

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

In these times of change and uncertainty, we rejoice in God's promise to Noah and to all creation in Genesis Chapter 8 verse 22. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

Opening Prayer - written by Nancy C. Townley

God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meagre lives and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving-kindness for you in this world. You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear. You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness. Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us. Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn/song

Prayer of Confession - written by Moira Laidlaw

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember with gratitude those people who generously sowed the seeds of faith in our lives.

*Pause for a time of reflection*

Above all, we recognize how you have blessed our lives with the gift of the Holy Spirit so that our faith has miraculously and mysteriously grown.

We confess the times we fail to involve ourselves in planting any seeds of faith in the lives of others; the times when our personal agendas become more important than yours; the times when we have denied others the opportunity to expand their faith through our lack of interest or involvement; the times when our lives become so entangled with the values of the world that we forget what you have said and done and promised.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that when we become disconnected from you, our lives become parched and unfruitful and our faith becomes stunted and dry.

Bless and renew our lives, we pray, so that we remain connected to you at all times and in all places, strengthening our faith to expand and, growing strongly and vigorously, to bear the fruit of your mercy, your love, your undying life. **Amen.**

Hymn/song

### Theme Introduction – Where are we now?

We wait with expectation and trepidation for tomorrow's announcement from Downing Street.

Will some or all restrictions be lifted or will it be necessary to put on the brakes in order to protect precious lives and our treasured NHS from the new variants of Coronavirus?

Like the restless child in the back seat we pester and ask 'Are we nearly there yet?'

We have not yet begun to realise the long-term impacts of what the British Academy are calling the 'Covid Decade'. I don't think we will hear our prime minister use that phrase tomorrow!

This week I was privileged to attend a helpful online seminar for ministers where we were helped to think about the ongoing impact of Covid-19. We learnt about the 'collective trauma' the virus has inflicted upon us and human responses to it. We charted the different phases, beginning with the initial heroic phase – which we saw especially in the first lockdown – rallying round, key workers made superheroes, and so on, an energy which cannot be sustained. So the highs of the heroic phase give way to the lows of the disillusionment phase, characterized by tiredness, confusion and nervousness about the future. Does this sound familiar?

But all is not doom and gloom. For a recovery phase follows.

This involves finding rest, naming and grieving our losses, adapting to the new, turning towards hope, and thoughts of rebuilding and restoration.

As we come up out of the valley of collective trauma, we enter the phase of wiser living.

We cannot rush this journey or miss out any of the stages.

We cannot jump the gulf between the heroic phase and the wiser living phase. So where are you on this journey?

At what stage is the person sat next to you?

We shall need to find time and space to listen to one another's stories.

Who would have thought a virus so tiny as to be invisible to the naked eye could grow and spread across the globe, leaving a trail of sickness, death, social deprivation and economic woe.

Look at this picture showing the relative size of tiny particles.



Massively magnified, on the right we see a strand of brown human hair. Imagine how fine human hair is.

Then in descending order of size we see the relative size of other microscopic particles: fine beach sand, a grain of salt, a white blood cell, a grain of pollen, a dust particle, a red blood cell, a respiratory droplet, an even smaller dust particle, bacterium, wildfire smoke and then the red speck of Coronavirus. The Zika virus is even more microscopic.

No wonder we struggle to fight such an invisible enemy.

So what does faith say to the science?

How does the word of God speak into this?

Where can we find good news in our collective trauma?

Let us turn to God's word.

## Bible Reading

Mark chapter 4 verses 26-34

Hymn/song

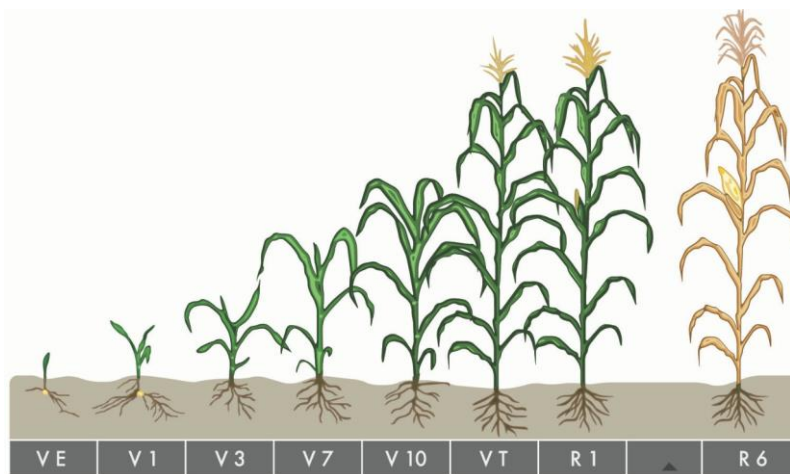
## Sermon

Seeds remind us that very good things come in small packages, not just the very bad stuff like Covid. One tiny seed has locked-in potential to produce something far bigger and far greater, a crop or a tree, to nourish and give life.

In Jesus' world and in our world seed has a message for us. Jesus uses the image of a seed to tell two short parables to describe the Kingdom of God.

Remember the kingdom of God means the rule of God in the hearts of men and women, people just like us. The first of the two parables tell of a man who scatters seed. Days and nights, weeks and months pass by, nature does its thing and the crop is ready to harvest.

Look at this picture showing the growing stages of corn – this is sweet corn:



What is Jesus teaching us today in this parable from Mark 4:26-29? He tells us the crop grew all by itself.

