

**Prayer**

Great God, you have chosen us, picked us out,  
for special awareness of your love.

Not because we are better than other people;  
not because we are good or strong or clever;  
but because your love is free, persistent,  
merciful.

You have chosen us and set us apart to be signs  
of your love, to proclaim it, to live in the  
strength of it, to make other people aware that  
they are chosen too, to be your sons and  
daughters,  
Amen

**Hymn Blessed be the name of the Lord**

Blessèd be the name of the Lord,  
blessèd be the name of the Lord,  
blessèd be the name of the Lord most high!  
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,  
blessèd be the name of the Lord,  
blessèd be the name of the Lord most high!

*The name of the Lord is a strong tower –  
the righteous run into it,  
and they are saved;  
the name of the Lord is a strong tower –  
the righteous run into it,  
and they are saved.*

Glory to the name of the Lord,  
glory to the name of the Lord,  
glory to the name of the Lord most high!  
Glory to the name of the Lord,  
glory to the name of the Lord,  
glory to the name of the Lord most high!

*The name of the Lord . . .*

Holy is the name of the Lord,  
holy is the name of the Lord,  
holy is the name of the Lord most high!  
Holy is the name of the Lord,  
holy is the name of the Lord,  
holy is the name of the Lord most high!

*The name of the Lord . . .*

**Reading Romans 8 v 1 - 11**

If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won't be punished. <sup>2</sup>The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you<sup>[a]</sup> free from sin and death. <sup>3</sup>The Law of Moses cannot do this, because our selfish desires make the Law weak. But God set you free when he sent his own Son to be like us sinners and to be a sacrifice for our sin. God used Christ's body to condemn sin. <sup>4</sup>He did this, so that we would do what the Law commands by obeying the Spirit instead of our own desires.

<sup>5</sup>People who are ruled by their desires think only of themselves. Everyone who is ruled by the Holy Spirit thinks about spiritual things. <sup>6</sup>If our minds are ruled by our desires, we will die. But if our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will have life and peace. <sup>7</sup>Our desires fight against God, because they do not and cannot obey God's laws. <sup>8</sup>If we follow our desires, we cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup>You are no longer ruled by your desires, but by God's Spirit, who lives in you. People who don't have the Spirit of Christ in them don't belong to him. <sup>10</sup>But Christ lives in you. So you are alive because God has accepted you, even though your bodies must die because of your sins. <sup>11</sup>Yet God raised Jesus to life! God's Spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life by his Spirit.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

There is no love like yours, living God: no love so true, so far-reaching, so sure, so determined to penetrate all darkness and fill it with light, so ready to suffer and be rejected to prove itself true.

There is no love like yours as we have seen it in Jesus: so willing to lay down his life for those whom he loved; so sure of your faithfulness persisting through death.

There is no love like yours: alive in him for us, and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit you have given us.

This is the love we praise; this is the love whose power we seek to perfect our praise in lives lived

for your glory in the service of our fellow men and women.

This is the love we praise; which will be praised in time and eternity; in the joy and promise of which we join our faltering praise to that of all the hosts of heaven, until we come where you are and find our praise and love combined in perfect harmony:

Father, forgive all our attitudes which make our lives a denial of your grace to us.

Forgive us all those feelings that we are worthy to be here; that we have earned our place in your kingdom; that we are holier than others, and deserve your love.

Forgive us, if we have lost our sense of wonder that you love us at all, and if we have stopped realising that all our faith, hope and love are grounded in your faithfulness.

Forgive us and fill us with genuine humility which will make us confident and strong, knowing whose well-loved children we are, through the love and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven,  
hallowed be Your Name.  
Your will be done on earth as in Heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom,  
the power and the glory are Yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.

### Hymn What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear –  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged:  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Can we find a friend so faithful,  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness –  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge!  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,  
thou wilt find a solace there.

### Reading Matthew 13 v 1- 9, 18 – 23

That same day Jesus left the house and went out beside Lake Galilee, where he sat down to teach.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around him that he had to sit in a boat, while the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then he taught them many things by using stories.

He said: A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field. <sup>4</sup>While the farmer was scattering the seed, some of it fell along the road and was eaten by birds. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on thin, rocky ground and quickly started growing because the soil wasn't very deep. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and dried up, because they did not have enough roots. <sup>7</sup>Some other seeds fell where thornbushes grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>But a few seeds did fall on good ground where the plants produced a hundred or sixty or thirty times as much as was scattered. <sup>9</sup>If you have ears, pay attention!

