



WELCOME TO ST PETER'S ASH



THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AT ST PETER'S IS CALLED TO CELEBRATE, LIVE AND REFLECT THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

12th JULY 2020

TRINITY 5

READINGS FOR TODAY

Isaiah 55 v 10 - 13
Romans 8 v 1 - 11
Matthew 13 v 1 – 9 & 18 - 23

PARISH OFFICE: Closed until further notice.
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A Sower went out to sow.....

COLLECT FOR – TRINITY 5

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.

CHURCH SERVICES

At present there is only a 10 am Family Communion service in Church on Sundays. Later in the month we are planning to have an 8 am Holy Communion as well, but in St Peter's Centre. We are unable to have both services in the same building at this time, due to issues relating to the cleaning that would be necessary between the services.

From Wednesday 22nd July there will be a service of Holy Communion at 9 – 30 am in church. Unfortunately, there can be no coffee and chat after this service at present.

The following procedures we will be in place for all of our services for the foreseeable future, following the advice from the government and the Church of England, for your health and safety:

Social distancing and Public Health requirements must be met. The two-metre distancing 'rule' applies for public worship. The maximum number that we will be able to accommodate in church will be 40. In St Peter's Centre the number will be 15. To preserve social distancing in church, you will be shown to your seat by a Steward. The wearing of face-coverings is voluntary.

Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household. They should carefully consider the risks associated with indoor gatherings and decide, accordingly, whether to attend public worship at this time. Those who are shielding until 31st July should not attend at this time. We shall be continuing to provide the Pew Sheet services for those who can't attend, or who prefer not to.

Everyone will have to use the hand sanitiser provided on entry and exit from the building. Also, we will be requesting the names of attendees, and these details will be kept for 21 days to assist NHS Track and Trace if required. It is essential that people do not gather on the church path, at the doorway or in the porch.

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend church due to the risk they pose to others. They should self-isolate at home.

To minimise the risk of transmission a disposable service sheet will be provide rather than the usual booklets. Singing will not form part of our worship. There will be no 'passing the peace'. Holy Communion will be in the form of the bread only (except for the celebrant) and hands should be sanitised before receiving. Kneeling at the rail is not permitted. Only the celebrant will prepare the altar and touch the vessels. There can be no servers or Communion Assistants at present.

The service much shorter than usual. On Sundays the 'sermon' will be the same as that printed on the pew sheet. After the service, sadly, we will be unable to have our usual coffee time together. Also, people must not stay and chat inside the building. Outside, in the churchyard and in the car park, social distancing rules will still apply.

In an emergency, the disabled toilet in St Peter's Centre will be available. The other toilets are out of use.

The pandemic is far from over and we need to stay alert to save lives! I hope that you will still be able to enjoy worshipping God at St Peter's. Just being together once again will, I know, be a great support – even socially distanced.

(Fr Keith on behalf of the PCC.)

Morning Prayer at 10 am on Sunday

If there is more than one person present, someone may wish to read the parts marked (L), everyone says the rest together. You can say alternate verses in the Psalm and in the Canticles. Please have a Bible to hand. You may wish to light a candle.

(L) O Lord, open our lips

All: and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

All Visit us with your salvation and sustain us with your gracious Spirit.

O come, let us sing to the Lord; ♦
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving ♦
and be glad in him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God ♦
and a great king above all gods.

Come, let us worship and bow down ♦
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is our God; ♦
we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All Visit us with your salvation
and sustain us with your gracious Spirit.

This hymn is said or sung:

1 Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!
All you who hear; brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration!

2 Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so mightily
reigning;
keeping us safe at his side and so gently sustaining.
Have you not seen all you have needed has been
met by his gracious ordaining?

3 Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our work and
defend us;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
Ponder anew what the almighty can do,
who with his love will befriend us.

4 Praise to the Lord - O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before
him!
Let the "Amen!" sound from his people again;
gladly with praise we adore him!

(L) The night has passed, and the day lies open before
us; let us pray with one heart and mind:

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

(L) God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, to be our advocate
in heaven, and to bring us to eternal life.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live
in love and peace with all.

Pause to call to mind our sins, then we say:

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

All say The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

We now say the collect for Trinity 5 (see previous page):

Read Isaiah 55 v 10 – 13 followed by Psalm 65 concluding with:

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as
it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

Read Romans 8 v 1 - 11

(L) Alleluia, alleluia. The word of the Lord endures for
ever. The word of the Lord is the good news
announced to you.

All: Alleluia.

Now read Matthew 13 v 1 – 9 & 18 - 23 Here are some thoughts from Fr Keith:

If you were to ask even non-church people to name a parable, chances are that they would say either 'The Good Samaritan', or 'The Parable of the Sower'. Those of us who are regular church goers could probably recite it almost word for word! It's so familiar though, that we are in danger of missing the stark message it conveys.

The whole of Jesus' teaching derives from His core message that people must repent, in preparation for the imminent arrival of God's Kingdom, heralded by the Day of Judgement. So, far from being just a cosy story that takes us back to our Sunday School days, the Parable of the Sower is something we all need to take very seriously. Jesus is speaking here about nothing less than who will be in God's Kingdom, and who will miss out, and it all goes back to mission and how successful that has been.

Reading a parable like this it is all too easy to keep it at arms' length, so to speak. It's not about us, surely? We are already believers, and aren't we therefore already bearing 'good fruit'? Well, hopefully yes, but this story isn't just about us, and we shouldn't ever become complacent in our faith. Even if we see ourselves as the seed that was sown on the 'good soil', this story still has relevance. I believe that it is asking us the question - What are we doing about the 'seed' that isn't being so successful? We can't just shrug our shoulders and forget about those other people who have yet to come to faith or who have lost their faith. They are God's concern, and should be ours too!

Stop and think for a moment about the identity of the sower. Who did Jesus have in mind for that role? Is it Jesus Himself? Well, yes and no is the answer to that. Certainly, in his ministry on earth Jesus did sow the seed of the good news of the Kingdom, but, after the Resurrection and Ascension, that job has been given to us. We are the ones who are told to go and preach the gospel to all nations, and nurture the seed that we plant as well. In telling this parable Jesus is challenging us not to leave the job half done. It's not enough for us just to mention Jesus and the coming of the Kingdom and think we've done our bit. We have to follow up that initial encounter to make sure it doesn't fizzle out and come to nothing.

The 'seed on the path' gets wasted because some people hear the word of the kingdom and don't understand it. It's up to us to try to help them understand, all of us, not just the clergy! We have lots of tools at our disposal to do that, not least the fruits of our own experience of the scriptures, of the church and what we have picked up over the years from other Christians. It's not good enough for us to just expect people to grow in the faith on their own, with no proper support. Mission is ongoing and hard work!

Similarly, we can't shrug our shoulders and pretend it's nothing to do with us if new Christians give up as soon the going gets tough (the seed on rocky ground), or when they get distracted by 'the cares of the world' or 'the lure of wealth', (the seed among thorns). Of course, every individual must take some responsibility for their own Christian growth, they need to put in some effort of their own, but we can't just leave them to it. We must be there for them, to teach and show them that following Jesus is more important than anything worldly. That doesn't mean forcing religion down their throats. In the end they have to make their own choices about the priorities in their life. But, as labourers in the harvest field, God does expect us to put in every effort to encourage keep them to stay on the road they have started out on. Their eternal life depends on it after all!

St Paul spells this out, in his letter to the Romans when he says: 'if the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you'. Those who don't believe, really do need the Spirit of God in their lives, if they are to live eternally, is Paul's message

So, this well-known parable is a reminder that God is looking to us, who have received the gift of the Spirit, to work tirelessly, not just to sow the seed, but to encourage and nurture it's growth. God will play his part of course, but we must play our part too. There are no exceptions, and no excuses. We need to keep praying for courage and strength to make those difficult initial approaches, and not just leave it that. We mustn't give up on those who might be in danger of falling away. It's all part of keeping Jesus' command to love one another as He has loved us, so that more will be saved and be able to enjoy eternity in God's wonderful presence.

Now pause for your own reflections, and then we say the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

We now say together:

*All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.*

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, ♦
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, ♦
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old ♦
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors, ♦
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
- 6 Free to worship him without fear, ♦
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the
Most High, ♦
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation ♦
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God ♦
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death, ♦
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

*All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

*All: You have raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of your servant David.*

Our prayers today are written by the Revd. Carol:

Response: Lord in Your mercy – Hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father we gather here today knowing that we are part of a huge family - the family of Christ. We pray for all its members, for those close to us and those who have become estranged from this family for whatever reason. We pray for those near and far who are not able to meet together as your family for fear of persecution and at the forefront of our minds at the time, for fear of the unseen Coronavirus. We ask that despite the pandemic we continue to grow spiritually and move forward in our faith, reaching out to the community around us as a witness to your love. Strengthen all those in ministry, especially our Bishops Andrew and Jo, and all our clergy colleagues across the Diocese as we strive to unite, encourage and establish new ways in which to gather together and worship you.

