



Order of Service
Date: Sunday July 12th, 2020
Pentecost 6A

We acknowledge that we are worshipping on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung people, of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

DON'T FORGET YOU CAN LOG INTO THE CHURCH WEBSITE AND SEE MUCH OF THIS BY VIDEO ON THE FRONT PAGE!!!!

INTROIT – We will lay our burden down, vs. 1.

1. We will lay our burden down,
We will lay our burden down,
We will lay our burden down,
In the hands of the risen Lord.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We bring our hopes and fears, our struggles and our lives as they are, into the presence of the one who leaves the doors and futures open to gracious possibilities.

All: God's word lights the path before us.

One: May this time of worship empower us to make faithful choices.

All: God's word lights the paths before us.

One: May this time of worship renew and restore our relationships with God and each other.

All: God's word lights the paths before us.

One: Come, let us worship God.

Sing – TIS 430

1

Your words to me are life and health;
pour strength into my soul;
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal.

2

Your words to me are light and truth;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing human thought,
as in their truth I grow.

3

Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace, and grace;
from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face.

4

Your words are perfected in One,
yourself, the living Word;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord.

WELCOME

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all!

And also with you!

Opening prayer

Abundant God,
use our senses to open our hearts and minds to the richness of scriptures.
Help us to receive the gifts you sow so graciously and freely in our lives,
and inspire us to share such bounty generously with our neighbours.
Amen.

Prayer of confession

For hatreds between peoples, for violence among nations,
for breakdowns into civility, we pray (*silence*).
Why does it have to be this way, O God?
What choices of ours could bring change? (*silence*)
For estrangement within families, for tensions among neighbours, we pray. (*silence*)
Why does it have to be this way, O God?
What choices of ours could bring change? (*silence*)
For divisions in the Christian church, for conflict within our community,
we pray. (*silence*)
Why does it have to be this way, O God?
What choices of ours could bring change? (*silence*)
For our inner struggles with an inflated ego, or deflated self-worth, we pray. (*silence*)
Why does it have to be this way, O God?
What choices of ours could bring change? (*silence*)
We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Words of affirmation

One: Hear the promise of God. Through all these times, amidst all these conditions,
God offers the Spirit's transformative power for our companion, guide, and hope.
Your sins are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

EARLY WORD – *The letters from no-one.*

If there are any children present, ask how they are going.

So, it seems you now have an extra week holiday many of you. Use it wisely and keep washing your hands.

Today we will hear a story from Matthew's gospel about a man who went and spread seeds around. He was called a sower, and spreading or planting seeds is called sowing, which is spelt differently to the sewing you do with clothes.

To help us understand that a little more, I am again drawing on the world of Harry Potter.

In the first book, or movie if you prefer, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, we hear the story of how Harry Potter begins his journey to becoming a wizard.

Every potential wizard or witch receives an invitation to attend Hogwarts School of witchcraft and wizardry when they turn 11.

They receive this invitation via owl-mail, that is, delivered by an owl.

Harry, having lost his parents when he was a baby is staying with his mother's sister and her family, The Dursleys. They are not very nice at all.

When Harry receives his first invitation, his uncle Vernon refuses to let him see it, knowing full well what it is.

This eventually gets out of hand, with, well let's just say, a multitude of letters begin to come.

You can see that in this first clip in the order of service if you have it, or below on the web page the first Harry Potter link.

After too much of this the family leave to stay in various places, but the letters always find them. Finally they move to a hut on a small island somewhere in the ocean, and it is here where a representative of Hogwarts, their groundskeeper Hagrid, finds them and personally gives Harry his invitation.

Again the clip is here in the order of service if you have it, or the second Harry Potter clip below this on the webpage.

When Hagrid finally delivers it personally to Harry he tells Harry that he is a wizard, a much loved one.

Like the sower in Matthew's story, Hagrid scatters his letters in abundance everywhere that Harry might get them. Like the seed, the letters tell Harry who he is and invite him to an incredible new future.

The letter for Harry becomes a call to freedom, he no longer has to live (except in holiday times) under the cruel and selfish rule of the Dursleys.

The same is said of this seed the sower scatters everywhere until it finds each of us and offers us Jesus freedom.

