

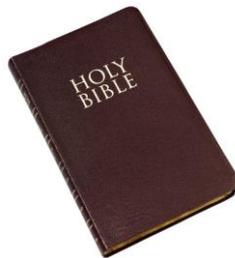


Trinity 5 – Sunday 12TH July 2020

With thanksgiving, we shall be able to worship together in church this week but we know a number of you won't feel comfortable doing that just yet. So here is Worship at Home for those who prefer to be in their homes.

This service mirrors what we will be doing in church so you can still feel part of St Maxentius Church, praising God and giving thanks for his world.

Sit comfortably in your worship place with your cross, Bible, candle, and add your prayers to ours.



GREETING

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ **and also with you.**

We meet in the name of God: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: God is one.

Lord, direct our thoughts and teach us to pray. Lift our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

INTRODUCTION

The service taking place in church today is not our usual type of service. We call it a Service of the Word and it focuses on the Word of God through the readings, prayers and sermon. We decided to do this so that we can get used to the constraints due to the precautions against COVID19.

We'll be celebrating Holy Communion next week, God willing, with distancing and the rest.

In format, it's pretty similar to what we have become used to in our Worship at Home but we have added some elements specifically for today. In church, we'll be blessing the Easter Candle, as we weren't able to do that on Easter Day. And we're including a thanksgiving for worshipping together again after so long.

A theme running through the readings for today is that God's word is active even when we struggle to see it. It doesn't return empty to him. If we can trust in that, we shall go out with joy!

CONFESSION

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.**

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name.**

Amen.

ABSOLUTION

**Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



PRAYER OF THE DAY

**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. Amen**

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55.10-13

Thus says the Lord:

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,
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.

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.
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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.



PSALM 65.9-13

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.
You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges,
softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning is now and shall be forever. Amen

SECOND READING Matthew 13. 1-9, 18-23

Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake.

Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen!

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

The Parable of the Sower Explained

'Hear then the parable of the sower. 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.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 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.

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.

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.'

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Everyone knows the parable of the Sower, and most people know how the writer of Matthew's gospel explained it. And it makes sense. We all know, perhaps from school, when we don't understand something we simply forget about it. For me it was physics: I am glad to say I haven't suffered badly by being ignorant of some basic ideas.

We do know that good intentions fade and we forget what we resolved to do. That's a phenomenon we revisit every new year.

Everyone knows that we are enthusiastic about an idea when someone is explaining it to us but we haven't grasped enough to be able to do anything with it outside that room. The explanation of the parable makes sense in everyday life.

But taken, as a whole the parable feels more than a bit depressing. All these people will encounter the Word of God but only a few will grow in faith as a result. So many more will fall away even when their initial response was enthusiastic. Was Jesus really saying that so much of his - or our - time will be wasted?

We're probably more conscious of this than ever these days. On top of the continued decline in church attendance (except where school places depend on it), we have the unknown effect of the closure of our churches due to Covid19. Three months without services may mean people have just got out of the habit.

Now we are able to worship together again it will be a different experience, lacking some of the warmth of human contact that makes any experience nourishing for us. We'll do what we can; of course, to engage with each other, but keeping our distance will have an effect.

It may be though that Jesus didn't exactly mean that to be the meaning to take from the story.

One of the things that would have shocked the first hearers would have been the farmer. What was he doing, chucking carefully stored seed, which was his livelihood

for the coming year, onto poor ground? He'd surely be more careful, making sure it fell where it stood the best chance of growing? You don't try to grow vegetables on your driveway, or not bother to get rid of the weeds on your patch of ground.

There's something about the farmer. Is he just hapless and careless, not really knowing his job? Or is he so keen for the harvest that he sows everywhere he can, and knows only some of it will grow. If we transfer that to God, there's a link with Luke's parable of the Lost Son – or, to give it its other name, the Prodigal Father. When we reflected on this parable in our Lent Group the generous outreaching love of the father came across so strongly. Whatever the younger son had done his father could not help himself but run to hug and hold him tight and throw a great party for his return. Prodigal, wasteful in the love that spilled out on this undeserving sinner.

And we see the same thing here in the parable of the Sower. The seed broadcast far and wide is God's Word of love flung out for everyone, however rich or poor their apparent interest, their 'soil'. His word is for all, whoever they are, whatever their past or current lives are like. In fact how much more miraculous is the harvest that struggles through the thorns, against all expectation?

Because that is the other message: there will be a harvest. It may not look like it at the moment, when despair or despondency weighs congregations down. For some of the first readers of the gospels persecution was the order of the day; imprisonment and death, loss of work and liberty. For them the message that God will bring forth the harvest was truly one they needed to hear.

But also for us; not facing those challenges but still at a loss to know how to bring in the increase. Perhaps we make like the farmer, spreading the love of God far and wide and not worrying about what the numbers are. The message might be to leave to God the harvest, which we may never see.

As I prepare to leave St Maxentius that's a question, I will never be able to answer: how many people came to faith as a result of what I did or said or was? Or how many people have felt the love of God for them through me? Thank goodness, vicars are not on performance related pay.

Maybe our job here at St Maxentius is to keep throwing wide the seed, the love, so that everyone we come across hears something of what it means and can let it grow. How can we keep that at the heart of our life as a church?

Let us pray the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire us in these present times and always. Amen

BLESSING THE EASTER CANDLE

We were not able to do this on Easter Day. As we get together for the first time, we mark the candle and say a blessing over it, ready to light at every baptism service and funerals.

The candle is marked with traditional symbols.

The cross is always the central symbol, most clearly identifying it as the Paschal candle



The Greek letters alpha and omega signify that God is the beginning and the end (from the Book of Revelation)

The current year 2020 represents God in the present amidst the congregation

Five studs are embedded in the candle to represent the five wounds of Christ: the three nails that pierced his hands and feet, the spear thrust into his side, and the thorns that crowned his head.

Almighty God, pour out your abundant blessing on this lighted candle, so that all who share in your holy mysteries may be filled with your grace and spiritual blessings. Once we were in darkness, but since we have become the Lord's people, we are in the light. Help us to live as people who belong to the light, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



CREED

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION



Father, you gave up your Son for us all.

You give us all things with him; you call us, justify us, glorify us.

Father in heaven **we give you thanks and praise.**

Jesus Christ died, was raised to life, and pleads for us at your right hand.

Who can separate us from your love?

Father in heaven **we give you thanks and praise**

For your sake, we face death all day long.

In your world, we face trouble and hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and death.

Father in heaven **we give you thanks and praise.**

But nothing separates us from your love:

neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any heavenly powers, neither the world above nor the world below nothing in all creation can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ.

Father in heaven **we give you thanks and praise.**

In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him, who loves us, and has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom and priests to serve you forever, with all the company of heaven, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Pray for your family, your friends, your neighbours; for all those in trouble or distress; for the sick, especially from Covid19; for those who have died and those who mourn them.

Pray for the renewal of our national life, a rebuilding of society to safeguard the earth and protect the vulnerable.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father in heaven...

Try this sung version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCxqjEz5hJ4>

BLESSING

Keep us, Father, in this community of faith, the Church of your Son Jesus Christ, and help us to confess him as Messiah and Lord in all we say and do. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us now and always. Amen.

Go in the peace of Christ: Thanks be to God