

“Let Them Hear”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron
July 12, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – July 12, 2020

Sing Them Over Again to Me #498 in the Book of Praise – all verses

Sing them over again to me

Wonderful words of life

Let me more of their beauty see

Wonderful words of life

Words of life and beauty

Teach me faith and duty

Chorus

Beautiful words wonderful words

Wonderful words of life

Beautiful words wonderful words

Wonderful words of life

Christ the blessed One gives to all

Wonderful words of life

Sinner list to the loving call

Wonderful words of life

All so freely given

Woing us to Heaven

Chorus

Sweetly echo the gospel call

Wonderful words of life

Offer pardon and peace to all

Wonderful words of life

Jesus only Saviour

Sanctify forever

Chorus

*Philip Paul Bliss © Words: Public Domain Music: Public Domain
CCLI License # 1952948*

Sent Forth by Your Blessing #775 in the Book of Praise – all verses

Sent forth by your blessing, our true faith confessing,
Your people, O God, from your table take leave.
The supper is ended: oh now be extended
The fruits of your service in all who believe.
The seed of your teaching, our hungry souls reaching,
Shall blossom in action for all humankind.
Your grace shall incite us, your love shall unite us
To work for your kingdom, your purpose to find.

With praise and thanksgiving to God ever-living
The task of our everyday life we will face,
Our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring,
Embracing as neighbours all those of each race.
One feast that has fed us, one light that has led us,
Unite us as one in your life that we share.
Then may all the living, with praise and thanksgiving,
Give honour to Christ and his name that we bear.

© Words: World Library Publications, 1964 Music: Public Domain

Scripture Texts: Psalm 65:9-13

*⁹ You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.*

*The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.*

*¹⁰ You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.*

*¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.*

*¹² The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.*

*¹³ The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with grain;
they shout for joy and sing.*

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I like to garden. I enjoy planting vegetables and a few annuals every year, caring for them, and watching them grow and yield yummy things. I also love to care for my houseplants, pruning, transplanting, watering and watching them bloom. There is something about working with these living things that just feels good. There is a gentleness about my plants, except maybe the cactus but if I respect its spikes it leaves me alone. There is something satisfying about watching something grow and produce. It's rewarding, dare I say therapeutic.

The key to keeping things healthy is in using the right kind of soil, finding the right amount and direction of sunlight, knowing how much water to give, and planting in an appropriately sized pot. It also involves caring for the roots. My peace lilies, for example, will not produce their beautiful white flowers if they become root bound. I have to take them out of their pots, tidy up the roots, untangle them, and sometimes find a larger pot in which to replant the lily. Occasionally one of my plants just can't keep going and it dies. I feel so sad when that happens, especially if I tried hard to revive and nurture it.

Jesus' parable of the sower is a story with which I can relate. I can understand the image because it is familiar to me. Not the farming part, but the whole idea of planting, nurturing, and watching as seeds become fruitful plants. It would have been an image those listening would have understood, in a society where planting and harvesting were common life. These people

knew the frustrations and successes of planting seeds. The seed that grew into fruitful plants gave them more than satisfaction for their efforts. It also gave them a livelihood, providing for their own families as well as selling the produce. It is a brilliant parable.

It's also brilliant because it reminds the people of the miracle of life and growth, and that it is by God's power, sometimes shown in gentle ways, that the seed that lands on good soil grows into a healthy, fruitful harvest.

The Psalm we have shared today also reminds us of God's gracious power to give life and bounty, to provide for us by providing for the earth. The People's Bible Commentary says: "Sometimes God works by spectacular miracles. More often he works in a gentle rain. Without the cycle of the rains God has ordained, life would vanish from the earth. When God sends rain even the deserts bloom. Through the rain our Father sends he richly provides our daily bread. All creation rejoices in his blessings. This beautiful description of the rain and its blessings [in Psalm 65] reminds us to praise the bountiful God who gives them all."¹

I can plant and tend and nurture my plants and gardens all I want, but without God's blessing of life and growth, my efforts are fruitless. It's still worth it though, because in my work there is reward – both for my plants and for me. God makes it all happen.

