

## **Trinity 5 (Yr A) – The Parable of the Sower**

I cannot tell you how good it feels to finally be able to share the worship space together again. Things might seem slightly strange with so many changes to what we are able to do in church at the moment. One of the big positives to this though is that it can help us to focus in on the most important thing – that we are in this holy place to come together as a community of faith to praise, rejoice and engage more deeply with our living God.

Many of us will have not been short of opportunities to garden over the past few months. I am sure many of our gardens are looking pristine. So it seems rather a godsend that we should have been allocated the parable of the sower as our Gospel reading today, on our first Sunday back together.

Jesus wanders outside to take a breath of air. He sits by the lake and soon, so many people are surrounding him, desperate for him to feed them. They are looking for something, but they are not sure what. They have a void in their lives, an emptiness that they cannot quite fathom or explain. Jesus seems to fill the vacuum.

He gets in a boat so that he can teach them all – yes this makes him slightly more distant to the few close to him, but it also means that he can teach more people. And it is from here that he teaches them the parable of the sower.

Now as every gardener knows, it is all about the soil. Without good soil containing enough organic matter and nutrients and regular watering seeds cannot flourish.

So it is with the Parable of the Sower. It could be said that the Parable of the Sower is all about the soil. The seed stays the same, no matter what.

What makes a difference as to whether the seed flourishes is the soil that it's planted into.

The seed that falls on the hard ground, the ground that has been repeatedly trodden down under foot, simply sits there and becomes food for the birds.

The seed that falls on the rocky soil doesn't take hold since the roots struggle to work their way down to the nutrients and moisture they so desperately need for the plant to grow.

The seed that falls in the patch of brambles, hardly stands a chance. Even before it has sprouted it is having to compete with an invasive and already well-established competitor.

But the seed that falls on the well-prepared soil. The soil that has been turned over and tilled until it is fine, with plenty of organic matter and nutrients worked in, thrives. This plant is likely to grow so well it may well produce seeds of its own - seeds in the hundreds. And those seeds, should they too be fortunate enough to fall on good soil, will also thrive.

So this is not a parable about the seed, the seed remains constant. This is a parable about the soil that the sower sows into. In other words, this is a parable about us! God's Kingdom Values remain constant, the message of Jesus does not change. We are the ones who receive Jesus. We are the soil.

We, like soil, are shaped by our environment. If we are walked on over and over again, we develop a hardened exterior, we lose the ability to self-reflect and receive new insights. We simply grow a hardened exterior of self-protection which nothing, not even Jesus can penetrate.

Those who flit from one thing to another, dipping their toe in the water here and there without going deeper, Jesus describes as rocky ground.

These are people who lack the staying power to deal with – well rocky ground. When faith gets tough, when something challenges their belief, they back away and go into retreat rather than see it through. And so the Kingdom of God cannot take root.

The soil with thorns relates to our overcrowded lives, which leave us with little room for more planting. We try our hardest to double dig the beds, but our plots are just too heavily planted with all the demands and distractions of modern life. No sooner do we feel the call of God on our lives, than we allow it to be straggled by all the other ‘stuff’ that gets in the way.

St Paul has these three types of people in mind when he says ‘the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God’. If that is so, then how do we ensure that ‘our hearts and minds are set on the Spirit’ so that ‘Jesus can therefore dwell in us?’

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just go to a garden centre and buy a nice bag of compost? But this is not something consumerism can fix.

As any gardener will tell you, good soil takes years to cultivate. It needs to be fed, nurtured and given depth. Organic matter must be added regularly, and it must be worked and reworked. And as new seeds grow and draw on its nutrients, it must be replenished. If we are the ones who are to receive the seeds that God sows, then we, as both individuals and as a community need to be fed, nurtured, given depth and have our nutrients replenished. The wisdom of holy people past and present; the stability of scripture and church tradition; the regularity of our divine worship, adoration and devotion; the influence of the created world and the prompting of the Holy Spirit will all help to nurture us, feed us and give us depth.

Both communities and individuals can suffer from a culture of bad soil, but they can also benefit greatly from a culture of good soil, where things can grow. If this is to be true for us and those around us, then we must ask ourselves:

How can we reflect most honestly on the shape our soil?

How might we become good soil?

What can we do to enable the seed to take root in our bodies and souls?

How will we know this is happening?

How might we become the nurturers of good soil in those around us?

None of this will be possible on our own terms. We must recognise the people God has sent to us and we must work at digging through the hard crust of self-protection, picking out the stones and the rocks that stop the roots from taking hold, removing the brambles that overcrowd our lives and strangle the shoots as soon as they poke through.

And all the while the grace of God is working in us. And this free gift means that we are not without hope. It is true that seeds that land on hard or rocky or overcrowded ground stand less chance of thriving, but it does happen. Occasionally one does encounter a great big oak growing from a rock or a beautiful flower pushing up through a concrete patio. We will have moments, maybe even whole periods, where we feel like we can't go on tilling the ground. But these wonders of God's creation are a testimony that the Kingdom of God will continue to grow even on the days when we feel beaten down, or overcome by busyness, or feel at our most rocky. So long as we return as soon as we can to the tending of the soil then the Kingdom of God will continue to grow more deeply within us and those around us. And God will add to our number, those whom he is calling. Amen.