

Issue 17

12th July 2020

For these days ...

Lectionary Readings

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalms 119:1-5-112

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Hymns

181, 'For the beauty of the earth'

600, 'Spirit of God, unseen as the wind'

527, 'Lord, make us servants of your peace'

Dear friends, we are now into our 17th week since this newsletter began. In the past week, the First Minister has announced that permission has been granted for church buildings to reopen for communal worship from the 15th July. That being said, there will be no singing, masks will have to be worn and physical distancing and stringent hygiene measures will have to be very much in place. The Kirk Sessions of both Clydebank: Waterfront and Dalmuir Barclay met on Zoom last month and there was an overwhelming sense that safety must come first. To that end, a task group in both congregations was established and, in the coming weeks they will be reviewing how best and when to return to our church buildings. I do not foresee that this will happen anytime soon, but be assured that you will all be kept up-to-date with developments.

As always, please keep safe and do not hesitate to be in contact if there is anything you need – even if it's just to hear another voice at the end of the phone. For the rest of July, there will be no Zoom meetings on a Sunday morning, or prayer meetings on a Thursday night. Digital worship on Facebook, Youtube, DVD and the phone line on the 19th and 26th July will be led by our guest preacher, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Martin Fair. Stay safe and have the best kind of summer possible under the circumstances. God bless. Ruth

Prayer

Generous God,
For the beauty we see in gardens,
For the love we know in our lives,
For the signs of hope around us,
For the stories of Jesus that bring life,
We say thank you,
As we come to seek,
And discover,

And praise you this day.

For you are God,
In whom our lives find purpose and meaning.

You are God,
Who sets us free.

You are God,
Who sows seeds with reckless abandon,
Longing to find good soil,
To grow and nourish love.

Generous God,
When our hearts are hard,
Forgive us.

When we are tempted to give up on faith,
Encourage us.

When our lives are busy and we crowd you out,
Speak our names and call us back to you.

That we might see,
And hear the good news of Jesus,
And become the place where the seeds of your Kingdom
are grown and scattered,
so that others might come to know your great love for them too.
So be it,
Amen.

Reading Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. ² The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. ³ He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. ⁴ As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. ⁷ Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the

plants. ⁸ But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

⁹ And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

¹⁸ “Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. ¹⁹ Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. ²⁰ The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. ²¹ But it does not sink deep into them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. ²² The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. ²³ And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty.”

Reflection

Like many of you,
Over the weeks of lockdown,
I’ve found myself tidying out and sorting through drawers –
Not all of them,
It has to be said,
But some!

And I’ve found some interesting stuff!
Stuff that I had forgotten I even had!

Some of it went into the bin,
Some went to the clothes bank,
And some of it was tidied up and put more neatly away!

I found ordination cards,
Wedding day cards,
Good luck in your new home cards –
And this envelope,
Addressed to Miss Ruth Bell.

I didn’t have any idea what it was,
Until I opened it,
And therein was a letter dated 13 June 2005,
That started,
Dear Ruth,
I am happy to inform you that the Assessment Conference
Has decided to accept you as a candidate in training

for Full Time Ministry.

Apart from making me feel quite old –
 And realise that a lot has happened in 15 years –
 It was a wonderful reminder of my calling,
 For enclosed was the Assessors' report form –
 And one answer in particular jumped out –
 'Whilst Ruth initially thought she may be called
 to overseas mission work,
 She has become convinced that 'the mission is here'
 and that her call is to parish ministry.
 She would want to communicate the love of God,
 Especially His forgiveness.'

I remember that moment so well,
 Being asked,
 Why do you want to be a minister?
 And answering,
 Because I want to tell people that God loves them.
 And you know,
 That answer hasn't changed,
 That's still my motivation,
 And I mention it today,
 As we come to the story of the parable of the sower,
 Because it's God's extravagant love that I hear.

Jesus loved his stories,
 And this is a good one,
 One of only a few that we are told he explained,
 And in some ways I wish he hadn't.

Because there are so many ways to hear it and interpret it,
 And that's what I've been doing all week.

Thinking about the seed and what it represents.
 Thinking about the ground on which it falls.
 Thinking about the ideal conditions needed for things to grow,
 But, at the end of the day,
 I came back to the beginning.