As for the sower – he does not know how. It is a mystery and a miracle.

When we think about our lives and our church - where we are and where we would like to be - it is ok to say 'Lord, I don't know how'. 'Lord, I don't know how I'm going to cope if there is further delay to restrictions being lifted'. 'Lord, I don't know how I am going to get through this personal and collective trauma. I don't know how I am going to grow through the stages of heroic defiance, the valley of disillusionment and tiredness, to rebuilding, and to a place of wiser living. I can't see it'. God is saying to you today 'Trust me'. 'Leave it to me'.

With the apostle Paul we affirm 'I am sure of this: that the One who began a good work among you will keep it growing until it is completed at the day of Christ Jesus'. (Philippians 1:6)

Like the seed, the growth of God's kingdom is invisible and inevitable.

Nothing can stop nature's growth. Nothing can stop the growth of God's kingdom. Not even Covid.

Let us try not to be impatient or try to force change or growth.

Nothing emerges full-grown.

We don't look down on a seed because it isn't the final crop.

Likewise, we should not despise small beginnings in the kingdom of God.

God's design is perfect at every stage.

The seed is a perfect seed.

The new shoot is a perfect new shoot.

The stalk is a perfect stalk.

The flowering is a perfect flowering.

The ear of corn is a perfect ear of corn.

The full grain is perfect grain.

The harvest is a perfect harvest.

Likewise, God's design in your life is perfect at every stage. Be kind to yourself. Be patient.

Each stage has its own season.

At every stage, have faith that God is working perfectly well in your life.

For we live by faith not by sight.

(2 Corinthians 5:7)

Nothing emerges full-grown. We need great patience with God, with others and with ourselves.

You are growing 'in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'. (2 Peter 3:18)

Yes we confess we sometimes resist God, but nothing in the end can stop God's kingdom rule.

If you could take a time-lapse snapshot of your faith you would see how far you have grown.

Lastly, in the second of the two parables - in Mark 4:30-34 Jesus speaks of a mustard seed, the tiniest seed that grew into a huge bush or tree providing shelter and shade of all kinds of birds. Look at this picture showing the mustard seed and the mustard tree.



Earlier, I said who would have thought a virus so tiny could grow and spread across the globe, leaving a trail of devastation. Jesus' parable of the tiny mustard seed reminds me that the kingdom of God, the reign of God, is also growing and spreading across the globe, but bringing new life, new love, new freedom and new hope to all who will receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Peoples from many nations find refuge and shelter in God. Take heart. The kingdom of God is greater than the kingdom of Coronavirus.

As we go from here, we give ourselves to the work and the life of His kingdom.

We don't just fold our hands and wait.

We keep on sowing seeds, we water them with prayer, and we leave the growth and transformation to God's Holy Spirit.

I close with these words of a hymn:

*All we can do is nothing worth unless God blesses the deed;  
vainly we hope for the harvest-tide till God gives life to the seed:  
nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God,  
as the waters cover the sea.*

## Prayers for Others

We give thanks today for the harvests of Christ's cross, the fruit of Christ's passion: unconditional love, full forgiveness, unending mercy, transforming grace, complete wholeness, endless peace and eternal life.

In the cross of Christ our need meets God's redemption.

The tree of pain becomes the tree of new life.

In confidence and hope, we now bring the prayers of our hearts for the transformation of the church and the world.

Lord of the harvest, the time of sowing and the time of reaping are yours. The time of weeping and the time of singing are yours, too.

Thank you for the time of sowing and the time of reaping.

Let there be a harvest in your world.

We pray for those places in the world where the crops have failed and for those where poverty is the result of human aggression and human greed. We pray for the G7 summit and its outcomes.

We pray for our local Foodbank and all who benefit from its services.

And we pray for those who reap a bitter harvest, victims of natural disaster and victims of war.

We pray for a harvest of peace and plenty in our world and we promise to work with you for it, both reaping and sowing.

Let there be harvest in the hearts of children, women and men.

We pray for those who are spiritually starved, who long for meaning in their lives and who need to belong. We pray for a harvest of faith and of lives transformed by the good news of Jesus and we promise to work with you for it, both reaping and sowing.

Let there be harvest in our own lives, and in the lives of those we know and love.

We pray for those who are sick or troubled, for those who are lonely or who have suffered loss and trauma.

We pray for ourselves, that, whatever difficulties we face, our lives may be grateful and joyful.

We pray for a harvest of deepened love, more faithful discipleship, and we promise to work with you for it, both reaping and sowing for the harvest of your kingdom.

We ask these prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ, our living Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

### The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

May the offerings brought this day be used as seeds,  
planted faithfully and nurtured lovingly so that God's way may be  
realized anew in this world.

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest  
upon you now and always. **Amen.**

### Coffee Time Conversation

- Finish the sentence 'Lord, I don't know how...'
- What areas of your life is God saying 'Leave it to me'?
- How will you use your 'mustard seed faith' this week?

### Suggested Hymns and Songs

#### More Traditional Music:

God is working his purpose out  
Great is thy faithfulness  
God of all power, and truth, and grace

#### More Contemporary Music:

Water you turned into wine  
Blessed be your name  
I am a new creation

Keep socially distancing.

Keep safe.

Keep communicating.

Keep celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord and the coming of  
the Holy Spirit.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter