

Sunday Between 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July [15]

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the sower seems to be the easiest of Jesus' parables to understand, at first glance at least. Not only does Jesus refer to growing food, something that most of us understand and many of us will have tried to do even if few of us really make a living that way. But he also explains the parable's meaning when asked by his disciples. What could be simpler?

The Seed is the Word of God and the four types of ground on which the seed lands represent 4 types of people who encounter God's word and how they respond to it. That's all straight forward enough. We are challenged by this parable to self-examine and decide which type of soil am I. Most of us would be fairly sure we can't be accused of being the path as we have not heard and denied God, We've made God central in life, no I am defiantly not the path. Not many would liken ourselves to the rocks either, we haven't fallen away from God in the rough times, we've made a commitment to the church, phew, not rock!

We hope we are not soil affected by weeds, we're not perfect and have been tempted by the riches and pleasures of life but we are hardly living lives of Reilly. No I don't think we need to worry too much about the weeds, but we'll keep our guard up, just in case.

So, we must really be good soil, hurrah, parable of the sower neatly and successfully negotiated for another year.

We could be forgiven for reading this gospel and following an exercise such as this, perhaps the disciples did the same thing when they heard the explanation. Periods of self examination are always a good thing and this parable is a helpful way of focussing the mind.

But, could it be that we've missed something? What about the role of the sower? You see we know the seed is the Word of God and we know that the ground is the hearer or the word, but who is the sower? In the original parable Jesus is the sower, he has come among his people to proclaim the word of God and he is observing the various responses of the people with whom he comes into contact. Certainly he has been rejected, others are initially enthused by what he has to say but quickly go back to their old lives and forget about him. Others are certainly making a commitment but find they are unable to fully give themselves to God's will, think of the man Jesus asks to give up everything to follow him but who finds he is unable to quite do that. And then there are the apostles and the many other disciples from whom the twelve were chosen who dedicated their lives to God's holy purpose. But what about today?

Jesus is no longer preaching among us, God's word and Jesus' example is displayed through us, his disciples now, in this place. We have the gospels to inspire us but we cannot spread God's word simply by referring people to read the gospels. It's a great outcome for people but they need a reason to do so before they will pick up a book.

But I don't want to spread God's word, you might protest, isn't that what clergy are for? Well actually it is what we are all for, by baptism. God calls us to be disciples, to look at the type of soil we are and to try to improve but the whole point of being good

soil is to bear fruit and the word of God when it bears fruit causes more seed to be produced and requires a sower to spread the seed anew.

And just as each of us has responded to God's word we each need to play a part in spreading that Word to others. So we are the sowers now. And we will have God's word rejected by some, we will throw seed on the path. We will have some who respond to us attentively and joyfully but who will quickly move onto the next big thing as we throw seed on the rocks. We will undoubtedly, and perhaps most painfully, inspire some to come to Christ with every good intention for a considerable period of time only to have them turn their backs on him later when worldly things get in the way and that can feel like a personal betrayal. But remember Jesus tells us now that we will throw some seed among weeds, that's natural. And ultimately we will bring alongside us committed Christians who over their lifetimes will grow mature in faith and go on to be fruitful producers of God's word in their own right as every farmer I know spreads most of the seed on good soil, that is after all where he or she will aim it.

In this version of the parable we have to be brave and open about sharing our faith. We have to not judge the reactions of the people around us and choose to hide God's word from those we think won't be interested or won't make good enough disciples. If we are the sower then we have to spread God's word indiscriminately, aiming for the good soil, praying for a good harvest but trusting God with the real work of growing that seed. We cannot be a sower holding on to a basket of seeds, that benefits no one, not God and certainly not us. The Gospel is too precious to keep it to ourselves, it is a treasure to share.

And we understand that we are not all going to sow the seed of God's word in a pulpit or preaching in the street, many of us find talking about faith difficult and even uncomfortable. But we need to remember that we can sow the seed in many different ways, by our words and by our actions and omissions. When we find ourselves able to say we are the good soil in the parable and we are bearing the fruit of God's word in our lives, then others will see it too.

So this parable, like so many others, spoke of Jesus' work in his earthly ministry but equally speaks to us today. As sowers, entrusted with the word of God, some of our work will not grow to fruition but God is working with us and we must not despair. We will not always get to enjoy the fruits of our own labours, we will often simply plant seeds and rarely will we see any results but that is no reason not to do it. Sometimes we will see the results of seeds others have planted in the past as people come to faith who have pondered the word of God for a long time and it just so happens that we are there when understanding grows and commitment is made. In the end, whatever we do, the harvest of the good seed will far surpass what is lost, God will see to that, yet we can only have that harvest if someone sows the seed, let's make that someone us!