

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 19 July 2020 ('Seventh after Pentecost')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for 19 July, the seventh Sunday after Pentecost, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica and Rachel for their contributions to this week's edition.

Music¹ – Prelude, from Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007
performed by Yo-Yo Ma
composed by Johann Sebastian Bach

Call to Worship:

God's love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit he has given us.

Here is the proof that we dwell in God and God dwells in us: he has given his Spirit to us.

An uplifting metrical version of Psalm 100, in the arrangement composed by Vaughan Williams for the Queen's coronation in 1953: *All people that on earth do dwell*.

Hymn: *All people that on earth do dwell* (Psalm 100)
(Arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams for the 1953 coronation)
The Wallace Collection, Choir of King's College, Cambridge,
Sir Stephen Cleobury & Benjamin Bayl
From the Album *England, my England*

*All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with fear, his praise forth tell,
Come ye before him, and rejoice.*

*The Lord, ye know, is God indeed,
Without our aid he did us make;
We are his folk, he doth us feed,
And for his sheep he doth us take.*

*O enter then his gates with praise,
Approach with joy his courts unto;
Praise, laud, and bless his name always,
For it is seemly so to do.*

*For why? the Lord our God is good:
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.*

*To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
The God whom heaven and earth adore,
From men and from the Angel-host
Be praise and glory evermore. Amen.*

Prayers

Lord God, we are your sheep. You are our shepherd. And we praise you for your care of us, your provision of resources for us, your guidance to us, and the supreme gift of Jesus your Son.

Through him we can understand both the depth of your love for your Creation and your people and how we can live in your world, observing your rules, by which we care for your world and for each other.

In this unfamiliar way we come to you once again to thank you, to bring our worship and praise. We are sorely missing the best things about being together. The sense of congregation that is much more than just gathering in numbers. The sight of friends, the variety of voices, the conversations before and after our services, and at closer range than lockdown restrictions allow.

Yet we know that you are with us whether we gather and listen in dozens or in isolation, in churches or while taking exercise or indoors in our individual homes. Help us not just to listen to these words but to listen for you. For we know that like a shepherd you never stop caring and calling to put us on the right path.

Forgive us when we go astray. Forgive us when we fail to take even today's limited opportunities to do good for others. We know that the ills of the world are not your will. Forgive us when we doubt your love and care.

May we always rejoice with the psalmist that you are always with us, and active in your world through your people.

With all your people we offer our prayers to you in Jesus name, and join our voices with theirs in the family prayer of the church...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Scriptureⁱⁱ: Psalm 86:11-17

¹¹ Teach me your way, Lord,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.

¹² I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name for ever.

¹³ For great is your love towards me;
you have delivered me from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.

¹⁴ Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God;
ruthless people are trying to kill me –
they have no regard for you.

¹⁵ But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

¹⁶ Turn to me and have mercy on me;
show your strength on behalf of your servant;
save me, because I serve you
just as my mother did.

¹⁷ Give me a sign of your goodness,
that my enemies may see it and be put to shame,
for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Reflection (1)

Great is your love towards me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead

A fortnight ago we heard on the radio from Michael Rosen, the children's author (he wrote *We're going on a bear hunt*) about his experience of being ill in hospital with the Covid-19 virus. He had had to go into Intensive Care, and he was in an induced coma and on a ventilator for 47 days. I was particularly struck by his reference to the dreams and hallucinations that he experienced, and having no sense at all of time passing or of what his own condition actually was and what his family was experiencing as they waited for news.

If I find the thought of catching this virus scary, then it is mainly because of this kind of experience and thoughts of perhaps having to *return* to life support. In late September of 2009 I was admitted to Intensive Care at Walsgrave, with pancreatitis. I spent four weeks hooked up to a ventilator and have the tracheostomy scar to prove it. Like Michael Rosen, when I emerged I didn't know how long I had been on the ward, how close I had been to death, or what the truth was about the family experience – though at least in my case they had been able to visit. The scary bit is what went on in my head while being treated, as well as the most basic things I was unable to do when I came round. Speaking. Walking.

