

**SERMON AT THE GELORUP ANGLICAN CHURCH: OS 15: SUNDAY BETWEEN 10 AND 16
JULY. 16/7/2017: GEOFF CHADWICK**

MATTHEW 13:1-9: TEACHABLE MOMENTS AND THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Let me begin by talking about “teachable moments”. This is a concept from teaching theory.

The idea is that the most effective way to learn something is when the learners realise they need to learn it at a particular moment. I remember one I had when I was helping with a woodwork project at the school. There was a moment when a 14 year old lad was holding an uncooperative piece of wood in one hand whilst trying to drill a hole in it with other hand. Picking up a clamp that was at his feet, I went to him and said: *“You might find it easier if you use this clamp to hold the wood in place.”*

Of course he then invoked the *omniscience* of a 14 year old boy and replied: *“Nah- that’s a stupid idea.”* And proceeded to carry on as before.

Ten minutes later I saw him teaching one of his friends to do the same job he had just been doing. He picked up the clamp, gave it to his mate and said: *“Use this, it makes it easier.”*

No doubt the clamp idea was something he thought of all by himself!

Teachable moments are important because they are points of accelerated learning. In a moment, you can learn something which was once too difficult or irrelevant. Curriculum writers know this and struggle with it all the time. Curriculum, by its very nature is ordered and structured but the real teaching may come in the surprising, unpredictable moment never anticipated.

I don't know how often I heard someone on the media say: *"They should teach this in schools."* Or: *"Don't they teach this in school anymore."*

If only they knew!

More often than not these things are taught in school, but without a teachable moment these are quickly forgotten or simply remain surface knowledge. I remember trying to teach loan calculations to Year 10s in Maths. It made no sense to them because borrowing money from a bank was not yet a teachable moment for them. Nevertheless, two years later when they buying their first car would see them learn very quickly!

Now it seems to me that faith is no different. Faith too, has its teachable moments.

Somehow we can attend, church, go to bible study, and say our prayers ect and nothing new or refreshing seems to happen. Surface learning may occur but we long for a teachable moment.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to manufacture teachable moments.

This is where the parable of the sower comes in. The sower scatters the seed (which is the Word of the kingdom) and it falls onto various terrain:

- Bird infested ground.
- Rocky- joyless, ground.
- Thorny- choked up ground.
- Good- growth giving soil.

Metaphorically each of these terrains (*terra*) affect our faith development.

When We are Hen-pecked. This is terrain when no matter what you do, someone is “picking” on you. One or two “pecks” are manageable but constant pecking is overbearing. It’s hard to live like this. It’s a place of fear and humiliation. In this type of terrain you put your head down, make yourself small and constantly hope you will not make a mistake. In this terrain Faith may give you perseverance but there is no place for anything new. Oh yeah- and there always the possibility of becoming like your enemy and peck back...

When Our Ground is Joyless: Life is tough and we all must endure rocky paths now and again. But Jesus’ parable talks of joy. I think that’s a key to survival here. Joyless paths are a sure impediment to growth, but rocky paths *with* joy are another matter indeed. Somehow, in the midst of difficulty we must keep our joy. I know that’s not always easy- but it seems to be the way to growth. Perhaps the key is to surround oneself with joyful people. Maybe it’s finding something to laugh at each day. Somehow joy, brings us faith.

When Our Ground is Choked With Weeds: There’s a saying I recently picked up: “That’s just a First World problem.”. In the midst of all the petty things that can worry us, like:

- Poor internet speed.
- What colour walls to paint the house.
- Whether my outfit will meet the approval of my friends.
- Or complaining that the Deli ran out of Magnum ice-creams.

The saying reminds us that there are people in the world who have real and significant worries such as:

- finding food,
- finding shelter,
- getting a job
- or being safe.

That's not to say we don't have significant worries, but how easy it is for us in our First World mind-set to over-play our worries.

Should I grumble that I got a green birthday cake instead of an orange one? Maybe I should just be grateful that I got a birthday cake!

Grumbling and griping stunts our faith. What's needed is a way to turn gripes into goals.

When We Find Ourselves in Growth Giving Soil: At the risk of mixing metaphors, it seems to me that we are meant to be the good soil. The community we create as we come together as God's people will either grow us or stunt us.

It's worth thinking about and I think it's worth a bit of self-examination. We might do well to ask ourselves the following questions from time to time:

- 1) What hen-pecking or rooster-pecking thing do I do at church from time to time. How can I stop doing that?
- 2) Whose joy have I recently squashed because I was jealous that they were happy? What can I do to keep joy alive in me and in this place?

- 3) Am I being a “grumble-bum” at coffee after church. People will listen politely but will go home exhausted. Can I turn my gripes into goals?
- 4) Who can I grow today? What little thing can I do to keep another’s faith alive?

If we are the soil let us be good soil. No pecking-hens (or roosters); no kill-joys and no “grumble-bums.”

Just good soil!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.