



# KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

## Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

### *Parable of the Soil*

## 10am – Sunday 12 July 2020

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**Pre service music** *"Folk Song"*, Percy Whitlock (1903-46); *"Aria"*, Flor Peeters (1903-86);  
*"A moment of reflection"*, Mons Leidvin Takle (b. 1942)

## Welcome

**Introit** *"Invocation"*, Alan Ridout (1934-66)

## Silence and call to worship

(based on Romans 8:1-11)

Kia noho a Ihowa ki a koutou. The Lord be with you all.

**Ma Ihowa koe e manaaki. The Lord bless you.**

The Word of the Lord is a lamp to our feet

**And a light to our path.**

So give us life, O Lord, according to your life-giving Word and Spirit.

Let us worship God.

## Hymn

CH4 147 - St Francis of Assisi, trans. William Draper

1 All creatures of our God and King  
Lift up your voice and with us sing  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Bright brother sun with golden  
beam  
Clear sister moon with softer gleam:  
*Sing praises, sing praises,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

3 Let all things their Creator bless  
and worship God in humbleness  
Sing praises, alleluia!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the  
Son,  
And praise the Spirit, Three in One:  
*[Refrain]*

2 Dear mother earth, who day by  
day  
Unfolds God's blessings on our way,  
Sing praises, alleluia!  
All flowers and fruits that in your  
grow  
Let them his glory also show:  
*[Refrain]*

## **Prayer of approach, assurance of forgiveness and passing of the peace**

E te whanau a te Karaiti, we are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

Kia tau te rangimarie o te Karaiti ki runga i a koutou. May the peace of Christ be with you always. **And also with you.**

**Prayer for Illumination:** Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet

**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet**

**And a light unto my path** (x2)

**When I feel afraid and I think I've lost my way**

**Still you're there right beside me**

**Nothing will I fear as long as you are near**

**Please be near me to the end**

**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet**

**And a light unto my path**

## **First reading: Psalm 119:105-112**

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word. Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your ordinances. I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

*Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church* **Thanks be to God**

## **Gospel reading: Matthew 13:1-9**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

*This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ* **Praise to Christ the Word**

## **Musical reflection** "Elegy", Alan Ridout (1934-66)

## Sermon: The power of words

It's a bit of a stereotype that Presbyterian worship is characterised by long sermons. And not without reason. The stereotype goes back to the very earliest days of the Reformation when the early humanists and Reformers like Erasmus, Luther, Calvin placed the preaching of the Word alongside the sacraments at the centre of the worshipping life of the Church. And with this focus, the length of the sermon grew, to the extent that an hourglass was often placed beside the pulpit and would be ceremoniously turned at the beginning of the sermon. Settle in folks, it's a long ride! (Don't worry I don't have an hourglass today!)

And yet for the likes of Erasmus and Calvin, the length of the sermon pointed to a central conviction: that the solution to systemic corruption and power abuse in the Catholic Church at the time; the solution to religious superstition and illiteracy at a popular level; the solution to generalized anxiety and fear in the wake of massive social and political change ... was to educate the people, to open and unpack the scriptures with them, to help them to think for themselves within the public communal gathering of worship and in so doing to empower them to contribute to the formation of a flourishing human community rooted in the vision of God's coming Kingdom. A seed of an idea, Calvin realised, can germinate, and grow, and, given the right conditions, can flourish prolifically, bearing fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, one hundredfold.

Words are powerful. The Reformers knew it. And words are perhaps even more powerful today in our hyper-connected age. Through the internet and smart technology most of us are more connected than we have ever been (even during lockdown). In our hyper-connected world, words have the power to grow exponentially, like genetically modified plants that produce well beyond what nature could produce alone. One tweet, we've seen, can go viral, bearing "fruit" 10,000-fold, 100,000fold, one-million fold in the space of a few hours (and into the intimacy of your living room no less!). We're talking of course, not only about good ideas, but about harmful ideas as well. One of the dangers of social media is that there is little rigorous testing of ideas in the public forum. On Twitter or Facebook, all ideas whether good or bad are presented as equal. And the individual, from the privacy of their living room, isolated from the community, is presented with a smorgasbord of ideas dictated by a computer algorithm according to their individual preferences.

