

Sunday 16 July – Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Psalms 119:105-112, Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

Lord, make your voice heard today and breathe on us your Spirit of Life, that we may be fruitful in good works. Amen.

The parable of the sower is one of only two parables in Matthew's gospel that is given a title in the gospel itself. But the parable is really not about the sower, but more about seed and the soil, wheat and weeds, sowing and growing.



The sower is not important, but the way he sows the seed is. He seems to scatter the seed all over the place. It sounds like an awful waste, doesn't it? Perhaps he has so much that he does not care... In effect, he'll be feeding not just the people, but the birds of the air and the little rodents... He's a generous sower then.

But then the waste is very real. Seed falls on the path, onto rocks, into patches of thorns, as well as good soil. Notice how Jesus seems to find this somehow acceptable. It is as if he expects this to happen. There will always be seed that falls on the path, on dry land, on thorny patches... equally, there will *always* be seed that falls onto good soil. And it doesn't take much good soil to produce a fabulous harvest. That's because it's in the nature of seeds to grow. They grow even among weeds and thorns. Sure, they get choked, but they do grow. So even a little good soil will enable the seeds to produce much fruit.



Jesus explains the parable: the sower is sowing the word; some people are really not interested; others are interested but then they face all sorts of obstacles that make them give up – pressures, difficulties, anxieties; others still are quite shallow, superficial, preoccupied by material things, love of wealth, cravings for other things, so the word struggles to be rooted in them... and then some people are interested, receive the word with joy and persevere, and in persevering, they become very fruitful, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

In Matthew, the focus is on the kingdom. So in this story, the seed is the word of the kingdom. And the sower is *anyone* who shares the word of the kingdom. It could be you, it could be me, and the way to share the word is the way of God, relayed by

Jesus. It is not a way of wastage, but of generosity. It's an open invitation, it's welcoming, it's saying come and hear the good news! God is doing a new thing, and it is for everybody. So we could say that the 'economy of the kingdom' is not one of wastage but of generosity. And a very important point that Jesus makes is that seed, the word, does fall anywhere, without any pre-judgement about the soil that will receive it. But where the seed is productive, the results are amazing.

It is in the nature of seed to grow. It is in the nature of the kingdom to grow. Theologian Paula Gooder compares the kingdom to mint! Once planted, you can never, ever get rid of it. It is stubborn, she says, pernicious and ineradicable. The kingdom is here to stay and will grow and grow, no matter what we do.

The word falls where it falls – seeds and weeds grow together in the kingdom - but the kingdom never stops growing.

Let us stop for a minute and think about this.

The word falls where it falls – seeds and weeds grow together in the kingdom - but the kingdom never stops growing. This is so much greater than us!



Now the seed we're talking about today is not just any seed, it is wheat. And this means that it will go on to feed many. Wheat does not grow for its own benefit, but to provide food for many and to be sown for further crops. So this fruitfulness is for a specific purpose: not only does the

kingdom grow, but it produces seed to nourish many and to *sow more seed*. It is a perpetual, virtuous, circle of life.

And this life comes from God, the Spirit of life, who planted the kingdom in the first place. The way of the world is death, but the way of God is life. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says: 'Now, there is therefore no condemnation.' The death sentence hanging over all humanity has been removed for those who are in Jesus Christ. That is the word of the kingdom, that is the good news. God met us all in his Son, we are in union with Christ. And this is not something that we can do, but something that God does for us. It is difficult to believe this good news, but it is not impossible to believe it. It is difficult to receive the word, the seed, but it is possible to persevere and become good soil. And to believe is to reorient our lives towards a power greater than ourselves, the power that grows the kingdom.

In this unstoppable power of life, there is no pre-judgement. Wheat and weeds grow together in the kingdom. And if we were to do the job ourselves of pulling weeds out, we might also be pulling good wheat from the soil. That's not our job.

Moreover, who are we to tell the weeds from the wheat? Mystic Howard Thurman writes that God knows all of his children as well as he knows himself and much better than we know them. So whether they are saint or sinner, good person or bad person, good soil or bad soil, we are never relieved of our responsibility to try and reach out to others, according to God's law. Because the Spirit lives in us, we belong to Christ. Reaching out. That's our job.

The kingdom is a paradox! There is nothing we can do to make it grow, but the right conditions help good productive growth. These right conditions are the growth of the kingdom in us. So...

Where do we look for signs of the kingdom growing? Are we looking in the right place? How about we start with ourselves?



Yesterday, we had a PCC away day, and it was all about growth, how to lead our church into growth. And it was about the small but significant changes that we can make to strengthen relationships, to expand and deepen our culture of invitation, to create pathways for seekers to

become disciples, to journey with each other. So today, the parable of seeds and soil speaks to us in a meaningful way. It all starts with us, with prayer, listening to God's voice, understanding the word, and then, sowing the word generously.

So let us pray.

Almighty God, you have planted the kingdom.
You met us in your Son, and your Spirit lives in us.
Make us caring sowers of your word
Teach us your laws, O Lord,
Your laws of welcome, selfless love and care of others,
That we may be fruitful in good works
and reflect your generous love in the world.

Amen

If you would like to explore further...

Paula Gooder, *The Parables* (London: Canterbury Press, 2020)

Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956)