

12th July - 5th Sunday after Trinity

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

Here's a well known parable about someone scattering seed.

Its quite important because its one of the only parables that we have Jesus explanation for. (we know he explained them to his disciples in private).

But here we have the parable, adn the key. Because a parable is like a puzzle or a code - there's only one way of understanding it, there's not lots of interpretations or ideas - in a parable this means this, end of story.

So in this parable - the sower is the person telling the message of the kingdom of God - it doesn't mean anything else, and we can't extrapolate either. The farmer is scattering the seed - well he's broadcasting it in the greek - from which our farmers also broad cast their seed, and then radio and then TV picked up on the idea that it could be words that were broadcast, and so now we call it the British Broadcasting Corporation.

But that's an aside.

Jesus explains this parable - the farmer is a preacher, a disciple sent on mission, an evangelist, you or me if we tell our friend in the queue in the Co op that Jesus answered a prayer this week.

Adn the seed is the message - that message at the heart of our faith - that God loves us to bits. If only we could take it in. He loves us. (not out to judge us, criticise us, see if we've been good enough this week, if we've said our prayers or not told lies) - he just loves us, through and through and through. So the soil - the 4 types of soil - that stands for the hearts of those who hear the message. 4 responses to the good news that God loves us.

And this is often called the parable of the sower, but I think really its a parable about the soil..

The instant rejecting heart - the pathway - it doesn't even sink in. People who won't even consider listening - too busy, too scared to think, too proud, whatever.

The stony heart - those who hear God loves them, and it sounds amazing - they come to church, for a week, they read the bible, for a month, they love their neighbours, but as soon as it gets difficult they give up.

The heart with weeds - they want to follow God, they try, unlike the stony heart they have roots, they stick at it - but all of the world and all of life seems to clog them up - they get caught up in worrying about stuff, rather than trusting in God, in gathering money or possessions, rather than giving it away - so they are still believers, they haven't lost faith - its just hard going and,, says Jesus - they don't' bear much fruit - not much peace or joy or love in their heart.

The final group are those with open and receptive hearts, who put down roots and really dig into their faith, and really hears the message of God - hears it in a way that means they put it into practice. And these bear fruit - their lives show forth the fruits of the kingdom - and they produce seed too - their lives

spread the message of the love of God to others.

So that's the parable, with its interpretation - and I've been tempted in the past to just leave it like that - like Jesus did! In his day, that had a massive impact - people talked about it, remembered it, chewed it over, and maybe asked each other about its meaning or application. The trouble is - we live in a world where there is noise all around us. In 30 minutes you will have talked to friends, listened to the radio, tuned into the cricket - and by tonight - this seed will have been taken away...
so before it gets taken away.. let me say 2 things..

Firstly its an encouragement to be liberal, to be generous
Don't give up sowing the seed, because only 25% of it grows - if you're telling people about God or the church, and 3 out of 4 people say no - well that's about what God said it would be! I actually know of a church that said we don't want to waste our seed, so lets only target the good soil - and they didn't knock on the door of Muslim houses, or people they thought would reject the message of God. That is totally not what this is about! Only God knows what our hearts are like - its not for us to judge. And the farmer - well would have gone bust - because he was a generous farmer and spread the corn everywhere - knowing the majority would bear no fruit. God send the rain on the just and the unjust - he loves us all - he sends the word, the good news - to everyone, even though many, most will reject it. And the church should be the same. We are here to proclaim God's love, even though many won't listen, many will give up after a week, and many won't get very far.. we will proclaim it. God has love to waste, to spare, more than enough love for us all.

And the second thing I want to say - is that soil can be improved and needs constant work
I know!

If this is the parable of the soil, not the sower, its about our hearts.
I had a patch of ground once, and I had ground elder. Horrible stuff. Only needs a tiny part of a root to grow a whole new plant. I cleared the patch. And it looked lovely. Plant some seeds. Went away and left it. After a little while - full of weeds again! The ground elder came back. To be a christian means we have to keep weeding - keep digging out the bad habits, wrong thoughts, judgmentalism, materialism, all the things that can choke the good news. Our soil, our soul - can be improved, and needs to be, always.

As well as weeding, another way of improving - is to take the stones out.
Wow. I had this patch, it was 4ft raised bed. So stony, terrible. One year I bought a sieve. I spent an afternoon or two sieving the soil - it was an eye opener! I took out bag after bag of stones - but... at the end, my soil had gone from like - gravel and dirt, to rich, tilth - like some gardening programme. I'd

never seen soil like it - wouldn't have believed it possible!

There are so many stones in our hearts - wounds or hurts from the past that we carry as baggage, that stop us receiving God's love. Wrong ideas, superstitions, traditions, that stop us receiving God's love. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can sieve the soil, we can work through our heart and remove the blockages.

And here's the really lovely thing - our community is made up of hearts just like ours - some good soil, some with weeds, some with stones. When we do something like Recreate, or the Forest Edge Cafe - we are improving the soil for the word of God to land in. Every time people see christians being kind, serving cake, putting on fun events - they go from - there is no God, to maybe there is something out there.

Or they go from - all those Christians are judgemental and selfish to maybe Jesus is alright even if the church isn't.

When they see us living by our faith, able to speak of the difference that Jesus makes in our lives - people go from - I may have misjudged those Christians, perhaps I'll give church a go.

This parable is all about encouraging us to go on telling people the good news, showing them that God loves them. Because over time, if we keep at it - the stones will come out, the weeds will come out - and the community will be transformed.

And with all things spiritual - it begins with us. First take the log out of your own eye, then you can take the splinter out of your neighbours.

First clear our own weeds and stones, and then work on the community.

And lets not give up, inviting people to Church, in showing people that god loves them.

We have been chosen by God, to be in his family. Adopted and told to invite others - not told them to invite them once, or twice, but to go on inviting, to go on, yoked to Christ, in his strength - improving the soil until one day, it bears fruit. Fruit that will last.

Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate; Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death; - Desmond Tutu