
Sunday 5th July 2020 – The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Readings: Romans 8:1-11 & Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Romans 8:1-11

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it

produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Reflection



So, at last the lockdown has started to be lifted. Hairdressers, restaurants and pubs are starting to re-open. Non-essential shops are trading again. Life is beginning to get back to normal. It’s what we’ve been wanting isn’t it? Yet think back to the first few days and weeks of lockdown, when people started to envisage what life after lockdown, the new normal, might look like. A world in which we continue to appreciate the everyday blessings we’d taken for granted for so long. A world where we remember all the lessons that this time has taught us: to appreciate the blessings we take for granted every day; the importance of looking for opportunities to serve our neighbours in need; and valuing the beauty of the creation in the environment in which we live.

Whether or not the new normal is different from the old normal is up to each one of us. We have to be the change that we want to see in our lives post-pandemic. And this depends upon our wills and our hearts. Or to use a metaphor from today’s parable, the condition of our soil.

This story is very familiar to most of us. A farmer goes out scattering seed everywhere, and predictably, many of these seeds do not produce. Some get eaten by birds. Some sprout but then wither. Some seedlings get choked out by weeds. Finally, a few yield varying amounts of grain. At the end of the story, Jesus says 'Whoever has ears, let them hear'. In fact, he refers to ears, listening or hearing 7 times in these verses. He clearly wants us to learn something from them.

It's easy to interpret this parable as referring to how other people receive the word of God, which is the seed. There are those people whose faith is superficial, like the seed that lands on the path. Their faith is just a label or for show, and is easily lost. There are those whose faith is shallow, like the seed that falls on the rocky ground. They readily accept all the positive aspects of faith but don't want to engage with trickier issues such as persecution or suffering. There are also those whose faith is easily derailed by other pressures such as materialism, wealth and success, like the seed choked by thorns. And finally, there are those whose roots go deep, who immerse themselves in the bible, in prayer and in time spent in the service of God. People whose lives produce a bumper crop.

But the thing is, this is something we need to apply not to other people but to ourselves. And we don't fit neatly into one of these categories. Indeed, I can identify times when I can be like all four in one day! So, this isn't about other people and how well they listen to God's word, it's about how I – how you – hear it. Are there times when our hearts are hardened, when our commitment is lacking, or when we allow too many other influences to take root in our lives?

Of course, the other lesson to be heard in this parable is that we are also called to be like the sower, who sows extravagantly and indiscriminately. The sower doesn't meticulously plant the seed only in soil that he knows to be good, he scatters it liberally. We too, should be willing to share our faith generously with all, not just targeting those we think might be receptive, but dropping seeds wherever we go, knowing that it is God, and not us, who nurtures that seed so that it can grow.

Let us pray that whatever type of soil we are today, that God will continue to sow his seed in us so that his Spirit is in us, equipping us to share what we know of Christ with those around us.

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