

Readings for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

12th July 2026

First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-13

Thus says the Lord: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle, and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Gospel: St Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was

sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

A Reflection for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

from Rev'd Anne Macdonald

This Sunday is Sea Sunday, a worldwide day of reflection on and prayer for all who work or volunteer at sea. As congregations living close to the coast, almost without realising it we are conscious of the sea, and probably as well, of the role of seafarers so we find it natural to continue to observe Sea Sunday every year. Indeed, in larger ports like Invergordon or places such as Barra there are still special services at the quay on Sea Sunday. However, nowadays it is not always straightforward for others who live further away from the coast to realise what we owe to those who are connected to the sea. Over time the outreach to seafarers has also changed as technology has evolved and reduced the number of seafarers.

There are no special readings allocated to this day, however, the Mission to Seafarers and other sea related charities give us a theme for each year. This year there are two main themes: Harbours of Hope: the church alongside seafarers, and additionally the Sailors' Society has asked us to hold in prayer all those sailors caught up in the war in the Straits of Hormuz. Rather than examining the readings for this Sunday on their own, there is merit in thinking about how Sea Sunday and the themes for this year might complement the readings. So, without pushing the analogy too far it is possible to say that water plays an important part in scripture. After all water is essential to life; we cannot live without it, and neither can we live well if we are disconnected from God. In the reading from Isaiah the prophet talks of the rain and snow watering the earth, giving seed to the sower, and bread to the eater. The passage continues to liken the Word of God to the watering of the earth. The Word does not return to God without having fulfilled its purpose, the purpose for which God sent it into the world.

Further, just as now, trade and food came from the sea. When we read the Acts of the Apostles or Paul's letters the importance of travel by the sea is clear. Travelling this way was not always safe or dependable but if God's word was to be spread it was essential. Then as well we have the fishermen who became Apostles, called to be fishers of people. Water, the sea and seafarers are part of the narrative of the scriptures, playing a role in disseminating the word of God. In the Gospel reading Jesus is sitting by the lake, sometimes translated as the sea, that is the sea of Galilee, a major reference point in his ministry and the lives of the people of that area. So great is the crowd of people that Jesus went out on a boat, whilst the people stayed on the beach. What an incredible picture. Jesus as we know from elsewhere in the Gospels was comfortable being in and around boats and water and here we have Jesus sitting in a boat and teaching the crowd. Just as in the Isaiah passage we have the juxtaposition of water and the spreading of the word of God. That though is not the only point in common with the Isaiah passage where the word of God is likened to the seed of the sower and the bread eaten by the recipient.

For the community around the Sea of Galilee fishing and agriculture formed the background to everyday life. It is also possible that Jesus, a devout Jew, knew the passage we read from Isaiah and that the people listening to him would recognise the reference. In any event, the image of the sower is one which resonates with an agricultural community and as we see elsewhere in the Gospels Jesus frequently used familiar scenarios when teaching. So Jesus sets the scene of a sower going out to spread seed. The sower scatters the seed, and it falls in many places. At that point, the sower does not know what will come from the scattered seed, however that is not a reason to stop sowing, if anything it is a reason to keep going because the return when the seed falls on good ground is so great. As Jesus explained to the disciples, and to us, the seed is the Word of God which God is offering to his creation. In this parable Jesus called us to listen. "Let anyone with ears listen." In the passage from Romans we read more about the gift given to all by God who sent his son into the world for our sake. In different language this echoes the parable of the sower: live by the Spirit, that is live as Jesus has taught us to.

This year for Sea Sunday, we have the theme of Harbours of Hope: the church alongside seafarers. A harbour is a port in a storm, a place of safety but a Harbour of Hope offers more than that it offers a future. The second part of the theme is a reminder that Jesus called us as Christians to walk alongside others, particularly the vulnerable and the poor. To show them the love of God and the greatest hope we can have by sharing with them the seed that is the Word of God. Anyone, regardless of their background, can need a Harbour of Hope at times in their life and for seafarers, a Harbour of Hope can be a real lifeline. Many of the people who go to sea come from desperately poor countries, or from poorer families within our own country. They might enjoy the life, but it is not clear if they choose this life or if it was the only viable option open to them. Some are away from home for extended periods of time, as much as ten months, whilst others might work two weeks on two weeks off. The fishing boats that still go out from our ports have long days and sometimes difficult and dangerous sea conditions. Lifeboat crews put their lives on the line for others. Frequently those who go to sea do not have the option to go home after a difficult day or when they miss their families. Some of the terms and conditions of work are poor, leading to exploitation. Seafarers can be very vulnerable.

Bishop Mark pointed out to us a few weeks ago in his sermon that the giving of a cup of water to someone vulnerable like a child would have been seen by the people of the time of Christ as the giving of something essential and precious. So the question for us is what would be equivalent today? For seafarers? And what can we do here in the North West Highlands? Although there are no large ports in this part of Scotland and the Mission to Seafarers no longer has any centres here there are things we can do. The Bible teaches us that we are all made in God's image. If we continue to work towards an environment where all are valued, where Jesus's teaching to reach out to the vulnerable is in action then we are creating a Harbour of Hope. By opening the church during the summer we are giving visitors and locals a space for reflection and prayer. Like the sower we do not know where the word of God will take root and flourish. It can be something as fleeting as acknowledging that someone exists by smiling at them. We can give donations to the relevant charities or support initiatives about improving conditions by signing petitions. There is a myriad of things we can do, including on this Sea Sunday praying for all seafarers caught up in the war in the Straits of Hormuz.