**Messy Church – September 2021**

**Parable of the Sower: Matthew chapter 13, verses 1 – 9, 18 – 23**

We are using the version of the story from the Gospel of St Matthew, but the story is also told in the gospels of Mark and Luke, with very little difference.

The activities are:

1. **Seed pictures**
2. **Card birds with concertina wings**
3. **Leaf printing**
4. **Cress seeds**
5. **Chocolate mousse mud pies**
6. **Microwave popcorn**

**In the celebration, we will also do:**

1. **Picture of the harvest**
2. **Cut out of a seed**
3. **Picture of a ripe stalk of corn**

**Stories and Activities**

**1 Seed pictures**

**You will need:** paper, glue, bird seed (most supermarkets sell small bags of mixed bird seed), pencils to draw your picture if you want to do that.

Make a picture with the seeds – you can spread the glue all over the paper, and sprinkle seeds on it, or you can sort your seeds into different types and make a picture using different types to do different areas. Could you make a farmer out of seeds using different seeds for his clothing and his face? Or do part of the fields, with the seeds growing on their stems.

Jesus was sitting in a boat, talking to a large crowd standing on the shore. He told them the story of the farmer sowing corn by throwing the seeds around his field. Some seeds fell on the path, and the birds ate them. Some seeds fell where there were rocks, and although the seeds grew quickly, they didn’t have much space for its roots to get water, and the plants died of thirst. Some seeds fell among the thorn bushes, and the thorn bushes stopped the seeds from growing well, by stopping the light from reaching the plants that grew from the seeds. Some seeds fell on the good soil, and they grew into strong plants, with lots of grain to make into bread, and save for planting next year.

**Talk about:** different sorts of seeds – all sorts of plants have seeds. We have used mostly grain seeds, because that is what birds eat – but peas and beans are seeds too. What sort of seeds do you eat?

**2 Card birds with concertina wings**

**You will need:** a print out of the bird, (sent with the booklet, or on the website), another piece of paper for the wings, scissors. Colouring pencils or felt tips if you want to colour your bird.

Cut out the bird, including, very carefully, the slit in the side (just cut the hole out). Fold the other piece of paper like a fan (this is a concertina fold). Very carefully push the folded piece of paper through the hole in the bird, making sure that the wings are even on each side of the body.

When the crowd had gone away, having listened to the story, Jesus’ disciples asked him what the story meant.

He told them that the seeds were like people hearing the word of God, and the seeds that fell on the path were like people who were somewhere where they could heard about God’s love, but they paid hardly any attention, as if the birds had taken the sound away.

**Talk about:** the difference between hearing and understanding something – like a lesson at school – and hearing and forgetting – like not being interested, and just ignoring what you have heard.

1. **Cress seeds**

**You will need:** a plate, or a waterproof tray, or a paper plate lined with tin foil, some paper towel, cress seeds (easily obtained at a garden centre, and possibly at a supermarket that sells seeds), water

Put several layers of paper towel over the plate, and make it wet – not with water overflowing, but wet to the touch. Sprinkle the seeds over the paper towel. You will have to keep the paper towel wet to make the seeds grow. Put the plate in a place where it gets light, but not too hot. Cress grows really easily under these conditions, and you will be able to see its roots develop – but it also wilts really fast if it gets too dry.

Jesus said that the seeds which fell among the rocks in the field were like people who were really happy when they heard the word of God, but when things in their lives got difficult, the first thing to go was God, because they didn’t have deep roots in God – like the cress seeds on paper.

**Talk about:** how it takes time to grow roots. Trees must have really deep roots, or they would fall over, but plants which only last a year would not need such deep roots. Think about how we might grow deep roots in God, and how much time it might take.

**4 Leaf printing**

**You will need:** leaves (preferably not bramble leaves, as the thorns on the back get in the way!) bindweed, or tree leaves are good, paint, paper, paper towel or pieces of sponge or paint brush to put paint on the leaves, plenty of water to rinse your sponge, wipe the leaves or clean your hands

Put paint onto the top of a leaf (the smoothest side), and then put the leaf paint side down onto the paper. Use your hand, or a piece of sponge or paper towel to smooth the leaf down so that the paint is transferred to the paper. Lift the leaf up and, if you want to use the same leaf again, with a different colour of paint, wipe the paint off and repeat with the new colour. If you want to continue with the same colour, just make sure there is plenty on the leaf and press it down again in a different place. If you want to use another leaf – perhaps a different shape – repeat the process with the next leaf.

All plants have leaves. The leaves soak up sunlight and water, and convert it to energy so that the plant grows and produces seeds. Trees grow the biggest and take the longest to produce fruit (which contain the seeds) and go on producing fruit for years. Some plants grow and produce seeds only for one year – corn is like that. If you see corn growing in a field where something else is growing, that would be seed that fell to the ground the previous year, and has grown. Even the grass in your garden, or in the park, has leaves – you could try printing grass leaves if you have some.

Jesus said that the seeds which fell among the thorns were like people who heard the word of God, but their lives were so taken up by other things – a car, a house, a job, their friends – and these other things were like the thorns, they grew up around the plants and prevented them from seeing the sun, and growing.

**Talk about:** if a plant cannot get enough sunlight, it doesn’t grow. Different plants need different amounts of sunlight, but they all need some. A plant that doesn’t get enough sunlight dies. If we never think about something, whatever that something is, it doesn’t develop in our lives – if you keep your bike in the shed, and never ride it, you get out of practice and never go anywhere. If you never pay any attention to God’s word, it cannot help you live your life.

**5 Chocolate mousse mud pies**

**You will need:** chocolate mousse mix, milk, measuring jugs, bowls to mix in, cake cases to put it in, trays lined with greaseproof paper to put the cases on while the mousse sets.

