

Trinity 5 Year A 2020

I don't know if it counts as the sin of pride, but I AM proud of the plants on my doorstep. If you know the house, the Vicarage has a very wide deep step, under cover, and it is my custom to fill this with potted plants during the summer. They are mainly different types of hostas (fortunately not too slug ridden!) and agapanthus. Both are in prolific flower at the present, as are several geraniums amongst them, including a great survivor. I grew several two years ago, left them behind the house last year (where I thought they had died) only to see that a spectacular double pink trailing geranium was determined not to give up! If you are passing Barrowfield, have a look. No. 5 is down on the left.

Why my floral start? Well, of course, the Parable of the Sower – one of those vivid attention grabbers the Lord uses so effectively in his ministry to get us to think about discipleship, linked very much to the agrarian society in which he lived, and perhaps resonates with us more as a result of the lockdown.

We are at the mid-point of Matthew's Gospel - and the Gospel writer has presented a great body of gathered teaching by Jesus we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Healing of the afflicted has followed, together with the call and sending out of the Disciples. We are aware of a rising sense of tension with the authorities, in the shape and form of the Pharisees. Immediately before the parable, Jesus, knowing that his mother and brothers want to see him, calls **all** who follow him, mother and brothers – a seemingly difficult teaching, but one which actually talks of the **inclusivity** of Faith in Jesus – he is not casting aside his own family, but reminds us that all are called into relationship with him through faith. This call is a life-long journey in which we are to know that in him is to be found relief from those things which we feel might separate us from God. As we heard last week Jesus said, *'Come to me, all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'* So the life of the Kingdom is open to all, a journey where, in opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit within our lives, we find divine accompaniment even in the darkest or most wearisome situations.

As we move into the telling of parables, note that Jesus preaches from a boat – he is on the same level as the people. Matthew may even want us to see the boat as the subsequent church, treasuring the mission of the Lord. The church (and we) are in the here-and-now, Resurrection and New Life are as much to do with how we choose to live our lives NOW as much as our journey to eternity within the heart of God's love. Many will know the standard approach to this parable, but I want to raise a few points. Why a parable? Why can't Jesus just tell us his message straight? Surely everyone wants a leader who can tell them the things they want to hear. Don't we want leaders who can reinforce our own fondest held prejudices? Don't we want a politician who can confirm our sense of this, that and the other?

But Jesus is doing something quite different. He is not telling us what we want to hear, neither is he giving us spin, soundbites, or flattery. He is leading us on a journey. Although Matthew provides us with an explanation of what the parable represents – this can be only

a partial understanding (and some Biblical scholars think that the explanation is a Matthean addition.)

Just note the liberality of the sower. He is scattering seed abundantly, regardless of where it falls. What is this seed which is being sown? It is described as the Word of the Kingdom. Yes, in one sense the good news of salvation, the Gospel itself. But what is the seed in essence? It is LOVE— pure, undefiled, unmingled, personal, all-powerful, life-creating Divine love. Do you remember at the start of John's Gospel that he refers to Jesus as the Word made flesh? Jesus offers us our exemplar of the perfect, divine example of God's self-giving love. And this is the journey we are called to. You might say that the sower sows these seeds, and on each of them is written the phrase: 'I love you my child.' - I love you Peter, I love you Ruth, I love you Mary.....

And every day we can contemplate the wonders within our knowledge and grow these seeds of love, as we appreciate the glory of nature and the talents of humanity, from music to science – all signs of the endless love of God within creation and beyond. But his wonder is made known to us in a way we can understand – in our own *humanity* in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul talks today of the Spirit of God working within our lives, and it is this which grows the seed of the knowledge of God's Love made known in Jesus. Engaging with our Faith, reading the Bible; seeking to deepen knowledge of Faith and discerning God's will and purpose within our lives – all are signs of growing those seeds. I can't tell YOU how you will do this, because the parable can only make sense in your discovering. It is only you, within your own context, who can open the secret of its meaning and discover how to allow the kingdom to yield an hundredfold within your life.

At the end of the day, Jesus did not leave us with all the answers, he left us with a parable. But the seed is falling upon your life here and now, and also falls on the life of those around us who are very different.

Just think of the **billions** of Christians who are considering this very parable today. From Christians in the war-torn nations of the Middle East, and those living in states which have broken down in Africa, From the super-wealthy of United States, to the desperately poor Christians in India or Pakistan, **all** of us considering these words; all of us given the opportunity to seek to continually transform and grow not just ourselves, but all those whose worlds we also touch.

The Sower Christ sows his seeds of love in our hearts, and says to each of us, '*Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.*'

This knowledge leads us to rejoice in understanding the words of Isaiah expressed in their fulness: *You shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all of the trees of the field will clap their hands. Amen.*



Isaiah 55: 10-13

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Romans 8: 1-11

⁸ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit^[a] of life in Christ Jesus has set you^[b] free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin,^[c] he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.^[d] ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit^[e] set their minds on the things of the Spirit.^[f] ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit^[g] is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,^[h] since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit^[i] is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ^[j] from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through^[k] his Spirit that dwells in you.

Matthew 13: 1-9; 18-23

¹³ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears^[a] listen!'

Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

*"You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.*

*For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,*

*and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.”*

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

¹⁸ ‘Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.^[a] ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.’

The sin of pride!

