

Sunday 13th June 2021

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us,
though separate let us worship together in God.

Suggested Hymn

God who spoke in the beginning

Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Creator God we gather together in your presence to praise you and to share together as we listen for your voice.

You speak through creation, we see your presence in the beauty around us, in the fragility of life and the many patterns that come together in wondrous ways to create the world in which we live. For all this we give you thanks.

You speak through our conversations as we learn from each other and share discoveries, all of which echo with your love for humanity. You speak through the coincidences we take for granted, and the unexpected events which lift our hearts and remind us of your love. For all this we give you thanks.

You speak through prophets and teachers as they help us to unravel the mysteries of history and the lessons we can take from the experiences of life. You speak to us as Christians when we study the message of Jesus and seek to emulate his ways in our own lives. For all this we give you thanks.

You speak to us in the still small voice of our conscience as we connect with you, opening ourselves to the oneness that is creation.

You speak to us.

Lord's Prayer

Reading

Mark 4:26-34

Story

Choosing a king (based on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13)

In a land far away, and in a time before our time, there was a prophet of God who mourned for a king. The king was not dead but although he had once been a great king, he had become corrupted by his own power and was no longer faithful to God. The prophet spent long hours wondering if he had done the right thing in choosing this king, was there anything he could have done to save the king, was he still a good prophet?

Into his pondering came a still small voice, a questioning voice which he had heard before but now it was louder and more insistent, and the prophet knew it was time to let go of his doubts and to once again be a prophet of God. There was a new king to anoint, he must pack his oil and head out to the land of Bethlehem, but he was still hesitant, he worried that the old king would hear what he was doing and have him killed. The still small voice within him spoke again and listening he took with him a heifer to sacrifice. Arriving at the city gates he was greeted by the elders who asked if he came peaceably. He replied he had come to offer a sacrifice and invited them to attend, he also invited Jesse and his sons for God had spoken and he knew that the new king would be one of the sons of Jesse.

When everyone had gathered the prophet looked around and seeing Jesse's eldest son thought this must be the new king, but the still small voice within said no, not this son, and the voice then reminded the prophet that God looks on the inside, to the heart, rather than the outward appearance. Now Jesse had many sons and one by one they passed before the prophet, and one by one the small voice said no. Somewhat perplexed the prophet asked Jesse if all his sons were present and Jesse replied that his youngest son was out with the flocks. The prophet asked that he be brought to the gathering. When the youngest son arrived, his outward appearance was stunning and the prophet, remembering the words of God was doubtful but the still small voice within immediately told him to anoint the boy, and thus David, the youngest son of Jesse, was anointed as the future king.

There is a wisdom which leads and guides us, a voice within which whispers the truth and when we follow its guidance great things can happen.

HW21

Suggested Song
Tune Skye Boat Song
Listen [here](#)

*Open the book and listen again,
hear in the words of old,
God's love for you, God's love for me,
here in these pages told.*

Long, long ago, stories were told,
meaning and wonder sought,
listening now, we hear again
stories our ancestors taught.
Open the book...

Stories of love, stories of war,
stories that make us grow.
When we connect our life with theirs
then love begins to flow.
Open the book...

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Reflection

What is your favourite fairy-tale, and why?

Fairy-tales were written to teach a moral, and some of them are quite frightening. Many of us have been influenced by the Disney versions and the light, uplifting songs can stay longer in the mind than the fright of the wicked witch and her actions, or the threat of bad fairies, but teaching morals often involved creating fear. These days we are encouraged to use reasoning with children, helping them to see and own the consequences, or possible consequences of poor life choices.

