**Dorset South and West Circuit**

Service for Sunday 12th July 2020 by David Ninnim, Local Preacher

**AN OPENING PRAYER**

Let us sit with the palms of our hands facing upwards as we pray:

Father, we sit before you with empty hands to receive from you

We sit before you with heavy hearts, that you might carry our burden

We ask that you might open our eyes to the needs of others

We ask that you may deal with our deafness to the cries of our neighbour

We sit before with you our hopes, our fears, our joys and our sorrows

We sit before you as we are, longing to be made new

We come in the name of Jesus because he first came to us. Amen

**HYMN**

Be still for the presence of the Lord the Holy One is here

Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear

In Him no sin is found we stand on holy ground

Be still for the presence of the Lord the Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord Is shining all around

He burns with holy fire with splendour He is crowned

How awesome is the sight our radiant King of light

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place

He comes to cleanse and heal to minister His grace

No work too hard for Him in faith receive from Him

Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place

 *David J. Evans*

**A PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION**

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we praise you for your love that has no beginning and knows no end. We praise you for your love which created the world and came to us in Jesus and transforms our lives. We praise you for the teaching of Jesus that makes your love real. We bring our praise in the name of Jesus who taught us to love you with all our heart and mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves

Lord, we are glad to offer you our praise but when we come to bring our confession, we are full of excuses. We are ready with questions but fail to see that you are the answer. We seek ways to avoid our commitment but you have given us responsibilities we cannot escape. We confess that we have often remained silent when you called upon us to speak and that we have done nothing when you called upon us to act. Forgive us for turning our back on our neighbour in the pretence that we were too busy and we thought you might not notice. Father forgive us, change us and make our lives signs of your hope and channels of your grace to a lost and hurting world. Amen

**BIBLE READING**

Matt 13:1-9 18-23 (NIV)

*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.****2****Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.****3****Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.****4****As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.****5****Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.****6****But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.****7****Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.****8****Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.****9****Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*

***18****“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:****19****When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.****20****The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.****21****But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.****22****The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.****23****But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*

**REFLECTION**

At the beginning of our Gospel reading we hear how Jesus was sitting in a boat talking to the crowd who had gathered on the beach. Jesus spoke in language the people could understand and much of his teaching involved the use of simple illustrations taken from nature. So I just wonder, as Jesus sat in that boat, whether he caught sight of a sower working in the fields beyond and this gave him the idea for this lovely parable.

In Jesus’ day, sowing was generally done by the sower scattering the seeds from a container as he walked up and down the field. It was a bit haphazard because he could never be sure where the seeds would land. Even less so if there was a wind blowing. Jesus refers to four different places where the seed could fall

In Palestine fields were long narrow strips of land and the ground between them were ‘rights of way’ beaten hard by countless passers-by. There was no chance of seed growing on these paths and the seed served only as a meal for the birds. Then again, there were parts of the field where there was only a very thin covering of soil lying on a bed of limestone. When the seed tried to put down roots it would be met only by rock and would be unable to survive the heat of the sun. Thirdly there were the deceptive thorns. As any gardener will know, thorns and weeds can grow very quickly and can soon throttle the life out of the seed. Finally, there is the good ground - deep and clean and soft. It is a place where seed can find nourishment and bring forward an abundant harvest.

Usually it is at this point that preachers try to unravel the passage of scripture in an attempt to share their thoughts on its meaning and how it relates to us today. However, on this occasion Matthew has done the job for us and sets out an interpretation of the parable in the second part of our Gospel passage. He reminds us of the different ways we can hear the word but whether it is the interpretation of Jesus or an interpretation put on the parable by preachers in the early Church is open to debate amongst scholars.

It is so easy for our minds to wander when people speak to us of things which do not particularly concern or interest us and then we miss the point of their message. I suspect that a similar thing happened in Jesus’ time. Some listened to his message and didn’t want to know. Some listened but did not understand the point Jesus was making. Others heard it but were too frightened of the challenge. To make it easier for them Jesus used symbols which spoke to the heart of his listeners and he valued each and every person. When we watch TV news bulletins we see so many areas of life today where respect for others is in short supply. It is so important that we all relate to people in the same way as Jesus did and then we shall find that the harvest we reap will be well worth the effort.

Sadly, we frequently fail to listen to each other let alone listen to what Jesus is saying to us. Yet when someone does listen to us or speaks to us in words we can understand it makes us feel good and gives us a lift. We really do feel valued don’t we. Yet this is how Jesus speaks to us, not only when we approach him in prayer but when he speaks to us through others. By his caring we nurture the seeds of his love which grow into the abundant harvest I spoke of earlier.

The problem comes when our soil is thin. We can enrich it by regular prayer, by being thoughtful and kind to others and by listening to the things others say and picking up on the things they don’t say. We can enrich it by paying close attention to what is happening in our world and in our neighbourhood. We can enrich it, not by turning our backs on problems, but by facing up to the challenges God lays before us.

Jesus is with us every moment of our lives, he nourishes us and speaks to us quietly, gently and in words we can understand. We should never be too proud or busy to listen and obey. He is the sower and it is so important that we speak to him and listen to him if the abundant harvest is to materialise. Amen

 **A PRAYER OF INTERCESSION AND PETITION**

*Allow a few moments of silence after each section of the prayer to enable you to bring to mind those people known personally to you.*

Think of a person who has recently added something good to your life – a friend, a member of your family. a member of the church or it may be a complete stranger. Ask God to bless them right now.

Think of a person who helped you when you really needed it – someone you can trust to go on caring or perhaps someone who may not even know that they have helped you. Ask God’s peace to be with them

Think of a moment when you felt uncertain and had lost hope. Remember those who tried to understand and care. Ask God to help you do the same for someone else today

Think of a person you know is ill. Ask God to heal them and share their pain

Think of a person who is overwhelmed by the burden of caring for sick or elderly relatives. Ask God to give them strength and courage

Think of someone who is mourning the loss of a loved one – and don’t know how to face the future. Ask God to fill them with the Holy Spirit and make their way clear

Think of a person who has hurt you or has spoilt the way you hoped things would be. Ask God to help and forgive them

Think of all those parts of our world which are in turmoil. Ask that God may be their beacon of hope

Finally, think of yourself and all that your life means to you. Think of the important decisions you have to face. Think of those moments of stress you face in your Christian discipleship. Ask that God guards your heart, guides your footsteps and shows you how best serve all those remembered in our prayers. Amen

The Lord’s Prayer

**HYMN**

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth, waiting for Thy gracious word,

Longing for Thy voice that cheereth Master, let it now be heard.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee; What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master, let me know it is to me;

Speak, that I may follow faster, with a step more firm and free,

Where the Shepherd leads the flock in the shadow of the Rock!

Master, speak! Though least and lowest, let me not unheard depart;

Master, speak! for oh, Thou knowest all the yearning of my heart.

Knowest all its truest need; Speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready, when Thy voice is truly heard,

With obedience glad and steady, still to follow every word

I am listening, Lord, for Thee: Master, speak, oh, speak to me!

*Frances Ridley Havergal*

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Gracious God, take this moment, take this hour and take this day. Take our lives and use them for your kingdom in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen