

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Sunday June 16th 2024
Proper 6 | Ordinary 11
The Revd Dr
Elizabeth Welch

Call to Worship

Let us come to worship God,
God who is the sower of the seed that gives life
God who brings fruitfulness and abundance
God who carries us through the challenges that life brings
God who enables us to serve fully and freely.
Let us offer our thankful hearts in praise.

Prayer of Adoration

For your generous outpouring of creative love
we praise your holy name.

God the Creator, you brought all things into being and hold creation in life.
We praise you for the sunshine and rain which lead to growth,
and for your gifts of creativity in human life.
For your generous outpouring of creative love.
We praise your holy name

God the Creative Word, made flesh in Jesus,
you come among us with your new creation,
re-born out of death, making all things new,
freeing us from death and sin and guilt
For your generous outpouring of creative love.
We praise your holy name

God, your Spirit swept over the face of the waters and brought life out of chaos; y
our Holy Spirit comes with the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
For your generous outpouring of creative love.
We praise your holy name

Loving God you offer more than we can imagine or dream
You come with seeds that bear fruit in our hearts and minds and lives.
For your generous outpouring of creative love.

We praise your holy name

Prayer of Confession

Forgiving and freeing God **forgive us and free us**

For the times when we have not let your seed of life be planted in us,
when we've closed our hearts and minds
to the receiving of your gifts flowing out of your love for us.

Forgiving and freeing God **forgive us and free us**

When we've chosen to go our own way and not followed where you lead us

Forgiving and freeing God **forgive us and free us**

When we've been put off by the challenges of this world,
have neglected caring for your creation
and felt too daunted to take the action that is needed.

Forgiving and freeing God **forgive us and free us**

When we've lacked courage and conviction to speak out about your love,
feeling fearful about the way our words will be heard,

Forgiving and freeing God **forgive us and free us**

Silence

Words of Forgiveness

May God, the sower of good seeds,
free us from all that troubles and binds us.

May Jesus, the giver of new life, pour out his forgiveness upon us.

May the Holy Spirit lift us up and open us to new possibilities

Be at peace, God forgives you.

Thanks be to God. Amen

All age Activity

If possible, take along a pack of seeds. Explain about the parables in Mark's Gospel, that point to a small seed being planted, but growing into a mighty shrub, and that this is what God makes possible, for this created world and for us as God's people. Pour the seeds out in front of the children, and ask them what they think will happen to the seeds. Also ask how often they have planted seeds themselves and, if so, what plants have grown as a result. Ask whether these have been house plants or garden plants, and how often they need watering and how often they have helped with watering the plants. Talk about the mustard seed and the way it is so tiny but grow into a huge plant, as part of God's creation. Ask the children how much they feel they are growing into the people God

wants them to be, with God's help. Suggest that they each take a sheet of paper and draw the kind of plant they would like to be.

Prayer for Illumination

May the words that are spoken,
and the thoughts of our hearts offer us your seeds of hope and love,
that your word of new creation may be planted in us,
O God our loving creator.

Notes on Readings

Ezekiel 17.22-end In Ezekiel, there's the wonderful image of God at work in creation, particularly with regard to trees. Trees can bear rich fruit. They can provide a home for birds of every shape and size. They hold together the physical and the spiritual aspects of life, in terms of seeing the trees as pointing to the work of the creator. The tree imagery is helpful in describing God's activity. It comes as a reminder that we can look at the created world and see the purposes of the creator. Different examples are offered for contemplation:

- Taking a small branch and taking it unexpectedly to be planted on a high mountain where it will bear fruit.
- There's a challenge to humanity, in that the trees 'shall know that I am the Lord.' Does humanity have the same sense of being made by the Creator?
- Bringing low the high tree, making high the low tree. This image calls to mind bringing down the proud and raising up the humble.

Psalm 92.1-4, 12 – end. The final verses of this psalm echo the words of Ezekiel. 'The righteous flourish like a palm tree...'. It's interesting that they include the words 'In old age they still bear fruit;' In an era when we're tempted to feel sorry for older people or feel that they've passed the fulness of life, this psalm speaks of the way in which older people can still bear the fruit that God offers and are indeed 'always green and full of sap.' They're not abandoned and left on their own. They still have the possibility of the new life of the Creator God being found in them. It's not because of their own strength, but because of God's work in them. The psalm begins with the note of praise 'It is good to give thanks to the Lord' and offers the example of thanksgiving through music. Music, in all its different forms enables us to grow in thanksgiving. The diversity of what is possible is shown in the quoting of three particular musical instruments, the lute, the lyre and the harp. There's no limit to what can be played in praise of God. The sheer enjoyment of singing can be a fulfilling offer of our praise to God.

2 Corinthians 5.6-10, 14-17 In the face of all the issues that early church had to deal with, they were encouraged to live confidently, walking by faith not just by looking at what they could see. This passage from the letter to the Corinthians reminds us of the

underlying significance of this, 'the love of Christ urges us on...he died for all so that all might live for him'. The starting point of our new life in Christ is not only about how we live for others, but how we let Christ's life live in us. Once we are in Christ, we no longer look at others just from our view of ourselves. We trust that there is 'a new creation, that the old has passed away, and that the new has come'. Sometimes we can wrestle with believing that new has come. We can be tempted to look at the world and only see brokenness and suffering. The coming of Christ offers us the possibility that the new has come, it has broken in, but we need to go on re-claiming it in every age. Our lives can be witnesses to the New Creation, as our lives are made new and all things are seen as being possible. This passage makes an astonishing claim with regard to newness, that the new has actually come. This is part of the astonishment that life in Christ brings. We're invited to believe that this really is the case, that we are each made new, that the old troubled and doubting self has died. We're invited to trust that this is the promise for all of God's world, even if newness and hope can seem quite hidden in today's world. And as we hear the promise, we are invited to carry it out by living in God's way.

