

Abbey Baptist Church, Reading
Worship Service with Communion
10.30 am, 20 September 2026
Simon Bird leading & Rev Zoltan Biro preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk.

Find us on Facebook @ Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



A Call to worship: (Psalm 95:1,2,6)

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, **let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.**
Let us come before him with thanksgiving, **let us extol him with music and song**
Come, let us bow down in worship, **let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.**

Song: (BPW20 MP650)

1. The King is among us
His Spirit is here!
Let's draw near and worship
Let songs fill the air

2. He looks down upon us
Delight in His face
Enjoying His children's love
Enthralled by our praise

3. For each child is special
Accepted and loved
A love gift from Jesus
To His Father above

4. And now He is giving
His gifts to us all
For no one is worthless
And each one is called

5. The Spirit's anointing
On all flesh comes down
And we shall be channels
For works like His own

6. We come now believing
Your promise of power
For we are Your people
And this is Your hour

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A Prayer of Praise:

Lord Jesus, as the crowds and disciples gathered round you by the lake, so we join together in your presence to listen to you and to worship you.

We worship and praise you; We bring to you our joyful thanksgiving
We acknowledge you as Lord of our lives, Halleluia!

The Lord's Prayer: *You are invited to pray in your own heart language*
Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever and ever. Amen.

Family Time: One type of seed, four types of soil

Song: (BPW 21 MP 691) **Offering taken, then children leave**

1. This is the day, this is the day
*That the Lord has made, that the Lord
has made;*
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.
(repeat)

2. This is the day...*when he rose again...*

3. This is the day...*when the Spirit
came...*

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First Bible Reading: Matthew 13:1-9 (Lumo video)

Second Bible Reading: Matthew 13:18-23

Song: (MP 1100)

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You, I want to see You

To see you high and lifted up, shining in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love as we sing holy, holy, holy
Holy, holy, holy; holy, holy, holy
Holy, holy, holy; holy, holy, holy - I want to see You

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Sermon: Hearts That Bear Fruit (Matthew 13:1–23)

Last week we looked at the words of Jesus: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (Matthew 9:37). We looked outward. We saw the harvest, people who need Jesus. Today Jesus asks us to look inward. If we want to work for God in the harvest, we must first ask a hard question: *What is happening in my own heart?*

Jesus tells a simple story. A farmer scatters seed. The seed is the same every time. The farmer is the same every time. But the results are very different. Why? Because the soil is different.

The seed is the Word of God. The soil is the human heart. So, the question today is: "*What happens when God's Word falls on my heart?*" Jesus gives four answers, four kinds of soil, four outcomes. Let's look at each one.

1. The Hard Heart

"I hear, but I do not receive."

The first seed falls on the path. The ground is hard. The seed cannot go in. Jesus explains what this means: "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart" (Matthew 13:19).

This person hears the Word. But hearing is not the same as receiving.

Show the congregation a seed and a piece of hard ground. A seed can sit on hard ground for a long time and does nothing. The problem is not the seed. The problem is the soil.

Our hearts can become hard too. This happens through disappointment. Through hurt. Through pride. Through sin. Or simply through familiarity, we hear the Bible so often that we stop really listening. We think, "I already know this." And when we stop listening, God's Word stays on the surface. It does not go in.

The first prayer I would like us to say is simple: "*Lord, soften my heart.*" Before we read the Bible, before we hear a sermon, before we talk about God's Word, we can pray: "Lord, don't just speak to someone else today. Speak to me."

Maybe we should all ask ourselves: Is there something God has been saying to me that I have stopped listening to?

2. The Shallow Heart

"I receive, but I have no roots."

The first heart does not let the Word in at all. The second heart is different, it welcomes the Word, but only for a while. This seed falls on rocky ground. It grows fast. At first, it looks very good. But there is not enough soil under it. When the sun comes, the plant dies. Jesus says: "Since they have no root, they last only a short time" (Matthew 13:21). This person does not reject God's Word. They receive it gladly. The problem is that it never goes deep, it doesn't really change their character.

Show a small plant in a shallow pot. It can look healthy. It can even grow fast. But without deep roots, it will not survive even a day in the sun.

This is the real test of our faith. It is not only about what happens when life is easy. It is about what happens when life is hard, when a prayer is not answered the way we hoped, when someone hurts us, when we suffer, when following Jesus costs us something. That is when roots matter.

