

Bradford North Circuit, Sunday Worship, 19th July 2020

Opening sentence: Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...the Spirit makes you God's children and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Abba, Father.'

Song: Join in with or listen to 'Sing of the Lord's goodness' (*Singing the Faith* 65) as we offer our praise to God: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGE6ZOumLQM>
Alternatively, use a well-known hymn such as 'Lord of all hopefulness' (*Singing the Faith* 526, *Hymns and Psalms* 552) as we affirm the presence of God in our worship today.

Opening prayers:

Creator God

We come to praise your name today,
We are confident of your love for us,
knowing that you want the very best for us and for your world.

Help us to be a people strong in Spirit
and faithful to your call,
so that the confidence you show in us
may be shown to be well placed.

And encourage us to share in the work of Jesus
that the good news of your saving grace
may be a message of hope and rejoicing
for all creation.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer may be said here.

Gospel reading: Matthew 13.24-30

²⁴ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" ²⁸ He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" ²⁹ But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Some thoughts on the Gospel: Waiting with patience

In the story that Jesus told, weeds and wheat are growing together. The response of the householder is to be contrasted with the response of the servants. Whilst the servants urge action without delay, the farmer counsels waiting and patience.

The workers in the story were keen to uproot weeds and eager to make a difference. Sometimes we say, 'We're not doing enough; we could be doing more to help the wheat to grow.' But sometimes it is better to hang loose, to watch and wait, as the advice was given to me long ago, to exercise a ministry of 'loitering without intent'. We may or may not be

called upon to act; and when we are our efforts can make a difference. But we are always called to be faithful, to stick with God no matter what, to trust in his word, and to wait on him.

If you have ever moved house - and I can claim to have done my fair share - then you will know that it is not necessarily wise to tackle the garden at the first opportunity. Any keen gardener will tell you that you should wait for a year to see what happens - who knows what hidden gem may emerge from the ground, which overeager digging and clearing might otherwise have destroyed. Yes, waiting may prove to be messy - certainly not an approach recommended by a garden make-over programme - but it can have its own rewards!

At the present time, as we come out of lockdown, we might find ourselves eager to take action. We want to return into our church buildings, to start up again where we left off. But the message of the parable is to take our time, to exercise patience, until the time is right. Living patiently means acting with the same long-suffering that God does. We may be eager to press on, but as Christians, we are called to live in God's time and not our own, even if that means living with all the contradictions and tensions of this 'in-between time' in which we find ourselves.



To think about: Look at this photo with wildflowers growing amongst the crop. In the bible story, the farmer lets the wheat and weeds grow together for the sake of the harvest to come. To what extent are we prepared to share in that same sense of long-suffering as we await the unfolding of God's Kingdom?

Waiting with purpose

That's not to say we simply sit back and do nothing. We are not being urged to adopt an attitude of resignation accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders. Waiting with patience is itself an action. First of all, waiting patiently with God means being watchful. The exercise patience brings new opportunity.

As we have journeyed through lockdown, we have already been encouraged as people of the church to try new ideas, developing different ways of working and means of keeping in touch. As we come out of lockdown, let's not lose sight of trying new things. Let's keep an eye out for opportunities, as they arise, and hold on to that willingness to try something

new. Let's sow some seeds and see what comes of them! They might not all turn out as we expected – that's not necessarily a bad thing. There may be weeds among the wheat, but let's be like the farmer who said, 'Let the wheat and the weeds grow together...' To my mind that is what ministry is about: stuff goes on. Some of it works out, some doesn't. Some things come good, some do not. Some are fruitful, others not so. With time we may be able to make a judgement on what has gone on; but only from the perspective of God's time can the final call be made.

As well as waiting with watchfulness, we are also called to wait with hope. Read these words from Paul's Letter to the Romans:

Epistle reading: Romans 8.12-25.

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

In this passage, Paul speaks of the expectation which comes with sharing in the life of the Spirit. He longs for the time when creation will be restored to that fullness which is God's intention for the world. We can be aware of the amazing beauty of the world in which we live, and at the same time we can be aware also of its deep brokenness. And we can recognize the part played by human failing in the marring of a world that God made good. This sense of brokenness is nowhere more apparent than in the divisions that we allow to take hold in human relationships – the division between rich and poor, abled and disabled, and especially apparent at this time, the division between black and white. But Paul's vision was of a world made one, held by the God whose love knows no division. Paul's appeal is that we are to wait expectantly for its coming with eager longing. In the 1950s and 1960s Martin Luther King lived by this longing for a better world, and he did not lose sight of this goal. The arc of history, he said, bends slowly, but it bends towards justice.

In his book, 'BeLonging', Peter Selby highlights the connection between two ways of reading this title. God's purpose for the world is one of **belonging**, of a world that belongs as one to the God whose love knows no division. But Selby also examines his title as two words – and how to **be longing** is a necessary response to this promise that God has set before us. It is through our human yearning that God has chosen to work, in revealing Jesus Christ to us as the means of redemption. If this current crisis of pandemic has instilled within us something more of this deep sense of yearning, not simply for a world we have lost but for a world restored with a new and common purpose then that is a vision worth committing ourselves to, so that glory might be given to the God to whom we all belong.

Response: Take time to look at the seeds in the picture below. Imagine holding them in your hand, and how, small as they are, they have the potential to grow and be fruitful.



Use this prayer: Lord God, thank you that you have planted good seed in my life. Thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit to guide me through all trials, giving me patience and hope, in every situation. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord God, we pray for our world and its people.
So many different cultures, colours, languages
– but we are all your children, all special in our own right.
Whatever our gender, race, colour or creed, we all belong to you.

We all need your love.

We pray that we might learn to live in harmony with each other,
to recognise that even someone halfway around the world is still
our neighbour in your sight. Far or near, we all belong to you.

We all need your love.

With today's technology we have access to news from afar,
almost before it happens. Help us not to become blasé about
the situations we see, but to pray and care faithfully for all concerned.
In war or peace, we all belong to you.

We all need your love.

We pray for those near and dear to us: protect them, wrap them
in your loving arms, and in sorrow and in joy, be with them.
Near or far, we all belong to you.

We all need your love. Amen.

Song: We finish by singing or reading the hymn, 'There's a wideness in God's mercy' (Singing the Faith 416, Hymns & Psalms 230) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJwft3SY_PU Or you may prefer to sing, 'God is love, let heaven adore him' (Singing the Faith 103, Hymns and Psalms 36) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqqBu1VVHqM>

Blessing: May the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
be with you and all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.

Credits. Prayers: Copyright Roots for Churches Ltd, used with permission. Photographs, Ian Downing and David East, downloaded from www.theworshipcloud.com permission given to use in churches for non-commercial purposes. *Scripture quotations are* from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.