



The Sixth Sunday after Trinity: 19th July

Take some time to be still, perhaps light a candle and offer your own prayer to God. You may find the following words helpful.

Father God, help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory.

Amen

Hymn 297: How sweet the name

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer's ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

Dear Name! the Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never-failing Treas'ry filled
With boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy name
Refresh my soul in death.

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**Almighty God, our 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.
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**

Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

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

Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, 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.

Collect

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward you that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Old Testament Reading: *Genesis 28:10 - 19*

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

New Testament Reading: *Romans 8:12 - 25*

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father.*’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Hymn 315: Immortal Love

Immortal Love for ever full,
for ever flowing free,
for ever shared, for ever whole,
a never-ebbing sea.

Our outward lips confess the name
all other names above;
love only knoweth whence it came
and comprehendeth love.

We may not climb the heavenly steeps
to bring the Lord Christ down;
in vain we search the lowest deeps,
for him no depths can drown:

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
a present help is he;
and faith has still its Olivet,
and love its Galilee.
The healing of his seamless dress
is by our beds of pain;

we touch him in life's throng and press,
and we are whole again.

Through him the first fond prayers are said
our lips of childhood frame;
the last low whispers of our dead
are burdened with his name.

Alone, O Love ineffable,
thy saving name is given;
to turn aside from thee is hell,
to walk with thee is heaven.

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 13:24 – 30, 36 - 43*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew
Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?" "An enemy did this," he replied. 'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

"No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.' He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Sara Merritt

Hope of the Kingdom

What hope do you have? What are you hoping for?
(let's just spend a moment thinking about that quietly – maybe short term hopes, maybe longer term...)

What are our readings all about?
Well now, those readings are tricky, aren't they?

Parable

First we have the parable of the wheat and the tares.. Jesus tells this story: of a farmer who sows seed in his field, but then finds that prickly weeds have sprung up among his lovely wheat. So his workers say "Shall we pull up the weeds?" but he says "No, because you might pull up the wheat too, so let's leave them together. Then at harvest time we'll separate it all out and burn the weeds". Jesus says this is a metaphor for the whole world, where the "sons of the kingdom" are the good seed, and the "sons of evil" are the prickly weeds. They're going to be left to grow up together, but at "the end of the age" the weeds will be burnt up "with wailing and gnashing of teeth" while the righteous will "shine forth as the sun".

It's not the easiest parable, is it?! It's not like the Good Samaritan, which we can all read and say "Oh yes, I should be kind to my neighbours even if they're not like me" or the one after this, the Pearl of Great Price, about God's kingdom being more important than anything else. Those are powerful but kind of straightforward.
No, this one is darker and deeper.

For instance, who are the sons of the kingdom and who are the sons of evil? (I'm pretty sure this doesn't just mean men, so let's try "children" instead.) Who are the children of the Kingdom and who are the children of evil? Which are you? And, who is the "enemy" who sows the seeds? And when is the end of the age? And, most importantly, what is Jesus trying to tell us in this parable?

...
I don't think this parable is about some people being evil and others good. Jesus is all about forgiveness and change and growth and second chances, new beginnings. He is not about some people being bad from the roots. I'm sure these weeds are not people...

Maybe the key is in verse 41. The angels will gather and destroy "all that causes sin and all lawlessness". Maybe those weeds are not individuals, but bits of individuals, or bits of society. Perhaps we are each a field with wheat and thistles growing. Or perhaps we can see our culture, or even all creation, in the same way, with goodness and evil growing together.

It's wonderful to have that picture of a future where there is no evil left, only good, but it's also good to acknowledge that that is not the world we live in now. Perhaps this parable is in fact an acknowledgement of the problem of suffering.

Have you ever tried telling someone the good news about Jesus? Has anyone said to you "what about all the bad stuff in the world, the wickedness and suffering? Did God make that, and if so how can he be good? And if he's all powerful why doesn't he stop it?" I think it's the hardest question to answer, the problem that is an obstacle to many people finding God. We need to have an answer to give them.

Is that answer here? Well, this parable actually says that no, God didn't make evil, the 'enemy' did (although we then have to ask whether God made the Enemy). But it also says that the reason God won't get rid of it yet is that the good stuff (the wheat) might get pulled up along with the bad

(the weeds). So God opts to let it all grow together until the end when it can be carefully separated out. Hmm. Does that make sense? If we got rid of all sin and suffering in the world would that really endanger goodness and love? That is a big, deep question for us all to continue thinking about.

