

## The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

### Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified:  
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,  
that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth  
to the glory of your name;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### Readings

#### **A reading from the prophecy of Isaiah. ( 55. 10-13)**

For 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.

#### **A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans. ( 8. 1-11)**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

**Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew. ( 13. 1-9, 18-23)**

That same day 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!'

'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.'

**Reflection**

Most of us value success – it may be just completing the crossword rather than getting our dream job but it makes us feel good especially when someone else recognises it. In our culture there is a lot of pressure to succeed. It can be hard to cope with failure whether at school, at work or in a relationship or even the smallest task. Not measuring up to our own expectations or those of others can leave us feeling demoralised or even depressed.

Our gospel reading this week is one of the best known and loved of the parables and it teaches us about success and failure. The sower experiences both. Most of his seed is wasted when it meets with rocks or birds or thorns. He knows that he has to make allowance for this but it does not stop him from scattering his seed. He knows that even with these failures some of his seed will take root and flourish and that at the end, their will be a harvest.

Jesus was, of course, talking about himself and his work. He was the the sower scattering the seed of God's word. What he said would often fall on deaf ears or be misunderstood. His closest friends were proving to be slow pupils. Yet, he said, in spite of this he would continue doing what God had sent him to do. He knew that even with unfavourable odds, at the end of the day there would be a harvest. As Isaiah prophesied (in our first reading) God's word would not return to him empty.



In telling that parable Jesus was not only speaking about himself but also giving us a way of looking at our own lives. There are times when we should keep soldiering on against unfavourable odds. This is not to say that we should keep banging our heads against a brick wall. There are situations where the prudent thing to do is to throw in the towel (too many metaphors!!) -

there were towns where Jesus had to walk away because he was not wanted. Yet, there are times when we have to keep on doing what we can even when it seems that the obstacles are insurmountable. Various versions of the birds of the air, and of rocky and thorny soil can threaten to wear us down, but God may be calling us to be faithful to the good work that we are doing. It was Mother Teresa who said God does not ask us to be successful but to be faithful. Like me, I am sure that you can think of examples of that kind of faithfulness – the offspring caring for a cantankerous parent, the charity worker seeing insufficient funds coming in at present to complete their project.

This kind of persistence illustrates how God relates to each of us. The parable suggests that God gives even the most unlikely people and places the opportunity to hear his word and respond to it. We all tend to assess the likely return before we make an investment. Today's parable tells us that God is not as calculating as we often are. He scatters his word, his Spirit, liberally without discrimination. As Matthew tells us a little earlier in his gospel God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. It is reassuring to know that God is wasteful and persistent to us and it encourages us to keep on responding and 'doing our bit' even if we feel that we are working in the face of failure.

*Jesus Christ is calling, calling in the streets,  
'Come and walk faith's tightrope, I will guide your feet.'  
Listen, Lord Jesus, let my fears be few;  
walk one step before me, I will follow you.*