There is a song we will be singing in Zoom church called "Draw the circle wide". If you are watching this on the webpage, you can find a link to the song below.

Other than that, enjoy another week of holidays, and I will see you next week. Bye.

SING: Draw the circle wide

Refrain:

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

Let this be our song: no one stands alone.

Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

1. God the still-point of the circle

Round you all creation turns

Nothing lost but held forever

in God's gracious arms

Refrain

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

Let this be our song: no one stands alone.

Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

2. Let our hearts touch far horizons

So encompass great and small

Let our loving know no borders

Faithful to God's call

3. Let the dreams we dream be larger

Than we've ever dreamed before

Let the dream of Christ be in us

Open every door!

Refrain

Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.

Let this be our song: no one stands alone.

Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

SHARING OUR STORIES – Choose yoke light!

READINGS:

Genesis 25:19-34

¹⁹These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." ²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he

was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. ²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." ³²Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Matthew 13: 1-23.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

¹⁵For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.' ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and

understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

PREACHING – Love that disrupts

In case any of you have wondered about my abilities as a gardener, and my knowledge of things agricultural, let me assure that my dad kept a good garden and took time to teach me things, and my first placement (and kind of placement before that) were in Traralgon and Cobram respectively.

In both places there were smaller congregations out of the main centre in smaller communities, all of which were based around farming, either dairy, cattle, sheep, crops, stone fruit or grapes.

So it is fair to say that after all that exposure to such environments, and those who worked them, I have come away with knowing pretty much nothing about it all.

Not that I didn't try, and no offence to those absolutely wonderful people and communities, these were not things I was passionate about.

I did learn about timing of farming practices however and how this impinged on church life. Like don't ask Terry Saunders in Katamatite to do anything at harvest time. If anything offer him a beer at the end of the day. He like most of them was a great bloke.

So I come to the passage from Matthew today from a theological perspective, clearly not any agricultural focus.

But before I launch into Matthew and how it evokes the theme, "Love that disrupts", a word about the passage from Genesis about brothers who don't get along. Now that I do know something about.

(I mean my two sons in case you were wondering)

This is an interesting story. Not only from the perspective that Isaac's story is glossed over pretty quickly to him being the father of Jacob and Esau.

And the story sets up a conflictual dynamic from the time they are in the womb.

Why is this?

And why do I even need to know how stupid Esau is, except that maybe he suffers from poor impulse control and the inability to delay instant gratification. A psychologist would have a field day with him.

And maybe this is how 21st century people engage with this story.

I got to thinking that maybe it may just be part of a legendary tale about how the nation of Israel developed over decades through the famous patriarchs and prophets and judges.

The birthright traditionally went to the eldest son who would become the patriarch of the family and receive double the inheritance of his brothers. Esau swears over his birthright to Jacob in return for a meal. While this act may seem strange, it falls into a larger literary tradition of tricksters and reversals that take place throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. These reversals disrupt social conventions and traditions, and unlikely characters advance God's plan. (Seasons Fusion material Sunday July 12th, 2020)

Or maybe, maybe there is a little something in there that we too easily ignore.

It may also be the case it is describing the time when a split occurred in a founding family, and one path through Jacob continued into Judaism as we know it, and the other through Esau took the road to what we now call Islam.

Is it a reminder that we were once one, but parted ways, over what amounted to petty sibling rivalry? Is it a reminder in the 21st century to ask what can we do to reclaim at least some of that one-ness?

Doing so would be an act of love, but it would also be absolutely be disruptive.

And what about this parable?

Well, first we need to remember that in the previous chapter Jesus has confrontation with scribes and Pharisees over his actions of healing and plucking grain on the Sabbath for example. All this in front of the people.

He has in the previous several chapters taken time to spell it out to the disciples what he is on about, what it means to follow him, what it means to live a life that begins and ends with God.

So, they have been privy to all this teaching in private, and now they wonder why he does not do the same with the crowds of people who follow.

Now he is by the sea and crowds have gathered, and he begins a lengthy monologue on the nature of the kingdom of heaven beginning with this parable of the sower, except he does not explicitly call it a parable of the kingdom. Rather it seems he is introducing the idea of the process of using parables, and why he does this, after a question from the disciples.

The section from verse 10-22 is not included in the set lectionary reading today. I included it because I think the passage is the poorer for omitting it. But also, as it helps us understand better what is going on.

