

Call to worship

Welcome if you are joining us live from wherever you are. Welcome if you are listening to this on a CD or reading a transcript.

In today's Bible reading Jesus is sitting in a boat by the shore of a lake teaching the crowd. Our call to worship reflects this:

Lord, we might not be sitting by a lake today.
However, as the crowds eagerly gathered
to listen to the stories and truths you told them,
we too await your word to us.
With joy in our hearts, and anticipation,
we pray that you will give us listening ears,
and hearts open to receive your love,
your teaching, and your wisdom.
Help our lives to be full to bursting, bearing your fruit.
Amen.

Hymn (SoF) 3145

Our first hymn is one we learnt two or three years ago and tells us something of the God we worship.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFRjr_x-yxU

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness,
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?
The King of Glory the King above all kings.

Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder,
Who leaves us breathless in awe and wonder?
The King of Glory the King above all kings.

*This is amazing grace,
This is unfailing love,
That You would take my place,
That You would bear my cross.
You laid down Your life.
That I would be set free.
Oh, Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me.*

Who brings our chaos back into order,
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter?
The King of Glory the King of Glory.

Who rules the nations with truth and justice,
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance?
The King of Glory the King above all kings.

*This is amazing grace,
This is unfailing love,
That You would take my place,
That You would bear my cross.
You laid down Your life.
That I would be set free.
Oh, Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me.*

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave.
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave.
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy is the King who conquered the grave.
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
Worthy, worthy, worthy.

*This is amazing grace,
This is unfailing love,
That You would take my place,
That You would bear my cross.
You laid down Your life.
That I would be set free.
Oh, Jesus, I sing for all that You've done for me.*

Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro & Phil Wickham
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Prayers

Today as we think about the work of the sower, let us remember all that God does, and offer Him our praise. Please join in with the words in bold type.
Let us pray.

A prayer of praise

The Bible tells us that the sower went out to sow.

We praise You that You have made the world
So that it will grow the things that we need to live.
Lord, we praise You for Your work of creation.

The work of the sower would mean
that he would have to walk up and down the field many times
As he sowed the seed,
Not stopping until the work was done.
Lord, we praise You because You are always working.

As the sower walked up and down,
He threw his seed all round,
Making sure that all the ground was covered.
Lord, we praise You for your generosity.

When the sower had finished,
He would go home to rest from his work.
Lord, we praise You for times of rest and refreshment.

**We thank You for the rest that we can enjoy today.
Give us glad and thankful hearts,
So that we may remember all that You have done for us,
And praise You as You deserve.**

A prayer of confession

For the times we dash haphazardly into your presence,
finding it hard to leave behind our cares and worries:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we don't learn from our experiences:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we don't take care of ourselves,
or the people we share our lives with:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times we don't see what you want us to see
and just take things at face value:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

For the times when we want our seed planted in neat rows,
when our own plans become more important than yours,
rather than letting the Holy Spirit prepare the soil of our lives
and blow where the Spirit wants to:
forgive us, good Lord, and make us new.

If we confess our sins,
God is faithful and just
and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Introduction to our theme.

Today we are focusing on the Parable of the Sower. Let us remind ourselves of the story in this animated version.

Play Max7.org version of the Parable of the Sower.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9IOhGPrRvY>

Activity

See separate sheet.

Hymn

We sing again, a hymn based on the parable of the sower.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mj9s66DLQXI>

The sower (the sower)
Went out to sow (Went out to sow)
To plant some seeds (To plant some seeds)
In hopes that they would grow (Hopes that they would grow)
Some seed fell on the path
The sower went out to sow
In hopes the seed he
Threw would grow

The sower (the sower)
Went out to sow (Went out to sow)
To plant some seeds (To plant some seeds)
In hopes that they would grow (Hopes that they would grow)
Some seed fell on the rock
Some seed fell on the path
The sower went out to sow in hopes
The seed he threw would grow

The sower (the sower)
Went out to sow (Went out to sow)
To plant some seeds (To plant some seeds)
In hopes that they would grow (Hopes that they would grow)
Some seed fell on the weeds
Some seed fell on the rock
Some seed fell on the path
The sower went out to sow in hopes
The seed he threw would grow

The sower (the sower)
Went out to sow (Went out to sow)
To plant some seeds (To plant some seeds)
In hopes that they would grow (Hopes that they would grow)
Some seed fell on the good soil
Some seed fell on the weeds
Some seed fell on the rock
Some seed fell on the path
The sower went out to sow in hopes
The seed he threw would grow

But the birds ate the seed on the path
The sun burned the seed on the rock
The seeds in the weeds were choked you see
But the seed on the good soil grew and grew
Like the Word of God in you.

Bible Reading

We will now hear the parable of the sower read to us:

Matthew 13:1-9 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

The parable of the sower

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered round 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.'

Bible Reading

The trouble with this parable from the preacher's perspective is that a few verses later Jesus tells the disciples what the parable of the sower means. We are going to hear this now. It will be read to us:

Matthew 13:18-23 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

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

So having heard Jesus' explanation is the preacher's task done on this one? Do I now say, there it is, let's all go home. Actually we are at home. We'll carry on.

The answer lies in the soil—so they say.

But one of the biggest challenges facing us today is the degradation of soils around the world.

Thinking about the soils described in the parable, we still have footpaths across some of our fields where no crop grows.



On a footpath it is the tread of human feet that tread the soil down. But the ever increasing weight of the machinery used in today's agriculture can cause the soil to become compacted beneath the wheels.