Whilst we have been wrapped up in our own experiences of 'lockdown', it's easy for us to forget there are other ways in which people suffer, especially in other parts of the world where there is famine, disease, conflict and lack of resources. We pray that you bring rains where there is drought and the provision of foods and medicine where they are needed. And we pray for those who have the authority and power to change things, that they work together to bring peace and justice to all.

Many of us have had the opportunity to take more time to admire the beauty and wonder of your creation. We pray for those who have not had the luxury of a garden or park close at hand and are finding it difficult to get out of their 'lockdown' environment. We pray for the frustrated parents not being able to send children to school and those who are not yet able to return to work. We thank you for those who continue to daily deliver food, medicines and a sense of human kindness to those who need it. We especially pray for those in the health and social services giving care to the weak and vulnerable. We thank you too Lord for the sense of community and drawing together of people through these past few months and we pray that lasting relationships will grow from it.

We bring before you, Father, those who we know need your healing touch, and we especially pray for those who are unwell with Coronavirus in hospital at this time. We take a few moments to pray quietly those known to ourselves. We ask that your healing hand comforts them and gives them strength and courage in their illness. Be with their loved ones in their time of anxiety, not being able to be with their loved one.

Thank you, Lord, for the lives of those who are no longer with us and we remember today Terry Rigby. We pray too for those who have died suddenly through accident or violence and those whose lives have been taken by this pandemic. We ask that you help those left behind, whose grief is deepened by not being able to say 'goodbye' to their loved ones. Give them peace of heart and mind in their time of sorrow. And we look forward to the day when we can all celebrate together in the heavenly feast through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Father God, this family now comes to you in prayer and celebration with you as we move towards your table. We rejoice and give thanks for your gracious and unconditional love for us along with all the saints in heaven.

Merciful father accept these prayers for the sake your Son our saviour Jesus Christ.

As Jesus taught us, so we pray: Our Father in heaven....

This hymn may be said or sung:

Thy hand, O God, has guided
Thy flock, from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
Full clear, on every page;
Our forebears owned thy goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness:
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Thy heralds brought glad tidings
To greatest, as to least;
They bade them rise, and hasten
To share the great King's feast;
And this was all their teaching,
In every deed and word,
To all alike proclaiming
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Through many a day of darkness,
Through many a scene of strife,
The faithful few fought bravely,
To guard the nation's life.
Their Gospel of redemption,
Sin pardoned, man restored,
Was all in this enfolded:
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

And we, shall we be faithless?
Shall hearts fail, hands hang down?
Shall we evade the conflict,
And cast away our crown?
Not so: in God's deep counsels
Some better thing is stored;
We will maintain, unflinching,
One church, one faith, one Lord.

Thy mercy will not fail us,
Nor leave thy work undone;
With thy right hand to help us,
The victory shall be won;
And then, by all creation,
Thy name shall be adored,
And this shall be their anthem:
One Church, one faith, one Lord.

Let us pray:

(L) Almighty God,
send down upon your Church
the riches of your Spirit,
and kindle in all who minister the gospel
your countless gifts of grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All: May the God of all grace,
who called us to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus,
establish, strengthen and settle us in the faith;
and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us and all
who we love, today and always. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace, and rise with Christ in glory. Amen.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF THE RECENTLY
DEPARTED, ESPECIALLY: TERRY RIGBY**

READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK – TRINITY 6

Isaiah 44 v 6 - 8; Romans 8 v 12 - 25;
Matthew 13 v 24 – 30 & 36 - 43

Evening Prayer for this week

O Lord open our lips,
and our mouth shall show forth your praise.

O God make speed to save us.
O Lord, make haste to help us.

- 1 Hear my prayer, O Lord, and in your faithfulness give ear to my supplications; ♦
answer me in your righteousness.
- 2 Enter not into judgement with your servant, ♦
for in your sight shall no one living be justified.
- 3 My spirit faints within me; ♦
my heart within me is desolate.
- 4 I stretch out my hands to you; ♦
my soul gasps for you like a thirsty land.
- 5 O Lord, make haste to answer me; my spirit fails me; ♦
hide not your face from me lest I be like those who go down to the Pit.
- 6 Let me hear of your loving-kindness in the morning,
for in you I put my trust; ♦
show me the way I should walk in,
for I lift up my soul to you.
- 7 Teach me to do what pleases you, for you are my God; ♦
let your kindly spirit lead me on a level path.
- 8 Revive me, O Lord, for your name's sake; ♦
for your righteousness' sake, bring me out of trouble

All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

This hymn may be said or sung:

Glory to thee, my God, this night
For all the blessings of the light;
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done,
That with the world, myself and thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the awful day.