The section starts - *¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*

This is really a statement reinforcing the privileged position of the disciples to have the words of Jesus for them alone, for him to talk straight to them. He reveals important maybe secret details of what he needs them to know.

As for everyone else, the crowds of anonymous people, they are not privy to this information, nor it seems are they capable of really hearing it or understanding it. On the surface his comments seem less than complimentary, but I will come back to that shortly. And I think some of what comes from his mouth may have come from the pen of the author of this gospel.

Rev Prof Bill Loader puts it well in his comments on this passage:

The parable of the sower draws on very familiar earthy images which would have been part and parcel of every day life in the rich granary of Galilee. It appears to have been typical of Jesus that he saw sacred text in every day life. This made him different from the scribes who derived their expositions from scripture.

The earliest material we have rarely shows Jesus using scripture in anything like a scribal way and it was noted: he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes (Mark 1:22). In preaching it is always salutary to remind ourselves that there is more than one text. Good preaching arises from a meeting of the text of scripture and revelatory text of common experience and reflection.

The image of sowing and reaping had always been part of every day life and is therefore also richly used in scripture. Many of Jesus' every day images are like that, so there is scriptural allusion present in many parables.

It seems that if you approach scripture as a heritage of rich imagery and less as a sterile legal document, you can be more in touch with its play, its poetry and images, and more in touch with what (who) inspired it.

Those of you who know me are aware that I am a huge proponent of this idea in my use of stories and media and poetry and images.

And in this story today at the very least it is about that despite appearances, and setbacks, God's kingdom, God's reign, would come and surprise us with its overwhelmingly rich harvest.

But there is more here that I said I would come back to.

Jesus' image of God's bountiful harvest not only attests to the power of God's reign but also stands in stark contrast to the Roman Empire and its agricultural and ecological practices. Rome's unquenchable desire for goods and exotic luxuries led to exploitative practices resulting in barren land, deforestation, animal extinction, and environmental devastations still felt today. God's way produces an abundant harvest, while Rome must use violence and exploitation to secure its harvest.

(Seasons Fusion material Sunday July 12th, 2020)

I find it is useful to note that the entirety of the New Testament, when the events actually took place to when the final book was written, possibly the little book of Jude we studied last year, were all under Roman occupation.

So the people who were there hearing Jesus tell this parable, those who later wrote it down, those who later heard it in their own context, knew nothing in their entire lives but Roman occupation, so to hear of a practice that bore fruit over against Roman devastation, would have been liberating in itself.

To hear Jesus apparently commend a local practice of agriculture as productive would have made people prick up their ears and be prepared to listen more closely to the underlying intent.

And then after going away and chatting with friends and gossiping with neighbours and hearing what the more insightful members of the community had to say, they may have realised that this was also a sideways sleight at Rome and its practices. "Here is a man", they may think, "Who is prepared to suggest that Rome is not as mighty as it thinks and is not the way forward into the future."

This parable then speaks to the disruptive power of love that seeks to nurture and promote growth, over against the destructive power of Roman practices, both agricultural and, well most everything else.

When Jesus says to the disciples - ¹⁵For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them,' maybe this is the reason they are like this, this lifelong submission under occupied rule that has worn them out and worn them down.

Finally, in this parable, which will lead into more parables after this chapter, people are given a glimpse of love that disrupts the status quo of all they have ever known, under the iron fist of Roman rule, and the oppressive leadership of the temple and the local king.

Here finally was another way.

The way of disruptive love.

For us in this year of 2020, maybe these two stories remind us God's ability to work even through the worst of us, and the even the dodgy things the best of us still do. Maybe we are reminded that this difficult world we live in is the world in which God really relates to us, and not some future kingdom in some far-off land with a fairy-tale prince coming to save us.

Maybe too, we modern disciples are like those original twelve, whose failure was not at the level of grasping the truth but trusting it and living by it.

If we can't trust what we believe and understand, why might that be?

I want to finish with two more references that round out thinking about this passage from Matthew.

The first is to a book by the priest Thomas Merton titled, "New seeds of contemplation." In it he writes:

Every moment and every event of every person's life on earth plants something in her or his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men and women. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love.