The next photograph shows that where this happens the plant roots find it difficult to penetrate very far into the soil so they can become devoid of water and nutrients and their growth is stunted.



We still have stony soils as this picture shows, but the soil here is deep enough to produce a good yield.



The next picture shows that we can still have problems with weeds in today's crops despite all the tools available to our farmers.



Even if we have good soil it can degrade or disappear. This picture shows the Holme Fen Posts. The post on the right is the original one and when it was put in its top was level with the soil as it was in 1851. As the peat subsided it eventually became unstable and the steel guys were added in 1957, when the second post was added with its top level with the original. The tops of these posts are now 4m above the current ground level. Holme Fen is believed to be the lowest land point in Great Britain at 2.75m or nine feet below sea level.



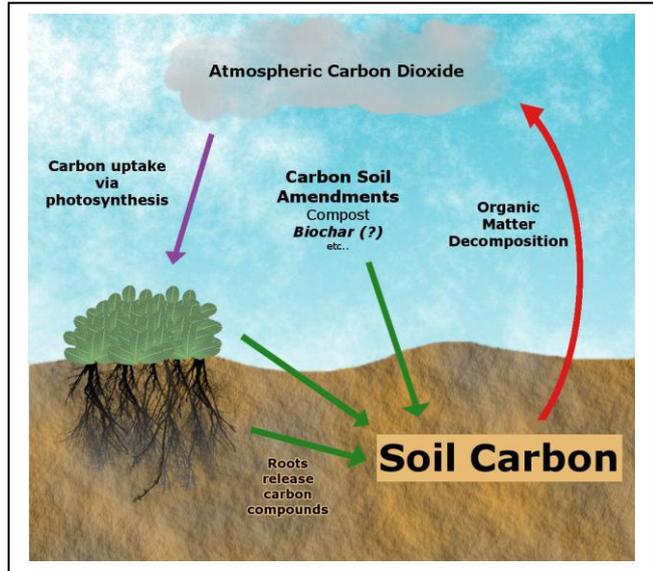
There is increasing concern about soil erosion. This picture shows what can happen during heavy rains, which are increasing with climate change. Once the soil has been washed away it is probably lost and gone for ever.



Here we can see soil being blown away by the wind.



Some people are worried about the loss of carbon from our soils. This diagram depicts how good husbandry can put more carbon into the soil, a process known as carbon sequestration. The importance of this is that the more carbon that can be stored in the soils, the less there is in the atmosphere helping to mitigate climate change. Every day's a school day.



We can see that even good soils can deteriorate. Now, when we read or hear the parable of the sower, do we just associate ourselves with the good soil? We have heard the Word and might regard ourselves as part of the hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. What I would like us to reflect upon as we go through this week is what type of soil are we now.

- Have we allowed ourselves to be trampled upon, run over so it is now difficult for the Word to germinate like it once did, or if it does, the pressures of the world have borne down upon us so the Word cannot root deeply in our lives?
- Is our faith as deep as it once was because we have allowed it to become eroded, washed or blown away, or merely just shrink?
- Have we become a poorer, less fruitful soil because we have allowed ourselves to become drained of nutrients because we have neglected to read and study God's Word?
- A farmer went out to sow What kind of soil are we?

Prayer of Response

Lord, it is so good to read your Word,
and hear the parables you told.
But, Lord, we can't leave it there.
We must take note of the explanation,
and work it out in our own lives.
Help us, O Lord, to listen, to learn and to act.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray for those hearts that are stony ground; may they may be open to you.

Lord, we pray for those hearts that are rocky ground; may the way be cleared for you.

Lord, we pray for those hearts that are burdened; may the snares of their cares be untangled for you.

We pray a word of comfort for the sick and bereaved.

Today we pray for those battling Covid-19 all over the world and for those at home or in hospitals who are suffering with physical and mental illness. We think particularly of ...

We pray for those who have lost loved ones during this pandemic, and we pray that you would draw close to all those people at this time. We are so thankful that you are a God full of grace and compassion, who understands our pain and grief.

We pray a word of encouragement for the lonely and downcast.

Today we pray for those who are still isolating or shielding at this time. God of compassion, be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation. In their loneliness, be their consolation; in their anxiety, be their hope. Grant them protection and give them your peace.

We pray a word of love for the unloved and the outcast.

Today, we continue to pray against all racism and injustice that goes on in the world around us. We pray that you would help us have open hearts and open ears so that we can see, hear and respond to the racism, injustice and oppression we see around us. O God who created all people in your image, who loves the stranger, who cares for the downtrodden, walk with those who face discrimination, protect them from harm and help them to see Christ in our community.

We pray a word of hope for the church and the wider community.

Today, we pray that the church will be light in these dark times, being Christ's hands and feet, caring for those around us and comforting those who mourn. We pray for all the churches in Letchworth and for other churches in our Methodist circuit. We ask that all churches will be led by the Spirit and will prayerfully seek to do your will in all the decisions they need to make in the coming days.

God of healing and hope, may this time of the pandemic by your Holy Spirit, bring out the best and not the worst in us. Show us the ways in which we can share faith and love, while standing at a distance, and honour our connection with one another, and with you, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, **Amen**.

Hymn (StF) 662

We sing our final hymn: **Have You Heard God's Voice?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1Aiqbqg9eU>

1 Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?*

2 Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

3 In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

4 Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G Jones

Blessing

A Celtic Blessing

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always on your back,
May the sun shine warmly upon your face,
And the rain fall softly on your fields,
And, until we meet again,
May the Lord hold you in the hollow of His hand.

Amen.