Mark 4.26-34 One of the commentaries (Sacra Pagina) points to the way that these two parables are the only two explicit kingdom parables in Mark. They carry significance in terms of the hopefulness that the kingdom is seen to point to, even when the kingdom might seem to be hidden. The seed bears fruit – 'by itself'. There is no visible cause. The growth is unhurried. It's a reminder that we can't just speed the kingdom along at the pace we might long for. There is a need for patience; the kingdom depends on God's power. The mustard seed carries a mix of being tiny, hardy and intrusive. It points to interesting dimensions of God's kingdom. Faith can be tiny and hidden, but can grow and blossom and flourish. The parables point us to what we can see in God's created world, but also offer a sense of mystery. Everything isn't always clear all at once. It's a reminder of the danger of us wanting things to be pinned down and clearly visible. The disciples are the recipients of the mystery, so that they can reveal it to others. We are invited to share in telling others about God's secret revelation, yet to be fully revealed at the end of time. This passage is a message of hope for Jesus' discouraged followers. Discipleship comes with the need to hear God; throughout Mark the failure in discipleship is equated with improper hearing. True discipleship is a progression: It's about hearing, accepting, and bearing fruit as we see in the progress of the good seed. But we're also made aware of the death of the seed and the death of Jesus, before new life springs forth.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us take a moment in silence to reflect on the seeds that we see, give thanks, and pray for them to keep on growing.

Silence

Creator God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

As we give thanks, we pray that we may share in your care for creation,

across the world, and in the places close to us.
May we, and all your people, learn to use your gifts wisely and well.

Silence

Creator God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

As we give thanks for the seeds of new life that God offers in the birth of children, and in the renewal of life in the elderly, so we pray for children and young people, and those at the other end of the spectrum, that each may be blessed in all that they face

Silence

Jesus, Sower of the seed of new life, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

In the face of war and conflict and hatred, we pray for seeds of new life and peace, especially in Israel and Gaza, between Russia and Ukraine and amongst the countries across Africa where there is conflict. We pray for God's help to, day by day, scatter seeds of love and peace in a troubled world and amongst troubled people.

Silence

Jesus, Sower of the seed of peace, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

As we gave thanks for our homes,
we pray for refugees, seeking a new home in this country,
that we may offer them a warm welcome.
We pray for the homeless and vulnerable people on our streets,
that we may learn again to seeds of hospitality amongst them.

Silence

Jesus, Sower of the seed of hospitality, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church. May the root of God's Word deepen within us.
May we not despair at the issues we see around us,
but learn to sow seeds of faith and hope in the communities
in which we find ourselves.

Silence

Jesus, Sower of the seed of faith, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who sow the seeds of healing,
in particular all who work for the NHS,

that they may be treated justly
and strengthened in the valuable work which they offer.
We pray for the people we know and love,
naming before God in a moment's silence the ones in particular need
whom we carry on our hearts and minds today.

Silence

Jesus, Sower of the seed of healing, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We remember those we have known who have died,
and those who are mourning their loss.
We commend into the hands of God the life-giver each one.
We pray for comfort in our sadness and strength for what lies ahead of us.

Silence

God, the giver of life that is eternal, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**

As we go out to serve God we pray for courage and conviction
to live whole-heartedly in God's way.

Silence

Creator God, Sower of the good seed,
we give thanks for the seeds you sow in this your created world,
and the way they speak to us of the seeds you have sown in our lives
and in the life of the world.
Seeds can be so small, and yet can have such a large impact.
Help us keep our eyes open to see your seeds and let them bear fruit,
within us and around us. Amen.

We offer all these prayers in the name of God the Creator,
who has brought the world into being,
Jesus, the Sower of the seed of fruitfulness
and the Holy Spirit, bringing the gift of new life. Amen.

Offertory

Let us come to make our offerings to the God who has poured out the offering of Jesus Christ for each one of us. Let us offer again our lives, and whatever small token we might have today, so that God's creative work may be more fruitfully be carried out in this church and in God's world.

Offertory Prayer

O God, you offer us so much in our lives, even in the most difficult times.
We offer ourselves again to your this day,
praying for your blessing on us, in whatever we might be going through.
We offer you this gift of money, as a sign of the offering of ourselves,
praying that these offerings may be fruitful in the life of this church
and this community. Amen

Blessing

Go now, filled with the seeds of God's word,
to offer your lives to God through this church and in this community.
Go, filled with the life and hope and peace that are the blossoming of God's seeds.
Go now, to be God's new creation in Christ in God's world.
And the blessing of God the Father and Creator,
God the Son and Redeemer,
and God the Holy Spirit and Empowerer,
rest upon you now and always. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Come ye thankful people come	40	233	123	106
For the fruits of all creation	42	231	124	153
I am a new creation			553	254
Joy to the world	135	320	330	393
For the beauty of the earth	41	181	102	152
Eternal spirit of the living Christ	300			
Come my Way, my Truth, my Life	352	579		
Praise and Thanksgiving	48		125	

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Elizabeth suggests a hymn by Carl Daw Christ, [Faithful Sower, Scattering the Good Seed](#) published by Hope Publishing Co. You would need either a CCLI or OneLicence in order to reproduce the words. The metre is 11.10.11.10 and works fairly well to the tunes Lord of the Years, Epiphany, or Charterhouse.