Merton is inviting us to see that Jesus' Parable of the Sower is not about the occasional moment when God or a human evangelist sows a seed about God.

*Rather, **everything at every moment of every part of our lives is a seed suffused with life-giving spiritual import.** This claim is not to say that everything that happens is good or controlled by God; instead it is to say that **the sort of soil that we are — good or bad, rock-filled or thorn-infested — in each arising present moment effects how we receive the seeds of experience that are always being sown around us and within us...** you might like to also to consider*

that our commitment to spiritual practices like Sabbath keeping (remember last week?), contemplative prayer, and works of mercy (like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick) help till and fertilize the inner soil of our souls...And practicing works of mercy can help cultivate the inner soil of love, for as we practice setting aside our egos and engage in acts of loving-kindness toward others we find love becomes more and more our second nature.

This love becomes disruptive for us and those who receive it as it seeks to offer unexpected graces.

Finally again I refer to Rev Jan Richardson as she refers to a passage from the book from the Bible's Apocrypha, the Book of Sirach. It harks back to the passage about Jesus' yoke from last week, but offers a fitting conclusion to the passage today that acknowledges peoples' burdens under oppressive rule and the offer of a new way:

*Come to her (the Wisdom of God) with all your soul,
and keep her ways with all your might.*

*Search out and seek, and she will
become known to you;*

*and when you get hold of her,
do not let her go.*

*For at last you will find the rest she gives,
and she will be changed into joy for you.*

*Then her fetters will become for you a strong defence,
and her collar a glorious robe.*

*Her yoke is a golden ornament,
and her bonds a purple cord.*

*You will wear her like a glorious robe,
and put her on like a splendid crown. (Sirach 6.26-31)*

Sing – TIS 382.

1

Now the green blade rises
from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth
many days has lain:

love lives again,
that with the dead has been:

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs up green.*

2

In the grave they laid him,
Love whom hate had slain,
thinking that he never
would awake again,

laid in the earth,
like grain that sleeps unseen.

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs up green.*

3

Up he sprang at Easter,
like the risen grain,
he who for the three days
in the grave had lain,
raised from the dead
my living Lord is seen:

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs up green.*

4

When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us
back to life again -
fields of our hearts
that dead and bare have been:

*Love has come again,
like wheat that springs up green.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of each, God of all:

we pray for our families, those with whom we are drawn together by birth or by marriage or by adoption.

May they receive care and love from you and from us as well.

We pray for our friends and neighbours, those with whom we are drawn together by common places of work or learning, by common aspirations and values.

Strengthen the ties between us, and may we find in these relationships the freedom and companionship and community that nurture us and the world around us.

We pray for our fellow citizens, those with whom we are drawn together by birthplace and nation, by regional ties and societal traditions.

Fashion these bonds so to insure the relationships and ideals we claim are paid more than lip-service, so that who we are and have been never closes us to who we may yet become.

We pray for those who are part of this community and in the whole Christian Church, those with whom we are drawn together by a common faith and uncommon grace.

May we thrive in ministry, may we expand in mission, may we deepen in spirituality, and may we grow closer to one another and you.

We pray for those who are fashioned in your image, with whom we are drawn together in one family.

Free us to recognize the stranger as no stranger, but sister and brother;
and to see the joy and need of any as the cause for our rejoicing and compassion.

Loving God, in your mercy, hear our prayers. And all these prayers we bring in the name of the Risen Christ who taught us to pray saying:

***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.***

Sing – TIS 130

1

We plough the fields, and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the cold in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for such abounding love.*

2

We glorify the maker
of everything that is,
who gives to us to care for
the earth, the air, the seas,
who wills that all the peoples
might have their daily bread,
that we might share our plenty
as channels of God's love.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for such abounding love.*

3

We thank you, gracious giver
of all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food.
Help us in our thanksgiving
to use your gifts with care,
to serve as friends and neighbours
your children everywhere.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for such abounding love.*

BLESSING –

May the blessing of God the great sower, Jesus the abundant bread of life and living water, and the Spirit the great tiller of soils, be with you now and always.
Go from this worship today finding the strength to right any wrongs,

To be the peace brought to division,
To be the love that is needed within the world.
Go in peace. Amen.

Recessional – TIS 755

You shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace,
and the mountains and hills shall break forth in singing.
There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.