

Blairdaff and Chapel of Garioch Parish Church

Sunday 26th 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 eighth Sunday after Pentecost. Our Gospel passage contains a number of short parables Jesus told. One is about the Kingdom being like treasure and so our first and last songs reflect the precious nature of our relationship with God. It is also the Sunday nearest the 24th July the date of the Battle of Harlaw 1411.

Call to Worship: Psalm 117

All of you nations,
Come praise the Lord!
Let everyone praise him.
His love for us is wonderful;
His faithfulness never ends.
Shout praises to the Lord.

Song: [As the deer pants for the water](#) [Click on the link](#)



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

(The prayer of praise is based on Psalm 105)

Lord God almighty, we praise your name!

We sing praises to you!

We celebrate and worship your holy name with all our heart.



You are the creator of all things, from the atom to the unimaginable expanse of the universe.

We trust your mighty power, remembering your miracles and all the wonders you perform.

You are our God, bringing justice everywhere on earth.

You have provided for us. You have offered us a way to live with you in the place you have prepared for us.

We shout praises to you, the Lord our God!

God of mercy and love, on this day when we recall the hatred and violence that was dealt on the fields above Inverurie at Harlaw over 600 years ago, we bow before you confessing our sinfulness and seeking your forgiveness.

Father, forgive

- the hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class, people from people,
- the damage we continue to do in warfare, to people just like us and to communities just like ours,
- our aggression towards one another,
- the covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own, the greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,
- our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
- our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,
- the lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,
- our unwillingness to love and to be compassionate
- the pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in you.

We confess we tend to ignore the small people, people who have no power, influence or wealth to help us. We ignore the needs of the weak - people hungry, homeless, or lonely.

We confess we fail to make you known in the world. We fail to be a people passionate about your Gospel of love and salvation. We confess our desire for the things of this world rather than treasuring the things of your Kingdom.

Father God we give you thanks and praise that your son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, died for our sin upon the cross and that through faith in him we are forgiven and renewed. Fill us now with your Holy Spirit that we might be led into the way of peace, to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, and forgiving, just as you have forgiven us through Jesus Christ.

Loving God, we take time now to praise and adore you, to hear your Word and be renewed. Fill us with your Holy Spirit to guide us and equip us for service, that your Kingdom may grow.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour who gave us this prayer, prayed by millions across 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 bring to you the needs of all who lead national governments; particularly those responsible of people living in areas most besieged by the pandemic; for broken places where healthcare and resources are scarce, and the pandemic brings further suffering.



We pray for those afflicted with coronavirus, and those whose age or medical conditions leaves them vulnerable.

We ask your compassion and comfort and consolation for families grieving the death of loved one or worried about family in hospital.

As we tentatively unlock and return to some form of normality help us to be continually vigilant maintaining the hygiene protocols that reduce the chances of infection.

Loving God, whatever time of trial we face we know that you are with us and we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Bible Passage

Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-52 (ESV)

³¹ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” ⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” ⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

A reflection

God in the smallest of things – A reflection adapted from ‘*God in the Insignificant*’ by Barbara Bennett

We are amazed, amazing God
At the power you put into the smallest of things.
Buried mustard seeds giving life to huge trees
Yeast buried in dough that makes bread rise;
Treasurer buried in a field that brings joy to the owner;
The perfect pearl discovered among many.
Jesus said that this is what the Kingdom of heaven is like.
And the most amazing thing of all is that you grow your Kingdom in us!
You bless us, small and insignificant as we are.
Your Word, buried deep within, fired by your Spirit,
gives us life, to grow,
gives us faith, to rise,
give us joy of our treasured inheritance, which is beyond price,
Amazing God,
we find you in the small
as well as the great
and we praise you for it.

(Adapted from Feasts and Festivals URC Prayer Handbook 2017 © The United Reformed Church 2016)

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, or leaven.

There are a number of parables in today's Gospel passage. We will focus on two very short parables, one about a growing mustard seed and another about yeast and bread. Both are parables that tell us something about the Kingdom of God. Both are about growth from small beginnings. Interestingly, both parables are small in that one is two sentences and the other just one, but each has enormous meaning. In that sense, each represents exactly what it is teaching.

Over 150 years ago, Charles Babbage had an idea for performing numerical calculations accurately and reasonably quickly. He designed what was known as the Analytical Engine. From there, with the help of many others and their inventions, we have our laptops and mobile phones today.

Most of us would be lost without our computers and connection to the world-wide-web. It's amazing how big things can grow from the tiniest of beginnings. Even Alexander Graham Bell, having invented the telephone said, "I truly believe that one day, there will be a telephone in every town in America." Well, he wasn't wrong. We even have an expression (not Biblical) about mighty oaks growing from tiny acorns. Just think how massive and important is the world of the computer. Indeed, you'd not be reading this if were not for a computer, yet it all began with one man having an idea.

