**Morning Praise @ Home 6th August 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings Romans 9: 1 – 5 Matthew 13: 1 – 8

**Reflection from Philip *The Parable of the Sower***

At times my lawn seems to be covered with mole hills – it’s like a mole farm, fresh mole hills regularly appearing after heavy rain as the moles hunt out those juicy worms…



I go out and rather unsportingly flatten the mole hills – but hours later a new one usually pops up nearby! Anyhow, I sow fresh grass seed on the soil. I aim carefully at the soil as I spread the seed from a bag like this – but sometimes it gets blown around (note to self - don’t sow when it’s windy!). Some of it misses. Some of it gets gobbled up by the birds, some gets lost in the weeds (I grow a lot of those – I prefer to call it ‘wilding’…!). Sometimes I get lovely new grass. Sometimes not. So I try again….!

In the old days, people used to sow seeds from a bag at their waist using their hands. Inevitably some of the seed falls in the wrong place.

Now a man called Jethro Tull realised this method could be improved upon & so he invented something called The Seed Drill that put the seeds just where they were meant to go – so there was far less waste of seed and bigger, better crops.

A drawing of a wooden cart

Description automatically generated

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The seed drill didn’t exist in Jesus’ time, so a parable about seeds ending up all over the place would have been something people could easily relate to. A bit like me with my bag of grass seed and the mole hills!

So - a quick reminder – we heard the parable of the Sower in our reading from Matthew 13.

In the parable, some of the seed falls on the path where the ground is hard - due to people and animals walking on it - and the birds quickly eat it.

Some falls on the rocks – it grows, but there is no depth of soil so with shallow roots the young plants eventually die in the hot sun.

Some falls in soil among thorns – it starts to grow but gets choked by the thorns and dies.

A collage of different types of land

Description automatically generated

But some falls in good soil – it grows deep roots and becomes a healthy crop, described in our reading as *‘…a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*’

So maybe we might think – ‘I want to be like the good soil’ or ‘I know people who are like the rocky soil’. Or ‘perhaps we should pray for the people like the thorny soil’.

Hold on! Suddenly this has become a parable about the soil, not a parable about the sower.

Let’s think about this parable from the sower’s perspective:

I had sometimes thought it seemed the sower was rather careless and wasteful. So many seeds were recklessly scattered on the poor soil (a bit like me with those mole hills!). The seeds were not carefully aimed at the good soil (as Jethro Tull and his seed drill would have done!). What a waste!

It might seem like careless sowing, but God knew what he was doing when he sent Jesus out to sow seeds everywhere. In Luke 5 Jesus said ‘*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick’.* Christ wanted to give everyone the chance to know him. The seed wasn’t just saved for the ‘good soil’.

A church once wanted to reach out to the local community to get children to attend a holiday club. They called around the local area with leaflets to hand out. One of the group told how he had nearly ignored one house because there was a dishevelled man drinking from a can of beer outside. Then they noticed a child’s toys on the ground in front of the house. So they decided to go up to him. To their surprise they received a warm welcome & the child did attend the holiday club.

The parable of the Sower shows us Christ came to share the word of God with everyone. He doesn’t pick & choose who is good enough to hear his word.

Those different types of ground might represent the condition of the listener & what they do with the word once it has been received. It might also show how during our own lives, ‘different soils’ can keep us from growing our faith and sharing.

At different times in our lives, we might be like seeds in any of these types of soil. But it’s not just about how we grow in our faith, it’s about how we share our faith too.

For some of us, those different soil types can represent not just a single sowing event, but stages in our own lives, in our own spiritual journey. I know I can look back on my own life and reflect on many periods when I was not in good soil:

* When I was on the path – and the word of God frankly went in one ear and out the other. I just wasn’t listening.
* When I was among the rocks, knowing the word of God, but in a shallow way, not acting on it. This was when I was involved in church but it wasn’t as important to me as it might have appeared. When times got tough, I didn’t rely on my faith but ‘did my own thing’. That didn’t go well.
* When I was among thorns, totally distracted by everything going on around me, career, house, money, seeking ‘success’ – and all the other things… things that distracted me. Again, after a while, these distractions took me further away from where my priorities should have been.

But there have been ‘good soil’ times too. Times when I have had a proper perspective on the things in life that really matter. Times when I have tried to listen to God, when I have prayed and studied the bible. Times when I have recognised my own failings and the strength I can have when I listen to God.

At ‘good soil’ times we can grow deep roots – to sustain us from the rocky and thorny times.

It has taken most of my life to find the good soil! Mole hills still appear both on my lawn and in my life, but, (if I may mix my metaphors!) with God’s grace they will not become mountains. Help us Lord to find good soil so we grow deep and sustainable roots in you. Amen.

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession led by Jane**

Gracious Lord, thank you for this new day, for all the time when we are awake and busy. Thank you for our time here together this morning. You have given us so much and shown your love for us. We think of the goodness you have brought us individually. Let us never take it for granted.

Creator God, thank you for the beauty of your world and the resources you have provided for us. Give us wisdom and compassion in our stewardship of all you have entrusted us with. Help those in positions of power to understand that our collective actions are the cause of climate change, and give the government the wisdom to bring about policies which protect your world.

Sovereign God, help us to understand what you are calling us to do and give us a joyous heart to respond. Help us to model your kingdom in the way we act and treat others. Give us the courage to seize opportunities to share your word with others.

In our parish prayer diary, the prayer point for today is our worship today at both churches.

Loving God, we bring before you Rev Alan Leach and Philip Hillman leading our worship today and that as congregations we may be attentive to what God is saying through them.

Saviour God, we think of all of those for whom today is a sad or difficult day; anyone in pain or illness, and those grieving for the loss of somebody they loved.

We ask you to take their burden, wrap them in your loving care and grant them your Spirit’s lifting presence.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**