



**Church at Home 18
for Abridge
Sunday 12th July 2020**



**'Whoever has ears to hear,
let them hear.'**
Matthew 13:9

We are looking forward to seeing as many of you as feel able to venture out this afternoon, up at St Mary's, in the field beyond the churchyard, for **an open-air picnic and time of gathered worship**. Bring your own picnic blanket, chairs, food, (umbrella?!) and something to drink. We will begin the picnic at 4.00 and then share in a time of thanksgiving, distanced singing, prayer, listening to today's Gospel story and an opportunity to say farewell to Nick, Crystal and the boys from AEFC.

We will also be reflecting briefly on the past 4 months of lockdown and in particular how the churches in Abridge have worked together to produce **church-at-home materials**, which we plan to continue into the summer. We recognise that there are many among us who are understandably still cautious of going out and services at church can't yet begin 'normally'.



On that note, we wonder if you still have your dedicated space for church-at-home? Over the weeks we have suggested various items that you might add to your focus table. In the photo (left) you can spot some of these linked to various Bible stories and festivals we have celebrated during lockdown. **For today's Gospel story you may like to add some seeds.**

Today's readings: Genesis 25:19-34 (the birth of Jacob and Esau to Isaac and Rebekah); Psalm 119:105-112 (which begins 'thy word is a lamp unto my feet'); Romans 8:1-11 (Paul's celebration of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us); Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23 (Jesus tells a story of a farmer scattering seeds)

Before we sing, read or pray, pause to remember and name those who would normally be sitting alongside you in church this morning. We are separated physically but nevertheless united by our love and prayers through the Holy Spirit given to each one of us.

Suggested hymns to sing along to: [Ye servants of God](#) [We plough the fields and scatter](#) (although this is a traditional harvest song, the words can be for all seasons!) [The Sower](#)

Today's Gospel parable is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, along with an explanation of its meaning from Jesus. It was clearly a well-remembered and popular story that Jesus quite probably used on more than one occasion. You can easily imagine the crowds calling out, 'Tell us the one about the farmer sowing seed', just like young children asking for their favourite story again and again. The version in each of the three Gospels is almost identical. In Matthew's collection of seed stories, 'the sower' comes first and serves both as an example of the sort of parables he used and also of the way in which we have to work hard to uncover the meaning of this and all his subsequent parables. In this sense it is a parable about parables as well as containing its own surprising insights about the Kingdom of God. The stories seem simple but have hidden depths that are intended to stimulate the listeners to work out the meaning for themselves. As Jesus says: God has given you a pair of ears, so use them! Jesus may have been easy to listen to, but it took effort to understand him.

Saying sorry: Let's use the parable to reflect on our week just gone, thinking of: our wasted words and our opportunities; our shallow commitments to care; contesting priorities on our time and gifts; and our longing to be fertile soil that produces a great harvest of goodness to God's glory. **Pause**

Our failure both as seed that germinates or soil that nurtures, is seen by God but also forgiven because of the death of Jesus Christ in our place. Rejoice in that forgiveness as you listen or sing along to:

[Before the throne of God above](#)

Although usually known as ‘the parable of the sower’, perhaps a better title for this parable would be ‘the parable of the soils’. Although the explanation of the story talks about the seed, it is the people who hear it who are represented by the different types of soil. They are the focus. It must have helped the disciples understand why some people didn’t respond to Jesus as they had done; some hearts were simply too hard, some too shallow and some too distracted. The big surprise of this parable comes at the end. An average harvest in first century Palestine would have yielded a seven or eight percent return on the sowing; this parable harvest brings in a staggering 30, 60 or 100% return. Where God is at work in a human heart amazing things can happen. **As you reread this story today, ask yourself:**

Is there something new that you have noticed perhaps for the first time?

Why do you think the sower scattered his seed so carelessly?

Do you think that some seed might have flourished in the hard soil, the rocky ground or among the thorns?

Who are the birds of the air, the rocks or the thorns in your experience?

What seed has God been sowing into your life over these last four months?

What fruit are you beginning to see, if any?

To help you explore the Gospel further, there is a **reflection sheet** and also **all-age activities linked to the passage**, that you might like to use, if you have access to the internet. You can find these resources on the websites of the two churches and here are the links: www.lambournechurch.com
www.abridgeevangelicalchurch.org

For our prayers, let us remember:

- Our gathering this afternoon; for a safe, enriching and encouraging time after so many months apart
- Our leaders as they face the challenge of balancing the public health and the economic concerns of our nation
- Those who are planning to travel to see family for the first time in ages
- Those who continue to struggle with health issues, disrupted plans and the pain of bereavement as a result of the crisis
- People we know overseas or countries on our hearts where.... locusts have eaten the seeds, wars have stopped the harvesting, illness has diminished the workforce and natural disasters have robbed people of the soil
- Ourselves and our families

Add any particular people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord’s Prayer**.

End your time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond

Final hymn suggestion: [How deep the Father’s love](#)



Please pray for: wise decisions about reopening churches and for Lambourne School as its Year 6 leave under strange circumstances

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