

**Dorset S&W Circuit Written Service 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023** prepared by Rev R Lownsborough

Welcome to this act of worship. Take comfort that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

**Call to worship** – selected verses from Psalm 65

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; You water its furrows abundantly, softening it with showers and blessing its growth.

**Hymn** StF 102 For the beauty of the earth

1 For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies.

*Refrain:*

Gracious God, to you we raise  
this, our sacrifice of praise.

2 For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale and tree and flower,  
sun and moon and stars of light:

*Refrain*

3 For the joy of ear and eye,  
For the heart and mind's delight,

For the mystic harmony,  
Linking sense to sound and sight:

*Refrain*

4 For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above,  
pleasures pure and undefiled:

*Refrain*

5 For each perfect gift and sign  
of your love so freely given,  
graces human and divine  
flowers of earth and buds of heaven

*Refrain*

*Folliott Sandford Pierpoint*

**A Prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Let us praise God when the sun shines and the rain falls,  
in thunderstorm and gale: *Praise be to you in all things.*

Let us praise God when life is full of joy and happiness,  
and in times of despair and sadness: *Praise be to you in all things.*

Let us praise God when the world seems a troubled place,  
and when signs of the kingdom break through: *Praise be to you in all things.*

Let us praise God at the start of life through to its conclusion,  
as one generation gives way to another:

Praise be to you for your constancy, from the dawn of creation to the end of time:  
*Praise be to you in all things. Amen*

**Lord's Prayer**

**Readings:** Isaiah 55: 10-13 *from The Message*

Just as rain and snow descend from the skies and don't go back until they've watered the earth, doing their work of making things grow and blossom, producing seed for farmers and food for the hungry,

So will the words that come out of my mouth not come back empty-handed.  
They'll do the work I sent them to do, they'll complete the assignment I gave them. "So you'll go out in joy, you'll be led into a whole and complete life.  
The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song.  
All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause.  
No more thistles, but giant sequoias, no more thorn bushes, but stately pines—  
Monuments to me, to God, living and lasting evidence of God.

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and 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.'

**Reflection** – What image does the 'word of God' bring to your mind?

The Bible? God's word which spoke creation into being? Isaiah 40:8, the word of God stands for ever? Logos – Jesus as the word? Isaiah 55:10-11, God's word will accomplish that for which it is sent out? The word of God, the seed that the sower casts near & far?

All of these images give us a different perspective on the 'word of God'.

In the readings today we have the image of God's word, in Isaiah it nourishes the earth, enabling flourishing, and in the gospel, it is the seed which germinates and flourishes, or otherwise, in people's lives.

For God's people who were in exile in Babylon, Isaiah paints a picture of flourishing life for a people rejoicing in joy & peace. There is assurance that God's word is effective; it will do what God intends it to do, no question!! This is what God's people could look forward to if

they returned to God, to live within God's covenant. – Not just life but abundant life. What picture does that conjure up for you?

The parable of the sower is such a familiar story that sometimes we may think that there is nothing new to learn. Jesus' first words when he is explaining the parable is for people to listen, and to listen well. It's really important to be attentive to what God is saying to each one of us....we don't want to miss, or ignore what God is saying.

The parable tells us that germination & growth of the seed, God's word, depends on the kind of ground it falls on:

1. Hard, well-worn path: the seed has no chance, it is trodden on and eaten before any chance to take root. Tend the soil! Dig it over, break up the surface, disturb the soil so that there is a place for the seed to take root and grow.
2. Weeds!! They choke the new seedlings. Do we need to look at our priorities? Are there things in our lives that have become so important to us that they choke out God's word?
3. Thin spiritual soil with no depth – remove obstructions, dig the soil, add enrichment. Perhaps your spirit needs some fallow time to recover, some peace & rest from the activity which drains you of life rather than energises your spirit.
4. Good spiritual soil – ready to receive God's word and let it grow to produce a harvest of the justice, mercy & love of God's kingdom.

Over time, our lives are like all those different kinds of ground and the harvest varies in its yield. There is a rhythm to the whole relationship of our lives with God: a right time to prepare to receive God's word, time for germination, growth, change, maturity and harvest.

These things take time & effort on our part, like the time & effort it takes to maintain the lawns at Wimbledon.

Net curtains! That's what Neil Stubley, head groundsman at Wimbledon, advises is the perfect means to protect your pristine lawn from the beaks of birds, while still letting in essential light and water. It's a quirky tip, but then it's never been an easy job to grow a consistent crop from seed, whether you're a farmer or, like Stubley and his team, you're tasked with providing the stage for one of the world's premier sporting events.

Wimbledon uses an astounding nine tonnes of seed a year, but it takes more than that to get results: 'Lawns are a living, breathing surface – keep them healthy and you'll be well rewarded. It's more about attention to detail and regular effort than rocket science'.

It is the persistent practice of faith that will nurture the seed in us, too – the seed of God's Word.

Jesus, the sower of God's word, sows extravagantly (wastefully?), even on soil that seems unpromising. But Isaiah declares that God's word will go out and accomplish that for which it was sent. God's word can take root in the most unlikely places and Jesus never gives up on those who receive that word in their hearts. May we be always open to receive God's word in our hearts and be ready to sow the seeds of God's love for others. Amen

## **Prayer of confession**

God of forgiveness and new life, I know that there are things in my life that sometimes prevent me from noticing or hearing your word, they choke my life with you: pride, greed, apathy, complacency. These are the 'weeds' I have allowed to grow in my heart and I need you Lord to help me pull them out.

*silence*

Sower of seeds, plant your Word deep in my heart. Let it take root there.

Send your living water to rain down on me, reviving and refreshing my faith, so that it bursts forth from within me, like a spring shoot, reaching out for the light of your Son, Jesus.

Let me blossom in the warmth of your love and bear fruit for you by your Spirit. Amen.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord God, we pray today for all the people given the great privilege of spreading your gospel.

We pray for the Church worldwide, but in particular in the places where people are still persecuted for their beliefs....

We pray for our ministers, who prayerfully seek your face, and bring us the words and understanding we need to become more faithful followers of you....

We pray for writers and poets, as they pour over your Word, and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring your message to life on the page.

We pray for artists and all craftspeople who draw inspiration from your Word, and speak to us through their creations.

We pray for all those who, for whatever reason, need the comfort, healing and strength which your Word brings.

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

## **Hymn**      StF 487 You shall go out with joy

Based on the reading from Isaiah, this song declares what it will be like when God's word accomplishes that for which it was sent – joy & peace for God's people.

## **Blessing**

May you journey into the coming days with the Word of Life rooted in your heart that you may sow seeds of God's love in every place you go.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer be with you always. Amen