O may my soul on thee repose,
And with sweet sleep my eyelids close,
Sleep that may me more vigorous make
To serve my God when I awake.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
we pray with one heart and mind:

Silence is kept.

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever. Amen.

*A Psalm is said: Mon 105; Tue 107; Wed 119 v 129 - 152;
Thurs 116; Fri 130; Sat 118, ending with:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever.
Amen.

*Two Scripture Readings now follow (see below). Between
the two readings we say:*

All Our hope is not in vain, because God's love has
been poured into our hearts.

- 1 God reckons as righteous those who believe, ♦
who believe in him who raised Jesus from the dead;
- 2 For Christ was handed over to death for our sins, ♦
and raised to life for our justification.
- 3 Since we are justified by faith, ♦ we have peace with
God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 Through Christ we have gained access to the grace in
which we stand, ♦ and rejoice in our hope of the
glory of God.
- 5 We even exult in our sufferings, ♦ for suffering
produces endurance,
- 6 And endurance brings hope, ♦
and our hope is not in vain,
- 7 Because God's love has been poured into our
hearts, ♦ through the Holy Spirit, given to us.
- 8 God proves his love for us: ♦
while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.
- 9 Since we have been justified by his death, ♦
how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath.
- 10 Therefore, we exult in God through our Lord Jesus
Christ, ♦ in whom we have now received our
reconciliation.

All Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

All Our hope is not in vain, because God's love has
been poured into our hearts.

Readings:

Monday: Ezekiel 1 v 1 – 14; 2 Corinthians 1 v 1 - 14
Tuesday: Ezekiel 1 v 15 to 2 v 2; 2 Cor. 1 v 15 to 2 v 4
Wednesday: Ezekiel 2 v 3 to 3 v 11; 2 Cor. 2 v 5 - end
Thursday: Ezekiel 3 v 12 – end; 2 Corinthians 3
Friday: Ezekiel 8; 2 Corinthians 4
Saturday: Ezekiel 9; 2 Corinthians 5

Gospel Canticle: The Magnificat (The Song of Mary)

All You have scattered the proud in their conceit,
and lifted up the lowly.

1) My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

2) From this day all generations will call me blessed; the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.

3) He has mercy on those who fear him, from generation to generation.

4) He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit.

5) Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

6) He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

7) He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, to remember his promise of mercy.

8) The promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.

All You have scattered the proud in their conceit, and lifted up the lowly.

Prayers of thanksgiving are made for the day that is ending. Intercessions are offered for the church, the world and for individuals, the sick and the departed.

Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Collect for this week (see first page)

O God,
the source of all good desires,
all right judgements, and all just works:
give to your servants that peace
which the world cannot give;
that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments,
and that, freed from the fear of our enemies,
we may pass our time in rest and quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, Lord, we pray, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of your only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK TO:

BETTY WELSMAN & DEREK MARCHANT (TODAY)

There is a free national phone line 'Daily Hope' that offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services. Available 24 hours a day on **0800 804 8044**

CARE AND SHARE

Our initiative to help those who may be short on food supplies in the current crisis. Food is being left outside church for people to take for themselves, or to share with others who they know are in need. If you would like to donate any tins, packets, UHT milk etc. please leave it on the doorstep of the Rectory. Thank you.

DON'T FORGET OUR ST PETER'S PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like emergency prayer for yourself or somebody else please phone: 01252 322292 or 01252 323037 – this is a confidential service.

THIS WEEK'S SERMON FROM BISHOP JO

Profligate Sowing - Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23

If I say the word 'extravagance' I wonder what you think of? I think of my grandmother's cooking. Whether the recipe said margarine or vegetable oil, she'd always get out the butter, and use about twice as much as was strictly called for. I think of the generosity of some older friends to our toddlers when we first moved to North Carolina who appointed themselves as honorary grandparents, determined our children wouldn't miss out just because we'd made the big move abroad. I think of a friend who was a brilliant gardener – she turned a bare patch of waste land into a rose garden that became the delight of a rough urban neighbourhood. And then before a birthday party she cut every stem there was and came over with bucket after bucket of beauty, til our flat looked like an Alma-Tadema painting. Extravagance!

The parable of the sower in Matthew ch.13 is nothing if not extravagant. It seems there's absolutely no shortage of seed. The farmer scatters it everywhere. I learnt the other day that this is the original context for the word 'broadcast' – where the seed is cast broadly, shed abroad so to speak. It's anything but limited or constrained or rationed. Here, have some more. There's no shortage of the seed and there's no limit on where it's scattered. This sower is extravagant. You might even say profligate.

