

Sunday 13 June 2021



Welcome to worship today wherever you are, either with us in person at Weoley Hill or sharing the video or printed sheet. As we have had brighter weather recently, we give thanks for the sunshine as it lifts our spirits.

‘Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.’ (Elizabeth Barrett Browning). Let us worship our Creator God, who has given us the miracle of life and sustains us through the sacred rhythms of planet Earth. Here we are, Creator God, Lord and Spirit, standing before you, grounded on the earth, our hands stretched high like a tree. You fill us with amazement, wonderful God. Amen.

Hymn: New every morning is the love

Opening prayers

Creator God, we bring to you all that is growing within us: for you to bless and nurture. We bring our prayers for the spread of your kingdom: for you to bless and nurture. We bring the initiatives for justice multiplying among nations: for you to bless and nurture. We bring the hopes and dreams, tiny and big, of all your children around the world: for you to bless and nurture. God of mystery, Sower, Saviour, Spirit, we worship you; and we ask you to give us: eyes to notice where the seeds of your kingdom are growing, courage to show them to others, faith enough to help nurture them, and a heart that delights in their harvest.

God of all, you do not force growth but nurture it. You do not start big but start small. Forgive us when we want too much too soon. You do not sow greedily but graciously. You do not hurry the harvest but hallow it. Forgive us when we want too much too soon. Forgive us, and accept the work of our hands, in Jesus’ name.

Living God, from a mustard seed to a tree, from I to we, In the mystery of the unseen, from brown field to green, in you we grow. By faith and not by sight, by day and by night, Forgiven and freed, through word and deed, in you we grow. As we sow and reap, as we laugh and weep, May your kingdom come, Father, Spirit, Son, as in you we grow. Amen.

Reading: Mark 4: 26-34

Reflection:

We all have different styles of learning and retaining what we have been taught. Some are easier for the majority to understand but there are some who find the usual styles more difficult. To me as an ex-teacher knowing my students and their needs allowed me to try to make them all understand the concepts I was teaching by explaining things in different ways.

Listening to a reflection is not necessarily the best style! This is what Jesus was doing with his telling of the parables. He was using everyday objects or situations that the people were familiar with and explaining that the Kingdom of God was like these things. He used many examples but, in the reading today from Mark we have the observation of how the seed grows into a plant for harvesting and the well-known parable of the mustard seed. Jesus was looking at the land around him and using the environment there to help explain what being part of God's kingdom is like. It is in the present tense not the future.

I remember several years ago Marilyn leading worship or part of it and giving everyone a mustard seed and a small wooden cross. I can't remember exactly what she said but I have the items to remember that occasion. It is that a tiny seed- mustard seeds are not the smallest can become a tree although we are not familiar with this type of tree. My grandson has grown an apple tree from a pip and he is waiting for it to produce fruit. It has taken about 7 years to get this size. The mustard seed was considered to be the smallest seed, but it grew into a huge plant. This is Mark's third parable of growth. In this parable, Jesus teaches that although the Kingdom of God started small, with Jesus and the disciples, it would grow and spread across the world to unlimited numbers of followers. The birds represent Gentile people. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God will include other nations and not just God's chosen people, the Jews. Mark's Gentile readers would have taken great comfort and hope from this parable.

Thomas Merton said a 'A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying [God]. It consents to God's creative love. It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree.'

Recall in your imagination, in as much detail as possible, a tree with which you are familiar. Trees can live for 100 or more years. Imagine how old your tree is. Once it was a small seed, a seed that trusted itself into the act

of letting go into death, as it sank into the soil, its outer shell cracking open as it absorbed water and nutrients and, of its very nature, began to grow. Roots went down, shoots up. And over many years it has become the tree you are seeing in your mind's eye, roots going as deep as the trunk and branches are high, roots giving its trunk stability to endure through all passing weathers. Remember some of the birds you have seen sheltering in its branches and other creatures or remember its fruitfulness. The tree 'IS' by letting itself be itself, by allowing itself to be the organism God created it to be. And that is all that God asks of any of us. Each year another circle of growth adds girth to the trunk. Each year it offers a fresh home to nesting birds, and perhaps fresh fruit or berries. Each year it is enfolded by different weathers. At the end of the tree's life, other creatures will make their home in its decaying wood. Or perhaps it will provide warmth, even shelter, for humans. It is so versatile and another important part of God's creation its roots hold the soil together and prevent erosion.

The natural world speaks to us of God's presence and nature. Tuning in to our place in the realities and rhythms of nature can help us to reflect on our spiritual journey with God, as does allowing praise to well up within us and lamenting our failure to help God lovingly tend creation. It is good to reflect on ways to pick up this urgent task together and individually.

Several of us have been appreciating nature more as we have been out and about on walks during lockdown, we have seen the seasons unfold and we are now emerging from spring into summer and so let us pray our faith grows more as we observe God's creation and appreciate it and help conserve it so much more. Plant growth continues throughout the day and night so all around the world plants continue to grow as does the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the same way as we entrust ourselves to God's wisdom, allowing God's life to unfold at its own pace within us, we give glory to God by being ourselves, by consenting to be who God created us to be.

Hymn: Now the green blade riseth

Prayers for the people and Lord's Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, it is hard sometimes not to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge facing us and the obstacles which seem to block our path. You call us to proclaim the gospel but so few seem interested in hearing it. You ask us to make disciples of all nations but only a handful seem willing to respond. We live in a world where faith is ridiculed and

your name casually dismissed, a world in which people live for today with no thought of tomorrow and in which good seems overpowered by evil. Instead of truth we see falsehood, instead of love, hatred, instead of peace, division, instead of joy, sorrow -the dawn of your kingdom apparently further away than ever rather than drawing near, and we feel powerless to do anything about it. Teach us, despite everything, not to lose heart. Help us to understand that we have a part to play in your purpose but that the final victory is down to you. Give us strength simply to do what you ask of us as best we can and to leave the rest in your hands, confident that, though we may not see it, the seed you have sown is growing, and the day will come when your kingdom will be established. Let us pray for the leaders in the G7 discussions that they come to suitable and just agreements for all peoples of the world. Let us pray for each other and those who are not worshipping with us in person that they will be able to join us at some point in the future. Let us have a brief moment of silence to bring our concerns to God. ... We bring all these prayers to you our saviour Lord Jesus Christ as we say the words you taught us... Our Father ...

Offertory prayer

Gracious God we ask your blessing on our contributions given with love in different ways. Our contributions of money, and care for creation and all whom we meet as we serve your kingdom here on earth. Amen

Hymn: Go forth and tell

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve God's world. It is beautiful and you are part of it. It is our sacred commission to help God love it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God be with us all as part of creation and with all whom we love.

Amen.