The mustard plant of Palestine is very different from our own. The smallness of the seed was proverbial in Jesus' day. When talking about a tiny breach of the ceremonial law the Jews would speak of a defilement as small as a mustard seed. Jesus himself used the mustard seed proverbially when he referred to the disciples' little faith – see Matthew Ch17 v20.

If you had a packet of mustard seeds it would be like having a packet of full stops. Yet from these seeds, given the right conditions, a tree or bush will grow to an average of 3-5 feet tall. Some have even grown to 10-15 feet tall and just as wide.

Indeed, the plant that grows from the tiny seed is so big birds can roost within it. Some commentators regard the birds in the parable as representing evil, because of that connotation in the parable of the sower. William Barclay writes that the birds enjoy the little black seeds the tree produces, so perhaps there is a connection. However, the point Jesus is making here is the bush that grows from one full-stop sized seed is large enough for birds to roost in.

That is the main point of this parable; the kingdom of God seemingly had tiny beginnings but we have seen the number of followers of Jesus grow and grow and grow.

Sadly, here in Scotland, and indeed across north-west Europe and northern America we can't honestly say that we see a growing Kingdom. What we see is the Christian church in decline. That may raise all sorts of questions for us, however, here are some figures to both give us heart and demonstrate the truth of the parable.

According to the Pew Research Centre, and the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's, Status of Global Christianity, Christians form the biggest religious group, globally. There are around 2.3 billion Christians, or 31.2% of the world's population.

Between 2015 and 2060, the world's population is expected to grow by 32%, but the number of Christians is predicted to increase by 34%.

The research also indicates that Pentecostals and evangelical Christians are growing faster than others.

Interestingly, in the UK churches outnumber pubs. Yet, while the mainstream denominations like the Church of Scotland and Roman Catholics have experienced a decline, certain Pentecostal movements, from black churches to Hillsong (a world-wide church that originated in Australia) have experienced growth in attendance.

Peter Brierley, writing in May 2019 for Christianity Today, says, "Young people will go to church if that church is attractive. Hillsong London had to add a second theatre as the Dominion couldn't hold more, and they have spread to several other cities and towns as well. According to Robert Beckford, theology professor at Canterbury University, Hillsong provides (a) practical preaching, (b) dynamic worship, and (c) a cosmopolitan congregation."

Surely, churches that are not experiencing growth need to explore what is behind these trends and identify how they might change their own models of mission and ministry.

Of course, the Kingdom of God and the Church are not synonymous. Neither is the growth of the Kingdom only about numbers. Numbers, nevertheless, are important. We are called to be fishers of men and women and make disciples of all people; and a kingdom is hardly a kingdom with few people in it. However, we know that once the seeds of the kingdom are planted in our own hearts, provided that is good soil (remember the parable of the sower), we shall grow in faith, and the kingdom will grow as we each grow in our relationship with God.

That kind of Kingdom growth often starts in small ways, a tiny seed of faith is planted within us and it grows. I am pleased to say that we have seen that kind of growth in our own parish. One parishioner wrote to me recently, wishing Diana and I well as we move into retirement. Referring to the past few years, she said, "I personally have felt my feeble faith grow and strengthen me."

What examples can you think of where great things have resulted from the smallest beginnings? What little thing could you do that might make a big difference for the kingdom of God in the parish or your place of work?

Let's hear a song and then we'll focus on the parable of the yeast.

Song: [For I'm building a people of power](#) **Click on the link**



The leaven, or yeast, in this parable is another symbol of growth. The parable depicts a woman making bread. If you have ever made bread you will know that it is not possible to see how the yeast works – it just does. Similarly, the Kingdom of God grows by the inner working of the Holy Spirit in and through people's lives. You may not be able to see it working, but you can see the results.

Many modern translations use the word 'yeast' instead of the word 'leaven'. Of course, in Jesus' day people did not know what yeast is. It wasn't until 1859 that Louis Pasteur, discovered that yeast was actually a living, single cell organism, able to actively grow and reproduce. The fact that yeast is a *living organism* makes the parable even more significant and meaningful.

Similarly, modern translations speak of the woman *mixing* yeast into the dough. Indeed, that is what bakers do, but the original Greek actually speaks of her *hiding* the yeast (or leaven) in the dough. The kingdom is hidden within people's lives and within the world, but just like the yeast in dough it has a transforming effect.

Just like yeast, the Kingdom of God is living, growing, dynamic. That should encourage reflection on our attitudes to change within the church.

