

## The Parable of the Sower: Sermon at Whitchurch. 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023

The Bible provides forms of poetry that touch human beings at a level which brings change. So the questions I am asking as I look at Jesus' Parable of the Sower is: 'How does this story change you and me?'

I want to look at some of the main features of the narrative and then see what challenges they pose for us as we try to follow Jesus in 2023.

1<sup>st</sup>, The seed is sown in abundance. The ground is not pre-prepared but exists with a large variety of conditions. Hard paths in-between the strips for sowing. Weed-ridden patches where the seed will meet with lots of competition. Rocky ground where rock is inhospitable to seed, so not much will grow there. And there is 'good' soil – soil that has room and receptivity for the seed and where the seed flourishes.

But the point that comes across is that the seed is sprinkled around liberally and abundantly and without restraint by the sower. Here's a reminder that God is communicating with us in an abundance of ways – constantly and consistently – but so often we are oblivious to God's presence and God's word in our lives.

So 1<sup>st</sup> question: How might we become better attuned to God's communication in our daily lives?

Interviews once took place and after them three people all sat in the waiting room. Suddenly a man jumped up and said: 'I've got the job!' The others were mystified! What had happened? The Panel had sent a message in morse code into that room – 'If you hear this message, the job is yours.' The others had not heard it – but the candidate who did knew what to do. How do we become like him when it comes to hearing God communicating with us?

And can we cope with the idea that God might communicate with us in unexpected ways? The Desert Fathers were devout men who lived during the fourth century in austere conditions pursuing a life of prayer and strict discipline. One day one of the Fathers or hermits heard a word: 'Go into the city and I will speak to you.' Into the city he went. As he passed through the gate he heard a voice: 'Man of God, come this way.' He glanced in the direction of the voice and saw a prostitute. He ignored her, and went on into the city. Eventually he met a blank – no voice, no guidance, no sense of God's presence.

'Lord', he prayed 'why is it that you have failed to speak to me?' The voice came back 'I spoke to you at the gate and you did not heed me.' We must not allow our prejudices and our presumptions to preclude certain people from being the channel of divine communication. God can confront us in the most unexpected places and through the most unexpected people.

2<sup>nd</sup> The Parable shows us that the seed enters the soil. Here is a reminder that the Gospel – the message of God's love – is not something that we generate from within ourselves. It comes to us. Seed has a power inside it; it changes its surroundings and so with our heart. It is not a human invention; it is a divine invasion. It is news not views – it confronts us and comforts us, but it comes to us from outside. Are we open to that? Lord Melbourne, a former Prime Minister of this country, once stated: 'Things have come to a pretty pass when religion begins to affect a man's private life.'

Question: How far have we allowed (or am I allowing) the Gospel to affect us in the values we hold and the way we behave?

3<sup>rd</sup> The different types of 'soil' are present in all of us. None of us is good soil through and through. There is some rocky ground, some weed-ridden ground and some wayside soil trodden hard. There are areas of resistance in each and every one of us as well as some receptivity. That is the truth that all of us have to live with. And that is why we constantly seek God's mercy and help – we know that we need to be changed – and we ask God to help us move in that direction.

Question: How far do we recognize our weakness and rely on God's help and strength?

Finally, lets think about the seed which does flourish in the soil – that does bring forth, as Jesus says, '100-fold' – an abundant crop. If we think about any crop then we know that when it grows to full maturity it will produce its own seed so that it can propagate and spread itself. And that's the question I want to focus on at the end of this sermon: What kind of seed falls from you and me and what effect does it have?

In answering that I want to quote two pieces of writing that reflect on the way we influence others – often unconsciously. I know that for me, personally, as I hear these pieces, it stimulates a mood of deep reflection and it might do the same for you.

The first is a very sad reflection and based on the failure of a parent to show love: it is written by Stan Gerbhardt and is called 'But you Didn't'

I looked at you and smiled the other day;  
I thought you'd see me but you didn't.  
I said "I love you" and waited for what you would say;  
I thought you'd hear me but you didn't.  
I asked you to come outside and play ball with me;  
I thought you'd follow me but you didn't  
I drew a picture just for you to see;  
I thought you'd save it but you didn't.  
I made a fort for us back in the woods;  
I thought you'd camp with me but you didn't.  
I found some worms 'n such for fishing if we could;  
I thought you'd want to go but you didn't.  
I needed you just to talk to, my thought to share;  
I thought you'd want to but you didn't.  
I told you about the game hoping you'd be there;  
I thought you'd surely come but you didn't.  
I asked you to share me youth with me;  
I thought you'd want to but you couldn't.  
My country called me to war,  
and you asked me to come home safely;  
but I didn't.

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There's something very painful about that last line.

It highlights the fact that opportunities to sow the right seeds are only there for so long – and then they are gone.

But let me end on a more positive and hopeful note. Here's another piece of writing about how a parent influenced a child.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favourite cake just for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed there is a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me good night, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry. When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared and I wanted to be everything that I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking I looked...and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.

We cannot estimate the effect of 'seeds' that are sown in love towards those who are looking for that kind of attention. And we must transpose these quotes to adult to adult relationships and how we might influence others for good or bad.

Question: What kind of seed falls from the stem of my life – and how can God help me to ensure that those 'seeds' are positive and life – enhancing rather than detached, selfish and hurtful?

So the Parable of the Sower (or Soil?) presents you and me with many challenges – and a number of invitations to be more open to God – and more productive of God's life-giving presence in the world.

Amen.

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