

Pentecost 7, Year A

Isaiah 55:10-13, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

LET US PRAY

The parable of the sower is a familiar one and one of the few for which Jesus supplied an explanation. Actually, it is not a parable about the sower at all but about the soil.

Was that the telephone? I think it might have been but anyway it's stopped. Let's just ignore it.

Although Jesus was special in many ways, he was in some ways he was just another rabbi telling stories...

It is the telephone; I think I'd better answer it. Excuse me a moment. (Picks up receiver.)

Hello. Oh, hello Jesus. I thought it might be you. I'm sorry that I've been ignoring your calls but today I'm in church so thought that I had better answer. We are just about to think about your parable of the sower and the soil.

LISTENING

That's what you want to speak to me about? You want to know what I have done with that bag of seed you gave me.

Well, it's being carefully stored in a cupboard so it's OK. What is it anyway? Is it wheat, oats...?

LISTENING

Oh, it's more Word of God seed like I had before. So, what do you want to say Jesus?

LISTENING

You want me to go and scatter it in that barren area in West Linton? Well Jesus I can't see the point; you know what happened last time.

Last time some of it blew onto the path and the pigeons came and ate it up so it was wasted. Some fell on ground where the soil was so thin that the seed

which did grow soon withered. So that was a waste too. True, some fell where the weeds grow and seemed to do alright for a while. But you know what weeds are like; they just take over. So that was more seed wasted even though some people did seem to flourish at first. And really, Jesus, there is very little evidence of growth in West Linton even where the seed fell on promising soil.

So, I'm sorry Jesus, I just can't see the point.

LISTENING

OK, so you say it's not up to me to decide; it's you. After all you said to go and make disciples of all nations. But we're not achieving much of that here are we? So why bother?

LISTENING

That's true, Jesus, we can't expect disciples without sowing seed. And, of course, you're right. It's God's responsibility to see that it grows. As Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 3:6) Paul sowed the seed, Apollos watered it, but it was God who gave the growth. But still, that doesn't seem to be happening here, does it?

LISTENING

You say remember that seed can remain dormant for years before it germinates, maybe even as long as 50 in some cases, so you never know. And besides haven't we just heard that God's word will not return to him empty, but accomplish God plans for it?

Fair enough Jesus. So, I must get out that seed from the cupboard and start sowing. And maybe I can persuade others to do the same. Thank you for your input...

LISTENING

What's that? You have something else to say. About gardening?

I do enjoy gardening although it is hard up on the A702 where the wind whistles along the Pentlands and temperatures can be -17C. Still the garden doesn't look bad when visitors call. They don't see the bottom corner where the couch grass and nettles come in from the field and overwhelm the raspberry canes and

where the aphids get the redcurrant bushes. Nor can they see the opposite corner where the brambles have smothered the honeysuckle.

LISTENING

Oh, that's not the sort of gardening you have in mind. You are talking about the gardening of my own heart. Of tending to the soil where the seed of your Word should germinate and bear fruit. What, you say, about the stony areas, the rocky areas, the weedy areas there? And am I fertilising the good soil?

Well, I guess that's something I need to think about, now you mention it. It is too easy just to get on with life and the usual Christian routines without thinking.

So, Jesus, let me ask which are the stony areas where the pigeons get the seed? Where is the soil in my heart thin and hard so the seed withers? What are the weeds? And how do I fertilise my heart?

LISTENING

Oh, you want me to think about that for myself. You're not going to feed up the answers on a plate because then I might take less notice.

OK, I'll think about it. And I'll ask my friends to help me think too.

Thank you for your call. It has been lovely to talk with you. And I'll try and be more responsive when you call in future. Goodbye.

So will you help me think about the heart gardening please?

Let's start with the pigeons. These could be resentments, sin or just poor habits and distractions. What might they be?

(Discussion)

Where might our response to God's word be so shallow and short-lived that the seed cannot really take root?

(Discussion)

What about the weeds, the *worries and the deceitfulness of wealth*? What might they be?

(Discussion)

And finally, how do we fertilise the soil of our hearts so that we bear good fruit?

(Discussion)

I'll send out the text of this talk by email as usual so you will be able to consider these questions in more depth during the week.

Chris Shaw, 16 July 2023