

Shellrock Benefice Service Sheet for Trinity 5, July 12th 2020

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the holy spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings

Genesis 25, 19-end; Psalm 119, 105-112; Romans 8, 1-11; Matt 13, 1-9, 18-23

A Reflection

The gospel reading for today could not have been more appropriate. Yes, we know it well: the parable of the sower, or as some see it, the parable of the four soils. But if we think about it today, in the middle of all we have been struggling with for the last few months, it might give rise to new thoughts and challenges.

This parable and its interpretation are sandwiched between stories of opposition to the gospel. Chapters 11-12 contain multiple stories of opposition and misunderstanding of Jesus' ministry. Chapter 13 ends with Jesus' home-town rejecting him. The parable of the sower and four soils, in between these accounts of rejection, may be an answer to the question, why does the gospel take root and grow among some people, but not among others? The flip side of this question is, what are the necessary conditions for fruitful discipleship.

The four soils described are, hardened, shallow, thorny and good. Our churches have been closed for months and it is only very recently that they have been allowed to be open for private prayer and, under special conditions for the prevention of risk, to be considering brief services. Churches of all denominations, and indeed different faiths, are asking themselves, how do we recover from this.

Turning back to the parable, Matthew draws attention to essential conditions for the growth of discipleship, beginning with understanding. Understanding the message of Jesus doesn't always come as a revelation, although for some, miraculously it does. So, we need to understand what God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" is about. And then, Matthew continues to remind us all that we have to be prepared to deal with resistance. This comes from outside, such as people mocking those of faith. But it also comes as temptations from within; the kind of anxious cares (Matthew 6: 25-32) and the lure of wealth and materialism (Matthew 19, 16-32).

These issues are with us all the time, but are brought into sharp focus by the continuing concern we all have about physical health and the health of economies. We have a great deal to reflect on in the days and weeks ahead. But I know that if we are open to the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, again we will find The Way.

Suggestions for prayer with a response: *"O Lord, Hear our Prayer"*

For all those who are mourning a loved person who has died.

For thanks that we are able to re-enter our churches for prayer and to start services

For all people known to us who are ill at this time, especially those in the benefice

For guidance from the Holy Spirit as we move ahead and plan for the future

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, For ever and ever Amen

Blessing

The good and gracious God grant us refreshment, renewal, restoration, that in his power we may work to his praise and glory. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen