# Sunday 12th July

O God,

We gather together in Your presence with expectation, hungry for an encounter with You, eager to hear Your Word.

Open our eyes and ears to the presence of Your Holy Spirit. May the seeds of Your Word scattered among us this morning fall on fertile soil.

May they take root in our hearts and lives and produce an abundant harvest of good words and deeds.

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

**STF 88**

1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,

praise him in glad adoration.

2 Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.

3 Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

4 Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,

who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

5 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650–1680)
*translated by* Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) and Rupert E. Davies (1909–1994)

**Reading Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

**Sermon**

This week we have a very well- known parable and with its explanation! On one hand it’s nice to have the explanation, on the other it almost makes this sermon pointless.

I have to begin by saying this is not a parable that is critiquing farming technique. If we take a brief moment to consider the example of the sower, they are not very good at sowing. There seems to be little to no care of how the seed is used. It is not carefully placed one seed at a time in the good soil, but flung almost anywhere as we hear it lands on a variety of places. On one hand we can say that the sower doesn’t care, on another we can say that it would take too long to individually plant seeds. I have to admit, the sower and I have a lot in common when it comes to sowing seeds. I start out wanting to give each seed space, but by the time I have done a couple of rows, I am just wanting to get the job done and end up saying that God can figure it out. Them explanation of the parable tells us that the seed is the word of God and doesn’t name who the sower might be. The sower might not be someone who owns the land or has any commitment to it, for in Jesus’ time, if a farmer or even a family wanted to grow food on whatever size land they had, they would have asked for others to help them to plant and harvest. So, the sower could have been a neighbour or friend, someone just doing their best to spread the seed.

For me, the image of the seed falling all over the place, is a comforting one. As the seed represents the word of God, it demonstrates that God’s word doesn’t discriminate where it is sown. It might not last in certain places, but it doesn’t only fall in the ‘good’ places. This seems to be very in tune with the messages that we are hearing in the media, all lives matter- even if we as a world have not quite managed to live this out. The word of God is not to be contained within a set space, if reaches passed those places that are well looked after, to the places that sometimes we as Christians might fear to venture.

I find this hugely challenging, at the moment thinking about which churches will reopen and which ones should. The idea that all of my churches have been around for a very long time, so the places that they exist must be very good ground- having been worked for generation after generation, being served by different preachers to enrich their soil. If the ground has been well worked, are there areas just outside that haven’t been touched and if not, why not.

Having a family dog in my younger days, often meant that I had to go on the dog walk and I can remember walking around a wheat field near the manse and noticing that where there had been a footpath the year before, it was now wheat. The farmer kept pushing the boundary, so that they could squeeze in that extra bit of crop. We as the church, should be thinking in this way. We shouldn’t be comfortable to just farm the same square each time, but be looking to see that places that the word of God reaches, but can’t quite take hold and looking to see if we can help.

The word of God is sown and will grow in the places were the ground is well prepared and not compacted. As we look to the future, are there places that as churches we have compacted, ignored the signs of potential life because it looked like too hard work or caused us to be afraid of the cuts and stings we would receive? If God’s word can cross the boundaries, how are we going to care for that precious gift of life, no matter how many fruits it bears? It is a parable of hard work and challenge, but the rewards for God are great. Let anyone with ears hear!

**Intercessions**

Lord’s Prayer

**STF 619**

1 Thanks for friends who keep on loving,
finding ways to help us grow,
celebrating our achievements,
sharing in our pain and woe.
God is glimpsed where love is faithful:
mirrored here in time and space.
Thanks to God for friends who love us:
Christ revealed in every face.

2 Other people help to shape us
when they take the time to share
words of wisdom, honest actions
through our journey in God’s care.
In our faithful, honest learning
we discover things unknown.
Thanks to God for friends who teach us:
seeking talent yet ungrown.

 3 When we find our friendships challenged
through mistakes and different views,
we discover deeper living
as the love of God renews.
For in Christ we see forgiveness;
know a strength still to embrace. Thanks to God for friends who keep us:
making real the gift of grace.

4 Praise to God for this great gifting
of relationship and friend:
imaging divine relating;
found in heaven with no end.
Bless us Maker, Word and Spirit
as companions on the way.
Thanks to God for friends who help us
to fulfil our lives each day.

Gary Hopkins (*b.*1984)

Go now into the world in the light of Christ. Do not let the fear of troubles or the lures of comfort and honour prevent God’s word taking root deep in your heart and mind. Walk according to the ways of the Spirit for the ways of the Spirit are life and peace.
And may God sow in you the seeds of an abundant harvest; May Christ the Word be a lamp for your steps; And may the Holy Spirit give life to you - body and soul.
We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
    ***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

12th July Walk

**May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
   be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

As you begin your walk look at the ground under your feet.

* What are you walking on? Has it changed from where you started your walk?
* Is it smooth? Full of cracks? Bumpy?

Take some time to really look at the different surfaces you walk on, if it’s helpful take some pictures.

**Read Matthew 13:1-9**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. **2**Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. **3**And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. **4**And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. **5**Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, 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 brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9**Let anyone with ears listen!”

The parable of the sower, as this is known, talks about how the word of God is spread a bit like someone who is sowing seeds. A lot of the seed will land on the ground that it is intended to be planted in, ground that has been prepared and worked. But sometimes the seeds can land in places that aren’t prepared, places that are exposed, or full of other things. In these places, there are signs of life, but not everything can be sustained and produce more seeds. This parable challenges us to think about our faith and how it is growing, but also how we share God’s word with others.

* Look at the gardens, parks, and at the ground around you, can you see examples of the parable?
* Can you see anything that looks like it is surviving in an unusual place? What does it tell you?

Over the next days, weeks, months, watch those plants and how they grow. Take some time to thank God for the spreading the seed of the kingdom to all places and ask for helping in nurturing those seeds that are in your care.

**Activity:**

**Have a look at the different types of seeds you can find on a walk or in the garden.**

**Try and find out about what each type of seed needs to grow.**

**What type of soil do they need?**

**What conditions do they prefer?**

**What type of seed casing do they have?**

**How big are they?**

**How many are there per seed pod?**

**Take some time to marvel at the variety.**