In our reading from Mark, we are reminded of how Jesus used parables. Parables are stories but unlike fairy-tales they are designed to encourage thinking by shocking their listeners and making them question what they are hearing. William Bausch in his book *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, explores parables and their use reminding us that the original context of these stories was a newly emerging culture engaging with an established orthodox one and confronting it with its inevitable demise. The parables are transitional stories intended to disturb and challenge the hearers and motivate them to move into a radically new way of engaging with the world and the call of the times. Jesus' message was about the new reign of God, an invitation to work towards a new world order marked by right relationships of justice, love, compassion and liberation, it is global in its geography and practical in its application. Bausch gives six ways in which parables work: They,

- Uncover our competitiveness and envy and invite us into brother/sisterhood instead
- Uncover our wrong centring and invite us into right centring
- Uncover our need to hoard and invite us to share and include
- Uncover our assumptions and invite us to turn them around
- Uncover our timidity and invite us to risk all for the sake of God's Kingdom
- Uncover our self-centredness, despair and distrust and invite us to hope.

There are eight parables in Mark's gospel, seven of which are also found in Luke and Matthew along with fourteen others in Matthew and twenty-one others in Luke. The eighth parable in Mark, found only in Mark is the parable of the growing seed which we heard earlier, alongside the parable of the mustard seed. If we approach parables as stories with a challenge rather than a message, we need to take time with them, and we need to uncover the shock or the surprise, often within the context of those listening for the first time.

The two parables in our reading are, like many of Jesus' parables, initially simple in appearance and yet beneath that lies the real challenge. Both of these parables are short but the first one, the growing seed, is probably the most overlooked, and maybe that is not so surprising given that it is quite remarkable in that nothing happens. A man sows some seeds and leaves them as he gets on with life until the harvest is ready. He does nothing to nurture them, he is not involved in their care. These seeds grow automatically due to nature. Susan Durber suggests this is a revelation of grace, something amazing, life-giving, and wondrous happens like a gift from nowhere.

What do we think about this story, what do we think about the man's actions, did he deserve the harvest? Our response may well be influenced by our own need to be in control, we like to make plans and know that things will happen but maybe this parable tells us we are not in control and things

happen despite us. Maybe this parable, no more than two sentences, tells us something quite deep about our need to be doing things and planning things when all the time things are already happening around us and the Spirit of God is at work before us. It does not say we can be lazy and leave everything to others, but it does remind us to stop and look at what God is already doing and work with God. I remember being at a planning meeting for an evangelistic event in Stroud and feeling very uncomfortable when someone urged us to look out of the window at the people going about their business below and telling us that if we did not pray for them, they were lost, it felt as if we were being invited to cut God out of the process, it was all down to us. I did not get involved in the event. In our story about the prophet Samuel, we see him working with God, and being reminded that God's choice is not always the obvious choice and we need to look deeper than the surface.

The second of Mark's parables is far more familiar, and yet it too has a deeper message. I wonder what strikes you when you hear this parable: Jesus also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

If you are a cook, you may have a pot of mustard seeds in the cupboard; you may also have a pot of nigella seeds or black onion seeds, which are the smaller? If you are a gardener, you will probably have handled many seeds some of which are tiny compared to a mustard seed, so why does this parable tell us that the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds? The second question is, have you ever seen a mustard tree, or even a bush large enough for birds to nest in, or that cast enough shade to sit under? So, what could this parable be hiding amidst these less than obvious statements?

The kingdom of God is surprising, you plant a mustard seed, and you get a tree. The kingdom of God is nothing to do with common sense and everything to do with miracles and grace. We do not need to be in control, we are part of something much bigger. We do not need to feel overwhelmed because our small gifts can, and probably will, achieve amazing things we never expect or predict. Our offering will feed the hungry, set the captives free and help the lame to leap. We offer what we can, and God's grace will do the rest. That though, is not an excuse to go back to bed, or not plan, because through our planning we will discover the depth of what we have to offer, and through our conversations we will discover the things we can be involved in which are an expression of God's love already happening in the world.

So then, parables are to be wrestled with, they are to be questioned, they are to uncover our deepest feelings and place them in the context of the Kingdom. Sometimes, we will not like the answers we discover, like the rich young man, and sometimes we will find the reassurance that we seek. Always, we will discover a truth about being in creation, being in God, being love in the world.

Listen to this gentle song and then relax and read the story that follows.

