

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit

Worship at Home

Lent 3

20th March 2022

Have patience - for a bit longer

Call to worship

Come, you who are weary with waiting.
Come, you who are hungry for change and fulfilment.
Come, you who are lost and seeking direction.
Come, to the one who will refresh, revive and redeem you.

Prayer of approach

God of grace and growth,
in this season of Lent and with spring blossoming all around us,
we bring to you in word, music and prayer,
our desire to change for the better –
trusting in your patience,
rooting ourselves in your Scriptures,
believing in your love,
appreciating the limitations of time,
and celebrating the gift of life
and all that there is to look forward to.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Hymn (StF) 88 Praise to the Lord

- 1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation !
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation !
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.
- 2 Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee ;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee :
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.
- 3 Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,

then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

- 4 Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.
- 5 Praise to the Lord ! O let all that is in me adore him !
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him !
Let the amen sound from his people again :
gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander

Prayers of adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
you nurture and nourish the soil of our lives,
you watch over us patiently and expectantly,
you fill us with the nutrients we need in order to grow, and you rejoice when we too,
nurture, protect and watch over others –
in your name.

We praise you, living God, that through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus, we have the chance to begin again.
As we learn from his words,
we have the opportunity to flourish,
as we follow in his footsteps,
we have the calling to serve;
as we grow in his likeness,
we have the time to do what is ours to do,
as we trust his promises –
slowly but surely, day by day.

Lord God,
forgive us when we are slow to change,
but quick to judge;
when we take more from life,
than we give back;
when we give up on others too soon
and offer support too late;
when we deny others the opportunity to grow,
and uproot their dreams.

Forgive us and grant us your patience,
perseverance and vision,
and inspire us to care for all you have made.
We ask this in Jesus' name.

Loving God, in whom all things are possible,
for giving us time enough to change and grow:
we thank you with all our heart.
For giving us the desire to change and grow:
we thank you with all our mind.
For giving us the opportunity to change and
grow:
we thank you with all our soul.
And for forgiving us when we rush, judge
and deny others those same opportunities:
we thank you with all our strength.
Amen.

Bible Reading Luke 13:1-9

1 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2 Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." 6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Word

Repairing and recycling programmes are very popular on television at the moment. While it is fascinating to see a skilled recycler at work, turning trash into cash, BBC's *The Repair*

Shop is arguably at the top of the list when it comes to skilled craftsmen and women. Damaged items, sometimes seemingly beyond hope of repair, are lovingly and painstakingly restored. Cherished objects are given a second chance of being what they were intended to be.

So, is God a restorer of people, a repairer, or a recycler? Perhaps the parable of the fig tree suggests God's preference!

Two weeks ago, I spotted my two Amaryllis bulbs were showing signs of life, so I quickly re-potted them in fresh compost to encourage their growth. The white Amaryllis has now got a stalk 14 inches high, so very soon that beautiful large flower will appear – they do grow fast. The red Amaryllis, for the third year now, is only showing leaves. I can sympathise with the vineyard owner in the parable! Yet that bulb is as big as, and healthy looking as the other, so with the fresh compost and extra feeding – and plenty of water, I shall give it another year to produce it's red flower.

We live in a time when instant results are often expected or even demanded. The Covid pandemic changed our perspective. Waiting and patience became a necessity. In the natural world, those of us who are gardeners (or winemakers) know waiting is inevitable.

It is fruitful (pun intended!) to spend some time reflecting on the parable of the fig tree with no fruit. Who is the man who owns the vineyard? Is this God? Who is the gardener? Is this Jesus? And the fig tree? Is that us?

The gardener is on the tree's side, and wants the tree to have every chance to bear fruit. What might be the equivalent for us, in our lives, of the process of digging around and adding manure? What do we need, to enable us to be fruitful and become the people God intended us to be?

Jesus, uses this parable to help his followers, who were inclined to see God's judgement at work whenever tragedy struck. They thought that because it hadn't happened to them, they

must be special people – they were better, not as sinful. Jesus responds by saying that bad things can happen unexpectedly to anyone - which we do know is true.

The Galileans had come on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Whilst in the temple Pontius Pilate sent in soldiers to slaughter them. At the healing Pool of Siloam, a tower had fallen – a tragic accident that killed 18. In each case believers had been the unfortunate victims. We have many instances in our world today where Christians have died due to conflict or natural disaster.

Jesus says, instead of pointing the finger at the victims, everyone needs to change their ways while there is still time to do so. He reinforces this with a story about a barren fig tree. The owner wants to cut it down, seeing it as a waste of space. But the gardener pleads for patience - and for a second chance.

The Bible could be described as a book of second chances, especially for God's chosen people. Peter is given several second chances. So is Saul, later to be renamed Paul.

There are similar stories outside the Bible too. John Newton – who wrote the hymn 'Amazing grace' - captained slave ships as a young man, invested money in that evil trade. During a violent storm at sea, fearing for his life, he turned to God. That was the moment God gave him a second chance, and later in time, Newton joined Wilberforce in his campaign against slavery, preached against the slave trade – and of course wrote the song we know so well. He truly was a wretch but God changed him.

If God allows time for change, so must we, both as individuals and as a community. Faith is like a plant that needs to be nurtured and given time and space to grow, flower and bear fruit. There may be – and probably will be, disappointments on the way, but there will be glorious surprises as well.

The precariousness of life should bring us up short, and we should pray for those

experiencing difficulties, or death. But we need, also, to look at the qualities of our own lives. The parable that Jesus told offers hope in terms of another chance, one more year for us to produce fruit. God has the patience to wait.

The fig tree

Three times the vines have flowered and budded.

Three times their grapes have drunk the sun.

Three times the vats have brimmed and flooded,

But from the fig, fruit there's none.

Three years its roots have delved the darkness

Draining goodness from the earth

Feeding just leaves, whose sheer starkness

Declare no harvest – only dearth.

'Too long, this tree, has scorned our tending.

Ungrateful fig! You waste good soil.

Away with you! My patience's ending

We'll plant a tree more worth our toil.'

'Sir, please give it one more season

I will mulch and tend it well.

If this fails, you'll have good reason

Your barren, sterile fig to fell.'

Lord, we see that we're that fig tree,

And from us you seek a crop.

Your compassion feeds us tenderly

But some day your care may stop.

With great love you keep on beckoning,

Encourage us to yield much fruit;

To refuse brings on that reckoning

When the axe is laid to root.

By Don Dowling

Hymn 306 Now the green blade rises

1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain ;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been :
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

2 In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen :

Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen :

4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been :

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872–1958) (alt.)

Prayers of Intercession

God of Grace,
we pray for those who live in areas of conflict
and violence
where bullets and bombs bring destruction and
devastation
– may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.

We pray for those who suffer the pain of
famine and drought
and the after-effects of natural disaster
– may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.

We pray for those who suffer the pain of illness
and disease,
their own or that of a loved one
– may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.

We pray for those who suffer the grief and
torment of bereavement
– may your love be known.
May your presence bring hope.

God of love, we humbly offer to you all the
suffering of our world,
and we pray that you will bring healing and
peace;
for the sake of your dear Son, our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the
glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn 167 Colours of day

1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we
meet.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

2 Go through the park, on into the town ;
the sun still shines on ; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again ;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.

3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

Sue McClellan, John Paculabo and Keith Ryecroft

Sending out prayer

Lord God, you look for growth and fruit;
help us this week to grow closer to you,
and to be patient when we have to wait –
as you are patient with us.
Amen.

Blessing

May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain
with you always. Amen.

Kathy Lowrie