

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
5th Sunday after Trinity 12 July 2020

Overturning the expected order

Welcome everyone.

The appointed readings continue through Genesis, where we start the stories connected with Jacob while the gospel readings, working through Matthew, reach chapter 13 with a series of parables on the Kingdom of heaven beginning with that of the sower.



*The Pont d'Avignon famed in song,
should cross the Rhone, but doesn't.*

Sheila has focused chiefly on the Jacob-Esau story with links to Matthew in the morning service and Keith has added some comments on the parable of the sower for night prayer.

The Gathering

Please access <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXldoDnvq4> for the hymn: 'Let all the world in every corner sing'. This is from a BBC Songs of Praise service, from a (large) St Stephen's Church – somewhere, possibly in London. Someone might recognise it. *The words appear on the screen.*

Gathering Prayer

Fire our imagination
O Holy Spirit of Wisdom!
Help us to see beyond what is,
to a vision of your kindom.

Inspire us, revive us,
that we might let go
of trying to fix what is,
to edit,
as if our
structures and institutions
are templates for a slightly better future
if only we fix them up a bit.

Instead, O God,
teach us to walk in your ways,
teach us wisdom

teach us to heed the prophets
of this and every age
and fire our imagination
for your kindom's sake.

Then, O God,
fire our wills,
strengthen our communities,
that we might be ready,
be able,
to do the work of realising
what we imagine,

that we might pray
in word and deed,
Your Kindom Come.
Amen

By Jemma Allen a priest of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Hopefully you have noticed the deliberate use of kindom not kingdom.

Prayers of Penitence and Praise

Holy One,
We have so many doubts.
You made us to fly, but we doubt our wings.
You gave us a song, but we forget to praise.
You know the way we are made,
down to each nerve and bone,
yet we don't believe you know what we need.
Forgive us.
Remind us of our heritage.
Show us again how you provide for us,
how you are always with us.
And when we are weary from challenges that confound and stress us,
renew our hope and give us safe rest.
Amen.



By Rev. Deborah Vaughn, a hospice chaplain in the USA. This and preceding prayer from revgalsblogpals.org

To all who turn to Christ, come these comfortable words;
Your sins are forgiven.

*Keep silence and consider this, then think, God has forgiven me, I can forgive myself, and say
Thanks be to God!*

Lord's Prayer

Our Creator God, who is above all things
We call on your name
and ask that you bring your full power
into this moment,
into our very beings,
allowing it to ground us, surround us, and lead us
equip us and fill us with all that we need
so that we might offer our full and best selves in this day,
committed to right relationship with all of creation.

And when we don't get it right,
please grant us your grace
and we will be sure to extend the same to others,
so that no matter what we face, no matter what we endure—
we will not give in to hate, apathy, violence and death.

Sovereign God, you call us into beloved community,
gathering us all to yourself.
We belong to you, now and forever.
Love will win! Amen.

*By Rev. Dr. Marilyn Pagán-Banks who is described as 'a queer womanist freedom fighter',
and adjunct professor at McCormick Theological Seminary USA. From revgalsblogpals.org*

Alternative Collect for Trinity 5

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.

Song

You might like to access

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=38&v=ox1r0Ozlwoo&feature=emb_title
for 'Through all the changing scenes of life' sung at Coventry Cathedral. Words appear on
the screen.

Reading Genesis 25:19-34

God's unexpected purposes

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The 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. And the Lord said to her,

'Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;
one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger.'

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterwards 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.



Jacob and Esau Charcoal drawing
Christopher Gonzales-Aden A living
US artist

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

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

Reflection

Today we read again of barrenness – waiting and prayer are involved before the birth of the next generation, as the children of promise come as a gift from God. Yet these children are also born in conflict, as the story presents a message from the Lord that will overturn the accepted norm of priority to the first born. No reason is given, but we learn that there will be division between the twins, and we read of the parents' favouritism as they grow up. The first time we hear either Esau or Jacob speak is in the story of the 'stew incident'. Esau is only concerned with his immediate need to satisfy hunger, whereas Jacob looks to the future and demands the birthright.

Commenting on this passage, one writer concludes that through Esau's stupidity and Jacob's selfishness the Lord's prediction that the elder shall serve the younger comes about.

'Later, Rebekah and Jacob will conspire together to take Esau's primary blessing as well, even though this will require the betrayal of husband, son, father, and brother (chap 27). Thus, this episode cannot be read moralistically ("Cheat, exploit, steal, and God will reward you for it!") It has to be read theologically. That is, attention must be paid to God's ability to work through circumstances that are ambiguous at best, and utterly immoral at worst. Yet, in light of God's unfathomable grace, the divine ability to effect salvation through such unsavoury means is not and cannot be diminished.' (Spina in Van Harn (ed) *The Lectionary Commentary, The First Readings*, Eerdmans, 2001, p 57)

Throughout scripture we read of God overturning the expected order of society and of reaching out for the 'younger one', the vulnerable and the outsider. Jesus associated with such people and told stories about pairs of sons. The most famous is in Luke 15:11-32 (the 'prodigal son'), where the older son expects his position to give him privilege while the younger one turns in penitence to the father and receives abundant gifts. I realise that too often I have acted like the older son and am ashamed of this.