I wonder what you think about a profligate sower? Some would say they're generous and radical, but if they're too radical and too generous you might begin to think they're wasteful or perhaps foolish. I remember planting a whole packet of tomato seeds in little yoghurt pots around the windowsills of my student house. Now that was foolish, I was clueless, and the timing was terrible. I asked my housemate if she'd mind watering them while I was away – it was our wedding, and then a honeymoon – not realising quite how much I was asking. When I got back there were trifids in every window.

The sower in this parable is generous to the point of profligate – you can imagine the Israelite agricultural

folk listening to Jesus frowning because that's foolish farming. Whoever wastes good seed on the path, or in the rocky ground, or among the thorns. They should know better.

But this sower seems happy to take a chance anywhere. Even though it's noted that not all the seed grows – actually, not much of the seed grows well, we may suppose only a quarter of it, or at least only the seed that is sown in the fourth location, the good soil. But there's no issue here about waste. Because there's no shortage of seed. The sower – whom we may suppose to be God – is not limited or constrained. There's no rationing. There's generosity, extravagance, abundance – even if it doesn't land well, even if there's awareness that it won't all be fruitful. God sows it anyway: this sower is willing to take the risk and look the fool. God is profligate.

The parable also ends with extravagance. The different gospel accounts of the parable of the sower describe the harvest from the seed that grows on good soil in varying multiples. Here in Matthew it's said the seed brings forth grain, 'some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty'. Do you notice that we're not just talking a four-fold harvest that might make up for the seed that was 'wasted' on the path and the rocky ground and among the thorns; we're talking about a harvest so plentiful that it vastly exceeds that with which the farmer began. Waste is simply not a problem. There is nothing 'lost' that is not ultimately restored many times over. It's a case of where to put it all: I'm reminded of that wonderful verse from Malachi 3:10:

¹⁰Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

We may say this parable starts and ends in extravagant abundance. This speaks to the nature of the farmer and their resources: there's no shortage of seed, of the word of God, broadcast liberally. Equally, there's no shortage of harvest, the fruit of God's word when it takes root in our lives. It produces abundantly. You might even suggest the problem is in the other direction: there's way too much. It's overwhelming. On a human level the response might be 'how will I cope?' But clearly that's not a worry here, with God.

But I'm also mindful that it isn't a case of a sense of extravagance all the way. A substantial portion of the seed does not grow. All of us who engage in ministry – and I hope that is all the baptised, all of whom our Divine Sower shares seed so that we can share in the privilege of partnership with God – we know that only too well. Indeed we can get depressed if the seed that we scatter does not seem to be taking root. Or when it does take root and we get all excited about some growth, we can get all the more disappointed if

seemingly it does not last. That's what happened BTW with my tomato plants – constrained in their rather pathetic yoghurt pots.

This parable challenges us not to get discouraged if, in our sowing, it doesn't feel very productive. Three quarters of the Divine Sowers' sowing does not produce a harvest. But God does not give up. Our profligate God keeps on sowing, scattering it extravagantly, here there and everywhere. We should not worry about the waste; equally we should not stop sowing. Indeed we might expect that $\frac{3}{4}$ of our labours may not be fruitful. But my goodness, we may also anticipate that SOME of the seed we sow may indeed be fruitful, and produce a harvest that more than compensates for the seed that is seemingly wasted.

If we look back over Jesus' life of sowing it's sobering to see how there was wilderness and scorched land times, there was the shallow yoghurt-pot problem of seeming success that faded away (you might even put the disciples in that category of enthusiastic respondents who fell away when it got tough) and there were plenty of 'pathway' people where the seed of God's word was blocked and obstructed before it could properly land. Superficially you might view the cross as the final ruin, the waste of a good life, the decimation of a promising crop. And yet God's seed, God's word, becomes fruitful – and a hundredfold doesn't begin to describe it.

This parable invites us to note the abundance, not the scarcity along the way. It seems to me this is a habit that goes against the grain of our universe, especially in pandemic times. We too easily dwell on the problems – the waste of seed, or the poverty of a particular context – without the bigger picture, the frame that encompasses the wider story within which we belong. Which is story of abundant God whose seed is not short supply and who is profligate with it – and encourages us to the same generous inclusive extravagant scattering. Not over-focussing on the seed that doesn't grow, not getting discouraged because there are a lot of thorns, but trusting that where seed does grow, where there is receptive soil (and we can certainly help with the digging there). Where seed does grow it will far outweigh anything that was lost. It will not run out.

So, what kind of a farmer are you? I encourage you to be extravagant, generous, profligate in your sowing. And expectant, resilient, undeterred about the harvest. The seed does not run out. Nor will the harvest be disappointing. And you won't be the one who has to work out where to put it all!

(Also available to watch online)