

Reflection for 12 July 2020 Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!”

¹⁸ “Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Back at the end of May, there I was like so very many others, shielding, and in lock-down, staying at home, which for many means staying in their rooms. I was reading Matthew 13 which turns out to be the Gospel reading set for today. The opening verses seemed so appropriate for our present crisis.

'That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.'

It sounded so blissful to me, to be able to do just that, to get out and look at the world - perhaps down by the Broads.

Jesus was seeking the need tranquility - time for recovery and perhaps meditative prayer by the lakeside. But that peaceful moment was not to be for Jesus, he was immediately swamped by large crowds. Peace eluded him because the crowds gathered around the lakeside. So Jesus went onto a small boat and then began to teach them, using the parable of the sower.

When his disciples asked him why he taught using parables, Jesus explained, that the ability to understand the meaning of a parable or not, depended to a large measure on the listeners' moral state.

Parables hide and reveal at the same time.

Only those who do the will of God and so belong to Jesus' family will understand the parables' meaning.

So it follows that those who do not follow their Father's teaching, will not understand.

And just in case we fall into the later category, on this occasion Jesus explained the meaning – the teaching

behind the parable of the sower. Reread it after this service and ponder on those images.

Now a further 2000 years after Jesus had told the disciples that message, here we are in the western world desperately in need of **listening, understanding** and **responding** to those same words.

I think that this parable is first and foremost a parable of graciousness and risk:

- The utter graciousness of the sower who flings the seed indiscriminately on every kind of ground.
- The risk that who knows how much of the seed is taken away, or withers, or is choked before it can bear fruit.

We don't like risk though, we surround ourselves with protective structures to minimise at worst, and at best eradicate all risk, but risk is the price of creation – of life.

So what could we say is wrong with our society?

Many will say lack of respect for others

Or

To much affluence

Or

Too much greed

Or

A decline in moral standards

Or

A lack of belief in God perhaps.

Or

A lack of leadership from the church.

Well yes, it's possibly all those things, and many more besides. But I believe it is connected with Christians being unwilling to take a risk – the risk of standing up and be counted as a follower of Jesus.

I think that the problem is much nearer home, - it's more personal:

The problem is ME

The problem is US

The Problem is YOU and ME

If I listened to Jesus' teachings, to his gracious words which he offers all, and followed them:

I would become the seed which fell on fertile ground and multiplied and yielded a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

If You listened to Jesus' teachings and followed them:

You too would be the seed that fell on fertile ground and yielded a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Our country is greatly in need of a faith revival.

Each time that our country has fallen by the wayside, each time that our people have become rocky ground, thorny pasture, paths of hardness on which God's words fall and wither, God has sent along a leader to turn the nations back to Him.

So are we now in need of such a new spiritual leader?

BUT WHY - why do we feel we are in need; why are we waiting?

We already have that leader, we have Jesus, God's son, who has shown us, who has told what to do. We don't have to wait for another.

We just need to become Gospel people.

We can start that revival which our nation so badly needs.

Each one of us can become the good fertile seeds and good fertile ground on which God's words fall grow and flourish.

No longer do I,

No longer do YOU,

No longer do WE, need to be the problem .

We can become part of the solution.

We must turn in faith to Jesus as Lord, and master, and each day try to live our lives in the way he showed us.

Then perhaps people will see a difference in us and want to join in and become fertile ground for God's word themselves.

Ghandi once said "If it wasn't for Christians, we would all be Christians."

What he meant was that people he saw who professed to be Christians, were behaving in very unchristian ways; moaning - back stabbing, bickering amongst each other, each one trying to set themselves up as masters not servants, seekers of dominance and power over others.

We need to take the risk of placing our faith out front in

What we are,

What we say;

What we do and

What we don't do.

In the army there is a saying that there are no atheists in foxholes.

During this pandemic I expect that millions of people have turned to prayer - seeking God's protection through prayer, silent or spoken. Perhaps because of this terrible disease

which has affected our lives, people will return to church to give thanks for all we have and continue to seek His guidance, ease and protection.

If so, will our churches,

Will I,

Will you

seek to be the fertile ground for new seeds and help to spread God's word through Jesus' teachings.

Can we help turn this disaster of COVID19 into a spiritual revival?

Amen.

The Revd Barry Furness