The familiarity of the parable of the sower can mean we forget both the generosity of the sower - the seed is scattered widely - and that fruitfulness is not assured, but varies depending on the receiving context. The global pandemic has forced rapid social changes, though how far-reaching some of these will be remains to be seen. The closure of buildings for public worship has encouraged faith to be expressed more within the home and through the internet. The seed of God's word has been scattered more widely, but the challenge now is: will it bring forth fruit?

How can those who have dipped into a service online be encouraged to learn more and to join a community? How do those who have faithfully worshipped in their local church adapt if services are not resumed according to the previous pattern? What is the place of the sacraments – baptism and eucharist – if restrictions continue? Are we concerned about divisions within and between nations? Is our Christian fruitfulness seen more in our care for the vulnerable and our passion for justice in society?



Profession of Faith, Creed

(We are not alone; we live together in God's world.)

We believe in God, who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus to reconcile, and to make all things new.
We trust God, who calls us to be the Church,
to love and serve others, to seek justice and to resist evil;
to proclaim Jesus, born a human, crucified, dead and risen;
our judge and our hope, in life, in death,, and in life beyond death.
God is with us, and we are not alone.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Intercessions

Thanks to Caroline for these prayers. She tells us that they should be credited to Alison Webster and are from the Diocese of Oxford website.

God of redemption
Your challenge is peace
Given not as the world gives it with limits, conditions and reversability
But unconditionally, and with infinite love.

We pray today as we find ourselves
In places we do not want to inhabit,
In communities where we may no longer feel welcome;
An identity that feels cut off at its roots.

We pray for those of us with feelings we don't know what
to do with
Loss and grief
Fear and anxiety
Uncertainty about our future.

Bless us whatever we feel and whoever we are,
Dwell in our souls deeply,

Give us courage to tell our stories honestly and openly;
The compassion to hear the stories of others with an open heart;
The discipline to share what we have,
The discernment to advocate for those more vulnerable than we are;
And the means to be agents of care and connection, justice and hope.
To seek out and celebrate the life and joy in our communities,
Setting a tone of harmony with you.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus and those who came after him
Who lived in times of bitter conflict,
Who were perplexed but not driven to despair,



Afflicted in every way but not crushed,
Persecuted but not forsaken,
All the time proclaiming you.
AMEN

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.



A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to access 'Come Holy Spirit' – one of Nigel's pieces, (we used it at Pentecost) sung by the Langford Singers. The words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3adYODI4Lg&feature=youtu.be>



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.
(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Post Communion Prayer

Grant, O Lord, we beseech you,
that the course of this world may be
so peaceably ordered by your governance,
that your Church may joyfully serve you in all godly quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission Prayer

God of all power and love,
we give thanks for your unfailing presence
and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.

Send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.
Revive us to live as Christ's body in the world:
a people who pray, worship, learn, break bread,
share life, heal neighbours, bear good news, seek justice,
rest and grow in the Spirit.

Wherever and however we gather,
unite us in common prayer
and send us in common mission,
that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *(from Revgalsblogpals.org)*

Closing (Commission) Hymn

Please access the link below for 'In Christ there is no East or West' from the same St Stephen's as our opening hymn.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfNlboxXbus>

Dismissal

We are dismissed by the Christ in the power of the Spirit,
to live and work to God's praise and glory.
So let us live in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Coffee Break

We invite you to make your own contributions informally to replace the time we usually spend chatting after the service over coffee. This can include prayer, or requests to remember someone or some event. Please email or post material or requests to Keith.

A poem from Daphne

The Candle

I am a spark – make me a fire
So says our Christian prayer.
But as the flame arises higher
The candle sheds a layer.

To be effective as a fire
Ourselves must be subdued
The burning zeal we all admire
With caution must be viewed.

As candle burns it wastes away
In giving light its spirit
And so shall we be if we pray
For greater commitment.



This is a coffee break. Your contributions can also hopefully raise a smile!

Opening the pubs? A cautionary story from Genesis (Revised Corvid International Version)

And the landlord planted a beer garden in the 'Eden in the East' public house, and the man and the woman entered to sojourn there over a pint of lager, a G &T and packets of crisps. And there was a notice board in the middle of the beer garden that gave the menu and also stated the rules of behaviour expected of customers, visible for all to see.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the customers in the beer garden, and he ordered a cocktail to be brought to him, and it was so. And when the woman saw this, and how the drink was of an orange colour, a delight to the eye, with a frosted rim and garnished with all manner of fruit, she did desire it, and asked from her table of the serpent what the name of the cocktail was.

