

Sermon for 12th July 2020 The Parable of the Sower Trinity 5

One of the benefits and indeed pleasures of the recent lockdown was the amount of time we suddenly could spend on gardening. Lockdown began at the beginning of the Spring growing season and along with beautiful sunny and warm weather we had perfect conditions for getting our hands dirty! My husband Doug even took on part of an allotment and we are now reaping the benefits of home grown vegetables - wonderful. The allotment is at Temple Lane and the farmers field beside it is now resplendent in plant. We watched as it was ploughed and planted out, seeing the tiny seedlings suddenly spring up and lo and behold, the crop simply grew and grew and grew, so quickly. I was astounded at how reliable this crop appeared to be in its wonderful straight rows. When I think of my own seed sowing in my garden, mine is very haphazard and out of a seed packet a few strong ones have survived but I am sure there are many seeds which haven't taken at all!

So it seems in the parable of the sower, that famous story we all know so well, which is the gospel reading for this morning. We hear that Jesus was surrounded by so large a crowd that he had to get into a boat, push out a bit and address them on the beach. He begins his story telling of a pastoral scene of a farmer sowing seed on his land. The seed is cast far and wide. Some of it falls on the path, some on thin soil, some of soil full of weeds, but some falls on soil which has been well prepared, where it takes root, giving a wonderful harvest.

Each different kind of soil Jesus explains represents a different kind of hearer. He explains the parable later to the disciples by telling them that the seed is the word of the kingdom. As they listen, the disciples might identify either with the sower proclaiming the kingdom, or with those who hear that message. We might perhaps do the same, because at different times we are both sower and listener.

There's the shallow part of the pathway where the kingdom seed lies on the surface of someone's life. Our hearts may be closed to God's word and we won't allow it to enter our hearts at all, so it never gets a chance to take root within us.

Then there's the rough rocky ground of a troubled life, where seed can't flourish because it can't reach nourishment. Perhaps any initial excitement of hearing of God's kingdom dies away as life gets busy or when we fear others may laugh at our new found faith or even old established faith... We

resist thinking any more about that profound experience we once had that could change our lives.

Some seed falls on lives that are already choked with what seems like insurmountably prickly or painful issues - the thorns. Perhaps we have never known the sort of love that God offers or cannot believe that we deserve it.

But there is also seed that lands in lives that can receive, understand and nurture it. Sometimes our hearts and minds are open to receive what God is saying to us and we flourish and bear fruit for ourselves and for others.

So let us explore this a bit more by accepting that at different times we are both sower and listener. God is ultimately the sower, the seed and the growth. He is in all things. We are called to help in this great agricultural task as sowers sowing his word. Sometimes this is called evangelism yet we all are sowing his word by listening and caring for one another, by sharing God's love and kindness, by going out and living our lives as Christ would want us to, in so many different ways. And God is with us when we do these things; the Holy Spirit working to bring the seed we plant to full growth and fruition. We can only sow the seed and it seems to me that much of ministry is about sowing seeds amongst our people, our community. And we are each given different soil to sow in. It may be our neighbours, our family, the pub, the local shops, the workplace. As God's people we are called to scatter the good news of Christ's kingdom. It won't do to say "I won't bother sowing seed there, its a bit stony" or "I won't sow seed there as it hasn't been weeded for years". Trusting God's grace we still must try to sow the seed.

And as we know it can be a rather thankless task at times. I'm sure we all recognise times and places where we very much think our sowing seed has definitely fallen on hard ground where it will never take root. But we never know do we? We don't know the effect of our actions, a kind word, a helping hand, a person connecting that to knowing we come to church most weeks - maybe even they might like to be invited to join us on a Sunday? And of course there is sheer joy for us and for God and his angels and all the saints when his word falls on someone ready to hear and to receive his word and his love and in fact his life; new life. But there are also the indifferent, where the seed will simply bounce off them and fly away... Yes its hard work being a sower especially when you don't see the harvest.

However this parable tells us we are told not to worry about the harvest. This is God's work. Just scatter the seed wherever you can and leave the rest to God. Be encouraged. As the words of Isaiah said in our first reading:

'My word 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'

So what can this parable say to us this morning as listeners? Well as listeners we can be encouraged to nurture our spiritual lives. We can think of the soil as our hearts and here is where we have to take some responsibility. God's generosity is pouring out his resources trying to connect with us. Think of how God poured out himself by coming to us through the incarnation, to walk with us in flesh and blood, in frail humanity. If ever there was a fool's errand we might think, it was Christ coming to live among us. Yet there was no one, no matter how broken, abandoned, demon possessed or treacherous who he wouldn't reach out to. The parable tells us of God's tenderness too. The seed lands on the ground. Where that ground is well prepared it will germinate. But the soil - our hearts, are a matter for us. God always there beside us, waiting for us; but he will not compel us to have the seed of grace planted.

So how do we respond to this as both listener and sower? We must take responsibility for our own hearts. If we examine our lives and find there is no yield there - no love, peace, compassion, forgiveness; no concern for justice or the voiceless, then we must reflect. Have we failed to understand God's word? Have we given it no soil to grow in or simply allowed other things to choke it? Well don't panic if this is the case. If we don't find our hearts yielding love, let's not despair but start weeding! Perhaps we need to explore our assumptions about others or about God's character. We may like to look at praying in new ways, or bible study, or a quiet day or a retreat. Perhaps we need to weed out particular habits with hurt us or others. Holding grudges, hanging on to certain privileges unjustly - each of us has to confront different things...

God is with us in the great and in the minute events of our lives. He speaks to us in gentle tones and in language we understand. Always look for God in ways you can understand. God spoke to me through art. Think how he speaks to you and then maybe apply that as you sow his love in other places. What ways might they understand? How might they hear God so that they can understand? As life gets busy again for some, remember the time we had to garden and such like; don't get so busy again if that is a

problem. Listen to him: he is the sower, the seed and the food for growth.
Relax: the harvest will take care of itself.

Amen.