting, yet revenues could be severely hit. Please prayerfully reflect on this and, if you are able, continue to put aside

your financial offering so that you can make your contribution for the work of the church when we next meet together. Thank you.

Thank you too if you already give by standing order or by bank transfer, that is much appreciated.