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**Sunday 16th July 2023**

**Ordinary 15 | Proper 10**

**The Revd Nicola**

**Furley-Smith**

**Call to Worship**

The Psalmist says: Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.

As we come to worship, we offer you, O God, our whole lives:
let the words we hear and the words we speak take root,
that they may change the way we are.

May we worship not only with our minds and our mouths
but in every circumstance and in every action. Amen.

**Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

Generous God,

we praise you for the generosity in giving your word of life to us.
From the pages of Scripture we read your word.
In the life of Jesus we see your word.
In the power of your Holy Spirit we live your word.
Your word that is light in our darkness,
security in our confusion,
and hope in our exploration.
Your word that transforms our lives.

Generous God may your Word be heard in our hearts that we might love you.
Generous God may your Word sound in our souls that we might worship you.
Generous God may your Word echo in our mind that we might embrace you.
Generous God may your Word speak to our strength that we might follow you. **Amen.**

Loving God, we ask for your forgiveness for the times we have blocked your voice

by refusing to listen or ignoring your call.

Loving God, we ask that your spirit of wisdom will allow your voice to flow

so that we may hear and know your word and respond to your call.

Loving God, we confess that at times we are afraid of what you may ask us to do

afraid that your call will be too hard for us to respond to.

Loving God, Enable us to be all that we can be, to do all that we can do,

to live in response to your love. Amen.

The Word of God in Christ Jesus
has set us free from the law of sin and death.
Therefore there is now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus.
Your sins are forgiven; be at peace. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination**

O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love,

and strength to follow on the path you set before us;

may your kingdom come and your will be done.

In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

**Reading**

Isaiah 55.10-13 | *Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23*

**For all the Family**

Explain the reading from Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23. A farmer scatters seed in four places: on a path, in rocky places, among thorns, and on good soil. The only place that the seed could grow was in the good soil. After Jesus finished telling the story about the farmer, he explained the meaning. Seeds that fall on a path and are eaten by birds represent people who hear God’s Word, but do not understand it. The ones that fall on rocky ground represent those who hear God’s message, but it doesn’t take root in them, and they abandon it when troubles come. Seeds that fall on thorns represent when the Word is choked out because we are too busy. Finally, the seed that falls on good soil grows, representing a person who hears the Word, understands it, and accepts it: 23: “But the seed falling on good soil is the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.”

Here’s what you’ll need:

* Instant snow powder (Let it snow instant snow powder – www.amazon.co.uk)
* Soil
* A glass container
* Water

What to do:

Put some soil into the glass container. Explain the properties of good soil (it must be deep enough for seeds, moist, weed/thorn/rock free, etc.

Add the “seeds” to the soil (the instant snow powder). “Nurture” the seed by pouring water over it to make it grow. The instant snow will expand to thirty or more times its original size, just like a crop would.

Explain: If we are good soil and the Word of God has been “sown” in us, how can we produce “fruit”? We can do that by sharing God’s Word with others. Think about: one person shares the gospel with one person. That person shares the gospel with five other people. Those five people each share it with ten others. That’s a lot of fruit!

**Sermon Notes**

Here could be three strands to the parable. Is it about

* the sower?
* the harvest?
* the soil?

Explore why the sower seems to waste so much of his precious seed by throwing it in such unhelpful places?

Consider that in the natural world plants produce multitudes of seeds – a single sunflower, for instance, might produce hundreds, and anyone living close to a sycamore tree knows just how far and how successfully its many thousands of seeds spread! A packet of ordinary garden seeds can contain a couple of thousand tiny seeds. Not all will germinate, but the massive numbers show a kind of reckless generosity on God’s part. God can do a lot with a little.

Jesus’ approach to mission is quite at odds with our play-it-safe instincts. He gives us freedom to take risks for the sake of the gospel. He endorses extravagant generosity in sowing the word, even in perilous places. We may of course wonder about the wisdom or efficiency of his methods, but Jesus promises that the end result will be a bumper crop beyond our wildest dreams.

**Prayers of Intercession**

**Life-giving God**

**Let your seeds be scattered among us that, through us, your kingdom may grow.**

Help us to be more like Jesus....

Help us to grow the seeds of your compassion and love so that our lives may be full of the freshness and the goodness that springs from the thanks for this enjoy your spirit inspires.

Lord, graciously hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Help us to see more like Jesus....

Give us eyes to see our lives from your perspective. Make us humble in tending to those in need. Help us to show them the light of your love all around them and within them: the hungry, the despairing, the lonely, the homeless. May we champion the concerns of old, the young, the sick of those unable to cope with life and ask that your kingdom will grow as we work amongst those whom society has failed.

Lord, graciously hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

 Help us to hear more like Jesus....

Give us ears to hear through the commotion of our world. Grant us the space to hear your still, small voice. Give us strength in the difficulties that we face especially in this time of global crisis and deep uncertainty. May we work and pray for the renewing of this battered earth and ask that your kingdom will grow in justice love and peace fresh in the minds of leaders and people like.

Lord, graciously hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Help us to speak more like Jesus....

Give us lips to proclaim your message to the world; words of friendship and comfort:; words of concern and love; words of joy and peace; words of challenge, provoke a deep response; words of good news, words of God. We pray for the United Reformed Church which is grappling with new ways of speaking your word and sowing seeds. May your spirit enable us to break down the barriers that separate us from one another so that we may bring your healing love into the lives of the peoples of our world.

Lord, graciously hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

 Help us to understand more like Jesus....

We pray for wisdom in our decision making. May our empathy touch the lives of those we that meet whose priorities are not the same as ours:

we pray for those hearts that are stony ground:
**may they be opened up to you;**we pray for those hearts that are rocky ground:
**may the way be cleared for you;**we pray for those hearts that are too burdened:
**may the snares of their cares be untangled for you;**

**Let your seeds be scattered among us that, through us, your kingdom may grow. Amen.**

**Offertory**

Generous God, giving abundantly
more than we can know or ask,
our promise is to justly share
ourselves in celebration of your word.

Take our gifts to use in your service. **Amen.**

**Blessing**

May God sow in you the seeds of an abundant harvest;
May Christ the Word be a lamp for your steps;
And may the Holy Spirit give life to you - body and soul.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
  In the name of Christ. Amen

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| Hymn Suggestions |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Thou whose almighty word | 38 | 112 | 106 | 699 |
| Through north and south and east and west | 24 |  |  |  |
| The Kingdom of God is justice and joy | 200 |  | 255 | 651 |
| God’s Spirit is in my heart | 476 |  | 404 |  |
| Thanks to God whose word was spoken | 319 | 605 |  |  |
| What Shall We Offer Our Good Lord? |  |  | 671 |  |
| All my hope on God is founded | 586 | 192 | 455 | 16 |

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

If you can get hold of a copy of Celebration Hymnal for Everyone you might find *Seed, Scattered and Sown* is worth learning.