

Sermon for Trinity 5 2020

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, Matthew 13.1-3

Some years ago we were blessed with the company of a Norwegian professor. She had arrived in Sydney for a sabbatical and given the standard of accommodation available she elected to stay with us. Of course, we did invite her to stay, she did not just move in unannounced, and she lived with us for about 6 months.

English was her second language, and while she spoke English fluently, some of the Australian idioms confused her. At one point Ursula accused me of always saying the opposite of that which I meant. It had not occurred to me that my sense of humour and smart alec comments could be so misunderstood.

When we look to the teaching of Jesus he spoke in parables and while some people understood the parable, people such as the disciples, there were many who missed the point. The deal was that the people listening to the teaching would have need to stop and think about the meaning of the parable. "What does he mean? Who is the story aimed at? Is he trying to tell me something? Is he having a go at me? Is there a special message about God in there somewhere?"

These are all valid questions. Jesus, in his desire to teach has spoken in parables so that the people listening would need to commit themselves to the exercise of solving the puzzle. It is not a message being spoon fed, but a teaching that demands the people think, and then to solve the puzzles for themselves. In solving the puzzle they learn. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that when they discovered the meaning of the parable they will have learned something precious about God.

The parable today is a classic. Is it a parable of the sower? Or is it a Parable of the seed? Or indeed a parable about the soil? All three of those elements are introduced into the parable which is then interpreted. Even in the interpretation we have the three elements of sower, seed, and soil.

We can take the classic interpretation and understand that the Sower is God, the seed is the gospel message of salvation, and that we are the soil. The question remains, is it about only one of these elements? I suggest that the parable is about all three, and there may be more primary, or subtle, points in the parable that I have not yet identified.

If the parable is primarily about the sower then we are speaking of God. As the sower is throwing the seed about there does not appear to be great concern regarding where it fell. There does not even appear to be an exercise in preparing the soil. The seed is simply scattered willy nilly. It fell on pathways, among thorns, on rocks, some, we are told, fell on fertile ground.

God does not reserve his message for only a select few. There is no special mob who will be treated better than anyone else. For God, all people are loved exactly the same, and are

seen as being equal. We are all called to respond to God. It is love that connects God to us and it is love that connects us to God. The sower, God, gives every one of us the opportunity to respond to the gospel message of salvation. No one is excluded.

The seed is the gospel message of salvation. It is an unchanging message of good news to all people. For generations before Jesus' arrival the prophecies were focussed on the Messiah, the one who would come and free the people from slavery. He would be a great leader and he would reveal the great truth of the character and person of God. Some thought that he would be a great warrior who would throw off the Roman Yoke of burden and set the people free. No one appears to have considered that the Messiah would be a man of peace and compassion. It is for this reason that Jesus has been progressively rejected from the temple. Today he must teach from a boat and following this event he turns to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the seed, the message, is made clear. The passion, death, and resurrection of Christ are the foundation of the gospel message of salvation.

In our time this is the seed that must continue to be sown. As the Body of Christ it is for us to fulfil the role of ensuring that all people are given the opportunity to hear, and to respond to, the gospel message of salvation in Christ. We are not to judge one person as being worthy or unworthy. It is not for us to decide who will be saved, or who will stand condemned. Our role is to love God and to love our neighbour. A major aspect of that love will see us introducing all people to the faith.

Humanity, us, we are the soil in the parable. At different times of our life we will have been like the path, or surrounded by thorns, or perhaps even fertile ground. We are the only ones who can determine in which part of the field we may be. It is for us to seek to open our hearts and minds so that God's message can penetrate our, sometimes, resisting nature.

As we read through this parable let us forget that it might only be about the sower, or maybe only about the seed, or even primarily about the soil. To fully comprehend the parable we are to consider all three of these elements. If we only think of God we will say to ourselves that we have a wonderful God who constantly gives us whatever we want. God might become a great big spiritual Santa Clause who has nothing better to do than wander around sprinkling goodies all around us. This would be a very problematic understanding of God.

If we think of the parable as only being the seed, a message which is available to us, if we want it, then this is also problematic. If we concentrate only on the message which we perceive to be sprinkled around with gay abandon and not aimed at anyone in particular, it will lose value very quickly. The only thing that gives the message meaning is that it comes from God and that it is aimed at every human being in the world. More importantly, the message is aimed directly at us.

If we consider only the soil in the parable it may well lead us into the sin of self righteousness and judgement of others. It is a very easy for us to judge others as being a bare path on which nothing will grow, or a rocky ledge without much depth, or when we are feeling charitable, they might be a fertile field producing all sorts of exciting stuff. It is so easy to judge the integrity and faith of others.

In reality when we read a parable we are gazing into a mirror. In that mirror we will recognise our own faults and shortcomings. When we look in the mirror of the parable, we will know immediately which form of soil we may be. When we look in the mirror, we will also recognise a person who is loved by God. We will see a person who has been offered eternal life. We will see a person for whom Christ died.

Parables may be tricky, but when we place ourselves into them, we discover the beauty and the divine love of God, and this will generate our desire to till the earth of our very being. It is when we take care of the soil and build it up with learning, prayer, worship, humility, and good deeds that we will find ourselves moving closer and closer to God. In that closeness we will discover that we have the potential to produce one hundred fold, sixty fold, or even thirty. In this way we become the sower of the seed. In this way we become the Body of Christ.