I'm not sure this parable really answers the problem of evil, but I'm glad it's here, acknowledging the question and attempting an answer. If you want to discuss this question more, let's make space in church to do so. If you want a book to read I would suggest CS Lewis *The Problem of Pain* which is old but evergreen and just makes sense. I expect the other ministers would also be happy to suggest reading, and we should make it an ongoing conversation.

But there is another side to the parable, and that is the powerful image of the pain of the current age being burnt away, overshadowed by the glory of the world to come. Perhaps the most important thing to take away from it is not ideas of enemies or weeds or gnashing of teeth, but of hope, the hope that just maybe it will all make sense in the end, that good will triumph and evil will be destroyed.

For now we live in a world of conflict, between good seed and bad seed, but at the end of the age only good seed will survive, in the glorious kingdom of God.

Romans

Now, let's have a look at our other reading, from Romans, and see if this can help us at all with that tricky parable.

Romans is, itself, a notoriously difficult letter. But if we try hard with it we can sometimes find great treasure.

When I read this passage with the parable in mind, I noticed several parallels. Paul also divides life into two sides – flesh and spirit. Living according to the flesh will end in death, but living according to the spirit will end in life. Perhaps these are the same as the weeds and the wheat?

He says that we, who live according to the Spirit of God, are the children of God, which again leads us back to the wheat in the parable. Paul talks about life now being full of suffering, not just for people, but for all of creation, and how all of creation is waiting to be liberated.

In the parable, this time we are awaiting was pictured as a harvest. Paul pictures that same time as a freedom from bondage, freedom from slavery to the 'master' which is decay, corruption, evil. If we go back to that wheatfield, it's freedom from growing up alongside those nasty prickly weeds.

And then he gives us another picture – this time of birth! He says this suffering, this living in bondage, living with the painful weeds, is like being pregnant and the end will be like birth!

Three images of hope

That might sound a bit confusing so I'll say it again. It seems to me that the parable and Paul say that this suffering, evil world is like a wheatfield waiting to be free of its weeds, like a slave waiting to be free, and like a labouring woman waiting to see her baby.

Do those pictures resonate with you?

Which one works best for you, the wheatfield, the slave or the pregnant woman?

You won't be surprised to hear that I like the birth one best! (I'm a midwife, in case anyone doesn't know!)

I know a little bit of what Paul says about the pains of childbirth. I know that after a baby is born most women who've been well cared for will completely forget about labour. The suffering – or hard work – seems insignificant in comparison to the glory of the new baby.

(which is lucky as it allows the possibility of subsequent children!)

I also know that when you are pregnant for the first time you cannot imagine what parenthood is going to be like. I think it is totally impossible, and I have certainly never met a couple who have

managed it. You cannot imagine what life is going to be like after the birth. You get really caught up with the exciting, frustrating, hard work of being pregnant. You know there's all this potential going on inside, the baby growing, and you try to imagine. But you have no idea what that baby is going to look like or be like, and you have no idea how your life is going to change. When you've had a baby you become a different person. A mother and father are born as well as a baby. It's a new, different life for everyone.

Do you think our current conflicted world is like a woman in labour, suffering now but with the hope of a new world to come?

And can we take some comfort from Paul's insight that the world to come is as unimaginable as life with a new baby?!

Can we take some comfort from the hope of the Kingdom of God? We don't know what it will be like or when it will be, but we have been promised that it will be glorious.

To sum up:

Life is hard work and painful.
We don't know what's coming next
We have one great big Hope...

Now what?

What are we going to do about it?

What difference does this understanding of life, or this hope, make?

Pie in the sky when you die?

Is this hope just for some unimaginable future? What's the point of it?

Imagine a film. A superhero film, or science fiction, or a thriller – anything that has goodies and baddies. Think about it for a moment, how it feels when you're watching it. You know what's going to happen. You know that good is going to win, even if it's the first time you've seen it. So although the film might be scary, you have hope all the way through.

If you were a character in that film, and you knew that good always triumphs, wouldn't that change the way you acted? I suppose if you were a baddie it might make you change sides... If you were a goodie it might give you strength to carry on.

I guess this is what films do – they try to give us hope that good will win. Isn't that just what Jesus and Paul are both saying in today's readings?

This hope must affect our behaviour.

