

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

What's the story?

Exploring story - the parables of Jesus and sharing our own stories.

When you hear the word parable you probably immediately think about Jesus. Perhaps, if you grew up with church, you're transported to Sunday school or school assemblies. Jesus is, I think, widely regarded as one of the greatest story tellers ever. There's much to learn as adults in the modern age from Jesus' parables and also from sharing our own stories in a way that encourages and challenges others.

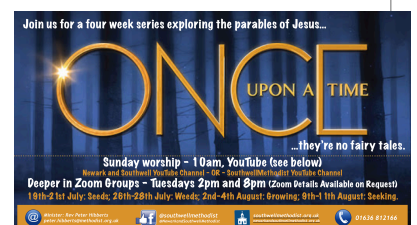
We are coming to the end of the year of story in the Methodist Church and I wonder if I haven't taken the opportunities possible to get folk sharing their stories - not that time is running out, we can of course continue. One of the things I aimed to do when I first started in ministry was to visit every member of every church, at home, to hear their story (I managed all but a small handful and the ones I missed are still highlighted on my lists - if that's you, give me nudge and I'll put it right as soon as is safe to do so!) Somehow, after I'd done this I felt like I knew and had connected with each member. Stories are powerful ways of connecting.

We can use story to bear witness to events (from our own perspective) and in church settings we often call them testimonies for that reason. Stories also help us to make sense of things, to process them and fit events into the framework of the rest of our lives - they are not only meaning communicating but meaning making. Stories can also influence us, challenge us and encourage us.

A parable is a particular type of story and the name 'parable' comes from the greek *parabolē* which literally means to throw alongside (*para* as in paramedic and *bolē* as in to bowl). It is the art of using a familiar idea to explain and illustrate an unfamiliar one. It's essentially a comparison like an embroidered simile or metaphor. They should be simple and there is normally one central concept that's being communicated. Sometimes the meanings are more complex with various individual parts symbolising various individual things (known as an allegory) but even then, there is often one central concept to take away.

I'm looking forward to the next few weeks in which we will explore the parables of Jesus but may I encourage you to also explore your own story and the story of others. The Sunday services, starting this week, will include stories from folk which you may or may not recognise, folk from our own churches. I have chosen a farmer (or the wife of a farmer!) for the parable of the sower; a gardener for the parable of the weeds; and a baker (or one connected to a family baker) for the parable of the yeast though I've asked them all to simply tell their story during lockdown. It doesn't matter what your story is, its no more or less valuable than someone else's story - it's yours, tell it! You may be surprised at what God reveals to you, about yourself and God, as you tell your story and you may also be surprised by how you bless, encourage and challenge others. Why not also phone someone up during this lockdown and ask them to tell you their story? You may be surprised by how much that blesses them and you too!

And don't forget the Tuesday groups that we'll be offering to go deeper into each parable. If something peaks your interest, prompts questions or even presents something that you disagree with in what I write or say, why not join me on a Tuesday at 2pm or 8pm through Zoom in order to tease it out in discussion - I'd love to hear you and a bit of your story in the process!





Worship Opportunities

1. Circuit Services

A variety of worship opportunities will be hosted on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF-CBiFzWL81CUJrKjC1Psw>) Tune in today!

2. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am **A Word for All Seasons**

Another service celebrating the Catholic Church's 'Year of the Word' and the importance of scripture from the Diocese of Leeds.

3. Radio Nottingham

Every Sunday, at 8am, you can listen to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. Listen online to BBC Nottingham radio station 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.

4. Online Holiday Club!

Southwell Methodist Church will be running (in collaboration with three other churches in Southwell) an online Holiday Club, for children in Reception to Year 6, 3rd-7th August 2020. If you know of anyone who would benefit or can offer to carry this yolk with them, please get in touch!
families4SMC@gmail.com

If all this baffles you - call me or email:
peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk.

Sowing generously.

