

Parable of the Sower



Luke 8:4-15

The parable of the sower is a little bit like an old friend. It's a little story that we have heard before and like the old friend it's comfortable and familiar. But like all of Jesus' stories it is a parable: an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. We read this: The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand." The story was to have a special meaning to the disciples because it told them something about God and them, but to those who do not believe - it was just a story about a part of life they were familiar with.

Like our folk from Norfolk, the people in those days were mostly farmers. To grow food, they needed to plant seeds and tend the crops to harvest. The picture I have kept showing you this morning is called the Sower, by Vincent Van Gogh. It's a very famous picture and it shows how people traditionally sowed seed - by broadcasting it. That doesn't mean they put their request into Radio 1 or Radio 2 or whatever. The farmer would scatter the seeds on the ground. Jesus then describes the farmers' frustration - because not all of the seeds scattered ever bore fruit because it fell in places where it did not grow.

Modern farmers don't use this method. they now plant seed by drilling it using a machine that puts that breaks up the ground, puts the seed in and covers it up to protect it. It was invented by a man called Jethro Tull in the eighteenth century and here's a modern picture of a tractor pulling a seed drill. And if you thought that Jethro Tull was the name of a rock band - then that ages you!

Seeds represent potential. A wheat seed can grow into a plant that will produce many more wheat seeds - which then we can harvest and use.

The story is told of British troops who were involved in a confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia in 1964. It was called Malaya then and the British used Gurkhas from Nepal who as you know have a reputation for bravery and courage. They were asked if they would be willing to jump from transport planes into combat against the Indonesians if the need arose. The Gurkhas has the right to turn down the request because they had never been trained as paratroopers. The Gurkhas usually agreed to anything, but on this occasion they provisionally rejected the plan. But the next day one of their NCO'S sought out the British officer who had made the request and said they had discussed the matter further and would be prepared to jump under certain conditions.

"What are they?" asked the British officer. "The Gurkhas told him they would jump if the land was marshy or reasonably soft with no rocky outcrops, because they were inexperienced in falling. The British officer considered this, and said that the dropping area would almost certainly be over jungle, and there would not be rocky outcrops, so that seemed all right. Was there anything else?

"Yes," said the Gurkhas. They wanted the plane to fly as slowly as possible and no more than one hundred feet high. The British officer pointed out the planes always did fly as slowly as possible when dropping troops, but to jump from one hundred feet was impossible, because the parachutes would not open in time from that height. "Oh, said the Gurkhas, "You didn't mention that before! That's all right, then. We'll jump with parachutes anywhere. "

What on earth has that to do with the sower? Like our parachuting troops, the seed leaves the farmer's hands with the potential to grow, but quite where it lands will determine whether it would bear fruit. Parachutes will get the soldier to the ground - but if he lands in the open where he can be shot, gets tangled up a tree or lands too far from his fellows - then he's no use.

Now every farmer knows that seed has problems growing on paths, on rocky ground, or amongst weeds. If you know this, the you do something about it as you don't want to waste seed where it won't grow. As I said earlier, we have machines today that will plant the seed that none of it is wasted. They did something about it then too – knowing that seed would fall in wrong places, they knew that they had to be careful and prepare properly.

If the path is a problem, then you don't sow on it. If there are stones, you dig them out. If there are weeds, you pull them up or put weedkiller on them. If you can anticipate the problem - then you can find a solution. The parable wasn't there to inform, but to anticipate the problem because there are solutions to all of them. This parable is a picture of the word of God being spread. But who is the sower? How does the word of God get to the ground? How do people hear the word of God - because you and I sow it. We're the sowers and it's up to us to not waste the word of God, but to sow in a way that brings a harvest. We need to learn not to be sloppy and waste seed.

- **Snatched**

Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. So to the first consequence of sloppy sowing. Seed lands on the path and gets snatched. Satan is ready, willing and able to take our efforts and run off with them. We need to take care with how we plant the word of God. One of the biggest problems with churches in our land today is our lack of fruitfulness - we are not producing a good crop. In most cases we are not producing any crop.

Some of that is that we disobey the last command of Christ: the great commission. Another problem is that we try to plant in the wrong ground. We put on evangelistic events that nobody comes to, Alpha courses no-one attends, special services that we can hardly persuade people to come to. What went wrong. The problem is nice idea, poor ground. The word of God never changes - it can't. The Gospel represents one who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

But what we have to learn is to communicate that effectively to people in our community. Otherwise, the devil will just snatch everything away.

- **Sizzled**

Then there are those who have believed but when difficult times come along and they become discouraged and fall away. This isn't about sowing so much as the responsibility a farmer has to tend his crops. If he de-stones his field, it's fine - otherwise his crop gets sizzled. How many times have we seen people start well in the faith and then slip back. How many youths have we seen grow in the Lord only abandon their faith later on. Jesus didn't tell this to make us shrug our shoulders and say "what a pity". It's here because we need to understand that we have a responsibility to nurture new believers and support them through what may be a difficult time in their lives as they struggle with faith. As a young man I was encouraged by some men in my church that had a burden to see young people discover their gifts and participate in the life of the church. And each week

they took a few of us aside and encouraged us. Nurturing makes a difference - I'm here aren't I.

- **Strangled**

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. I'd say this one is the biggest threat to the modern church. Christians who just don't mature in Christ because they've got "better things to do" than spend time with God. There is a solution - to encourage one another - as Paul says - provoke one another to do good works. What's your fellowship like? Encourage one another and provoke one another to good works.

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

God wants us to grow and be fruitful. Here's couple of verses from Colossians We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God ..Colossians 1:9b-10 (New Living Translation)

The difference is made when we desire to be fruitful. Do you want to make a difference - then learn how to tend the field as Jesus taught - take care where you sow - don't waste words, break up the soil by personally mentoring someone new to the faith, spend time with God, and live a life worthy of honouring God.

Prayer

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