

TRINITY 5 - Proper 10

PSALM 65

- 8 You visit the earth and water it;
you make it very plenteous.
- 9 The river of God is full of water;
you prepare grain for your people,
for so you provide for the earth.
- 10 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
you soften the ground with showers and bless its increase.
- 11 You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.
- 12 May the pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness
and the hills be girded with joy.
- 13 May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep
and the valleys stand so thick with corn
that they shall laugh and sing.

1st READING

Isaiah 55.10-13

As rain and snow water the earth and enable it to yield fruit, so God's word will yield fruit in our lives.

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."

2nd READING

Romans 8.1-11

The Christian need have no fear of eternal condemnation: the sacrifice of Christ has set us free from sin for ever. When our minds are led by the Spirit of God.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

THE GOSPEL.

Matthew 13.1-9,18-23

Jesus tells a parable about the planting of seeds. He explains that the seed is the word of God, and the soil is the heart of those who hear the word. Some seed yields a rich harvest and other seed doesn't.

Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop - a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

"Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 13:9)

It's said that silence is golden, and often in our hectic lives, with all the background noise, chatter and distraction, we feel the need for peace and quiet. Over the last couple of weeks or so our churches have opened once again to allow people to be able to do just that – find peace and quiet. However, if you are really serious about experiencing a quieter life, then scientists say that you can do no better than visit the Anti-sound Chamber at Orfield Laboratories in South Minneapolis. It once held the Guinness World Record for being the world's quietest place, as it was said to be 99.99 per cent sound absorbent. Interestingly, however, complete silence doesn't mean peace of mind. In fact it's so quiet in the chamber that it quickly becomes unbearable, and it's common for people to hallucinate. So extreme is the reaction to near-total silence, that the longest that anyone has survived in the chamber is just forty-five minutes.

Normally, of course, whether we're asleep or awake, in town and countryside alike, we're used to constant background noise. Traffic, people, animals, birds and even the wind in the trees, all provide a soundtrack to daily life. But just as extreme silence can cause us to hallucinate, so focusing on these sounds would probably drive us to distraction. So we learn to listen selectively, to filter out what is unimportant and hear what we need to, such as someone asking us a question or shouting a warning. Sometimes, however, we miss the very thing we are waiting to hear. While listening to the local weather forecast on the radio, to find out whether our washing will dry or the hay can be harvested, it's all too easy to get distracted and miss the information we need.

All of today's readings require us to pay attention to what is really important, rather than what distracts us. Isaiah says that God's reassurance that peace and joy will replace loss and sadness is as real as the seasonal changes in the weather. The people's situation of exile and longing for home will change to singing, clapping and rejoicing.

Paul, writing to the Romans, reassures them that God has set them free for life not death, so they mustn't get distracted by the glitter and shallowness around them, but know themselves to be God's beloved people. The problem is not that they are human flesh, but that they forget to pay attention to what is really important and what will give them life in God.

In his parable of the sower, Jesus shows how easy it is to be distracted. Trouble and wealth can distract us, just as a lack of understanding of God's joy in the creation can lead us to forget that God is the God of abundant life. But the good news is that, even in that sorry place of forgetting what matters, God's abundance is constant and enduring. We could hear the story of the sower in a narrow way, as a threat to people who get distracted from living a joyful, God-filled life, but that would be to make God too small. This God, whom Jesus tells us about, is one who, even if there is distraction, can bring forth abundance in the world and in people and communities. Now that is good news indeed!

So how might we set aside a place and time in our noisy world to hear God's words of encouragement? Part of the problem for some people is that there is no expectation that God has anything left to say. Other people think that God speaks only through words written down several thousand years ago. Others feel too busy or oppressed to find the space and time to listen. Perhaps some of us feel that God speaks only to more important, "holier" people. Maybe some people are even afraid that the word God speaks will be angry, telling us of our faults. Looking again at today's readings we can see that God speaks words of joy, peace, life and abundant fruitfulness, not punishment and anger. So we do not need to be afraid to hear God. We simply need to listen out for that voice. But how do we distinguish it from the background noise? The test seems to be that if the word bears good fruit and shows life, peace and joy – then it is the voice of God. We can hear it anywhere and anytime. We might hear it in words spoken by a child, or a friend or stranger.

Today we are reminded that God speaks in many voices, and not only through the Church or chapel or in a place of silence, but in the noise and chatter of everyday life.

COLLECT PRAYER

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,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.