

# THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

12<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity / Proper 10

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## Collect

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.

## Isaiah 55:10-13

<sup>10</sup> For as the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return there  
until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

*If you would like to read it, the psalm set for today is no.65.*

## Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those  
who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of  
life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin  
and of death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law,  
weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his  
own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with

sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> so that the just  
requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk  
not according to the flesh but according to the  
Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set  
their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who  
live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things  
of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but  
to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For this  
reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to  
God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it  
cannot, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please  
God.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since  
the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not  
have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But  
if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of  
sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the  
Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in  
you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life  
to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that  
dwells in you.

## Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat  
beside the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such great crowds gathered around  
him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the  
whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup> And he told them  
many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went  
out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the  
path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Other  
seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have  
much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had  
no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun rose, they were  
scorched; and since they had no root, they withered  
away. <sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns  
grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good  
soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some  
sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> Let anyone with ears listen!'

<sup>18</sup> 'Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup> When anyone  
hears the word of the kingdom and does not  
understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away  
what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the  
path. <sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is

the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup> yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. <sup>23</sup> But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

### Post-communion

*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.*

## NISCU NEWS



It's a big week coming up for Charlie Day, our Furness Secondary Schools' worker, and the charity that employs him, NISCU.

This week, 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> July is NISCU's Week of Vision and Prayer. Please have a look at their YouTube video to find out what it is all about:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gc1kbiMZRyw&feature=youtu.be>

On Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> July, at 10.30am, there will be an online service featuring Bishop Emma:

<https://niscu.online.church/>

This site is already showing a rolling programme of prayer suggestions from all the NISCU workers across the North West. Have a look, to see what is going on and get a sense of how many enthusiastic disciples of Christ are at work on behalf of the church in our region.

On Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> July, we are encouraged to take a prayer walk round our local area. If you have never tried a prayer walk, it's very simple: go for a quiet walk, alone or in company, and make sure that you pray as you go! Charlie suggests that your walk take in local churches and schools as you pray for our shared mission. Charlie will be posting prayer ideas online: <https://niscu.org.uk/prayerfurness/>

Finally, on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1pm, there will be a Zoom gathering to pray for schools work. Get in touch with Charlie for details: [charlie.day@niscu.org.uk](mailto:charlie.day@niscu.org.uk)

Even if you can't make any of these activities, please include the work of NISCU in your prayers this week and consider whether you will be able to make a donation to NISCU this year. They were suffering from a lack of resources even before the Lockdown, as we heard from Charlie when he dropped in to the Parsonage Room on his Fun Run from Millom to Coniston in March. During the lockdown, all the NISCU workers were furloughed and they now need our prayer and support to get things going again in these unusual times for schools and for the new academic year in September.

<https://niscu.org.uk/home/giving/>

### Our secondary school connections

Charlie supports all the Secondary Schools in our immediate area, including Millom, Coniston and Ulverston Victoria. He is engaged on a variety of pastoral, RE and Primary transition projects, and works closely with Ruth Hutchings, our Network Youth Church minister for Furness and *Meeting Point* leader (Broughton). It's a great example of joined-up thinking among the various church organisations in our area. You may also know that John Hudson (Woodland) and Stephen Tudway are governors of Millom School.

## NOTICES

Clive Moody (Broughton) has a mobility scooter, no longer required by a relative, for which he would like to find a good home.

For further details, for pastoral matters, home communion and all church enquiries, please get in touch at any time:

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## SUNDAY MESSAGE

What does being a Christian involve? If you had time and inclination to be the best possible Christian you could be, what would your life look like? What would your church look like? What would other people's lives look like in consequence?

One of the themes I have found myself returning to recently is the notion that life is not simple. The issues that face us, the people we encounter, are rarely binary; they seldom fall out into a choice between good and evil. We would love it if they did. That's why so many popular films pit a goody against a baddy.

Down through the ages, people have sometimes thought of God and Satan in this way, as engaged in some sort of fight, as if either one might triumph through cunning, or better generalship. God of course cannot be beaten, or hoodwinked, or overcome. Good and evil is not a fight whose outcome is still awaited. That battle is already won.

Things are not simple and in the world of human activity there is very seldom an obvious right answer. That's one reason why, when God came into the world in the person of His Son, he did not come with a long list of specific rules. He came instead reiterating the fundamental principles of His Old Covenant, to love God with your whole being and to love your neighbour as yourself. Fundamental and always right.

That things are rarely simple is also a reason why, when God came into this world, he came teaching in parables, stories of extraordinary depth and complexity. If they raise in your mind as many questions as they seem to answer, then they have done the work that God intended. Parables are not a roundabout way of telling us something simple, but a succinct way of opening our eyes to see, to ponder, and to work in, a world of great complexity.

