

WORSHIP SERVICE ON SUNDAY 12TH JULY 2020 FOR SHEPPARTON UNITING AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS

Welcome/Introduction:

May the peace of the Lord be always with you.

A very warm welcome to all who are joining us for worship today.

Acknowledgement:

I pay my respect to the traditional custodians of this land in which we live work and worship. To the Elders and members of the Yorta Yorta nation past, present and emerging.

Call to worship:

Praise God with shouts of joy, all people! 2 Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise! (Psalm 65: 1-2)

Let us worship God.

Prayer:

Be present to us now, in your holiness, Jesus Christ, and then arise in our minds as the One who walks our way, so that we may find trust in all that you bring to us in the inspiration of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: 215 (TiS) 'You servants of God'.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

We give you thanks O God in hymns of praise and prayers, and there are no words to tell you, of the grandeur of love that you have planted in us and the seeds of hope you have sown in our hearts.

Forgive us if we have found it hard to live with those who are different, fearful of the unpredictable, of cultures and customs we do not understand.

We are sorry that we have love them less than you would have wanted us to.

In this difficult time, we face the reality of trusting you as you call us to the margins, and we confess that we are afraid.

Gather us in with your grace, for we believe that there lies the transformation and renewal and your love for all people. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

The love of God never changes, no matter how unwise or wilful we are. Grace is there for us forever.

We are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Reading: Mathew 13: 1-9, 18-23 (NRSV)

13. 1. That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into the boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and

ate them up. 5 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. 6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 Let anyone with ears listen!”

18 “Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil ones come and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 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. 22 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 hundred-fold in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

REFLECTION:

The parable of the extravagant sower who sows indiscriminately without any critical analysis of the soil, comes in the middle of the Gospel of Mathew (Ch. 13), after stories Jesus encountering opposition to his ministry in Chapter 12.

In chapter 12, after his encounter with the Pharisees, it was clear that the Pharisees are now plotting to kill him (12: 14). Jesus was accused of working for the devil and not God (12: 24), and it appeared that even his own family disagreed with him (12: 46 – 50). At the end of Chapter 13 of Mathew’s gospel, his own hometown rejected him.

The parable of the sower tells of how people responds to the ‘word of God’. There are those who “hear the word of the kingdom and do not understand” (3:9) – including religious leaders.

There are those who responds positively to his teaching and miracles (9: 8, 15: 21, 21: 8-9), but turns against him in the end (27: 15 – 23).

And, of course, there those who “hears the word and understand it, who indeed bear fruit” and yield an abundant harvest (13: 23).

The disciples, after hearing the word of the kingdom followed, but when trouble starts and persecution arises, they fall away. The rich young ruler heard the word of the kingdom but couldn’t give up his treasures chokes the word and yields nothing.

Despite their failures, Jesus does not give up on them. He even entrusted to them the future of his mission.

We find similar responses to the word of the kingdom these days!

But even if do not have confidence in the disciples, we ought to have confidence in the promise that Jesus made: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28: 20).

We can also have several kinds of soil in our own personal lives, even in our own congregations. The only hope for unproductive soil and less than ideal soil is that Jesus will not give up. He will keep on sowing The word of the kingdom.

Jesus' approach to mission may be different from ours especially during this difficult time.

We may be tempted to play it safe and not take risks, but Jesus will call to perilous places and ask us to be extravagant and generous in our sowing of the word of the kingdom. He will not let choose whether the soil is suitable or not, he will tell us to keep sowing...

We may be tempted to make sure that we sow the seeds of the kingdom only in places where people are likely to become contributing members.

If we sow extravagantly, consistently and without judgements, the harvest will be a bumper crop.

Prayers of the People:

We pray today O God, for all who are prisoners in their own homes, and those who are bowed down by illness or anxiety, due to the Covid pandemic.

Walk with them Jesus Christ, offering them your love, healing their wounds and living within their questions.

Give to your church the passion and courage that we may share with you, bringing love, hope and joy to others.

May our lives be a testimony to the victory you have won over sin and death, and may the whole creation echo the promise of your endless renewal and transformation.

Re-assure us one more time of the abundance of seeds from the sower, grace, forgiveness and life sown indiscriminately without judgement.

May courage and compassion blossom and bear fruit in us, that all people may long to join in your way of life.

May our faith be renewed everyday so that we may never give up on our dream for a better world.

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn: 130 (TiS) 'We plough the fields, and scatter'.

Blessing:

Go forth from this service into the world, bearing fruits in the life of God. **Amen.**