

Preaching as Dialogue

Read the Parable of the sower - Matthew 13:1-9 (*On page 4*)

Imagine many small fields, each bordering the others and homes scattered around.

Imagine that the fields of wheat or beans or peas have been harvested and they are now just bare fields.

Imagine people wandering from home to home as they visit. Children running across the fields to visit friends. People taking the shortest route to the well - even if that shortest route passed straight through the unsown field. Paths criss-cross fields.

Now imagine - the clouds are starting to build and there are signs of the first rains each farmer now begins to break the soil - to soften the surface - so that the seed when scattered can find a crevice to nestle. Or perhaps the farmer has set the field with furrow. She knows her field. She knows the productive areas and where she has tossed the stones. She knows where the weeds doggedly remain. She knows even the stubbornness of her neighbours how they refuse to walk around the field and rather cut their own shortest route to friend or well. She knows all this but never the less has now worked the field - it is broken and ready for seed or now 'ridge and furrow' ready for planting. The seed is now scattered the seed is now planted.

But there is no plant. There is only dirt or ridge and furrow ...

Discuss or think through the following? What happens to the seed:

Where the neighbours had walked? (*The seed had no chance*)

Where the stones lay?

(The seed sprouted but without firm root soon withers)

Where the weeds persisted?

(The plant cannot compete with the weeds and fails to mature)

Where the soil was rich and un-compacted? (*Thrives and fruits*)

Why had the farmer persisted in sowing the entire field?

Optimistic/hopeful - about the goodness of the seed and the goodwill of neighbours.

Generous - despite the foreseen loss she will never-the-less scatter.

This is a beautiful story of farming life in Palestine, which Jesus uses as a story to tell us some spiritual truth.

BUT what are we meant to learn from the parable?

Is the story about the sower?

And if so, what do we learn of the character of God?

Might the character of the sower shape our own attitude toward faith sharing? If so how?

Might it also shape our attitudes towards one another in the church for even in the good soil, fruitfulness varies without the sower differentiating at harvest

Is the parable about the seed?

And if so, what do we learn about the seed? Might this also give us a certain boldness to share our faith? If so how?

What do you find so 'encouraging' about the seed which we share/sow?

Is the parable about the field? And if so, what is the field?

Humankind throughout history?

The potential of an individual throughout their life?

Can we ever give up on a person if they appear resistant to the gospel's beauty or either hopelessly distracted by worldly pursuits or fearful of the cost of discipleship? If so why? If not, why not?

Is the parable a warning? *Something to heed and avoid?*

Is the parable a description? *Something to accept?*

We all know that there are times in our lives when we have shown elements of each soil. Our testimonies may well have all of these soul types represented. How might Romans 8:1-6 bring us hope? *(Read passage on page 4) [Christ has condemned sin in his body - we live now by that grace and the gift of the Spirit]*

We all know of people whose encounter with Christianity has followed the way of one or other of the soils? Our life in the church and our experience of witness are filled with these 'soil responses' to the Gospel. How might the parable enable us to make sense of the attrition which we have seen in church-goers? Are we left 'fatalistic' about those who 'fall away'? (Does a sower only sow her field once? Does this ongoing persistence of sowers and fields impact our attitude in faith sharing?)

Is the parable a call to prayer? If so, what shall we pray?

Conclude our time in prayer.

Romans 8:1-6

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

Matthew 13:1-9

Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."