Reflections from Matthew 13:1-23 (NRSV)

Lockdown has thrust the majority of us into different pursuits. For the Hibberts family, we have been thrust into the garden. The wonderful weather in early lockdown and the shielding rules that prevented me from leaving home even to exercise, forced me to find fulfilment in cultivating vegetables. We constructed four raised beds and have grown tomatoes, peppers, carrots, cucumbers, rocket, radish, lettuce and a variety of herbs (some more successfully than others!) I must confess my experience of sowing has been quite different from the one presented by Jesus. I've had small seed trays and carefully measure depths with a dibber, carefully placed individual seeds, pricked or thinned out seedlings and eventually planted out into the beds with attention to guidance regarding spacing.

In Jesus' parable, the sowing is much more generous (one might say careless)! There is seed on the path, amongst the thorns, in rocky ground and of course in good soil. In this parable, we are fortunate enough to have some words of explanation. The seed is the word of Kingdom of God (if you like its both Jesus - The living Word and the message which we communicate with our words and lives). The birds are considered to be the 'evil one' (perhaps many a gardener whose seeds have been snaffled by the wildlife would agree!) who steals it away before faith can take root; the rocky ground is where folk receive but it doesn't go deep enough and so faith does not last, and the weeds are the pressures, worries and distractions of life that prevent faith from growing. Of course the good soil is a message understood and a journey of discipleship undertaken. In short the plant that grows to full maturity and bears its own fruit (further seeds for further disciples) is anyone who becomes a disciple of Christ, a true Christian.

I think anyone who has been in the church for a long time has witnessed folk in each of these categories. I distinctly remember two people who I prayed with in my work as a youth group leader. One, a young lady, asked me to pray with her as she accepted Christ. She continued with a group for a while but then stopped coming. Whilst I cannot be sure what came of her faith, I fear it dried up and she no longer follows. The other, a young man who answered a call at a Christian conference, and I had the privilege to pray a pray of commitment with him, now works for a para-church charity helping some of the most disadvantaged in society and has a faith stronger than ever (from what I can tell). I can't take any credit for the faith of either and though I wonder if I could have done more to disciple the young lady, the reality is that some continue in faith and others do not. We sometimes like to make this parable about church strategy, how can we prepare the soil, how can we fend off the devil and protect those young in faith, how can we encourage folk to put down deep roots, how can we suppress the weeds. In fact sometimes we become earth cultivators. I think there's a lot of merit in this - church is about creating an environment, a family in which faith can grown

18. and thrive but to suggest this is the central meaning of the parable, I think is a mistake. It's much simpler than that. It's about a generous sower. The sower does nothing to tackle the weeds at this stage; the sower does not take care to avoid the path as 'he' sows; the sower isn't reported to set up scarecrows to ward off the birds. He simply scatters. I wonder sometimes if we are so busy preparing the soil for the seed that we forget (or never get round to) sowing. We are perhaps worried that folk will reject our church or our faith and so we aim to work on church and try to get our services just as we want them and then we can plan to open up and invite folk.

I've spent some time exploring an initiative called the 'Weekend of Invitation' which aims to get folk inviting friends and relatives to church. According to its founder, Michael Harvey, 7 out of 10 Christians can name someone they feel God might be prompting them invite to church and yet 8 out of 10 of them have no intention of doing so. Is it any wonder that our church is in decline. The Good News is that (research shows) people are open to received an invitation and we know who to invite; the bad news is that these invitations are not happening. Have you invited someone recently? If not, what's stopping you?

Perhaps we don't feel **competent** to invite folk. ('I'm not an evangelist' I hear people say - the reality is we are all called to share our faith.) Actually, if scripture is any indication, God doesn't use *competent* people - look at Moses who was a poor speaker, Gideon the smallest of the smallest tribe, David the youngest and so called weakest of his family. And in the New Testament, Peter denying, Thomas doubting Saul persecuting. All used powerfully by God. God doesn't need us to be *competent*.

Perhaps we don't feel **confident**. How confident do you think Moses felt before the pharaoh? How confident was Gideon in facing the Mideonites? How confident do you think Peter felt when locked in the upper room? How confident was Thomas when Jesus first appeared? Yet all had been chosen!

What we need to feel is **courageous**. Actually we don't need to *feel* courageous, we need to *be* courageous. That's the common factor in scripture. Joshua, at the beginning of his leadership if the Israelites, into the promised land is not called to be competent or confident but to be *courageous* (Joshua 1:6)! (In fact in verse 7 he's told to be *very* courageous!)

