

A Proper 10

16th July 17

Place: St Mary's
8.1-11

Isa 55.10-13, Rm

Theme: Don't worry, pay attention Matt 13.1-9.18-23

- ◆ Where are you this morning? Are you really here? Or are you still at work, or at the bank, or at home in the kitchen, at the shops or with a friend, or on the golf course or at the tennis? Or perhaps you are at the Doctors or in hospital, or at school or in an exam. It is very difficult to be fully present, especially when we are worried.
- ◆ Jesus talks a lot about how bad worrying is for our spiritual life. In the parable of the sower he warns us that worldly cares and worries can easily choke faith as it begins to grow. Worries are just one of the distractions in the parable that get in the way of God's word taking root in our lives. The path is the busy place, constant movement and interaction, comings and goings. These distractions too stop the word taking root and easily lead to it being stolen away. The rocks under the surface are also a distraction. Places where on the surface of our lives everything seems OK, but in reality underneath nothing can change, nothing can grow, the places of deep resistance within us. We don't want to pay attention to what they are, to digging them out and making more space, instead we are distracted from them and the growth stops when

2

things start to get hot for us. The parable of the sower warns us about all the different distractions that get in the way of growing in faith. If we want to grow as Christians and as a church we need to pay attention to God and stop worrying.

- ◆ Jesus tells us not to worry about the future. He draws our attention to God's providence, to the way the needs of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field are handsomely met and tells us to remember that we are much more precious to God than any of these. When we hear Jesus telling us to consider the lilies of the field it can be easy to think that that is all very well for the Son of God but he didn't have a mortgage to pay or rent to find or the children to feed. He hasn't seen what is going on in the world today.
- ◆ Indeed, paying closer attention can just lead to more worry. Watching the news, seeing how things go with other people is sobering. Realising how easily we could be caught up in random acts of violence is terrifying. The more we see the news at the moment; the more we realise how unstable and unpredictable the world is. It is very hard to have faith when we see what is going on.
- ◆ Many people in our society and I suspect the church choose to distract themselves with drinking, drugs and dancing, with facebook and

Instagram. Always busy in other places and always moving.

- ◆ Paying attention is the key to the spiritual life, but in his letter to the Romans Paul reminds us that we need to make sure that we are paying attention to the right things. We need to be paying attention to God first, and then the world and ourselves. This is what the commandment to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our strength and with all our souls and to love our neighbours as ourselves looks like in practice. Love is the attention we give to something. If we love someone we think about them, we spend time with them, we are concerned with what they think and what they need and what is best for them. That is how we love God too.
- ◆ So how do we pay attention to God? We do it through coming to church week by week, through worship, through prayer and through reading the Bible. It is simple, but it is not easy. We need to make time and give our attention to God. Our bodies may come to church, but is our attention on God when we are here? When we pray are we really praying and giving our time to God, or are we really setting aside time to worry? When we read the Bible and come to church do we come expecting God to speak to us, do we quieten ourselves so that we can hear?

- ◆ Our attention is the good soil in the field, the place where the word of God can grow and develop in us. If we practice paying attention to God, stilling the voices within, letting go of distractions and worries, we will hear wonderful and surprising things. We will discover that God is not far away at all, God is very close to us, but we easily wander away. We will discover things like the wonderful reassurances and promises of our first reading from Isaiah.
- ◆ Isaiah tells us we do not need to worry because God's will will prevail. God will do what he has promised both in our lives and in our world. And what is his will for us? His will for us is joy and peace. We just need to be ready to receive it.
- ◆ We could learn a good lesson on this from the tennis players down the road. When they are waiting to receive a serve they are absolutely ready, absolutely present, absolutely focused; so when their opponent serves they are ready to receive and respond to whatever happens. We need to come to church and to our prayers and Bible reading with the same attention and readiness. Can you imagine what St Mary's would be like if the whole church on a Sunday was ready and waiting to receive from God and to respond?