

July August 2026

From the Minister

I'm never quite sure when summer officially begins in Britain. Usually, it's the Tuesday afternoon when everyone says 'it's too hot' before immediately complaining about the rain! The weather is important to life, massively so for farms and our gardens! I wonder how many of us are green fingered? Maybe you've a window box, small or large garden, or just a plastic plant! Some of us have decades of experience with vegetable plots and fruit, while some are prizewinning flower growers! Gardening is big business; we spend around £9Billion annually on our gardens, £13Billion if you include landscaping services, tools and renovations.

We're blessed at the Manse in having a great size garden – not too big or small. Last year we didn't do much, but this year we're trying to get it how we'd like and make an already pleasant space into a haven we can use to relax and entertain, as well as attract as much wildlife. One rule of thumb that's been reinforced is that weeds grow faster than flowers, and snails are faster and hungrier than I'd like (Leave my hostas alone slugs!!). Earlier this year I put my name down for an allotment; thinking it would be a good while before getting one. I'd done the same in Eyemouth and 9 years later – about 3 weeks after accepting the Call to Harborough – I was told "Your allotment is almost ready!" This time I had an email to say there were spaces, and now we've been offered a half plot. After procrastinating about whether to take it, I've now completed the paperwork and paid the tiny annual fee. Hopefully I'll get the gate code soon. I do so with trepidation. It's been decades since I've grown veg and the work to get the plot ready is formidable. The climate here is also very different – cucumbers, courgettes, even sweetcorn can grow outside! But with rising costs I hope growing our own veg will be beneficial, cheaper and a good source of exercise.

I'm also hoping that the allotment – and garden – will teach me patience and hope! The Bible uses many illustrations from gardens and horticulture. The Creation accounts culminate in a Garden, and Revelation ends with a Garden City. Similarly, the Fall turns the garden of creation into a wilderness in constant need of cultivating and labour. The Garden of Gethsemene and the Garden Tomb are key settings in the life and death of Christ. Not forgetting the many cameos' gardens take in the Old Testament – in Psalms, Song of Songs and the Prophets. In addition, Jesus uses gardens and gardening in his teaching and parables, while Paul uses gardening to illustrate deep truths about the reality of our hope and future in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-49). Remember Jesus talked about little faith as positive, comparing it to a mustard seed. It's a tiny seed but can grow into a large tree! So small faith is important and enough to claim Jesus.

The parable of the Sower illustrates the obstacles and problems we face in the garden – unprepared or shallow soil, weather, weeds and thorns, pests; destroying the chances of our seeds producing plants – all in a practical picture of the struggle we humans have with the journey of faith. I'm worried about my abilities in the allotment; lack of energy or physical strength to undertake the transformation needed even before the planting and maintenance once it's sown. My lack of knowledge and experience in soil condition, the right plants and how to nurture them while keeping pests at bay, as well as the time, enthusiasm and commitment to the task are all in question! So too, with our journey of faith. Sometimes it's just too much effort, we don't know enough and we get easily stuck. Am I up to the task?! Life, pain, doubt, chaos, frustration all happen and our faith may shrink or even seem to die. But our gardens remind us of the hope of resurrection – where death seemed to win, new life springs! This growth to blooming doesn't happen overnight, it takes a long time, and patience. In our everyday, we can wish we could pray more, that praying, making time to read the Bible and talk about faith with each other would be easier. That we'd be able to share our faith with others more easily. We can lose patience with ourselves, our Church family and with God.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul writes *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."* (1 Corinthians 3) Again in John 15, Jesus describes the Father as the gardener, Jesus as the vine, us being the branches. God nurtures, tends and looks after us in the garden, causing us to develop, grow, blossom and produce good fruit. Similarly Paul uses that illustration that the Holy Spirit living in us produces a life of faith seen in our fruit – peace, joy, self control etc. It is God who makes us grow in these ways – fruit of the Spirit. Back to the parable of the Sower. So often our focus is on the soil – the hard path, stony, weedy or good soil. But the parable isn't that of the Soil. It's the Sower – who is God! Let's say that in Jesus' illustration the seed is God's invitation to know him, the welcome into his family; the Good News of Jesus. I don't know much about gardening, but the videos and books all say how important seeding is – the right depth, right spacing from each other, the right feeding, temperature and soil type. Yet here the Sower is throwing handfuls of seeds wherever he's walking; no attention to the conditions. This is a demonstration of the lavishness of God, rather than the inefficiency of the Sower. The first hearers would've been confused – that's not how you get a crop! The Sower holds that the hard, stony, thorny ground is as welcome to his seed as the good ground. Hallelujah! Sometimes we're hard, stony and thorny. Sometimes we're watered, fed and cultivated; ready to receive the invitation into deeper relationship with Jesus. Too often the message of the Sower is about effort, worthiness, hard work and we miss the extravagant, love of God. I'd love to be fertile ground all the time in my relationship with

God. We are all invited to partner with the Spirit to grow more like Jesus, connected to him as the vine branches. We're called to take up our crosses and follow him. But while we can water and tend; while we can even strive to become good fertile soil it is God's work not our effort. Of course, we're not just passive! Even just asking God to take our hardness away and make us willing and able to hear and understand is a great thing; for him to give us a desire to be ready to hear his voice and become more like Jesus. But God has chosen to call us beloved and graciously scatter his lavish love on us. No amount of fruit or failure can separate us from his love. "Listen!" Jesus said "A sower went to sow" – good news whether we feel good enough or not. Jesus asks us to lean on him to ready our ground to be fruitful, not for us to break ourselves with effort. So I'm going to try in my tentative, feeble efforts with the allotment to remember that the harvest God wants in my life will be with seed sown by the Good sower into my life, that he tends and prunes. That we are to help water the shoots of faith in each others lives, but it is God the Gardener that makes us grow. Happy Gardening this summer!

Your Minister, friend and brother *Roo*

If there's a spare space somewhere later in magazine: Photo and this

Oh! Remember, if you go looking at some RHS Gardens, Country House Gardens or even Open Garden days... Enjoy the beauty, the skill and the environment. Don't compare your garden to theirs. Nor your life of faith with others. Enjoy the beauty of others faith, I know they will be enjoying yours. Be quick to see the weeds and stones in our own gardens, but slow to see and slower to look for them in others.