As we imagine the woman making her bread, we should avoid an image of her opening a wee packet of yeast as we might today. Rather, imagine her taking some dough she had put aside from the previous batch of baking.

We don't know quite when yeast, or leaven, came to be used in bread dough. For much of ancient history, all that was known were flatbreads. What amazement there must have been when the first leaven loaf was pulled from the oven, and then people began to taste it. Compared to the flatbreads it would have been tasty, soft and good to eat. (Try making some bread without yeast and see the difference.) Imagine the smell filling their nostrils, the crunchy sound of breaking the crust each time another one breaks off a piece making their mouths water. The kingdom of God is like that.

The action of the Kingdom in the world is to change transform, improve, and to excite, giving joy and wonder. And, as we learned in the parable of the sower there is extravagance and plenty. The three measures the woman took amounted to around 50 pounds (39 litres), producing enough bread to feed a hundred people.

So, are you, am I, is the Church, stuck in our ways, saying, "We've not made bread like this before."?

Are you, am I, hard, dry and not very nice; or are we mixed with the yeast of the Kingdom, and really tasty?

Are we mixed with the yeast of the Kingdom, so *our* faith continues to grow?

Is there enough to put some aside so that it can be used to make the next batch and feed those who will come after us?

Let us praise God for those who gave us a little of their yeast and let us ask God to help us grow into effective and tasty disciples, that others may "taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8)

The parables of the treasure and the pearl pose the question, 'what do we really value?'. Is the Kingdom of God our first priority? Is God's Kingdom and our place in it more important to us than, silver and gold, friends and family, status and power? Is God's Kingdom so important and

valuable to us that we genuinely want to see it grow here in our own community? If the Kingdom of God is my precious pearl will I pray for its leaders, that they will be gifted and guided by the Holy Spirit? Will I pray for its growth? Will I pray that all who confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour will grow in their relationship with him?

Song: [Lord you are so precious to me](#) *Click on the link*



Prayers of the People for the People

Paul wrote to the Romans (8:26-27): “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” So, let us pray knowing our words are inadequate but the Spirit knows our heart.



Father God we come before you as people who are rich. Compared to many we have so much – we are certainly rich in your love.

And so in our gratefulness we bring to you the needs of others. Our hearts go out to those who take long and dangerous journeys across deserts and sea to escape war, violence, abuse and poverty – pregnant women, young children.

On this day when we recall the Battle of Harlaw, we place into your hands the needs of those who have not escaped war and violence, those who experience death and destruction on a daily basis. Comfort those who have lost their homes, their businesses their limbs or their minds. When governments consider how they should respond help them to be clear about their objectives, the criteria for success, and what future political structures will secure a lasting peace.

We are rich in material things, and treasure our peace and security; help us not to store these in barns of our own making, excluding others but help us to treasure your gifts of love and to be compassionate, generous and sacrificial in our love and care for all who are made in your image.

We pray for those closer to home, those known to us who are in need at this time –our friends who suffer from dementia or other mental illness, for our elderly with mobility difficulties that make life frustrating, for those who are sick and need medical care. We pray too for those who are finding it difficult to secure work, for those addicted to alcohol or drugs, for those who find each day a challenge. We thank you for the love shown to them by carers, counsellors, families and friends. Uphold and strengthen all who carry burdens of one kind or another whether due to their own situation or due to their responsibilities, care, love and concern for others. We thank you, Father God that you love them; may they experience your presence always with them and hold your love and peace in their hearts.

We give you thanks for aid agencies, their staff and partners, for the work of Christian Aid and FROM Scotland. We thank you for those in our own community who are instrumental in providing this practical care and love.

Merciful Father, never let us forget those who are hurting in ways we may not know about. We lift to you their needs together with the needs of all who are sick, imprisoned, lonely, confused, homeless or spiritually lost. Teach us to comfort our brothers and sisters in their hour of need.

Comfort all who are close to death and all who mourn the loss of loved ones. Help us to rejoice in your gift of eternal life for all your faithful people.

We thank you too for the fellowship of our church community here in this parish. We give thanks that the church is growing in so many parts of the world and we ask that we may see the church grow here in Scotland too. God of the mustard seed and the leaven, by the power of your Holy Spirit reach out through us to touch the hearts of those we meet and enable us to make Christ known in the world. Help us to be a church that has a desire to grow in our relationship with you, in our prayer life, in our understanding of your Word and in our numbers. Guide Church leaders and each one of us as we begin to work together with neighbouring parishes. Reveal to us new and fruitful activities. Enable us as individuals and as a Church to treasure what is right and good.

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

Benediction and Blessing

You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. *(1 Peter 1:18-20)*



[Blessing](#) **Click on the link**

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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.