

Reflection & Newsletter St Mary's & St Augustine's:
Sunday 19th July - 6th Sunday after Trinity.

Sunday Bible readings: *Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:12-25; Psalm 139; Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43.*

Wednesday's Bible readings: *Psalm 63; Zephaniah 3:14-end; Mark 15:40 – 16: 7.*

Reflection for Sunday

"Parables are important and precious; they are a gift but sometimes it feels like they have a lid on and they are hard to get inside, but keep coming back to them and one day you will get in." This is how parables are often introduced in a Godly Play session, and I find it to be a helpful reminder as we come to today's gospel reading.

Reflecting on Jesus' parables, the theologian Kenneth Bailey comments "Jesus created meaning like a dramatist and a poet rather than like a philosopher.... a parable challenges the listener in ways that abstract statements of truth cannot". He likens parables to "a powerful television image which communicates meaning that a thousand words cannot express. A parable is not a delivery system for an idea, but a house in which the listener is invited to take up residence and look on the world through the window of that residence."

We are not called to a blind faith or to simply carry out instructions for living, we are called to hold, to ponder, to explore the deeper and hidden meanings of Jesus teachings and to inhabit their truths .

So, let's be encouraged to sit with the parables, to revisit them, to try and unlock their deepest meanings..... and fortunately, sometimes Jesus explains one or two to his disciples !

Matthew chapter 13 contains seven parables – two are explained and five are left for the listener to ponder, and all except one are told with the same introduction "The kingdom of heaven is like...."

Since we pray " your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven" it is important for us to consider what the kingdom of heaven is like, and so we are called to consider these parables and to keep sitting with them – especially the parts that make us uncomfortable.

It is difficult to sit with a parable that ends with those who do evil being thrown into a fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (v.42) Similarly we often find it difficult to include the verses found at the end of today's Psalm "If only you would slay the wicked O God..." (Psalm 139:19)

But I'm sure we have all watched the news and been so disturbed by all that we see – war, injustice, abuse, cruelty (the list goes on) that we wish God would step in and sort things out – however we must also reflect that we too are part of the problem, our lives are - in the images of the parable - both "weeds" and "wheat". That too is an uncomfortable truth we need to learn to sit with – but we sit in the light of the love and mercy and of God, a Holy God whose fire purifies and refines us. For now, we and all creation continue to long to be liberated from the bondage and disfigurement of sin (Romans 8:21) and as part of that longing we continue to pray "Your kingdom come."

Collect for this Sunday

Holy God, faithful and unchanging:
enlarge our minds with the
knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the
mystery of your love,
that we may truly worship you.
Father Son and Holy Spirit, one God,
now and for ever.

We are encouraged to use this reflection alongside the Home Acts of Worship Sheets for Sunday Morning – so let's continue to gather in our homes at 10.30am on Sunday and 7pm on Wednesdays to share worship together but separately – or at a time which suits you !

Worship Reminders and Updates

There is no zoom worship this week - Sunday 19th July. It will recommence next Sunday 26th.

St Mary's will be meeting outside in the grounds this Sunday at 12 noon for a socially distanced short act of worship and a picnic – please bring your own picnic blanket/chairs, your own picnic, hand sanitizer and mask if you wish to wear one. The church building will only be accessible for emergencies. All being well this will happen again on 16th August.

It is hoped that St Augustine's worship will restart during August.

Roots resources including prayers and reflections for adults, families and children for each Sunday
<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/i-am-looking-for/public-copies/worshipathome19jul>

Muhila is a mature student from India, who started to worship with St Mary's early in 2020 – she has asked that we share her testimony with you all.

I am Muhila Ayyathurai, an MBA student at Sheffield Hallam University. I would like to testify to what God did for me.

It was end of April, and on one late evening, my flatmate informed us that she had tested positive for Covid19. Though we have our own bedroom and toilet, we share the kitchen and the dining room. NHS said that I have high probability to be infected due to the situation, and advised me to self-isolate for 14 days. I made no delay in connecting with my accommodation manager and requested for an empty flat (most of them had vacated due to lockdown). She was kind enough to agree and I moved out temporarily to a different flat in the same building. Every day was so painful, anxious, stressful and lonely. Not just me, my family back home, were so worried about my helpless situation. But we kept praying continuously and trusted that *God is in control*. I was also having a big assignment due to be submitted online and the anxiety was just making it harder for me to focus on studies. I must say, I was so low and depressed, and struggled with the studies, and I somehow submitted my assignment 5 minutes before the deadline. I definitely would say Jesus Christ tried harder than me to make me calm and study; it is difficult to explain in words, it is a feeling.

14 days passed, and to everyone's shock and surprise, I had no symptoms and was never infected. I was hugely relieved. The infected flatmate had also recovered and went back home. I secured a distinction for my assignment, I rechecked so many times if it was really my score, as it was unbelievable. It was God's grace. God is real. His presence is there always with us. He is so good. I am forever indebted to Him. This whole episode made me more faithful, grateful and closer to God than ever before. Amen.

Muhila was able to return to India recently and we continue to pray for her and her sick father in particular. She hopes to return to complete her studies in due course.

St Mary's featured on the BBC news at 6 this week –

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000ky72/bbc-news-at-six-15072020> about 15 minutes in.

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