

# Service of the Word 12 July 2020

## Pentecost 6

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### **Welcome**

Good Morning and welcome to our Service. This is a very special week for us here in Scotland because we have begun Phase 3 of our journey out of lockdown. This means that some things are beginning to open up again and more, including places of worship, will reopen in the coming weeks. It all feels exciting and scary at the same time. We long to get back to doing “normal” things but we will need to learn how to do many of these things in a new way. Change is always unsettling and this new time of change is no exception. In some ways isolating ourselves was easier to negotiate because the rules were simple. There was very little leeway and few exceptions to what was required of us. Now as we begin to learn this new way of living, this new normal, more responsibility is placed on each one of us to use our own judgement. There are rules that must be obeyed. There are guidelines which should be obeyed. And there good old fashioned common sense which will hopefully help us to weigh up and evaluate the risks that this new way of being has for each one of us. I said many weeks, no months, ago that although we are all in the same storm, we are not all in the same boat. As we learn to steer our particular boat in the still stormy waters ahead let us pause for a moment to bring our voices to God in praise and thanksgiving for bringing us safely to this new place.

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### **Gathering**

We are gathered together as the family of God  
to offer praise and thanksgiving  
to ask forgiveness of our sins  
to hear and receive God's holy Word  
to pray for the needs of the world  
and to seek God's grace  
that through Jesus Christ our Lord  
and in the power of the Holy Spirit  
we may give ourselves to God's service.

### **Penitence**

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.  
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.  
Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, all we long for is before you;  
and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.  
But we acknowledge our wickedness;  
we are filled with sorrow at our sin.  
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;  
O Lord, make haste to help us.  
May the Lord forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are  
and direct what we shall be,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Praise**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to God's people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,  
and God the Holy Spirit,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world;  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

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## **Collect of the Day**

Lord God, you have prepared for those who love you  
good things no eye has seen:

pour into our hearts such love of you,  
that, by loving you in all things and above all things,  
we may be worthy of your promises,  
which surpass all we can desire;  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, world without end. Amen

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## **First Reading**

Psalm 65

- 1 Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;  
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
- 2 You who answer prayer,  
to you all people will come.
- 3 When we were overwhelmed by sins,  
you forgave[c] our transgressions.
- 4 Blessed are those you choose  
and bring near to live in your courts!  
We are filled with the good things of your house,  
of your holy temple.
- 5 You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,  
God our Saviour,  
the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas,
- 6 who formed the mountains by your power,  
having armed yourself with strength,
- 7 who stilled the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
and the turmoil of the nations.
- 8 The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;  
where morning dawns, where evening fades,  
you call forth songs of joy.
- 9 You care for the land and water it;  
you enrich it abundantly.  
The streams of God are filled with water  
to provide the people with corn,  
for so you have ordained it.[d]
- 10 You drench its furrows and level its ridges;  
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
- 11 You crown the year with your bounty,  
and your carts overflow with abundance.
- 12 The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;

the hills are clothed with gladness.  
13 The meadows are covered with flocks  
and the valleys are mantled with corn;  
they shout for joy and sing.

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## Second Reading

Matthew 13:1-17 The Message (MSG)

**13 1-3** At about that same time Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing him to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories.

**3-8** “What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

**9** “Are you listening to this? Really listening?”

**10** The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?”

**11-15** He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they’re blue in the face and not get it. I don’t want Isaiah’s forecast repeated all over again:

Your ears are open but you don’t hear a thing.

Your eyes are awake but you don’t see a thing.

The people are blockheads!

They stick their fingers in their ears

so they won’t have to listen;

They screw their eyes shut

so they won’t have to look,

so they won’t have to deal with me face-to-face

and let me heal them.

**16-17** “But you have God-blessed eyes—eyes that see! And God-blessed ears—ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance.

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## Reflection

Two things struck me in this morning’s gospel, the Parable of the Sower. Firstly, there is a lot of interest in gardening just now during our time of lockdown. So maybe this is a story that we would do well to pay attention to. Secondly, the Disciples question to Jesus: *Why do you tell stories?*. I love stories, as I guess many people do, stories, as Jesus well knew, are something that people pay attention to. This story, this Parable of the Sower is familiar yet often misunderstood as a story of failure. We tend to focus on what went wrong with the seed and then worry about what kind of ground we might be for the seeds of God’s Kingdom.