Life is complex because we have made it so. We do not inhabit the sort of simple world that our pets, farm animals and wild creatures inhabit. I wonder if that is why the parables are always about people, and often people living lives characteristic of the world we have created. The people of parables are rulers and wealthy men, wayward sons and poor widows, good shepherds, harsh slaveowners and dishonest employees. The parables are quite unlike that most enduring form of folk literature the world over, the fable. In a fable, a simple moral lesson is taught by a fictional story in which animals, plants, inanimate objects or the forces

of nature behave like people. In a parable, people engage in real activities; the moral is invariably complex and sometimes, as in the case of the dishonest steward, quite obscure.

You don't need me to tell you what today's parable is: you've heard it and read it, probably not for the first time. You don't need me to tell you what means either, because you've heard and read that in Jesus' own words. We have all we need, but we've only just started.

Jesus speaks in parables not to make things easy and simple, but not to make them hard either. Jesus speaks in parables to acknowledge the complexity of what he is talking about. There is always a sense in which God is hidden, and God's purpose and will, at least in their detail, are hidden from us. Parables reflect this hiddenness. We are shown what we need, but not everything.

Today's parable evidently invites us to consider what kind of soil we are. But are we, at any given moment, just one kind of soil? Are we the same kind of soil all the time? Are we always the soil which brings forth shallow roots because of opposition? Are we always the soil which allows the Word to be choked by worldly considerations? Of course not, because Jesus came to call us away from these tendencies. Each one of us will be one or more of the soils at any one time, changing with the season, our mood, our circumstances. We know this, so the parable does not give us a simple moral, but rather calls our attention to the variability of our own performance.

The message of the Gospel is not fatalistic: it is a call to repent and come to Christ. So if we are bad soil today, we have access to forgiveness and renewal through Christ. In him, we can shake off the soil we acquired in our old place and plunge our roots down into fresh soil.

The parable calls us to reflect on when and why we are particular kinds of soil. Are there circumstances in our lives, predispositions or learned behaviours that make us less effective followers of Christ? Are there particular parts of the Gospel message that we find difficult? Important things that take shallow root in us?

While we are thinking about the layers of meaning at work here: what is the 'Word' to which Jesus refers in his explanation? Is it the written Word of God to be found in the Bible? Surely. Is it also the mystery of Jesus himself? Just as surely. This parable is talking about the divine Word, Jesus Christ, coming to take root within us. And if we are not yet open to that sort of

mysterious indwelling, that sort of incarnation of God within us, then in terms of the parable we are being like the path. Are we always the path? Are we condemned because we don't yet understand? No, and Jesus tells parables about mercy, repentance and forgiveness too.

Just as our calling is not simplistic, neither is the measure of success. Among those who bear fruit in following Christ, for some will it one hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. We might ponder why this is so, when all are equally valued, all equally forgiven. Might it be due not to the measure of our moral performance but chance, or circumstances? The same degree of openness to the Word will bear different fruit in different people. We are not required to be the hundredfold. The thirtyfold fruit is good enough, as long as we do bear fruit by receiving the Word of God.

Our calling is to let Christ dwell in us, as Paul says. When we truly do that, we are capable of amazing things. Our reading from Isaiah shows what the Word accomplishes. Mountains and hills burst into song. Trees clap their hands. These are not the literal results of us being good Christians. The poetry of Isaiah is doing the opposite of what the parables do: it is attributing impossible actions to inanimate objects. It is saying that amazing outcomes are the result of the Word of God truly dwelling in the hearts of people. It's not unlike those passages in Acts 2 and 4 that describe the fellowship of believers. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship ... Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed ... they shared everything they had ... there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them ... and [the money] was distributed to anyone who had need."*

Acts tells how the seed of Jesus' teaching germinated in one group of ancient Christians. Not in an unworldly group, or one that rejected property, or work, or buying or selling – but in a community that still lived in this world, one which observed the highest standards of justice through sharing. It is showing us amazing fruit borne by those who allowed the Word to take root in them. That is the Christian calling, to be amazing to others.

That's the challenge for us, to let Christ dwell in us richly, to let the seed of his Word germinate and flourish. What will the fruit that we bear look like? How will it grow not in a fantasy world, not in the next world, but, in this world? So that people are amazed. What sort of world are we called to create?



Above: Jean-Francois Millet, *The Sower* (1850).

Art can serve a purpose rather like the parables. The more we look, the more we interpret, the more we draw out associations, the more we find ourselves speculating on the complexities of life through the complexities we find, or imagine, in the art.

In the foreground of Millet's painting, a man sows seeds from the bag over his shoulder. Behind him, a murder of crows circle. In the distance, another man prepares the ground with a plough.

There is great ambiguity in the figure. He is a sinewy giant whose face is half hidden by shadow. He is very close to us, but also stands alone. He is engaged in a virtuous task, but seems tinged with darkness: his feet seem to disappear into the earth. It seems both soft and fertile and curiously bare from the ploughing. The crows, the distance from another human being, seem to hint at some form of threat, as does the sky. It may be that there are clouds coming, but perhaps the light is simply fading and the darkness, like the crows, is gathering behind the sower.

Do we see Christ in the figure of Millet's sower? What forces might be gathering against him? What are the results of his work?