You may have been following the recent controversy over Facebook's refusal to place a fact-check warning on a recent post by the President of the United States. According to Mark Zuckerberg, it is not Facebook's role to be the arbiter of truth. But it strikes me that precisely in refusing to do so Facebook is validating and proliferating harmful or false ideas. And that's because there's no robust discernment. All ideas are presented as equal. So the only distinguishing factor is who has the loudest voice. And I've never heard Donald Trump speak in a whisper.

In this environment of constant noise, the Word is God is apparently highly vulnerable. We're told it's like a tiny seed, almost imperceptible, that needs favourable conditions to take root and grow. And we're also told there are a number of unfavourable conditions. Each of these reveals something profound about our culture today.

In our parable, the first unfavourable condition is that some seed falls on hard ground, packed earth, unreceptive soil so that it gets eaten by birds. The soil is indifferent to the needs of the seed. We've been confronted with this blind, historic indifference in the wake of George Floyd's death. One of the key messages to come out of the Black Lives Matter movement, is that black people have been pointing to historic and systemic racism and inequality for generations and generations. And in Aotearoa, Māori and Pasifika have been doing the same. George Floyd's death is tragically nothing new. But part of the reason that we have not heard the cries for justice in the past is because, for those in power, myself included, systemic and historic injustice is completely outside our frame of reference and experience of the world. Those in power, who are predominantly white, have not heard the cries of injustice because we have not comprehended. The seed of God's Word has fallen on indifferent, packed soil and time and again has been snatched up by the birds. May it finally penetrate beneath the surface!

The second unfavourable condition is the soil full of rocks. The seed is able to germinate and spring up. But because of the rocks, it is not able to grow deep roots and so in the heat of the midday sun the plant withers and dies. The roots are shallow, superficial. Michael Jenkins, a Presbyterian minister in the U.S. who talks about the cult of superficiality in our society today: from sensationalist news headlines, to the latest fads, from political scapegoating, to the reduction of complex ideas down to simple, ideological, black and white positions: we live in a culture that celebrates and embraces superficiality. Case in point, in a few months we're being asked to vote in two referenda that reduce two very complex social issues down to a popular yes or no vote. I'm reminded of the book of Proverbs in which Lady Wisdom cries out for justice on the streets in the public places. Her words are deeply provocative:

"How long, O Simple Ones, will you love being simple?

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing

and fools hate knowledge?

...I have called and you refused,

stretched out my hand and no one heeded."

The third unfavourable condition, we're told, is that some seed falls into soil full of thorn bushes that choke the plant. There is something pernicious about this final condition that is unlike the other two. The thorns are actively choking the good seedlings. To return to the Black Lives Matter movement, it's been interesting to observe the language that has been used to describe many of the protests in the public discourse -- from the President of the United States no less! The protestors have been decried as angry, violent, chaotic, riotous mobs. Think about what's happening there. The language delegitimises the voices of the protestors and makes their perspective synonymous with irrational chaos and anarchy, while those in power are on the side of law and order and reason and everything we hold dear. Here we see the power of thorny words to choke and snuff out the life of minority or marginalised perspectives.

Yet, while there was some violence in the Black Lives Matter protests, the vast majority were peaceful. And even where there was violence and destruction (for example tearing down statues and monuments), this destructive behaviour could hardly be called anarchic and irrational. This was no unruly mob. This was a group of people united by a very clear purpose. Whether you agree with the destruction of statues or not, there was a very clear rationale behind that destructive behaviour -- a commitment to challenge the historic and systemic racism in our society and to advocate a new future together built on equality and justice.