<sup>18</sup> Now listen to the meaning of the story about the farmer:

<sup>19</sup> The seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message about the kingdom, but don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the message from their hearts. <sup>20</sup> The seeds that fell on rocky ground are the people who gladly hear the message and accept it right away. <sup>21</sup> But they don't have deep roots, and they don't last very long. As soon as life gets hard or the message gets them in trouble, they give up.

<sup>22</sup> The seeds that fell among the thornbushes are also people who hear the message. But they start worrying about the needs of this life and are fooled by the desire to get rich. So the message gets choked out, and they never produce anything. <sup>23</sup> The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and understand the message. They produce as much as a hundred or sixty or thirty times what was planted.

### Sermon

Words from the end of the parable of the sower - 'some seed fell in good soil; and the plants grew and produced corn, a hundred grains each'

It is a great parable that - great for ministers, great for congregations. Hear the parable and you know what you are going to get - a nice little sermon about seeds.

Actually it's a funny thing, but whenever I hear or read this parable, I get this image come into my mind. I wish I could say it was a deeply spiritual image, but it's not. Whenever I hear or read the parable of the sower, I always think of 'Little Weed' - you remember Little weed - Bill and Ben

No it is a well known parable and it is well interpreted by Jesus - he actually explains what the seeds represent - and it is recorded in three of the four gospels.

We all know the parable and we all understand it. It doesn't matter that farming methods have moved on from Jesus time. It doesn't matter

that people no longer walk through fields throwing seed about - the imagery still holds good. We hear the parable - we see the image in our minds and as the seed is scattered all the old explanations and understanding come flooding back - ah yes the seed on the path - of course that is where people hear the gospel, but can't respond and the seed on the rocks that is where people don't hold onto faith in times of trouble and the seed in the thorns that is where people hear the word but are too concerned with riches and pleasures and other such things. And of course the seed that fell on good soil - well we might not like to admit it - but that really must be us - the word, the gospel has fallen on good soil and taken root.

We know the parable, we understand it and perhaps that is the problem - we know the parable too well. We hear the parable, we see the image in our minds and we relate the seed to people in various situations ... and we miss the fundamental point of what the parable is really about.

We think of the parable of the sower as being about the seed and the results of sowing in various places. We understand it as explaining why people don't respond to the gospel, we think of it as explaining why this seed we sow in people's lives doesn't always bear fruit.

Let me tell you - the parable is not about the seed - but about the sower. I guess it says it on the tin - the parable of the sower.

This isn't an objective parable - a parable about what can happen, a parable to explain success and failure, but a subjective parable - about what WE - you and I - must do in sharing the gospel. We focus in on the seed, we ought to be focusing on the sower - for the parable is about how we must sow the seed of God's word. The parable is if you like an agenda for evangelism.

Now seen this way, from the sower's point of view, from our point of view - this parable first gives us a pattern - a pattern for evangelism - a pattern by which we are so sow the seed of God's word.

Not for us nice well tended rows of crops, not for us the careful sowing of the seed in certain specified, well tended areas. When we sow the seed of God's word, we are to scatter it everywhere.

In the days before modern farming methods took over - this was called broadcasting.



This picture was taken close to where I grew up – about 25 years before I was born. As you can see the idea was to broadcast the seed over as wide an area as possible. You have a whole field to cover and you only stand a chance of doing this if you broadcast as far as you can.

I think broadcasting is a good word, a good pattern for us too. We have a large field to cover with the seed of God's word. Even in this so called civilised Christian country - there are children and adults - hundreds of them - thousands of them - who haven't heard God's word - who haven't received that seed.

We need to be broadcasting the gospel - instead we have been sowing seeds carefully in tiny plots where we think they are likely to grow. And you see that is the problem - we have been sowing where WE think the seed will grow. The Holy Spirit doesn't work like that. Jesus has set us a pattern - we have to broadcast the gospel - no matter that some of the seed will be wasted - we have to broadcast the word of God, sowing as widely as possible - which means that sharing the gospel must be part of every aspect of our lives.