I have four suggestions:

1. Be good: For a start, if you believe that good is going to win that's a pretty big motivation to be on the right side. Don't be a tare or a thistle, be good seed, Be fruitful, contribute to the good stuff in the world, not the evil stuff. Don't be an obstacle to others and don't be lawless. Follow God's law, which is summed up in "love God and love your neighbour". These are the basics. Do we get that right? Are you a goodie? A child of the kingdom? Be on the right side.
2. Be your true self: In one of Paul's ideas he talks about freedom from slavery. A slave is treated as a non-person, but when they are liberated they become a person. Now, of course, we know that slavery is deeply wrong, because all people should be treated as people and those who treat other people as inferior, as non-persons – are very very wrong. But if we can imagine the difference it makes to someone changing from being seen as a non-person to being seen as a person, perhaps we can catch a glimpse of the difference it will make to all of creation when it is redeemed at the end of the age, when it is liberated to becoming what it truly is. Its true self. Perhaps this is something we can experience a taste of now. With the

Spirit in us we can start to be our beautiful true selves, the eternal persons we were created to be...

3. Be with God: If we live now by the Spirit, rather than just "in the flesh" we have a taste of what life in all its fulness will be like, in that future. Eternal life is not just for the future, it's for now, and our experience of God and love now gives us hope
4. Be unafraid: This hope is actually based on what we experience now. To the extent that we know the faithfulness and love of God now, in this life, that will help us to we can trust God for the future. What we know now informs what we hope for. We walk by faith not by sight, we can live without fear because we live in hope. This lack of fear, this confidence, affects the way we walk, the way we live, every step.

So, maybe we still haven't found what we're looking for, but we must keep looking for it, working for it, hoping for it, living it. Let us go forward in that hope.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

God our Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who made the world and everything in it, we give you thanks for the wonderful gift of life and all the pleasures that it brings us. We praise you for the joys of creation, so evident in these lovely summer days.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all hope we call on you today. We pray for our church in this time of uncertainty; for those people who are worried about attending worship and for those who may feel more isolated by not being able to attend. We give thanks for the Zoom services and for the wonderful contributions

made by everyone, and which has brought us together during the past few months. As we start to open up St Mary's and welcome people from our community back into church to sit for a while in peace and prayer, we give thanks for the church building itself and for the churchyard with the trees and birds who inhabit it; it is still there for us and it is a good space to be.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God we pray for our world and all who suffer within it. We pray for all the countries affected by Covid-19, especially where the rate of infections is still rising. We pray for all those who have died and the families who have been made homeless by the heavy monsoon flooding in the north Indian state of Assam which has submerged thousands of villages, and parts of the Kaziranga National Park, a Unesco World Heritage site, where wild animals have also died.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our Queen and her family, please keep them safe and well. We pray for our Government: Gracious Lord, grant those in positions of power and responsibility, patience, knowledge and wisdom with regard to the decisions they must make for our safety and our future.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Gracious God, we give thanks for Alan's ministry during the past 11 years. As his retirement draws near, we pray for Alan, for Liz and for their family and wish them all God's blessing on their future lives together. May retirement bring them much joy and happiness.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray for our own families and those we know and for the children growing up within them and those who will soon be on holiday from school. This has been a very unsettling time for children everywhere and we bless them each and every one and may they know your presence and feel your guidance in their lives as they face new challenges when they go back to school in the autumn.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God, we pray for the elderly, especially those unable to leave their homes; we pray for the lonely, especially those separated from loved ones and we pray for all those who are ill, especially those receiving end of life care.

We pray for those who we know who are ill at this time, and in our church community we pray for....

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for those who mourn because of the death of loved ones, and for those who still miss the companionship and care of those dear to them. We remember before God all those who have died.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that nothing will separate us from your love, so please be with us in the week ahead. Help us to be strong and not afraid. Stay beside us to defend us, guide us and lead us, and be with us for ever and ever. Amen.

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

The Peace:

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 70: Be thou my vision

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art -
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be,
Thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and thou only first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

Hymn 72: Bind us together

*Bind us together, Lord, bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together in love.*

There is only one God, there is only one King,
There is only one Body, that is why we sing:

Though there are many branches, there is only one vine,
We are one in Christ Jesus, that is why we sing:

One with Christ in his death that, as one, we might rise.
So we are but one people, that is why we sing:

There is only one table, Christ alone is our host.
He invites us together, that is why we sing:

Remembering the Lord's Supper:

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 636: The Church's One Foundation

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the Word:
from heav'n he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder
men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping,
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

The church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish,
is with her to the end;
though there be those that hate her,
and false sons in her pale,
against both foe and traitor
she ever shall prevail.

'Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union
with the God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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