Because it's not called the parable of the seed,
 Or the parable of the soil,
 It's called the parable of the sower,
 And what a sower he is!

I don't know much about farming or gardening –
 Much to my Mum's despair, I'm sure,
 but the farmer in this story seems to employ a method that is
 somewhat careless,
 wasteful,
 reckless even,
 as he scatters seeds here, there all over,
 caring little about where it falls.

Some of it lands on hard ground,
 Some of it among the rocks and stones,
 Some end up choked among the thorn bushes,
 And some ends up on good soil.

Why not just sow on the good soil only,
 Why waste your time on the rest?

Maybe,
 He wasn't a very good farmer,
 Or maybe we are to hear something revealed to us
 about the heart of God.

A God,
 Who like that farmer scatters –
 Broadcasts –
 The seeds here, there and all over,
 With careless,
 Wasteful,
 And reckless abandon,
 Because God is God and can do no other,
 And does not wait for perfect conditions to reveal to us his love.

Perhaps God scatters on hard ground,
 So that even if it can't grow,
 The birds will be nourished.

On rocky ground,
 So that even in our struggles and trials,
 We might see a shoot of hope.

On thorny ways,
 So that even when his voice is drowned out
 amidst the busyness of living,
 We might see signs take root of a better way to live –

So that might be challenged and encouraged to become the good soil,
 The place where that better, fairer and more loving and peaceful way
 is grown.

Our God is a sower,
 Who scatters –
 Broadcasts –
 The seeds of love,
 Here, there and all over,
 With careless,
 Wasteful,
 And reckless abandon,
 Because God wants his love to be known –

I was thinking about that this morning,
 When a hymn popped into my head:

I though so unworthy still am a child of his care,

For his word teaches me that his love reaches me everywhere.

There is no one and no place beyond God's love or reach or forgiveness.

and that is good news for you and for me,
and too good to keep to ourselves.

Our calling is not just to believe that this is true,
But to live our lives in such a way,
Beyond the walls of our church buildings and homes,
Beyond the confines of facebook and youtube,
Beyond the confines of our parish and country,
That others might come to know that God loves them too.

My motivation as a minister hasn't changed,
But I've come to see more clearly,
That the calling to tell people that God loves them,
Is a ministry not reserved for a few,
It is the work of us all,
To broadcast, scatter, far and wide,
The good news – God loves you.

Prayer

Eternal God,
Your love for creation,
Is wider, higher and deeper than we can ever imagine,
And though we can never grasp its greatness,
So we give thanks with grateful hearts
that you have revealed it to us in Jesus,
That through his birth and life,
His death on the cross,
His resurrection,
And the Spirit at work in our lives and the world,
We might believe that you love us,
are for us,
And that there is nothing that can ever separate us from you.

And so,
In the wonder of that love,
We pray for the scattering of your good news in the world –

For hope to be sown,
Where there is despair.

For love to be sown,
Where there is hate.

For peace to be sown,
Where there is strife.

For faith to be sown,

Where there is fear.

For fairness to be sown,
Where there is injustice.

For healing to be known,
Where there is brokenness.

As we lift up before you,
Our world,
Our community,
Our families,
Our church,
Ourselves.

God, in the silence, hear our prayers –

Silence

Eternal God,
As we navigate our way through what has been towards what will be,
Guide your church, we pray,
Fill us with courage and wisdom and vision,
And help us to see that each of us has a part to play in scattering,
Your love,
As you nourish the seeds that are sown,
And make our lives the place where you are known.
We ask it all in the name of Jesus,
Who taught us to pray together saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ...

Closing Thought ...

We've now been in lockdown for enough weeks to be able to know that the expenditure for both congregations greatly outweighs the income. This was to be expected, not least as a consequence of there being no collection of free will offerings. Many, many thanks to those of you have faithfully saved and deposited your offering in recent weeks. Please continue to fill and keep your envelopes or write a cheque and pass it on. For those who would like to know more about standing orders and gift aid, please contact our Treasurers at Waterfront and Dalmuir Barclay.

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Dalmuir Barclay Youtube channel

https://m.youtube.com/channel/UC_BhuF4R1qhDDEbopduSgHA

Clydebank Waterfront Youtube channel

https://m.youtube.com/channel/UCf0B0U_dcvlCN7UrSHS7ghQ