'It's the landlord's own special creation, called 'Good and Evil',' said the serpent, 'come and try this for yourself.' So the woman went to his table and did sip from the glass, and she called to her husband and said, 'come here darling, you must try this, for it tastes sublime.' And he did so.

And the landlord saw this and was wroth, and said to the woman and her husband: 'you have broken the rules of social distancing and you have touched with your lips and hands a vessel already handled by another without due sanitisation.' And the landlord evicted them from the beer garden, and forbad their return.

So the couple had to buy their drinks from a supermarket, which was much cheaper, but although they remembered its taste for ever, they never found out the recipe for the cocktail.



Please scroll down for night prayer

Night Prayer



If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

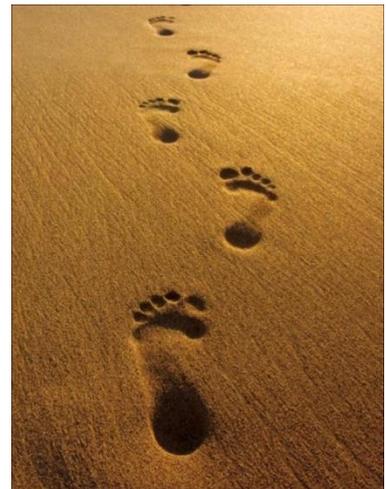
You might like to begin this time of reflection with the hymn: 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' Which you will find at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>
Words appear on the screen.

Opening Prayers

Ever-present God,
you walk with us
through good times
and bad,
mountain top
and valley deep,
your footsteps our guide,
hands our support.

Ever-present God,
you are close to us
when life is smooth
or rough,
in wholeness
and brokenness,
your healing our hope,
your touch our desire.

Ever-present God,
bring comfort and peace
and the warmth
of your presence
and I shall fear no thing,
for you are with me,
always. *(from faithandworship.com)*



Reading

The New Testament reading appointed for today is Matthew 13:1-23

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly 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 “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears

the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

New International Version



Sower with Setting Sun
Vincent van Gogh 1888
Kroller-Muller museum,
Netherlands

Comment

We have become all too familiar with the parable of the sower, and perhaps the Covid 19 pandemic gives us the ideal opportunity to reflect on its limitations. It all depends on what the sower is sowing. If the sower is scattering the germs of coronavirus, then I for one, and I am sure all of you too, will not want to be part of the fertile ground. We probably won't even want to be by the roadside, but well away where no chance seed might fall.

The question now becomes how do we know what the sower is actually sowing? Does the same sower scatter different seeds, or are the sowers different too, and if so, (sorry about the pun there!) how can we recognise one from another? It also implies that the nature of fertile (or otherwise) ground will change depending on what is being sown.

I would like to suggest that for much of the time we are not in an either ...or situation (either we are fertile ground or we are not) but a both...and situation, because we cannot be sure who is going to come sowing or the nature of what they are scattering around.

At present you and I are tending to err on the side of caution and assume the worst about sowers and seeds; others including those who flock to pubs or the seaside perhaps do not.

It's all getting very complicated. It demonstrates that although stories, whatever their origin, may well contain some profound truths about humanity and about God, they will only ever be partial. Paul's comment that 'now we see through a glass darkly' is spot on.

Reflective prayer (yet a different take on the parable)

You are so extravagant, God!
Throwing Your truth and grace out into the world
like a carefree farmer sowing life's seeds
with no concern for where they may fall.

We are so grateful,
because we may never have heard Your word,
we may never have received your love
if it could only be found in the 'proper' places;
in neat rows of carefully tilled hearts,
in the securely-fenced fields of respectability.

So, we praise You that You sow wayward seed,
and that it found a place in our hearts
where life could grow and transform our barrenness into fruitfulness
our wilderness into garden.

Amen. (www.sacredise.com)

An evening collect

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.

Conclusion and Blessing

Spirit of the living God
present with us now,
enfold us, body, mind and spirit,
and heal us of all that harms us,
in Jesus' name. Amen

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.
Amen.

*We bring worship to a close with Bee playing 'before the ending of the day'.
Access as usual – just music, no pictures.*

<https://www.parishofcentralexeter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Before-the-ending-of-the-day-converted.mp3>

The words are below.



Before the ending of the day,
creator of the world, we pray,
that with thy wonted favour thou
wouldst be our guard and keeper now.

From all ill dreams defend our eyes,
from nightly fears and fantasies;
tread under foot our ghostly foe,
that no pollution we may know.

O Father, that we ask be done,
through Jesus Christ thine only Son,
who, with the Holy Ghost and thee,
dost live and reign eternally. Amen

Thanks

*Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services:
Especially to Sheila for the morning reflection and hymns, Caroline for the intercessions,
Daphne for her contribution to Coffee Break, Nigel and Bee for music, and to Sandie who
suggested the idea of the Beer Garden of Eden.*

*Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in
the text.*

