

Video Sermon 12.07.20
Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23: The Parable of the Sower

Let's imagine the scene - you are sowing wheat in one of the fields next to your family home. As you walk up and down, the years of practice mean that every handful of seed you scatter, lands, more or less, on the soil you've spent weeks preparing. Then suddenly the breeze off the Lake increases - your aim isn't so good now and some of the precious seed lands at the edge of the field, on the path, in the weeds, on the poor soil. You adjust your aim and pay a bit more attention to the task, accepting that the birds will have a good lunch and come harvest time, the poor may have a few extra stalks for gleaning.

Coming in from your task the family are all buzzing - the teacher you've heard so much about is down on the beach! So you scoop up your lunch and head down to the Lake - not wanting to miss the man whose been wowing the crowds, winding up the Pharisees and worrying his family with his antics!

The crowd is so huge, the teacher has to get into a boat anchored, a short way from the shore, and as they settle down to listen, he tells a story of a man sowing seed and once more you back in your field, reliving your morning's labours.

3-8 "... A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn't put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

9 "Are you listening to this? Really listening?"¹

You've been nodding as the story unfolds, then suddenly you are brought up short, what on earth did he mean by: "Are you listening to this? Really listening?" You look at your mother-in-law and she shrugs, none the wiser. So you tuck into your lunch, paying a bit more attention to what follows.

¹ 'The Message' version of Mtt13:3-9

When you get home that evening, you glance over to the field you'll be working in tomorrow. Once more the story of the sower comes to mind and you spend a moment mulling over what it might mean. Perhaps the familiarity of the task had side-tracked you, maybe the thing you should be focusing on was the soil and not the sowing? You yawn - bedtime, there'll be plenty of time to think about that tomorrow when sowing that next field!

Jesus was a such a skilful teacher - he preferred not to deliver clever arguments, or impart lots of information. Instead, he chose to engage people's imaginations and emotions by telling them stories. Memorable stories, that made connections with their everyday lives, but which also contained a twist that got them asking questions and thinking about what they had heard. And as people mulled over their meaning, talked about it with others - gradually, at least for some, a new insight was gained and because they had worked so hard to fathom it out, it made much more of an impact than if Jesus had just told it to them straight. [But Remember, if you are feeling a bit inadequate for the task - take heart even the disciples sometimes needed some divine help before they got it!]

This parable is possibly very familiar to you, and in being so, you may just find yourself nodding and not feeling particularly engaged. It's a parable I have known since childhood, when I was taken to Methodist Sunday School and where I later became a Sunday school teacher, despite not having much of a faith to speak of - and certainly nothing like the friends I had at school who had found Jesus! It didn't really connect with me until I was 21 and at university, when I had reached a crunch point and said to God - 'if you are really there and want me to follow you - show me!' And it was then, sitting on the bed in my hall of residence, that a Gospel reference popped into my head. When I looked it up in my Bible, it was the Parable of the Sower. Being a scientist, I needed a bit more evidence and asked again. This time a different Gospel reference popped into my head - and so I looked it up - and yes, you've guessed it - the Parable of the Sower again. So now the data was begin to stack up and I knew I had to pay attention - to listen, to really listen! Throughout my life, many had sown the seeds of the Gospel into my heart, it was now time for me to decide what sort of soil I was going to be. To say my 'yes' to God's call to follow and be fruitful. I'm not sure it was a resounding 'yes', more like a 'well ok then', but as the gardeners amongst you will know, soil doesn't get improved overnight. It takes a lot of hard work and nourishing before it yields a harvest. Neither does the hard work stop there - it's an ongoing process of digging, weeding and feeding!

So what about you - which bits of the parable might God be wanting to underline for you just now? What's your soil like? Stony? Shallow? Strangled by weeds? Was it once rich, but is now a bit exhausted; only producing stunted growth? What might you do about? And do you want to do anything about it?!

Maybe it's not your soil God wants you to think about, but your sowing. Do you hoard your seed? Sow it sparingly? Plant it in neat rows, in only what you consider to be fertile soil? Or do you lavishly scatter it about, leaving it up to God and his grace to produce the harvest – taking the risk that it might be eaten by birds or fall onto stony ground?

As a Diocese we have been encouraging one another to be 'Renewed, Released and Rejuvenated':

- *Renewed* in our faith through reliance on the Spirit in prayer and worship
- *Released* into mission and to live as Lights for Christ in our everyday lives
- *Rejuvenated* by being fruitful, leading to new life and growth in our churches

It seems to me that the Parable of the Sower really strikes a chord for us at this time. So this week, why not find the space to mull it over a bit more – it might be helpful to imagine yourself in the story, as if hearing it for the first time, talking to others about its meaning – what new insights come to mind? Or try reading it slowly each day – savouring its words and praying through what God might particularly want to speak to you about. And if you don't already, daily use the Diocesan prayer – its word could have been written to sit alongside the Parable of the Sower! Let's finish by saying it together.

Living God

Jesus calls his followers to seek first your kingdom

Renew us as we make your love known;

Release us to share freely together in mission;

And Rejuvenate us to be fruitful in your service.

Give us courage, wisdom and compassion,

That strengthened with the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may, as the Diocese of Sheffield, both flourish and grow through Christ our Lord.

Amen



RENEWED



RELEASED



REJUVENATED