

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you all
and also with you.

Let us confess our sins to God our Father.

Heavenly Father, we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault;
by what we have done and by what we have failed to do.
We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Absolution Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy on you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all
goodness, and keep you in eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Isaiah 55:10-13

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so 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 succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;

and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 [The Parable of the Sower]

Jesus sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, **Amen.**

Pat and I have a pearl of great price in our rectory – we have a garden which is large enough to grow a decent amount of fruit and vegetables and flowers.

I actually like the stress-busting mucking around in what the Americans call “the dirt”. If my hands [show them] aren't always delicate and priestly, it's due to the time I spend there.

So you'll understand my instinctive connection to this parable. Many's the time I have quoted parts of it in my garden, when I try to rationalize the overnight loss of a young tomato plant. When my carefully nurtured courgettes and potatoes come with an unwelcome lodger eating away the inside.

We all know this parable so well that it's difficult to approach it in the same way that we would were we to hear it for the first time.

Are we losing that direct connection with sowing seed; with cropping food from the earth? Do kids raised in apartments understand this parable?

Perhaps it's our mechanized manufacturing processes that are at fault. A plant manager (and I've been one, so I should know) doesn't have much tolerance for waste in the production process, whether he makes cloth or cars, whether he processes paper documents or online bank transfers, or manages a bottling plant or canning factory. Waste is bad.

Waste not, want not has been firmly inculcated into our Puritan minds. We find it difficult to accept the survival rate of the natural world, where thousands of frog's or fishes' eggs are spawned, to ensure the survival of only a tiny number of adults.

Maybe that is what pulls us up short every time we hear this parable of the Sower. Does Jesus really mean that? Does he really tolerate a less than 100% success rate; a perfect evangelization process? What happens to those who fall "by the wayside?" But of course that isn't the point of the parable. All Jesus is doing is using as an analogy the normal sight of Palestinian life of his time – a man sowing seeds – to make his point.

I think part of the problem we have is a hangover from the triumphalist church of Christendom – the notion that all people are or should be members of the Christian Church. The culture of exclusivity rather than inclusivity. That you had to be a practising, church-attending Christian to be one of us, or you would go to hell. That if you were an un-married mother, a gay man or woman, a bankrupt, a derelict or an alcoholic you would go the same way.

That notion of 100% membership resulted in sometimes brutal, un-Christian rules and sanctions against those who didn't participate in the charade of 100%. We have such a corpus of rules, laws, regulations and attitudes in this church of ours. We regularly obscure the one kernel message of Jesus – that we should love one another, as he has loved us.

Or are we attracted to the Billy Graham school of Christian evangelism? Come forward; stand up for Jesus. How does that work in today's real world? Does the sun rise and scorch our best intentions? How does it stand up to the competitive tedium of the grind of getting to work on the bus or DART? Not the easiest of roads here.

Or the Richard Dawkins of this world, pecking away like the birds of our parable at our Christian belief - our long-held but infrequently-examined Christian beliefs? Christianity is not an easy road, at all at all. We need to repeatedly spend time sharing what the Bible really says and means.

The parable speaks to me that, if we're trying to be Christian seedsmen – sowers of the Word - it is our own conscience, our own behaviour, that is our responsibility. That we should try to, as it were, spread the Seed – that we should try to convince others about what we believe. Not necessarily by standing on a street corner shouting Gospel verses – heaven forbid!

For me it's much more important that we convince people about Christianity by what we do; and especially by what we are. By what we stand for – what we are prepared to stand up for. What we are prepared to stand against, too. We need to periodically take out and polish the old-fashioned virtue of constancy, and of love. Of pastoral care. Keeping an eye on things.

Keeping an eye on people who live around about us; those whom we value, and (hard sometimes) those whom we don't: those for whom the seed didn't survive in their lives. But just as importantly, we all also know someone who seems to be as effortlessly spendthrift in their love as the sower in the parable. Someone who cares for everyone around them. Someone who sows good seed.

Making the time to focus on someone for whom life isn't as it used be. Someone who has lost or forgotten the fun of life, who may be short on love and can't see the beauty that's around us all. Try it yourself! Sow a few good seeds today – you never know where they might land.

Today's psalm encourages us: "Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path."

And now to the one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died and was buried;

he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
Hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth
to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Lord, grant us both the opportunity and the will to serve you day by day.
May all that we do, and how we bear each other's burdens, be our offering of love
and service to the glory of your name. Give to our politicians, and all in authority,
that same urge to offer love, service and sacrifice to all.

Thank you, God, for all your work among us. Yours is the vigour in creation, yours
is the impulse in our new discoveries. Make us adventurous, yet reverent and
hopeful in all we do.

We ask your blessing on all doers of the word in this community. We ask you to
bless our Archbishop Michael, and all bishops, priests, deacons and readers. We
pray for all those in many places who are suffering from failed harvests, and who
struggle to cultivate infertile land. We pray for people who once believed but have
fallen away through trouble and persecution. Bring them back to know the
richness of your love.

Lord, we place into your hands those for whom we want to pray: Those whom we
love: Those known to you but whom we have never met; those for whom the
reality of COVID-19 has stressed and changed their lives. We know that you love
them with a greater love than we could ever imagine. In the stillness of your house,
we are, for a few moments here with you - for them, as we ask for your
intercession.

Lord God, we thank you for calling us into the company of those who trust in
Christ and seek to obey His will. May your Spirit guide and strengthen us in
mission and service to your world; for we are strangers no longer but pilgrims

together. And when our span of life is over, we pray that we will join with all your saints in the joys of your eternal kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, 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.

Dismissal:

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.**

Amen