Line a tray with greaseproof paper. Make up the mousse as given on the packet, and spoon the mixture into cases. Put the cases on the tray, writing the name of the child on the tray lining beside the cake case. Put full trays in the fridge to set. Any child can help stir the mix into the milk. Older children can fill their own cake cases.

Jesus said that the seeds which fell into the good ground were like people who heard the word of God and thought about it, and tried to understand it. They were the people who produced good, Godly, things in their lives – the fruit of the people of God, like the fruit of the plant – the seeds of the grain the farmer planted.

**Talk about:** What soil needs to be good soil: all the right things in (water, the right chemicals, organic matter), and none of the wrong things in (stones, weeds), for plants to grow. For us to be good seeds, we need to do more than hear the word of God.

**6 Microwave popcorn**

**You will need:** Microwave popcorn in varieties that you like, plates to put it on when made, microwave ovens.

Follow the instructions on the packet/box, and do not leave the microwave unattended. When cooked, put an appropriate amount on paper plates for the children concerned. The plates can be labelled with the child’s name.

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**Talk about:** Talk about how small things can become large – plants grow, and so do children. For us to be good seeds, we need to do more than hear the word of God.

**Celebration**

For the activities during the celebration, you will need paper, crayons, colouring pencils, paints or felt tip pens, and scissors

This is the time of year when we think about harvest, and when we have Harvest Festivals. And to have a harvest you have to grow things. That’s why we’re telling this story. It starts with sowing.

We’ll sing one of my newer favourite harvest songs, Cauliflowers fluffy. <https://youtu.be/PukdaXUzgOU>

There was a farmer, and he had a field. It was a bit of a funny field. It was right at the edge of the village, where the land started to get hilly, even rocky. Beyond the field the land was only good for sheep or goats, not for growing corn. Bits of the field close to the hills were full of stones, bits of the field had weeds that grew into it from outside. There was even a path that people walked along right through the middle of the field, and trod it down hard. But some of the field was ok.

It was spring, and the spring rains had come and softened the ground. The farmer had a plough that he fastened to a donkey, and he ploughed the field. The plough barely broke the surface of the path, and it rode up over the stones, but it broke up the good ground and it buried the weeds.

After he ploughed, the farmer set out to sow his corn. He had a big, flat basket, and he filled it with corn, and he walked through his field, up and down, and he scattered great handfuls of seed from the basket. He threw the seed here and there, up and down, everywhere across his field. Then he went along with a rake to cover the seed with soil.

Some seed landed on the hard, trodden down path. The soil wasn’t soft there, it just lay on the surface. When he raked over it, it still lay on the surface. Well, the birds had seen the farmer, and as soon as he left the field, down they came to the path where the corn was lying and quick as you like, they gobbled it up.

Time passed, and summer started to come, and the weather and the soil got warmer. In fact, over the rocks and stones the soil wasn’t very deep, and it got warm quickly. The seeds germinated really soon, and in next to no time the corn started to grow. Soon the rocky patch was a sight, with corn quite high, higher than any other part of the field. But oh dear! It got warmer still. In fact, it got quite hot. And because the soil over the rocks wasn’t very deep, it quickly dried out. Oh dear! That lovely tall corn just dried up and died without even having time to produce more corn.

In another part of the field the corn grew more slowly. Unfortunately, something else was growing as well. Do you remember the weeds that had been ploughed under? They started growing as well. And they grew quicker than the corn. Before long there was just a weed patch in the field as the weeds choked the corn and it died.

But do you remember I said that some of the field was good? Well, on that bit the birds didn’t gobble it, and it didn’t dry up or get choked by weeds. On the good soil the corn grew slowly and steadily till it was tall enough to produce more corn, thirty times, or sixty time or one hundred times as much corn.

**Draw or paint a picture of the field as you think it might look at harvest time.**

Jesus told the story about the farmer to a crowd of people. His disciples heard it and thought it must mean something special, but they couldn’t work out what. So when the crowd had gone, they asked Jesus what the story meant.” Well” said Jesus, “it’s like this…”

You see, the seed is the word of God. **Get a piece of paper and cut out a large seed shape**. Maybe you have a Bible verse that you would like to write on it.

You can spread God’s words everywhere, but sometime they’ll just be snatched away like the birds took the seeds, before they have a chance to even start to grow.

Perhaps, like the seed on the stones, they’ll take root really quickly, only to shrivel away when it gets too hot.

Maybe they’ll get where the weeds grow. They’ll start to grow but get choked by the cares of the everyday world. You know, doing your homework, meeting friends, playing games, working, housework, paying the bills…

But perhaps God’s word will fall on good soil, and will grow, and spread, so more people learn about God and Jesus. And when they do, that’s a great big harvest.

**Let’s draw a stalk of corn with at least 30 grains growing.**

Let’s say a prayer, and then we’ll sing again.

Payer

Lord God, thank you for holidays, for picnics and for sharing. Thank you for days out and for times when we can learn about you. Be with us where ever we are and help us to learn and to share.

Amen

We’ll sing Give thanks for the harvest <https://youtu.be/DsqocyckoFc>

Next Messy Church is 16th October. We hope to see you then, but this month we’ll say goodbye.

Enjoy our celebration on the Harlington Methodist Church YouTube channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTMWR_QCxujkh1zHjTFcoJw>

Then have tea or a treat if it isn’t tea time!

If you send me pictures of anything you do, I will share them on the Church Facebook page (if you want to send pictures that you don’t want shared, just tell me. I’ll only share the one’s you’re happy to share.)

Harlington Messy Church Team