So often in recent years the Church has been told to stick to its own business - to keep quiet

about peace issues, to stay silent on the issues of homelessness and poverty, to say nothing about crime and the causes of crime - if we are to take the parable of the sower seriously - if we are to broadcast the gospel - then we must reverse that trend. As Christians we must get involved in politics, become school governors, find our way onto trust bodies, take places on the town council. We must get involved in community groups, in chambers of commerce and so on - so that we can bring the gospel to bear and broadcast the word to as wide a field as possible. We above all people must be involved with the world - AS CHRISTIANS - and I would offer that as a challenge to each of us - taking the parable of the sower to heart - to get involved in some aspect of our community - AS A CHRISTIAN bringing the word to bear in that situation.

So first and foremost the parable of the sower is about a pattern, but it doesn't shirk the problems. When you broadcast seed, when you spread the gospel the way that the parable of the sower says it should be spread then it is going to go to all sorts of places - and a whole lot of those places are going to be unproductive. For all sorts of reasons the seed will not grow in them.

It can be awfully discouraging - I know This year I planted a load of plug plants – most of them seem to have died. I planted some fruit bushes and we have had a wonderful harvest of a raspberry – singular.

It can be very disheartening to sow the seed and to see most of it wither and die where it lays and especially when that seed is the seed of God's word. But part of the message of the parable of the sower is that this isn't our problem. We are called to sow the word, it is between God and the person concerned whether that seed will bear harvest. It is not our problem - as long as we are sowing the seed we are playing our part - a part that will be rewarded for with the parable there comes a promise.

Yes much of the seed may be wasted, yes for all sorts of reasons much of it will fail - but if we

broadcast enough seed, God promises a harvest. For those with ears to listen. the Holy Spirit will do its work and the word will bear fruit.

Jesus said 'Once there was a man who went out to sow corn. As he scattered the seed, some seed fell in good soil; and the plants grew and produced corn, a hundred grains each'

The parable is a challenge to us - as a Church and as individual Christians is to sow the seed of the word of God in every part of his field.

And so I leave you a challenge, it is this - sow some seeds of the gospel. Pray for the inspiration, the courage and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then sow your seeds where God leads and then perhaps the promise of the parable - the promise of a harvest in God's field will be made ours.

AMEN

### **Prayer of Commitment**

Lord Jesus Christ, you call us your friends, because we know what your purpose is. Though your love is too deep for us, keep us eager to fathom it; though you will make demands on us we could never cope with by ourselves, give us your Spirit to keep us faithful.

Help us to be friends to all whom you love, and by our self-sacrifice to bring them to the joy and peace we share with you for ever.

Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Loving Lord, you gave us the good seed and the good earth and we watch and pray, hoe and harvest.

Help us to plant seeds of faith in others and nurture the growth of our own faith. May we walk by faith, not just sight, as we explore the world you have given us and develop a relationship with you which you offer to us, even when we let you down. Prepare us for the harvest, we ask, Lord, even as we start to grow in our love for you. Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Let the teaching of your Church match the power of your Son's parables, giving us clear teaching in a way which challenges us yet leaves us to find the right path guided by the Holy Spirit.

May we not expect to be favoured in the commission you have for us.

But let us respond with joy at the chance to serve you in any way that seems right to you and may we show generosity of spirit in all we do.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Your world is so vast and your hope so strong, we ask that you open our eyes to need and open our hearts to celebration.

We give thanks for the beauty of the natural world, for the diversity of the cultures, and for the arts and sciences in all their subtlety and complexity.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Send to those who are sick in mind, body and spirit the signal that you care and that hope is at hand.

We remember those in urgent need of our prayer, especially those we have mentioned who we bring before you in silence now.....

Grant those who give comfort the patience to listen and the gift of being present when needed.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer.

Finally we think of those we have loved and who are now at peace with you, remembering especially those known to us.

Grant them rest and give comfort to those who mourn.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour  
Amen

**Hymn Dear Lord and Father**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
 forgive our foolish ways;  
 re-clothe us in our rightful mind;  
 in purer lives Thy service find,  
 in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
 beside the Syrian sea,  
 the gracious calling of the Lord,  
 let us, like them, without a word  
 rise up and follow Thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
 O calm of hills above,  
 where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
 the silence of eternity,  
 interpreted by love!

4 With that deep hush subduing all  
 our words and works that drown  
 the tender whisper of Thy call,  
 as noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
 as fell Thy manna down.

5 Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
 till all our strivings cease;  
 take from our souls the strain and stress,  
 and let our ordered lives confess  
 the beauty of Thy peace.

6 Breathe through the heats of our desire  
 Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
 let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
 speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
 O still small voice of calm!

**Benediction**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
 And the blessing of God Almighty  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
 Will be with us all, evermore.  
 Amen