We do not grow deep roots simply by coming to church. Roots grow through simple, everyday habits: reading Scripture, praying, spending time with other Christians, worshipping, serving, obeying God. We looked at these habits earlier this year. These habits may feel small, but they put roots into our lives.

This matters especially for us, because we are a multicultural church. We come from different countries, different languages, and different Christian backgrounds. We do not all worship in the same way. But we are united because we are all rooted in the same Christ.

So ask yourselves today: Am I growing deeper roots? Or am I just becoming more familiar with church?

3. The Crowded Heart

"I receive the Word, but other things choke it."

There is a third kind of soil, and it may be the hardest to notice. This seed falls among thorns. The plant grows, but the thorns slowly choke it. Jesus explains: "The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22)

This person has not rejected Jesus. They may truly believe. The problem is not rejection. The problem is competition. Too many other things are growing in the same heart.

Bring a healthy plant surrounded by weeds. The weeds do not kill the plant right away. They simply grow next to it, taking the water, the nutrients, and the space — until slowly the plant stops producing fruit.

Our hearts get crowded in the same way. We worry about money, family, work, education, the future, relationships. We chase success. We want comfort, security, and recognition. None of these things is wrong by itself. But even good things become thorns when they take the place that belongs to God.

Again, ask yourself today: What takes up the most space in my heart? What do I think about the most? What worries me the most? What am I not willing to give up? That is probably where the thorns are growing.

Here is the good news: spiritual growth does not always mean adding something new. Sometimes it means pulling out a weed. It might mean saying no to something. Giving something up. Making our lives simpler. Forgiving someone. Giving our worries to God. The question is not only "What more should I do for Jesus?" Sometimes the better question is: "What do I need to remove, so Jesus has more room in my life?"

4. The Fruitful Heart

"I hear, I receive, and I bear fruit."

Finally, Jesus describes the good soil: "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop..." (Matthew 13:8). He explains what this means: "The seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23)

Notice what happens here. The Word does not just sit there. It produces fruit. That is the whole purpose of the seed. It is not enough for the seed to simply be present. It must produce something.

Hold up a piece of fruit. An apple tree does not produce apples by trying hard to *look like* an apple tree. It simply grows. It receives what it needs. And fruit comes naturally. Christian growth works the same way. It is not about trying to look impressive. As God's Word takes root in us, it changes us from the inside. We become more loving, more patient, more generous, more forgiving, more compassionate, more willing to serve, more like Jesus.

So, do not only ask, "How much of the Bible do I know?" Also ask: "What difference is the Bible making in my life?" If I hear about forgiveness, am I becoming more forgiving? If I hear about generosity, am I becoming more generous? If I hear about loving my neighbour, am I becoming more loving? If I hear about respecting my fellow brothers and sisters, am I becoming more respectful. If I hear about welcoming strangers, am I making room for people who are different from me? If I hear about serving, am I serving?

Fruit is the proof that the seed is alive.

5. A Fruitful Church

This question is not only personal. It is also a question for us as a church family: *What kind of soil are we creating together?* Imagine a church where God's Word takes deep root. Where people truly listen to God. Where people grow in faith. Where people from different cultures learn to love one another. Where personal preferences do not become thorns. Where people use their

gifts to serve. Where newcomers find a home. Where the fruit of the Spirit is visible in how we treat each other. That would be a truly fruitful church.

Notice one more encouraging detail. Jesus says the good soil produces "a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Not everyone produces the same amount, and that is good news. We do not all have the same gifts. We do not all have the same opportunities. We are not all at the same stage of life. God is not asking you to produce someone else's fruit. He is asking you to be faithful with your own life.

Jesus leaves us with four pictures, and four honest prayers.

- The path, a hard heart: "I hear, but I do not receive." *Lord, soften my heart.*
- The rocks, a shallow heart: "I receive, but I have no roots." *Lord, deepen my roots.*
- The thorns, a crowded heart: "I receive, but other things are choking God's Word." *Lord, clear the weeds.*
- The good soil, a fruitful heart: "I hear, I receive, I grow, and I bear fruit." *Lord, make me fruitful.*

Last week Jesus said, "See the harvest." Today He says, "Look at the soil." And maybe the most important question this morning is: "Which kind of soil am I?"

