St Andrews Uniting Church Glenbrook Worship-at-Home 1

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY IN PENITECOST 19 JULY 2020

seeds struggling

tor space

CALL TO WORSHIP God be with us in our houses and homes, **just as God is with us in our churches and cathedrals.** As God's scattered community, we come together, in our isolation, as one. So let us worship **As the farmer scatters the seed may the fruits of the Spirit**

be plentiful among us, wherever we may be.

SING: 'For Everyone Born' by Shirley Erena Murray Or Listen on YouTube: <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmUIJvzRal4</u>

For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread, a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For woman and man, a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding the share, with wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man, a system that's fair,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song, the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For just and unjust, a place at the table, abuser, abused, with need to forgive, in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy, for just and unjust, a new way to live,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For gay and for straight, a place at the table, a covenant shared, a welcoming space, a rainbow of race and gender and colour, for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be, to work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be free,

> and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace: yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy!

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Creator God,

you are the source of all that is: the life in every living thing: birds and beasts; fish and fowl; crops and the locusts that devour them; trees and the diseases that threaten them; wildflowers, which are beautiful in one place, and troublesome weeds in another.

You made them all, and you made us: not wholly good or wholly bad, but full of creative potential, which, like yours, can be used for good or for harm; squandered or never allowed to flourish.

We come to you today, not so much to make our confession, as to open ourselves up to your inspection: ready to be surprised by the good that may reveal; hoping not to be too discouraged by what is harmful and what needs to be changed.

But first, we need to open our eyes and look, with you, at the ripening harvest of our lives. What shoots of new growth can we see? What is there in us that is stronger and healthier than it was before?

Let us give thanks: with God and to God, for every growth in grace; every lesson learned;

every kindness shown; every struggle overcome. Let us ask for help to nurture and encourage every seed of life that God has planted.

And now, as we continue looking inwards, what else can we see? Are there weeds of tiredness or frustration; thorns of envy or of fear that threaten to choke the life of the kingdom, growing in us?

Let us acknowledge, before God, the dangers that we face and the temptations that draw us. Let us promise not to feed these weeds with our time or water them with our attention, but to trust God, the farmer, to deal with them, when the time is right.

Lord of all life, may the seeds of your kingdom, grow in us, and be allowed to flourish, and may we share with all your faithful people in the joy of the harvest feast. Amen.

STORY: A Child's Garden By Michael Foreman



The boy saw it after a night of rain, a speck of green in the rubble, peeking up towards the sunlight.

He moved some broken bricks so nothing would fall and crush the tiny plant. He didn't know what sort of plant it was, a flower or a weed; he just knew it would struggle to survive.

The boy searched around and found an old can which held a little rainwater. He brought it to the plant.

"Drink up," he whispered. "Drink up." The sun was climbing in the sky and the boy gave the plant shade with some old sacking and wire.

The boy's world was a place of ruin and rubble, ringed by a fence of barbed wire. In the hot, dry summer the air was thick with dust. Faraway hills shimmered in the haze.





The boy knew that cool streams flowed in those hills. He used to go there with his father, but now the hills were on the wrong side of the wire.

Over the following weeks he cared for his secret garden. Soon the green tendrils reached to the high barbed wire fence. Now the boy could see it was a vine - a grape vine.

It spread along the fence, and gave shade to its own tender roots which, in turn, sent out more shoots.



Birds and butterflies came bringing seeds and pollen on their wings. The garden grew. It was no longer a secret. Friends came to sit in its shade, and it became a playground for the children.

The, one day, soldiers came and destroyed everything. They threw the vine in a ditch on the other side of the wire.





The boy thought his heart would break.

Winter came.

The boy and his family shivered in the cold and damp of their ruined home.



Spring came late. After the first night of rain for weeks, the boy noticed green shoots all along the ditch. Some seeds from his vine must have survived the winter. He worried about the new shoots. He couldn't get close enough to water them. They were on the other side of the wire.

Then, one evening, he saw a little girl playing by the ditch. She had a bucket and she was sprinkling water on the tiny plants. Each evening she returned.