Folk, really, what have we got to lose? We may fear embarrassment and rejection but the alternative is that folk don't get to hear of God's love. Stop worrying about where the seed may land and whether or not it will grow and focus on what you are being call (commanded) to do. Sow. Sow frequently. Sow generously.

I challenge you to ask God daily who God wants you to speak to, who God wants you to invite - who God wants you to sow into. Then I challenge you to pray for them, by name, daily. Finally, I challenge you to be **courageous** - **be very courageous** and reach out to them.

Prayer Space

Energising, life-giving, playful God,
whose Spirit teases out of creation things old and
new,
be creative in and through us;
be creative beyond us,
so that what you hope and will for the world may
come into being, justly, abundantly and joyously.

Help us to face honestly and boldly all the flaws and frailties that flow from the freedom you have given us.

Open us up, with the whole of creation,
to the future that is yours alone to give.
Involve us not to create your kingdom, but to
welcome its arrival in our actions and words.

We pray in the name of Christ, who proclaims and embodies the kingdom we seek. Amen.

Clive Marsh, Vice-President, British Methodist Conference, 2019/2020

Please also keep your eyes open for opportunities for prayer and to share together for the way we **Re-imagine Church** post lockdown - the **second** Zoom session for prayer is this Thursday - 16th July - between 2pm and 3pm. Please make it a priority if you can! Zoom Details:

Meeting ID: 842 4011 0921

Password: Imag1ne

(Capital I at the beginning and number 1 in place of the second i)

In these unprecedented times we believe we're invited by God to be...



...let's join together in this important process with opportunities for...

PRAYER ...and to... SHARE

A series of 'gatherings' for prayer and to seek God's will for our changing church.

Prayer 'Gathering' 1:
Thursday 9th July 2-3pm - Zoom
Meeting ID: 842 4011 0921
Password: Imag1ne

A series of 'gatherings' to share informally and imagine what the church could be.

Share 'Gathering' 1:
Thursday 16th July 2-3pm - Zoom
Meeting ID: 842 4011 0921
Password: Imag1ne

Ministers: Rev Nathan Falls | Rev Peter Bates and Rev Peter Hibberts | @newkandouthwellmethodist | newkandouthwellmethodist.org.uk

If you have specific prayer requests, do get in touch with me and if you would like requests to be shared around the SMC prayer chain contact Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.



FREE phone lines for prayers and news from the Methodist Church

Listen to a **prayer**: 0808 281 2514

Listen to **news**: 0808 281 2478

Content is updated weekly on Thursday afternoon

Zoom Home Groups

Our Tuesday Home Groups will be restarting on 21st July with a new four week teaching series on the parables of Jesus - 'Once Upon A Time.'

The theme will begin each Sunday as a focus for the service and offer deeper discussion each following Tuesday, via Zoom. Tune into our YouTube Channel for the services - Zoom details available on request.

ALL WELCOME - from any church or none.

Join us for a four week series exploring the parables of Jesus...

ONCE UPON A TIME

...they're no fairy tales.

Sunday worship - 10am, YouTube (see below)
News and Bulletin 10.30am - 11.00am (see below)
Deeper in Zoom Groups - Tuesdays 2pm and 8pm (Zoom Details Available on Request)
19th-21st July: Seek; 26th-28th July: Weeds; 2nd-4th August: Growing; 9th-11th August: Seeking

Ministers: Rev Peter Hibberts | @southwellmethodist | southwellmethodist.org.uk | 01432 812144

Reflective songs...

Blessed be your name (StF 41) [LINK](#)

Tell me the stories of Jesus [LINK](#)

Hear the call of the kingdom [LINK](#)

Have you heard the good news (StF 406) [LINK](#)

Great is the darkness (StF 405) [LINK](#)

Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Help for the isolated

Elston residents, if you need support during the lockdown please contact the Good Neighbourhood Group through Sandra Wright on 07773 689736 or Linda Fitzgerald on 0798937115.

The Sutton-on-Trent Buddies Corona Virus Helpline is up and running - for help of any kind the number to ring is 01636 351615. or email suttonbuddy@outlook.com

Southwell Town Council can provide support by calling 07874780931, 07874780932 or 01636816103.