The seed is good. The Word of God is powerful. The farmer keeps sowing. So let us ask God for hearts that are soft enough to receive His Word, deep enough to grow roots, clear enough to make room for Him, and fruitful enough to bless others, because the harvest begins in our heart. Amen.

Song: (MP 606)

Soften my heart Lord
Soften my heart
From all indifference
Set me apart
To feel Your compassion
To weep with Your tears
Come soften my heart O Lord
Soften my heart

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Communion

As we come to the Lord's Table, let us remember that we do not come because we are worthy, but because Christ is merciful.

Let us be still before God and examine our hearts. **A moment of silence**

For the times when we have trusted ourselves rather than trusted you: **Lord, have mercy on us.**

For the times when we have loved ourselves more than we have loved you and our neighbours: **Lord, have mercy on us.**

For the words we have spoken that have wounded others, and for the words of encouragement we have failed to speak: **Christ, have mercy on us.**

For the things we have done that we know were wrong, and for the good we have left undone: **Christ, have mercy on us.**

For the times when pride has divided us, when fear has silenced us, and when selfishness has kept us from serving: **Lord, have mercy on us.**

For the people we have found difficult to forgive, and for the forgiveness we have been slow to offer: **Lord, have mercy on us.**

For the ways in which we have failed to recognise Christ in our brothers and sisters: **Christ, have mercy on us.**

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

So we come, not trusting in our goodness, but trusting in his grace; not claiming that we have no sin, but trusting the One who forgives.

Lord Jesus Christ, we confess our sins to you.

Forgive us, renew us, and restore us.

**Take away what keeps us from you and from one another.
Give us clean hearts and willing spirits.
Help us to walk in your ways and to love as you have loved us. Amen.**

Brothers and sisters, hear the good news:

Christ died for our sins. Christ was raised for our justification. And in Christ we are forgiven.

So let us come to the Table with humility, but also with confidence;
with repentance, but also with joy;

remembering that Christ has made peace for us. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Institution:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

(take a piece of bread and eat as it is served to you)

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

(we drink together once all have been served)

Post Communion Prayer:

**Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession: – John Chilvers

Father God, grant us **FAITH** so that we can put our trust in You when we are uncertain about the way ahead in our own lives. Help us to be like the seed that has taken root and is growing in You. Forgive us when we have doubts and lose sight of You. You understand our human frailty, and we ask for help in placing our whole confidence in You.

We ask for Your help in finding a way forward in how the future leadership of this church is to be organised. We pray for the current leadership. Give Zoltan and the deacons wisdom, patience and strength to guide this church in the coming months. May we be in sweet agreement as we together as your church here at Abbey decide on a new leadership structure. Also, we ask for guidance as what we should do about the leaking gutters and the church roof.

Father God, grant us **HOPE** so that when we are discouraged or anxious about the future for ourselves, the church, the world, may we lift our eyes towards Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Father God, grant us **LOVE** so that we may love You with all our heart and to love one another. Grant us patience when we are tested, kindness to those in need and grace to forgive when we have been hurt.

With faith, hope and love, may we see the harvest around us and to be part of it. May what we say and what we do reflect Your presence to everyone we meet every day. May we work together with one mind and one purpose. Bind us together with cords of love that cannot be broken. In the name of Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn: (BPW68 MP 564)

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise Him, for He is your health and salvation!

All those who hear,
Brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise Him in glad adoration.

2. Praise to the Lord, who above all things so wondrously reigning,
Bearing you high on his wings, and so gently sustaining:

Have you not seen?

All you have needed has been
Met by his gracious providing.

Joachim Neander (1650-80) tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827-78) and others

3. Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper your work and defend you!

Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend you:

Ponder anew

What the Almighty can do,
Who with His love doth befriend you.

4. Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!

All that has life and breath, come now with praises before Him!

Let the Amen

Sound from His people again:

Gladly we praise and adore Him.

The Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Grace:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.**

Events to highlight next week

Tuesday 22 nd	20.00	Prayer meeting on Zoom
Wednesday 23 rd	10.30	Renew Wellbeing
	12.00	Bible Study
Thursday 24 th	10.30	Toddlers
Friday 25 th	16.30	Table tennis club
Sunday 27 th	10.30	Sunday worship

QR Code for Financial Offering

