

Greatham, Empshott and Hawkley with Priors Dean

Prayers at Home

12th July 2020

Hymn

Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
"My God and King!"
The heav'ns are not too high,
God's praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
God's praises there may grow.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
"My God and King!"

Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
"My God and King!"
The church with psalms must shout:
no door can keep them out.
But, more than all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
"My God and King!"

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Tune: Luckington by Basil Harwood (1859-1949)

Introduction

I love George Herbert's hymn: 'Let all the world in every corner sing' though I'm sure you feel the irony of using it at a time when what we can't do, is sing. It is more a case of going into a distant corner to avoid spreading germs which is of course what a lot of people are doing. What we cannot do is sing together. Poor George Herbert would find these times very difficult. In the hymn he says 'the church with psalms must shout' – and we can't do that either. The guidelines say 'no shouting in church', not that it happens in our churches very often but you get the point. What we love to do – we can't do. The 'church with psalms must shout, no door can keep them out' – o yes it can – the doors have been shut – but now very gently, they are edging open

I have spent some time with the psalms over recent months and the more I do, the more I learn. The Psalm set for today is a short, a short portion of Psalm 119 the phrase that sticks in my mind is this. 'The Lord is a light to my path and a lantern to our feet.' The portion of that psalm is in this week's order of service – do read it if you can.

We need to tread very carefully in the coming weeks and months remembering our responsibility not just for ourselves but for others. With church wardens and PCCs we will be looking carefully at how much risk is acceptable but alongside that activity I hope that at all times that verse will lurk in our minds. 'The Lord is a light to my path and a lantern to our feet.'

Psalm 119:105-112

Your word is a lantern to my feet
and a light upon my path.
I have sworn and will fulfil it,
to keep your righteous judgements.
I am troubled above measure;
give me life, O Lord, according to your word.
Accept the freewill offering of my mouth, O Lord,
and teach me your judgements.
My soul is ever in my hand,
yet I do not forget your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your commandments.
Your testimonies have I claimed as my heritage for ever;
for they are the very joy of my heart.
I have applied my heart to fulfil your statutes:
always, even to the end.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Reading Matt 13:1-9,18-23

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

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When 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. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;²¹ 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.^[c] ²²As 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. ²³But 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."

Reflection

Peter Sutton

In part, it's because of who St Matthew was that Jesus comes across as a rabbi and teacher, more so than in the other gospels. Here especially, Jesus is a great storyteller. We are reliant on the four Gospels. Each tells us the story of Jesus in different ways because the Gospel writers were different people who were writing for different networks of people. None of them tells the whole story of Jesus in terms of a chronological list of events and each reveal Jesus in a way that they knew their readers would understand.

I once went to a conference where the inevitable happened – we were split up into groups. Not randomly, but on this occasion, we were asked to group according to the newspaper we prefer to read. There was, as you might expect, an extraordinary amount of agreement. The rebel in me wanted the next group session to mix us all up but it was a church conference and at church conferences they like people to agree!

Matthew was writing in the last quarter of the first century and his audience was mostly Jewish. Matthew's point was to communicate that Jesus in his life, death and resurrection was the fulfillment of their epic story. The rabbis that his readers knew were people who told stories and so Jesus was someone they could easily relate to – even though he was incredibly different. His stories were punchy and dramatic and sometimes cut to the bone.

Like this one today. A sower went out to sow and his method of sowing seemed all a bit random so the success of the plant was totally dependent on the condition of the soil where the seed landed. Some will grow and flourish and others will barely get started and simply die.

For me, the story is not about the seed or the way it is tossed by the sower. It's all about the soil or in other words, its about the way we receive God's love and what we allow it to do in our lives. Do we squeeze it out or do we let it flourish in the way we live – in perhaps a more Christ-like way?

Jesus as rabbi was as much more a poser of questions than he was of answers. So a question to wrap up with. What shall I do with God's love this week?

Ruth and Keith Wey from Greatham lead our prayers this week.

Prayers

Let us pray

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon our path.

Loving God, in the parables of Jesus you teach us how to live.
In this new week with all its hopes and challenges
help us to learn from every new experience and from each new story we hear.

Lord hear our prayer.

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon our path.

God of all, in the words of Jesus you sow the seeds of perfect life.
In this new week help us to plant good things in the world around us

Lord hear our prayer.

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon our path.

God of all, in Christ you see more deeply than the colour of our skin, our gender, our resources, our politics or even, the strength of our faith.
In this new week give to everyone a seed of your love and compassion to plant in daily life.
Give contentment to the anxious, patience to the impatient and courage to frightened.

Lord hear our prayer.

Your word is a lantern to my feet and a light upon our path.

God of love, you feel the pain of those who suffer and the anguish of those who mourn.
In this new week bring healing and wholeness to those who are ill, strength and wisdom to carers and healers
and hope to those who are left alone.

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

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that 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.

Conclusion

The first 'back to Church' service happens in Greatham this weekend and we will look to see what we have learned for the coming weeks. Church News has details of where services are and if you would like to come please let me know first so that we can manage the numbers, organise seating and appropriate distancing. Church News also has information about how communion will happen where we bring our own small piece of bread and our own cup or glass. If you have any questions – do get in touch.

Let's pray for God's blessing.

God of love, be the light and lantern for the pathways of this coming week; help us to be to be receptive to your word and to share your love with others.

May God who is Father, son and Holy Spirit bless us now and always.

Amen.