

North West Wiltshire Pastorate
Service for Sunday, June 13th 2021

Welcome and Opening words

Good morning and welcome to worship today.
However you are worshipping with us
please know yourself to be welcomed
and may this worship be a time of nourishment;
rooted in God's words
nourished by the example of Jesus,
continually strengthened by the source that is the Spirit.

We read in St. Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth,
*"We are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us,
so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen
rather than in what is in the heart.
If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God;
if we are in our right minds it is for you.
For Christ's love compels us."*

**Worship Song – Matt Redman 10,000 Reasons (Track 1, Sing like
never before)**

Prayer of Praise

This week our prayer of praise comes from ROOTS
God of grace and growth,
you have called us to plant the seeds of your kingdom
in the fields of your world.,
and to trust in you for their developing and flourishing –

and so we praise you.
For the abundance of your creativity:
we praise you,
for the transforming nature of your Spirit:
we praise you,
for the power of small beginnings:
we praise you,
for the mystery of hidden growth:
we praise you,
and for the harvest we are invited to delight in:
we praise you,
In Jesus' name. Amen

Reading – Ezekiel chapter 17, verses 22-24 & Mark chapter 4, verses 26-34

Prayer of Confession

Our prayer of Confession is based on Psalm 92
Let us pray,
Planted – rooted – strong,
resilient and resistant.
praise-full and silent;
happy to make known your name
from morning to evening;
to be seen as a product of your creative genius-
to make you glad by individual works.

Eternal God,
For the times we have forced planting,

concerned only with being seen to be doing – Forgive us.
For the times we have started with a bang,
and then a lack of due diligence turns it into a whimper – Forgive us.
For the times we have harvested too early,
rather than give the space and time needed for maturity – Forgive us.
For the times we have expected too much of others,
wanting their efforts to reflect well on us – Forgive us.

Forgive us,
Encourage us to plant and be patient,
To water and wait,
To root and rejoice;
In the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
Whose mercy and grace feed us
And keep us rooted in faith,
Amen.

Worship Song – Iona, from Love and Anger (Track 2, *The Love of God comes close*)

To grow or not?

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying Him ... the more a tree is like itself it is like Him.”
Not my words, but those of Thomas Merton and immediately my mind fires up some follow up questions – for instance, how much easier is it to grow (no pun intended) into something when that is your only option? And is there a danger in linking conformity and obedience and finally ... and perhaps a little controversially is it not the case that individuals of the human kind are shaped and formed by circumstance and history and culture?

Would it not be easier to be a tree?

Your roots become established ... they spread out as the trunk and branches spread up and out, but what is seen is not the whole picture. And what happens, as we heard in those few verses from Ezekiel when shoots are transplanted, taken from that of which they are a part and put somewhere else where the hope of future growth is down to them alone. Yet such is the power of God that such a small shoot will take root and grow branches and produce fruit and become a mighty cedar ...

As a gardener would say, the roots 'have taken' – but more than that we don't just have this image of a strong tree, rooted and magnificent, with leaves of such colour that the best painter could not do them justice, amongst the leaves we find birds of all kinds finding safe shelter.

The Prophet's vision is that all power is centred in God's hands; therefore whatever is planted by God as part of the grand design will flourish.

At the time of the prophet's writing the political situation was fraught; power was both a positive and a negative force and even divine power carried with it a threat of judgement and even destruction. So the idea of a tree, planted, rooted and thriving in the midst of all that uncertainty was a very welcome image.

Later on in his second letter to the church at Corinth Paul would encourage the church to look beyond the visible of life, go to the roots, the heart, forget what was just the surface appearance, he argued that the death and resurrection of Jesus had changed forever the balance of what is important in life. Being a perfect physical specimen was not to be lauded – so what does that say about the image of the strong, perfect tree?

And finally we get to the gospel and the abiding image of the kingdom which here is growth, growth not construction.

So what does that mean?

It's about people not buildings – I'm increasingly unhappy with that being an either/or.

It's about growing those we have – but where does witness fit into that? And how does harvesting the power of the natural world help us where we are today?

And whilst we plant the seed and promise to water the plant, at which point do we stop being so diligent ... and believe the plant is now able to survive without our intervention and help?

The mustard seed grows into a large shrub and again wild birds find rest with its leaves and branches.

But are we only about making a safe place?

Surely, if we are true to the challenge of the gospel then we accept the element of danger that goes alongside planting and being rooted and being planted where needed, then do we see this as a growing adventure or an ask too far?

We are rooted here, here we have been planted ...over time hopefully the roots have strengthened and the branches have extended so that they resemble arms open wide in welcome ...

But what if God wants to take a shoot and plant it elsewhere?

Or the roots do not provide the nurture they once did and the tree is in danger?

Two views to end, from two different commentators: these parables remind us of the mysterious energy secretly at work in the world ... and ... the answer lies in Jesus' parables with their vision of a kingdom constantly growing.

If neither works for you then perhaps a third option is needed.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession & The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

We bring our prayers surrounded by an abundance of love
love that we know,
love that we expect,
love that encourages and enables us,
love that we sometimes claim without thinking.

That is not the case for so many people,
in our country, in our world,
we can group them under headings,
pray collectively for them
but fail to provide a place of safety
where they know security and solace.

We can name those known to us,
but such a list doesn't even cause
life's waters to ripple –
we can focus on situations that speak
most clearly to us,
but guard against making them a 'pet project'.

So we take today's focus as our starting point ...
We pray for our world,
where we have, by our selfish actions, threatened our eco systems;
we pray for all climate activists ...
for scientists who speak out ...
for all who try to live as sustainably as possible...
for the G7 leaders meeting in Cornwall,
where this is the top of their agenda.

For those whose dreams are battered
and those who feel too bruised to continue.
Lord, help us to plant where we are needed,
now where we think we should be
because it suits our purposes.
kindle a flame of hope in our hearts,
let your perfect peace dwell in us,
let your quest for justice pour from us.
These and all our prayers we ask in your name,
as we pray together saying,

Our Father,
Who art in heaven ...

**Hymn – The Best Hymns Album, (CD 1, track 7 Great is thy
faithfulness)**

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve God's world.
A world of which you are a part.
A world in which we all have a part to play.
A world which now, more than ever, depends on us all playing our part.
In the name of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.
Amen.