North Muskham's Buddy Scheme can be reached by contacting Andy Willey on 07967138724 or muskhambuddyscheme@yahoo.com.

If you would like to volunteer you should also make contact using the above details.

Dial-a-sermon service now live!

Dial a Sermon

To listen to this week's sermon from Revd. Peter Hibberts please call this number. (Calls cost the same as a local call.)

01636 558871

Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit
helping you stay connected whilst we're apart.



We now have a telephone sermon service. If you have no access to the internet but would like to hear the reading and sermon from the previous Sunday, you can dial up the number above and hear it from the minister's voice! Calls cost the same as a local call and recordings should be around 15 minutes each - you can access them at any time of the day or night! We endeavour to upload the new sermon each weekend so it may be a few days behind this newsletter - don't worry, that's normal!

Do get in touch if you need to on (01636) 812166 or peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk.

15-7-20

Families: families4SMC@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S CHURCH AT HOME!

We are providing a full children's church session for our younger church family members each week. You will be able to download the plan every week here:

<https://www.southwellmethodist.org.uk/childrenschurchathome.htm> so that you can do it at home as a family to help your children explore the theme that Rev. Peter preaches on in his service.



Family activities

Story Time:

As you tell the story, invite your child to participate by joining in with these actions:

Seed: curl up in a ball

Sun: Stand with arms wide and turn round

Grow: Wave one arm in the sky

Wither: bend at the waist like a rag doll

Jesus told this story: Once, a farmer planted some **seed**. He planted a whole big field. The **sun** shone and the wind blew and the **seeds** began to **grow**. Well, some of them did.

Some of the **seed** fell onto the path. It couldn't **grow** at all. Even though the **sun** shone and the wind blew, that **seed** just sat there until a huge bird flew down and gobbled it up.

Some of the **seeds** fell at the edge of the field where the ground was stony. The **sun** shone and the wind blew and the **seed** started to **grow**. It sprang up high in the sky. But because the ground was stony, the **seed** didn't have a root, and when the **sun** shone the **seed** was so thirsty that it started to **wither**.

Some of the **seed** fell into deep soil at the edge of the field. But there were weeds there as well. The **sun** shone and the wind blew and the **seed** began to **grow**. But so did the weeds and the thistles. They grew so fast and so hard that they strangled the **seeds**, and they began to **wither**.

Poor farmer... he sowed his **seeds**, and what was happening to it? Was it all going to **wither**? No! As the **sun** shone and the wind blew, most of the **seed** had fallen in the field. And as the **sun** shone that seed started to **grow** – and **grow** – and **grow**! And soon the farmer had a great harvest!

Jesus' friends looked at him. "Why are you talking about **seeds**?" they asked. "Why aren't you talking about God?"

"Ah," said Jesus. "I am! You see this story has a meaning. The **seed** is the things that I say. And the places that the **seed** falls are people's hearts. And when people listen to me, and do what I say, and learn to love me, then their hearts are like the field. And they grow strong, because they love me. But some people don't listen to me, and they don't want to learn to love me... and those people are like the other places – the edge of the field and the path... those people don't want to love me – and the **seed** never **grows**."

Explain that God wants to whisper in all of our hearts. But we have to decide if we will listen!

Craft Activity:

You will need: Kitchen roll cut into largish heart shapes, water in a watering can, paper plates, and cress seeds.

Let your child place a heart on a plate. They should sprinkle the heart with water and then add some cress seeds. As the cress grows over the next week or so into a heart shape, the children can remember that God wants our hearts to listen to what he says.

Keep in Touch

There will be lots of opportunities to keep in touch during this time, not least by picking up the phone, to each other, or giving me a call (Rev Peter: 01636812166) or sending an email (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk). Can I recommend the Newark and Southwell Methodist Church FaceBook page to you in particular. It's an open page so it's available to all and you needn't be on FaceBook to view it. You can access it at facebook.com/NewarkandSouthwellMethodist/. Don't worry if you're not a member of Southwell Methodist Church, we're all in this together!

Also, spread the word to anyone you think would appreciate receiving this newsletter. Let them know of our FaceBook pages and if you come across someone who might benefit from receiving it please get in touch.