

Sunday 16th July 2017: SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. YR A.

Gospel: Mt 13:1-23

The parable of the sower:

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear . . .

“The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”

A lady goes to the vet with a duck, which she presents to the veterinary surgeon. The duck is quite clearly dead and, after a cursory examination, the vet duly informs the lady that her duck has breathed it's last. Outraged, the lady tells the vet he doesn't know what he's talking about and challenges him to prove that her duck is, indeed, dead. The vet sighs but then opens the back door of the surgery and ushers in a large black Labrador who walks up to the examination table puts his paws on the table and sniffs the duck from head to toe. The Labrador looks dolefully at the vet and slowly shakes its head and leaves the surgery.

The vet then brings in a large tabby cat, which he places on the table beside the duck. The cat also sniffs the duck from head to toe and also looks up to the vet and shakes its head. The vet removes the cat and then says to the lady, “There you are, I told you it was dead. He taps a few keys on his computer and says, “That will be £150 please”.

The lady, clearly shocked says “£150 to tell me that my duck is dead, that's outrageous” “Well” said the vet, if you'd taken my word for it, it would have only been £20 but with the lab test and the cat scan it's £150”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable to you O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

We know from reading the Gospels, that Jesus often taught people by telling stories called parables. But Jesus didn't simply telling stories to entertain or to get people's attention,**Jesus told parables because He wanted to change lives!**

An old definition of **parable** is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables tell a story using something we see every day to help us understand a spiritual truth that we can't see with our eyes.

When Jesus taught in parables, He used things that the people of His day were familiar with. If Jesus were here teaching with parables today, they would be different because our culture is different. There might be fewer stories about farming, and more stories about computers!

The parable we are going to read today is about planting seeds. Most of the people that Jesus was speaking to were farmers. They understood all about seeds and plants because they grew their own fruits and vegetables.

The story line is simple enough. A sower goes out to sow, and casts seed so that it lands in four kinds of places, with four different results. The seed that lands on the hard path is eaten up by birds.

The seed that lands in rocky soil grows up only to wither. The seed that lands among thorns grows up, but is choked by the thorns. But some seed ends up in good soil, and brings forth abundant grain.

The story is simple, but the disciples of Jesus have trouble understanding it, and ask for an explanation. And ever since, the Christian community has struggled with just what this story means.

Chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel is the evangelist's collection of Jesus' parables. The word "parable" comes from the Greek word *parabole*, which means putting two things side by side in order to confront or compare them. And that is exactly how Jesus uses parables: He places something from life or nature against the abstract idea of the reign of God. The comparison challenges the hearer to consider ideas and possibilities greater and larger than those to which they might be accustomed.

Jesus' hearers expected God's kingdom to be the restoration of Israel to great political and economic power; the Messiah would be a great warrior-king who would lead Israel to this triumph. Jesus' parables subtly and delicately led people, without crushing or disillusioning them, to rethink their concept of God's kingdom.

In Palestine, sowing was done before the ploughing. Seed was not carefully or precisely placed in the ground. The farmer scattered the seed in all directions, knowing that, even though much will be wasted, enough will be sown in good earth to ensure a harvest nonetheless. The parable of the sower (which appears in all three synoptic gospels) teaches that the seed's fruitfulness (God's word) depends on the soil's openness (the willingness of the human heart to embrace it).

The parable of the sower challenges us to see how deeply the word of God has taken root in our lives, how central God is to the very fabric of our day-to-day existence.

There have been a lot of people who have suggested that a more appropriate name would be the “parable of the soils”. But that misses the point that the lesson of this parable is not intended for the people represented by the various soils but rather for the sowers who sow the Word. It is the parable of the sower, not the parable of the soils.

So what is the application to us who already believe and who have been called to share the Gospel with others?

Christ invites his followers to embrace the faith of the sower: to trust and believe that our simplest acts of kindness and forgiveness, our humblest offer of help to anyone in need, our giving of only a few minutes to listen to the plight of another soul may be the seeds that fall “on good soil” and yields an abundant harvest.

Jesus challenges us in the parable of the sower to be both sower and seed: to sow seeds of encouragement, joy and reconciliation regardless of the “ground” on which it is scattered, and to imitate the seed’s total giving of self that becomes the harvest of Gospel justice and mercy.

Amen.