I won't go on about it and you mustn't think I am perpetually beset by flashbacks. Those days are behind me. But if you see me taking extreme care in returning to congregational worship, you'll maybe understand why.

Of course the other thing I emerged from hospital with, after a free seven-week stay rounded off with heaps of physiotherapy and rehab, was gratitude. I'd echo what Michael Rosen said on the Today Programme, a message that I find aligns entirely with our Christian obligations to our community.

...I wanted to say that the NHS is this wonderful, incredible feat of the imagination, where people who don't know each other care for each other, for the social good.

People who don't know each other care for each other.

We should **all** be thankful for those who hear a call to this service, and respond.

Music: *Ubi caritas (Where there is charity and love, God is there)*
sung by The Taizé Community Choir
from the album *Songs of Taizé*

Scripture

Matthew 13.24-30 and 36-43

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ "An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Reflection (2)

With fewer reasons and opportunities than usual to be away from home of an evening doing things, attending meetings or even going to the gym, Erica and I have revisited some of our favourite films and TV series, watching some of the DVD collection.

Sometimes this has been an adventure movie, sometimes a love story, sometimes comedy. Occasionally all of these.

A lot of the films and I suppose much of literature or any other medium for telling a story turn out to be about goodies and baddies. And when the story is well told, it will challenge our assumptions, and not all the baddies turn out to be bad; not all of the goodies turn out to be good. God recognises this, too. It's his world, after all.

In this week's Gospel reading we find ourselves in the midst of a group of parables of the kingdom, illustrating the way God works to develop his people, to offer them life and to react to their response.

If you listened to last week's episode of this podcast you will recall the parable of the sower. The sower spreads his seed around, all parts of the ground receive the same seed, the same opportunity, but all parts in turn react and respond in different ways. Some seed fell on stony ground. You know the story. There seem to be rather more opportunities for the seed to fail than for the seed to succeed, don't there? But take heart in the sight out there, wherever you see a field of corn or rape or whatever. There is far more seed makes it than doesn't. The harvest can be large, even if the risks to it are substantial.

And having looked at last week's parable, let's turn to this week's. To sum it up,

A man sowed good seed in his field. But his enemy came by night and sabotaged the crop. Weeds sprang up. His servants noticed and asked him what to do.

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like this. A very similar message to the parable of the sower, you might say. But perhaps while the parable of the sower is about **potential**, the parable of the wheat and the weeds is about **reality**. About what really happens.

Here we are not talking about the sowing of the same seed across lots of different types of ground. We are not talking about the way the same initial opportunity can be either grasped or not by whoever hears God's word and reacts to it or doesn't.

We are talking about competition. And we are talking about different types of seed. And we are talking about distinguishing the results from one another. The goodies from the baddies.

This parable, it's a very harvest type of message, isn't it? Straight out of "Come ye thankful, people, come..." "Wheat and tares together sown, unto joy or sorrow grown".

God in Jesus, the sower of the seed and the owner of the field, knows what is growing there.

And there are some who **would** sow a different type of seeds. In Roman times it was an explicit offence – and it strikes me they don't put something into law and make it a crime unless someone has at some point done it, or tried to – it was an explicit offence to sow the plant Darnel in amongst wheat, as an act of revenge. It was agricultural sabotage.

Where do we stand on the question of the enemy sowing seeds in opposition, as it were, to God? Jesus in his explanation to the disciples says:

"The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels."

This is one way of characterising the way people are. In the earlier parable, Jesus acknowledged that some people are going to respond, others are not.

In this, he is saying that some are predisposed, not just to not respond, but to work against the kingdom of God. The world is filled, like our films, with goodies and baddies.

But also like the film plot, are we deceived as to who these good and bad people really are? An important part of the message of this story lies in the instruction to the workers not to pull up the weeds too early.

God doesn't need to give himself instructions or hints as to how to deal with us at the day of judgement. The message is for **us**. Not just a warning to try to make sure we are among the good plants, the healthy plants, the worthwhile wheat and not the useless weeds.

