



The **Methodist** Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 18th October 2020



This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

**Let's begin by singing together to the tune for
'Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldier of the
cross'**

We see the fruitful harvest
Our gracious God provides
And how, in his abundance
Our needs are satisfied
He sends the yearly seasons
And feeds with joy and care
Pure light and living water
Poured out for all to share

Lord of all the harvest
Creation brings you praise
So we will join the joyful song
Of everything you've made
This world of revelation
Unfolds before our eyes
The birds sing out God's glories
His wisdom fills the skies

The seeds are sown to teach us
Of death that leads to life
The fruitful trees remind us
To live each day in Christ
There is another harvest
The workers are so few
We'll tend the seeds he's planted
And see his word bear fruit

Adapted from Sam Hargraves@ Resound Worship,

Opening prayer: Psalm 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,^[a]
we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

³ The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

This morning's reading: 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^[a] listen!"

Let's sing again...new words to the familiar tune of 'Tell out my soul'

Creator God, we praise you for our seeds
Your rich provision for our daily needs
The ripening fruits and fields of waving grain
Constant reminders of your love through pain

From island seas come treasures from the deep
Men strive through storms their nightly watch to
keep

This fragile world with mysteries to explore
With grateful hearts we praise you evermore

We thank you God, for ores in richest vein
Plundered resources for financial gain
Teach us to be custodians of our earth
That children yet unborn may share its worth

Compassionate God, who weeps for distant lands
Where harvest fail and deep injustice stands
Help us to learn to share what we possess
That all in need may feel your tenderness

Margaret Wilson@ Poynton Methodist Church 2017

Today's message

The parable we have heard read this morning is probably one of the most familiar of Jesus, 40 or so parables. And sometimes there is a great danger that familiarity can breed contempt. Without knowing it there is a danger of mentally switching off whenever a familiar reading from the bible forms part of our lectionary readings, switching off both from your point of view when hearing it and also from my point of view when trying to preach about it. There is a temptation to think "we've heard this one before. Let's hear something different."

As so as someone who leads worship, there is a temptation to try and do something with a well known text to ensure we hear something we

haven't heard before. One of the easiest ways is to try and approach the story from a different angle or from the point of view of a different character. Sometimes it might be as simple as rebranding the story. Rebranding is the art of repackaging and renaming a product to make it more appealing whilst to all intent and purposes keeping the product exactly the same. In technical terms it is "the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a different (new) position and opinion in the mind of stakeholders and competitors."

I wonder how many of you can remember when Marathon became Snickers, Opal fruits became Starburst, JIF became CIF. So how might we rebrand this parable, what other name or names might we call it other than the parable of the sower...the parable of the careless sower, the parable of the miraculous harvest, the parable of the helpless seeds, the parable of the four soils.

Today I don't want to use this time to explain a parable, but rather to get you to think about parables in general and why Jesus used them. To think about parables as seeds and how the ideas sown might grow to produce a harvest.

So what does the word parable mean?...well it the comparison of two things laid side by side with each other for the purpose of teaching. Our English word comes from the word Greek word Parable, literally a throwing together, sometimes to show similarity, sometimes to show contrast, sometimes simply to surprise people.

The Hebrew word "mashal" was often used to describe parables but could have a much wider meaning to include mystery, riddle or proverb...not just two things laid side by side for comparison but also an everyday story with a meaning spiritual meaning.

Most biblical scholars suggest that a parable normally has only a single meaning, and of course one thing that we must remember sat here in 2020, it that this single meaning that must have been relevant to the lives of Jewish peasants living in Galilee in the 1st century. That has to be our starting point when we try to understand their meaning here today. But anyone who has heard

the same story over a number of years in church will know that there are 1001 ways to interpret it.

But why did Jesus teach in parables at all is an often asked question? Well I think parables allow Jesus to hold the attention of the people without alienating them. It allows him to use word pictures of scenes, events, incidents that would have been all too familiar in a rural environment. Yet whilst dealing with the well known, such parables moves or allow people to encounter the unknown often by means of a twist that catches people off guard but one that makes them pause, think, reflect on what they have just heard.

Parables acts as a means of revelation but only to those who are eager to see more, only to those who are prepared to put in the time and effort. Much in the same way that our muscles will decrease in size and strength if we do not use them so it is the same with our spiritual life.

And by teaching in such a way it spurred people onto making a decision. Parables were meant to challenge. Parables were meant to cause people to take a hard look at themselves in the mirror. Parables prevented people from being spoon fed but meant that they and we must puzzle things out for themselves. Of Jesus' 40 parables, only two of them are explained.

Parables are something that do not necessarily give an answer but which leaves its hearer or in our case reader with work to do on their own. The listener needs to figure out the rest. And the ability to understand was not and is not something that depends on how intelligent the hearer was but on their spiritual disposition towards God, their relationship with God.

Parable are themselves like seeds, seeds sown into different types of soil, seeds that need the right condition, seeds that need time to germinate, seeds that need to be cultivates, nurtured. Very few of those who first heard, including the disciples it should be noted, understood the parables that Jesus told straight away, and that gives me comfort every time I read one and then sit scratching my head trying to work out its meaning or meanings.

Many gardeners will know that in order to produce a harvest for a particular time of the year, the seeds need to be sown well in advance and that made me wonder as the church, what kinds of seeds have we sown, purposefully and occasionally without knowing it during this pandemic? Seeds that we might well think have fallen on stony ground, have been trampled on, have been prevented from growing by the pressure of others...and seeds that might just have landed in the right type of soil at just the right time

Seeds that have seen perhaps fractured communities come together in a common unity of looking after each other. Seeds that despite social distancing might actually have resulted in increased communication between people. Seeds sown by home worship material offers people a chance to ponder on a weekly message over a period of time. Seeds sown by our Messy Church material sent out as bundles of activities for young families to do at home. Seeds sown through the use of technology and especially zoom services that have brought in people who might never have set foot in one of our buildings.

As those entrusted with Jesus' mission today, as those who have been commissioned to be sowers of the word, of the good news ourselves, we might consider the implications of this parable for how we engage in mission. Too often we play it safe, sowing the word only where we are confident it will be well received, and only where those who receive it are likely to become contributing members of our congregations.

Too often in the name of stewardship, we hold tightly to our resources, wanting to make sure that nothing is wasted. We stifle creativity and energy for mission, resisting new ideas for fear they might not work -- as though mistakes or failure were to be avoided at all costs.

And yet Jesus' approach to mission is quite at odds with our play-it-safe instincts. He gives us freedom to take risks for the sake of the gospel. He endorses extravagant generosity in sowing the word, even in perilous places. Though we may wonder about the wisdom or efficiency of his methods, Jesus promises that the end result will be a bumper crop. Out there are many different types of fields, different types of soil. As we conclude this

act of worship today, let us not forget when we go, to take some seed with us and sow them wherever we go. Who know we might just be surprised at the harvest we produce . Amen

most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

Prayers of Intercessions

We pray for those who produce the food we eat

We pray for those who ensure if gets from the field and seas into our supermarkets and shops

We pray for those who work in our cafes and restaurants

We pray for those involved in areas of sustainability and finding new ways to improve our crops

We pray for those who often go to bed hungry

We pray for all those lacking spiritual nourishment

We join together to say the words of The Lord's prayer Our Father....

A blessing...from Isaiah 55:12
You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Amen

Let's conclude this worship by singing a familiar harvest favourite

For the fruits of his creation
thanks be to God;
for his gifts to every nation
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe keeping,
thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our worldwide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,