In our parable today, Jesus makes a penetrating critique of human society that lays bare many of the problems with our current public discourse. God's Kingdom cannot grow, we're told, in a culture of indifference, in a culture of superficiality, in a culture of antipathy and suspicion. These three things, indifference, superficiality, and antipathy, are amplified in our hyper-connected world today.

And yet there is hope! Because we're told some of the seed falls on good soil, growing deep roots and sprouting up, bearing fruit one hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. We're talking here about a community of people characterized by openness, by a common pursuit of wisdom and truth, and above all by love and care for one another.

Is that not what the Church is? The Church is a community, if not the community being opened up by the Spirit, being shaped by the Word, and being drawn into new loving community and flourishing human life together. Our parable today begins with a crowd gathering spontaneously and freely in a public place to hear the words of Jesus and to be shaped and transformed by them. Calvin had the same agenda in the Reformation: to place once again the Word of God at the centre of the church's life, that it may be shaped and transformed by them. In the age of facebook and twitter, and the erosion of public discourse and the evaporation of wisdom and truth among all the noise, that same task of gathering to hear the Word of God has never been more urgent.

Do not underestimate the power of gathering freely to hear the Word of God together and to allow our individual and collective life to be shaped by it. I still believe in the power of the Word of God to convert hearts and minds, which is why I accepted the call to be a minister here and a chaplain at the university. I still believe that this Word is forming a new community, a new humanity around the table of Jesus Christ to which we're called now. I still believe that the Kingdom of God is coming in power, growing like a seed among us and transforming this world for the flourishing of all. Amen.

## **The Lord's Supper**

The Lord be with you.

***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts.

***We lift them up to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

... And so we praise you with the faithful of every time and place joining with the choir of angels and the whole creation in the eternal hymn.

***Holy, holy, holy Lord***

***God of power and might***

***Heaven and earth are full of your glory***

***Hosanna in the highest***

***Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord***

***Hosanna in the highest***

*The communion elements have been prepared in sanitary conditions and advice has been sought to ensure we celebrate communion in a way that limits as much as possible the potential spread of germs. You are invited to come forward to one of the stations, take a piece of bread and a glass of juice. If you would like bread and juice brought to you, please indicate with the raising of your hand.*

## **Prayers for others and the Lord's Prayer**

*During this prayer, candles will be lit from the Christ candle. When a candle is lit, you are invited to share in the following response:*

We are afflicted, O Lord.

***Give us life according to your Word.***

*The prayer will conclude with the 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 forever. Amen.

E tō mātou Matua i te rangi  
Kia tapu tōu Ingoa.  
Kia tae mai tōu rangatiratanga.  
Kia meatia tāu e pai ai  
ki runga ki te whenua,  
kia rite anō ki tō te rangi.  
Hōmai ki a mātou āiane  
he taro mā mātou mō tēnei rā.  
Murua ō mātou hara,  
Me mātou hoki e muru nei  
i ō te hunga e hara ana ki a mātou.  
Āua hoki mātou e kawea kia  
whakawaia;  
Engari whakaorangia mātou i te  
kino:  
Nōu hoki te rangatiratanga, te kaha,  
me te korōria, Āke āke āke. Āmine.

## Hymn

1 I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
my hand will save.  
I, who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?  
*Here I am Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.*

(tune: Here I am Lord) CH4 251 - Daniel Schutte

2 I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have borne my people's pain.  
I have wept for love of them.  
They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them.  
Whom shall I send? [*Refrain*]

3 I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide  
till their hearts are satisfied.  
I will give my life to them.  
Whom shall I send?  
[*Refrain*]

# Blessing

## Postlude *“Concerto in A minor”*, Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) arr. J S Bach

*In relation to your monetary offering, you may:*

- *Make regular automatic payments (which are tax deductible) - contact Helen Thew at [plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net](mailto:plannedgiving@knoxchurch.net)*
- *Give online to the Church's bank account at 03 0903 0016425 00 - our charity number for tax rebate purposes is #CC52318.*