The boy hoped the soldiers wouldn't notice. But they didn't seem to mind plants growing on their side of the fence.





Then, one day, the boy saw tiny specks of green peeping from the rubble where his garden had been. "Look!" he yelled. "Come and see! My vine has come back!"

He began collecting water and once more tended his garden.

Soon it reached the wire where it became entwined with the green tendrils from the little girl's side.

> The barbed wire disappeared under leafy shade and the new garden became home once more to birds and butterflies. Let the soldiers return thought the boy.

Roots are deep and seeds spread.

One day the fence will disappear forever, and we will be able to walk in the hills again.









BIBLE READING

Matthew 13:24-30 (NRSV)

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Matthew 13:36-43 (NRSV)

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

REFLECTIVE PRAYER

Why is there so much evil in the world? Where did it come from? Who is to blame? When will justice finally be done? What does it all mean? Mighty God, we fritter away our time, and yours; we singe our neural connections and weary our souls asking questions that have no answers, or none that satisfy. Thank you for our freedom to pester you in prayer and for your patience in listening. Help us to know when to persist in our asking and when to let go; when to challenge the simple stories of our faith, when to enter into them and let them challenge and change us. Still our minds, we pray, and sow in us the good seed of the kingdom. May the birds not steal it, nor the weeds choke it; may it have water and sunlight,

and good soil in which to grow.

And by and by, when the time is right, may you reap in us a rich harvest of goodness and kindness; gentleness and hope, for the blessing of this world that you love. Amen.

BIBLE NOTES FOR REFLECTION - adapted from © 2020 Spill the Beans Resource Team **Goodies Vs Baddies?**

In the old-fashioned Westerns, there was no difficulty knowing who the heroes were, who the villains were, and who would triumph in the end. The principal 'goodie' wore a white hat, the 'baddie' wore a black hat, and good had always conquered by the time the credits rolled. Would that life were as simple as it used to be in the cinema or as it is in some of Jesus' parables; such as this one.

The parable of the weeds, unlike the parable of the sower, which precedes it, tackles the universal theological issue of theodicy: *why, if God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, is there evil in the world*? In the previous parable, the rocks, shallow soil, and thorn bushes are simply there: part of the way life is. The 'evil one' is mentioned in the interpretation, but not in the parable itself. The parable of the weeds, by contrast, is told for the very purpose of explaining what has gone wrong–where the intrusive weeds have come from, if the farmer planted only good seed.

The answer given in the parable, and spelled out in the interpretation, is both simplistic and verging on dualism. [Dualism being the idea of two opposites or contrasting things eg: black/white man/women good/bad] Essentially, the farmer, or the Son of Man, is let off the hook by saying "It wasn't me—a baddie came and done it!" The weeds have been planted by 'some enemy' during the night.

For theologians and natural historians alike, this is quite unsatisfactory. It is often said that there is no such thing as a weed–only a plant in the wrong place–and we are acutely aware now of the importance of biological diversity. People are not wholly good or wholly evil; we all have the potential for both. Good intentions can result in bad consequences, and vice versa. To put it more crudely, 's*** happens!'. If God is the source of all life, then responsibility for those aspects that cause problems for human beings, be they weeds or deadly viruses, cannot so easily be handed over to an unknown enemy.

In the context in which the story was recorded, however, all of this matters much less. For a 1st century Christian community; suffering persecution, wondering why Jesus had not returned to establish the Kingdom as he promised; what matters is to reassure them that they have not been wrong to put their trust in him. This may not be how they had imagined their future, as followers of Jesus, to be, but the kingdom has always been a slippery concept, confounding human expectations. That is why we are given not one, but multiple parables, each revealing a different facet of something that cannot ultimately be defined.

What was important then, as it is now, is to go on trusting that God, as revealed and personified in Jesus, the 'Son of Man', can be trusted, and has not abandoned his people.