So much attention in explaining this parable is often focused on failure of some seed for whatever reason that we fail to grasp wider picture of parable. We are so busy concentrating on failure of some seed that we worry away at it, chewing over reasons, that we miss the real point. We are so busy with this that we don’t open our ears to hear the message of the parable about the kingdom of God. We are so busy fussing with failure don’t open our eyes or our hearts to appreciate the bigger picture of the kingdom of God, the love of God which Jesus is painting in this parable.

Jesus says clearly at the beginning that *The Kingdom of God is like a SOWER*. He does **not say in this particular story that** the Kingdom of God is like some seed. The Kingdom of God is like a SOWER – so we need to focus on the sower. Firstly, we need to appreciate that sower is not doing anything remarkable, or extraordinary. The sower is simply doing ordinary task; taking part in everyday activity. He is sowing seed in the usual way.

It is quite normal; casting seed virtually anywhere, heedless of prevailing soil conditions; not prejudging ground where it falls. The sower is taking good seed and letting it fall where ever it will, all around. The sower has not gone

anywhere special; not pre-selecting special places to scatter seed. It is in fact a rather willy- nilly activity.

The sower, you may notice, is using seed lavishly, throwing it around, literally in great handfuls. The sower is not doling out seed by tiny seed in neat pre-prepared rows but rather throwing it out all around, heedlessly, recklessly; are I say it extravagantly. This sower would not get a slot with Alan Titchmarsh or on Gardener's world.

\*\*\*\*\* part 2

**The Kingdom of God is like a sower** who takes handfuls of good seed and throws it about lavishly and regardless of where it falls. This seed is sown all around in the familiar, ordinary world where the sower lives. Handfuls of seed is cast everywhere, regardless of good spots or bad spots not prejudging their suitability to receive the seed. The Kingdom of God, the love of God, is about a lavish, extravagant, gospel of love. A Gospel offered freely and generously to all, regardless of "quality" of their lives; regardless of their *supposed* suitability to receive it. Sometimes, sadly, the love of God falls into lives, or times in our lives; parts of our lives, when it is not accepted. There are times when each one of us rejects this lavish, generous Kingdom of God, the freely scattered love of God. These last few months of pandemic have been like that for many of us.

Yet we also know this love of God often falls into lives, or seemingly hopeless times or parts of our lives when it takes root and is allowed to grow. The result is we flourish and thrive. The yield is that we become more than we were before; much more than we could ever be without this lavish, generous love. The Kingdom of God – the love of God: is a part of our ordinary, everyday experience. It is out there, in here; all round us, every moment of our lives.

The Kingdom of God – the love of God: is freely, lavishly and abundantly bestowed on us, wherever or however we are; regardless of our circumstances; heedless of our stony, thorny sins and resistance to being loved by God. The Kingdom of God – the love of God: is the very essential element each one of us needs to grow and flourish so that we in our turn, as disciples of Jesus, may sow the lavish, abundant love of God into our ordinary

lives and the lives of those around us. Love to be received by those who have ears to hear and hearts open to The Kingdom of God – the love of God.

This parable that Jesus told is not about failure but rather about success if we are willing to lavishly, extravagantly and unheedingly to share the love of God. Not doing it out seed by tiny seed only in places where we feel it might flourish but wherever, whenever and however we are able to share it!

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## **Apostle's 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 power of the Holy Spirit, and 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 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.

*Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in  
our lives*

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## **Intercessions**

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### **Blessing**

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,  
Forever and ever. Amen

### **Act of Dedication**

Almighty God,  
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:  
may it be a lantern to our feet,  
a light upon our paths,  
and a strength to our lives.  
Take us and use us to love and serve all people  
in the power of the Holy Spirit  
and in the name of your Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praise**

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.  
You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \*  
you renew the face of the earth.  
May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.  
You renew the face of the earth.  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.  
You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; \* you renew the face of the earth.

### **Blessing**

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and evermore. Amen