Song Come and find the quiet centre

Listen [here](#)

Story

Once upon a time, in a land far away lived a giant. He was a kindly giant, but people just saw a giant and remembered stories about fierce and terrifying ogres, and so they were afraid and stayed away. The giant became lonelier and lonelier and sad, and because he was sad and lonely he became frightened and in his fear he became angry, and when he saw people he shouted a lot and so he became what they imagined.

Then one day a young girl wandered into the giant's forest. She was deaf and had not heard all the stories about the giant, so she did not fear him. She saw him chopping wood with an enormous axe and at the same time the giant saw the girl. He stopped chopping wood and shouted, waving the axe wildly above his head. The girl could not hear his shouting and imagined he was waving to her, so she went closer. The giant had not expected that and dropped the axe in amazement, it landed on his foot, and he began hopping in pain. The girl ran to him and gently held his foot, rubbing the rapidly forming bruise. The giant was amazed, here was someone who was not afraid of him, a friend. He

reached down and took the girl's hand and so began a friendship. They shared many times together, the giant showing the girl the wonders of the forest and the girl showing the giant the wonders of friendship.

Pause - Reflect on what if anything surprises you and what feelings it evokes. Now read the final sentence which changes the nature of this story.

Others heard of the friendship and came to build their own friendship with the giant and soon he had a whole new family.

Heather Whyte 2014

Suggested Hymn

Tune Hyfrydol Listen [here](#)

Gathered here to hear the stories
told by people long ago.
Stories of their lives and witness
to the God who helped them grow.
As we listen to their stories
we reflect on what we hear,
seeing God *within* our story,
sensing God is always near.

Gathered here we share our stories,
seeing God on every page.
Stories told of love and laughter,
sometimes joy and sometimes rage.
In their telling is revealed
all our human wants and woes,
but we also learn to treasure
how God's love throughout them flows.

Gathered here to share our witness
So, we pray for open hearts.
May our stories, joined together,
help us cherish what they chart;
you are one with all your people,
we have never been alone.
May our lives reflect the story
through which all your love is shown.

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Prayers

Eternal God, present around and within us, the still small voice and the billboard, as we share together, we offer you our prayers and the space for us to listen. As we look around our world, and the communities in which we live and serve, may we be open to your Spirit's leading and conscious of your loving actions making a difference. As we share together may we aware your voice within our conversations, and the ideas that could become your love in the world when we work within the knowledge of your presence.

Loving God may we open and receptive to the Spirit within us, guiding us to create loving actions that make a difference.

When we see injustice in the form of prejudice, intolerance, inequality and discrimination may we be creative in balancing what we see with the challenge of your love. Planning to make a difference may we remember your presence in creation and work with you to create new opportunities for growth and encouragement through practical solutions, working with those already making a difference.

Loving God may we open and receptive to the Spirit within us, guiding us to create loving actions that make a difference.

May we take every opportunity to share the story of your amazing love, our story of your presence in our lives but also take the time to listen to the stories of the people around us, offering them the space to reflect on life amidst the world that is yet to become the Kingdom of love. In our journeying may we always make time to sense your presence and to listen for your still small voice guiding and encouraging us.

Loving God may we open and receptive to the Spirit within us, guiding us to create loving actions that make a difference.

As we reflect on our sharing this morning, the things we have heard and the things we have felt we offer this time to listen for your voice within and around us.

Silence

Loving God may we open and receptive to the Spirit within us, guiding us to create loving actions that make a difference.

Loving God, we offer you the path in front of us, the things we have planned and the space yet to be planned in the coming week. May our actions be full of the promise of your love. May our minds be receptive to your voice in the words of family, friends and strangers, and the ideas that bubble up through the conversations we hear and of which we are a part. As we move towards a new tomorrow with new challenges may we always be open to new opportunities and prepared to let go of past ways to allow love to grow.

Loving God may we open and receptive to the Spirit within us, guiding us to create loving actions that make a difference.

These prayers we offer as followers of the way of Jesus. Amen

Offertory

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

Suggested song O Lord all the world belongs to you

Listen [here](#)

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.