



7th Sunday of Pentecost
16th July 2023

An extravagant Sower liberally sows his seed

Greetings!

It's good to be here as part of our church family, as we celebrate the 7th Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching you via 'live stream' and we long for the time we can all worship & fellowship together!

Today's Gospel passage is about the parable of the sower, and I would like to share with you an understanding of this, that I hadn't considered before.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The parable of the sower is recorded in the three synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and being Year A, today's Gospel reading is taken from St Matthew's account.

It commences with Jesus in a boat, and a great gathered crowd, standing on the beach, telling them the parable of the sower. This parable begs the question, why is this sower (God) so recklessly extravagant?

Then second half of the Gospel reading, the emphasis switches from God's action to our response; but the first half of the story, verses 1 to 9 is all that the listening crowds get, and their reaction must have been one of incredulity.

Jesus's audience may not be all farmers themselves, but they would all be much closer to the food production cycle than you and I are.

They would have known famine and shortage, and you would agree that as they would know, that any sensible farmer does not just fling the seeds, 'willy-nilly', all over the place!

He would prepare the ground as well as he could in advance, precisely so that the seeds don't fall on rocky ground among thorns.

Whatever is this sower in the story up to?

No wonder the disciples need an explanation.

The one that they got, has provided generations of Sermons and Sunday-school lessons, with the emphasis on how we receive the word of God, so generously scattered abroad. However, when you think about it, it is still an immensely puzzling story.

For instance, it is hard to see what those who hear God's word are supposed to do about it. It isn't clear that any blame attaches to them. For example, can it entirely be their own fault if they don't understand what is being said to them?

We could imply, that the shallow people, and the ones who allow themselves to be distracted by *'the cares of the world and the lure of wealth'* could be said to deserve what they get, up to a point!

Could it be that the sower is really the key to this parable? It is the sower who starts the story, and the explanation is given to those, (the disciples, *and that includes us*), who are going to be the *'sowers'*.

God may be the primary sower, but the disciples have accepted the commission to join Jesus in spreading the word far and wide, so it is their duty to make sure that the soil is prepared, that the birds are scared away, that the thorns are uprooted, and that the seed does not fall where there is not enough soil to let it grow.

The disciples are being given the key, not to make them feel superior, and to assure them of their status in the inner circle, but so that they can be responsible for those who have no other means of hearing the Word.

This is not, then, primarily a parable for seed, which by its very nature, bound to grow or fail, depending on where it is put.

No, this a parable for the sowers, and my brothers and sisters in Christ, that includes all of us!

Well if this sounds like too terrifyingly a responsibility, then take Isaiah 55 and Romans 8 to heart.

Although for some inexplicable reason God chooses to involve us in His mission, and to give us a real responsibility, God knows what we are.

As God says through Isaiah, *God's word will accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it'.*

Why then do we find it very hard it is always to believe that?

- We long to take over from God, to bend God to our purposes.
- We are sure that we know best!!!
- We wouldn't be the sower who flings the seed about without looking where it is going to land.
- We would make sure that the seed got only to the people like us that we know can be trusted with it.

How different are our careful, defensive, well managed strategies are from God's wild randomness, which knows no boundaries.

So when St Paul says, in Romans 8,1-11, that there is *'now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'*, those of us who are trying so hard need to hear it, as much as anyone else. After all, people who don't care about the law at all are not the ones who fear breaking it inadvertently. It is those who are zealously law-abiding who need freedom. Both sets of people need forgiveness, but Jesus's ministry showed, over and over again, that it is those who are trying to be righteous who find it hardest to accept that forgiveness.

But if, on one level, this is reassuring for anxious sowers, on another, it is even more terrifying than the responsibility of sowing God's word. Because Paul also says that *'the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God'*.

Paul does not say that such minds have to be doing or thinking evil, but simply that they are in themselves, hostile to God. All God's values are an aversion to them. They cannot stand the generous profligacy of the Holy Spirit.

So what must we wishful sowers do?

Prepare the ground as much as we can, and then trust the generous mercy of God, and sometimes throw caution to the wind, and watch with delight as God's word accomplishes what we could never have dreamed of. *AMEN!*