We may look for subtler explanations than this one of the origins of evil; we may not

want to wait until 'the end of the age' for justice to be done; but we need, as much as ever, to be encouraged to 'keep on keeping on': doing our best not to be discouraged by the weeds, looking for and nurturing the shoots of new growth when they appear, and leaving the final outcomes to God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFECTIONS:

When is a weed, a weed?

Can you identify 'weeds' in your own life?

In what ways, does your life feed, sustain, and nurture others?

How might Jesus interpret this parable differently for today?

What is one thing you can do today to be a source of blessing to others?

SING: 'In the Field of the Lord' by the Porters Gate Project

Or Listen on Youtube <u>https://youtu.be/DJeUimIB-Is</u>

In the fields of the Lord, our work is rest He is moving in our hands and feet to bless In the fields of the Lord, in the fields of the Lord In the fields of the Lord, our work is rest In the vineyards of the Lord, our work is light He is tending every leaf and every vine In the vineyards of the Lord, in the vineyards of the Lord In the vineyards of the Lord, our work is light

In the garden of the Lord, our work is sound He is weaving every thorn into a crown In the garden of the Lord, in the garden of the Lord In the garden of the Lord, our work is sound

At the harvest of the Lord, the fields are white Oh, He will wipe away the tears from ev'ry eye At the harvest of the Lord, at the harvest of the Lord At the harvest of the Lord, the fields are white

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Bountiful God, of all the gifts that you have given, the greatest and most mysterious is life itself. Refusing to be tamed or quashed, it sprouts in the gutters, pushes up through the pavement cracks, and bursts out as new green shoots from seemingly barren stumps. May we nurture the life that you have given us, and allow it to flourish in the world. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Living God, we give thanks for all the good things, that we have seen grow in the course of our lives, sometimes in the most unpromising of soil; for difficult times which have helped us to understand the difficulties that other people face; for painful losses which have helped us to value people and things that do not last for ever; for hard questions that have led us more deeply Into the mystery of our faith.

We give thanks for people who grow our food, for those who harvest it, prepare it, transport it, market and sell it, so that we can enjoy an abundance, that we too easily take for granted. We pray for those whose livelihoods are at risk, and whose children this week may not be fed. May we emerge from this time of hardship with a new appreciation of all that we have and a new determination to make this world a fairer place for all.

We give thanks for those who sow seeds of faith, of hope and of imagination, when those gifts are in short supply. May their work bear a rich harvest. Gladly, we think of those who cheer us by singing in the darkness; those who draw us gently into their laughter, and help us to smile at ourselves; those who pray for us, when we have forgotten how to pray for ourselves.

Gracious God, we pray for the church of Jesus Christ, charged with representing him in the world, and with tending the fragile seeds of his kingdom. Help us not to be distracted by the weeds, but to focus on the fresh, green shoots of new life. May we not choke that life with the tangled thorns of our rules and regulations, of our doctrines and dogmas and clever future plans. Keep us faithful in our planting, our watering, and our waiting for the rich harvest that is your glory and your gift. Amen.

SENDING

We are God's seed, watered by God's Spirit. Grow well, let the earth be full of God's glory. Grow well, let all the earth know God's love. Amen SING: 'Sent Forth By God's Blessing' by Omer Westendorf

Or Listen on Youtube https://youtu.be/PLp85eLlaIM

Sent forth by God's blessing,

Our true faith confessing,

The people of God from His dwelling take leave.

The Supper is ended.

O now be extended

The fruits of this service in all who believe.

The seed of His teaching,

Receptive souls reaching,

Shall blossom in action for God and for all.

His grace did invite us,

His love shall unite us

To work for God's kingdom and answer His call.

With praise and thanksgiving

To God ever-living,

The tasks of our ev'ryday life we will face.

Our faith ever sharing,

In love ever caring,

Embracing His children of each tribe and race.

With Your feast You feed us,

With Your light now lead us;

Unite us as one in this life that we share.

Then may all the living

With praise and thanksgiving

Give honor to Christ and His name that we bear.

Resources: <u>spillbeans.org.uk</u> 'A Child's Garden' *By Michael Foreman* Porters Gate Project Together in Song