It's also a warning not to look across at our neighbour and judge too soon. Not to take on ourselves the task of judgement at all. Ours is the tending task, the treasuring task, the stewardship of God's creation and people - that we talk about a lot and perhaps don't do enough.

God is here. The King is among us. **He's** looking at the field, **he's** deciding when to bring in the crop. **He** gives us the opportunity to be what we can be, by the time harvest comes around.

Prayers of Intercession

We punctuate our prayers of Intercession with words from Psalm 62:

*On God alone I wait silently; God my deliverer, God my strong tower. [...a setting by John L Bell, sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community, from their album *Psalms of Patience, Protest and Praise*]*

On God alone I wait silently; God my deliverer, God my strong tower

Lord God we wait for change. Change for the better, an opportunity to resume the things we enjoy, the activities we feel comfortable with, an environment in which we feel safe.

We wait for a time when the Church can be a channel of your peace, a guide for the lost and an example to those looking for a fresh purpose.

We wait for clarity on our own purpose in a changed world. Help us to see where the next part of our journey should lead and give us courage and faith as we take the next steps on our path.

On God alone I wait silently; God my deliverer, God my strong tower

Lord God, we wait for solutions and safety for the world. We pray for researchers and scientists, from epidemiologists to statisticians. Inspire them as the whole world itself waits for vaccines to immunize and drugs to alleviate the symptoms of the virus to which all are vulnerable.

We wait for commitment from politicians and industrialists to share and support, to collaborate and cooperate in helping all members of the human family to do more than just survive. In a world where inequalities and injustice all too often determine who lives and who dies, may this crisis be a watershed and the new normal be a better place for all.

On God alone I wait silently; God my deliverer, God my strong tower

We wait for the day when we are permitted not just to meet but to come within touching, hugging, whispering distance of all our family and friends.

While we wait, keep us in your care. Give us your strength, and at every point of decision a sense of the right thing to do.

Be with those others who are waiting. Waiting for test results. Waiting and hoping for loved ones to emerge from hospital. Waiting for a chance to resume treatment where it is paused. Waiting to celebrate the life of a loved one who has died.

On God alone I wait silently; God my deliverer, God my strong tower

In all of this give us love for one another and the grace to act as well as speak, where we can make a difference.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn *Make me a channel of your peace*
by Sebastian Temple
sung by the Celebration Choir
from the album *Hymns Ancient and Modern*

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this song in this transcript, although they can be found online if you are so equipped.]

Blessing

May God who rescued his people from exile give us all hope of a return to better days in a better world.

May Jesus who paid the ransom of his life to redeem all people inspire us to love our neighbours.

May the Spirit which has been with God since the beginning be with us to guide us through these uncharted times.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all today and for ever. Amen

Music: *Prelude from The Birds (Gli Uccelli)* by Ottorino Respighi
Performed by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields
Conducted by Sir Neville Mariner, from the album
Respighi: Ancient Airs & Dances; The Birds; La boutique fantasque

Thank you for listening to our podcast. [on <https://revdbill.uk>] Feedback and comments are always welcome, as are volunteers to record themselves reading our scripture.

Credits

The Prelude, from Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, by Johann Sebastian Bach was performed by Yo-Yo Ma.

All people that on earth do dwell (Psalm 100) in the arrangement by Ralph Vaughan Williams was sung by the Choir of King's College Cambridge conducted by Stephen Cleobury with The Wallace Collection and Benjamin Bayl, taken from the Album *England, my England*

Ubi caritas (Where there is charity and love, God is there) was sung by The Taizé Community Choir and taken from the album *Songs of Taizé*

On God alone I wait silently, a setting of part of Psalm 62 by John L Bell, was sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community, taken from their album *Psalms of Patience, Protest and Praise*.

Make me a channel of your peace by Sebastian Temple was sung by the Celebration Choir from the album *Hymns Ancient and Modern*

And the *Prelude from The Birds (Gli Uccelli)* by Ottorino Respighi was performed by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, conducted by Sir Neville Mariner, from the album *Respighi: Ancient Airs & Dances; The Birds; La boutique fantasque*

ⁱ All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

ⁱⁱ Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition