

Sunday 'Spiritual Communion' in Ordinary Time

*You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place. The words in **bold** you are encouraged to say out loud as worship and prayer.*

Opening Prayer

The Church of which we are members is not defined by the walls of a building but by the Body of Christ of which we are members.

We are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life'.

Opening Sentences in the Season of Ordinary Time

Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there

Be joyful in God, all the earth

With wonders you will answer us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation,

Be joyful in God, all the earth

For you will bear us on the holy wings of the Spirit to the stronghold of your peace;

Be joyful in God, all the earth



The river of God is full of water; you prepare grain for your people, You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; you soften the ground and bless its increase. May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep and the valleys stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing.

Be joyful in God, all the earth

Prayers of Preparation and Confession

Almighty God to whom all hearts are open,all desires known,and from whom no secrets are hidden:cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,that we may perfectly love you,and worthily magnify your holy name;through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord help me to be open to you this morning.

That for this time I might put aside the cares of this world.

Fill my thoughts with your peace, your love..

Grant, O Lord, that I may be free from greed and selfishness.

Remind me that the best things in life are free.

Love, laughter, caring and sharing.

You may wish to pray:

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.



A reading from the Gospel

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (A reflection is attached to the end of the service sheet)

Intercessions

Let us pray for the needs of the world, for our local community, and for those close to you.

End with the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father...

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer this morning which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in our vocation and ministry we may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name;

**O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.**

May the richness of your creation, Lord,
and the mystery of your providence
lead us to that heavenly city
where all peoples will bring their wealth,
forsake their sins and find their true joy,
And all the earth will be joyful in God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Blessing and Peace

May the Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**



The Peace of the Lord be always with you

Reflection on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

For many years I thought there was something rather fatalistic about the parable in today's reading. The farmer goes out and sows the seed, hopeful and expectant it will yield a crop in due course. However, as we know from our earliest encounters at Sunday school and at Harvest time in church, there is varied success. In the parable God is the farmer and human hearts the soil into which God's Word is sown. And as I say for many years I reconciled that this meant someone's religious experience was pre-determined by the kind of soil their heart represented. There was not much that could be done for those with hard or thorny hearts! However, over time I have come to realise that, in truth, the preparation and cultivation of the soil of our hearts is the very task of life itself! And that no-one's heart is destined either to hardness or richness without an engagement with the Spirit of God through Christ.

I came to this fresh understanding of the parable of the sower through reflection on the wider Gospel message of Jesus. Is it not true that wherever we look in the Gospel we see he is calling us to prepare and cultivate and tend to the soil of our hearts and the hearts of others? That the work of turning over our lives to become more receptive to God's message is the ongoing work of human living.

Consider the role of John the Baptist at the start of the Gospel. John comes to *prepare* people for the coming of Jesus. 'Repent' John cries for the kingdom of heaven is near. Isn't it true that repentance is a message of changing the hardness and shallowness of the soil of our lives. It is a call to disturbance, to turn over that soil, to reveal what is hidden, to make it more receptive. To dig out all the weeds and the thorns which could choke the message of love. This is what repentance means and it is the first indication that the message of the sower is not one of fatalism. We can change the soil of our hearts regardless of how hard or rocky it has become in life.

This truth is echoed in the message of Jesus to His disciples that God is patient with us. That if the seed which is sown into our lives is not bearing fruit God wants us to see this and to start again. So God does not give up on the seed which is choked or withers but breaks the soil open and starts again. He reinforces this message to the disciples in another parable ..

"A man had a fig tree that was planted in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the keeper of the vineyard, 'Look, for the past three years I have come to search for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Therefore cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone again this year, until I dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine. But if not, you can cut it down.'" (Luke Chapter 13)

This parable is a clear indication that the task of human life is to prepare and cultivate goodness in our lives and the lives of others. And that God our Creator is patient with us as we seek to use our time to dig and nurture and cultivate hearts which will respond to God's love. The message is that God is patient not wanting any to perish but all to find the hope of eternal life and receive this message and bear fruit.

So I came to see that the message of the sower is a message of purpose and vocation and not fatalism and resignation. It encourages us instead to use our lives to make as much fertile ground in our lives and our world as possible. It gives deep and eternal purpose and meaning to human living.