In working our way through Jesus' explanation of his parable, we can see how meaningful it is, not only for those who farm and plant, for all who try to live and share the Word with the world. Let's take it step by step and see how the Spirit of God helps us to understand.

The first seed Jesus explains is that which falls on the path. It is out in the open where it can be grabbed by birds. Have you ever had a conversation with someone where their eyes kind of glaze over and you know your words aren't being taken in? Those who do not pay attention, who are disinterested, who don't acknowledge the significance of what is being said: they are like the path. The words fall on their ears, but they aren't there long enough to be heard. The evil one whisks the words away so they have no chance to settle in or take root. These people are lost unless they change the way they hear, or their willingness to listen.

The seed that falls on the rocky path is a tricky one. Those who hear and take in the Word with great enthusiasm and overwhelming joy but do not spend any time in thinking it through, studying it, recognizing the commitment it involves, they do not realize what the Word means for them. They do not let it change their hearts and lives. Their faith and understanding in the Word is shallow. When they experience trouble in life they are quick to let go of what they have heard. When they experience opposition or dismissal because of their faith, they are quick to let it go. It's like a fair-weather faith... keep it while it works for you, but let it go when it's inconvenient or difficult.

The seed that falls among thorns is a faith that does not really trust God to follow through. Worries and fears and misgivings distract these people off of what God has promised. Instead of leaning and relying on God for strength and perseverance, these people try to manage it themselves, to draw on their own strength rather than that which surpasses all others. When I think about those that try to manipulate the Word to make it fit their wants instead of letting the

¹ Brug, John F. People's Bible Commentary: Psalms 1. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO 1989, Pg. 254.

Word transform them, I imagine them to be among the thorns – twisting and becoming so entwined in themselves that their faith in Christ cannot be distinguished from their faith in themselves, therefore choking out what God says with what they desire.

Then there are those who are the good soil in which the Word is planted and faith grows. These are the people that engage with the Word of God regularly, praying for the Spirit's wisdom to help them understand, asking for help when the Word is challenging. They study the Scriptures and do their best to apply what they learn to their everyday lives. These people not only read and love and Word, they live it, and by doing so they touch others with it. They model a Christ-like life by showing compassion, trusting God, sharing his Word, seeking justice and resisting temptation. And when they stumble, when they fall short of God's way, they pray for forgiveness and renewal to try again, believing that their faith in Christ assures them of that pardon.

We all know people that fall into each category of Jesus' parable. We have all encountered paths of emptiness, uneven ground, thorny brush and rich soil. We have encountered them in others and we may have experienced times when each of them has played a part in our lives. We may have been in one of the first three situations before giving our hearts and lives to living faithfully in God's grace. God knows what result will come from where the seed of his Word is sown. I hope all of us can be rich and healthy in receiving God's Word, and show others how to become fruitful in Christ.

As I reflect on this parable, I look at my houseplants and see some of them need some TLC. Some need pruning, some need a better spot to get light, some need to be transplanted. Some are just about finished blooming and will take what I call a Sabbath rest so they can bloom again. Some are just about to burst forth in colourful beauty. No matter what they need, I will be glad to do what I can to help them flourish because in doing so they provide me with a joyful reward.

When God looks at us, I'm sure he sees much of the same – metaphorically speaking of course. Some of us need pruning, some need more light, some need to be rooted where we can grow and mature. Some of us need a Sabbath rest, and some are ready to burst forth in faithful worship and service. No matter what we need, God is glad to give us what we need, not necessarily what we want, to help us flourish, because in doing so our faithful hearts bring joy to our Creator.

Where are you in these days of change and uncertainty? Do you feel like you're on a path of vulnerability or a rocky edge? Do you feel you're in a thorny thicket? Or are you feeling steady and well-rooted in the soil of faith? No matter where you are today, or any day, God is waiting to gently move you to the right spot, if you're open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your heart and mind. God is there to work a gentle miracle in you, to help you grow and be fruitful in his Word. Allow the gentle rain of God's Spirit to nourish you and help you grow deep roots so that you may flourish. And be the miracle of growth God has created you to be. Amen.