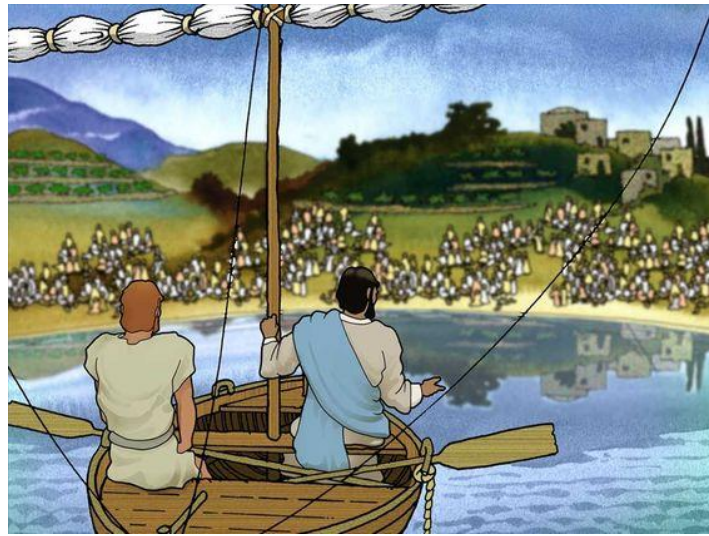


## Reflection Sunday 12th July 2020



**Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (NIV)**

### **The Parable of the Sower**

**13** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. **2** Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. **3** Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. **4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **5** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. **6** But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. **8** Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. **9** Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

**18** “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: **19** 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. **20** The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. **21** 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. **22** 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. **23** 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.”

I wonder if you have been to the Sea of Galilee - perhaps on a pilgrimage of some sort? If so I am very envious! Sadly, I have not, it is still on my bucket list.

I read this description by Tom Wright, of a visit taken a few years ago:

'We stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee on a spring morning. The bus was up by the road, and we had walked down, several dozen of us, to where the lake was glistening in the sunshine. It was peaceful and still. The ground slopes up steeply from the lakeshore, curving sharply around a narrow inlet . There are several such inlets along the shore just to the west of Capernaum.

Our guide had already asked a local fisherman to bring a small boat. Leaving us on the shore, he got in the boat, and they pushed off and rowed out to the middle of the inlet. Then he stood up in the boat, and in a clear voice, without needing to shout, read to us the story of the parable of the sower. We were amazed. His voice came to us across the water, clear and crisp in the morning air. The steep banks of the inlet acted like a well designed theatre with perfect acoustics. We stood there listening, imagining a crowd many times larger than ourselves listening to another voice from another boat 2000 years before. Jesus had discovered a perfect way to speak to several hundred people at once, and to have them all hear what he was saying.'

I had always wondered why Jesus would often speak to a crowd from a boat. I had thought it was to avoid being mobbed by the people, but I love the idea of Him making sure everyone could hear comfortably what He was saying.

I wonder why all the people have gathered here to see Jesus. Have they come hoping to see a miracle or two? Have they come out of curiosity, having heard about him from others? Have they been faithfully following him for a while and just want to be near? Are they here with an ulterior motive - are they suspicious of Him and are keen to hear if he is going to stir up the crowd against the authorities, and thus provide some evidence to bring Him to court? Have they just been dragged here by a friend who didn't want to come on their own? Have they just been carried along by the crowd and are not really sure why they are here at all?

We don't know, but perhaps all of the above reasons and others as well I am sure. We know there is a large crowd, Jesus has moved off-shore to speak to them. They are in eager anticipation of what is going to happen next - which is - He tells them a very short story about a farmer sowing seeds.

I wonder how they all reacted? Perhaps those that were looking for an excuse to arrest Jesus would have gone away disappointed - 'after all the hype - He just told them a story!'

But I wonder what the others thought? Why does Jesus, when He has a whole of crowd of keen listeners, tell them a simple story? Why does Jesus use parables?

Jesus' parables are all short, they can be retold in no more than five minutes at most, usually they are only about a minute or two long, and yet they stick in your mind. You find you are still thinking about them days later. They are puzzling, never straightforward or clear. Nowadays we are taught to believe that when we are speaking we should be concise, clear and to the point. Jesus was never like that! He spoke in puzzles and riddles, which force you to think and listen and consider Jesus and what He is really saying.

This popular parable, the parable of the sower, is the one that explains why He talks in parables. He doesn't explain the meaning to the crowd, but tells His disciples what it all means. The sower is God, and the seeds are God's word, God's message, God's good news of the Gospel. And depending on where the seeds land when scattered by the sower, they grow and respond to God's word in different ways.

As Jesus explains, some hear the word and not understanding it, ignore it. Some hear it with joy, but don't think any more deeply about it than that, and as soon as they face a problem in life, they forget about it. Still others hear it and believe it, but they don't make it the most important thing in their lives, and when other things start crowding in it gets lost and ignored. Thankfully, however, some hear the Word, believe it, study it and let it grow as they follow Jesus. It does become the most important thing in their lives and as a result they grow as Christians, their faith deepens and God uses them in amazing ways.

One thing the crowd, many of whom would understand farming, would find strange in the story, however, is the fact that the sower was so liberal and wasteful with his sowing. Any good farmer would carefully watch where he was casting the seed so as not to waste a single one. He would ensure that all the seed was broadcast on the good soil where it would take root and grow well. A farmer would also know that a good harvest might be a tenfold increase of what was sown. And yet in Jesus' parable it was flung around liberally everywhere, and then when it landed on good soil it took firm root and produced a harvest one hundred, or sixty or thirty times more.

Perhaps, then Jesus is telling us something in this parable, not just about the different ways of hearing God's message, and the different types of responses we make, but also about God himself. God isn't a frugal sower, He spreads His message far and wide for anyone to hear. He doesn't just choose the best people to hear it, knowing that they will be the good soil. He spreads it for everyone to hear, and to make up their own mind as to what they might do with it.

And I think that is what God expects us to do too. Like the disciples to whom Jesus explained the parable, we too are expected to be generous, extravagant sowers, spreading God's word as far and wide as we can. We don't know what people's response will be, that is in God's hands, so we mustn't choose who we think 'deserves' to hear it and only tell them. We are sowing with God alongside us. His word, like the seeds, are

what will growing people's hearts. We need to be extravagant sowers, preparing the ground as much as we can, but then trusting in the generous mercy of God, as we share the Good News of Jesus to everyone, and letting the words grow in those who hear it. We need to throw caution to the wind, and then perhaps we will see, with delight, how God's word accomplishes more than we could ever dream of or imagine.

As the summer passes, the corn ripens and we watch the harvest begin in the fields about us, may it be a reminder to us of this story. How do you respond to the parable of the sower? Just a good story, or something deeper? How are the seeds that have been planted in your heart growing, on good soil or surrounded by thorns?

May God show each one of us, these coming weeks, how to be extravagant sowers and give us the opportunity to share God's Good News with those around us.

'Whoever has ears, let them hear.'

Amen

Casting Crowns - Nobody [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yBzlt\\_z8oY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yBzlt_z8oY)

Prayer

O God,  
We come into Your presence with expectation,  
hungry for an encounter with You,  
eager to hear Your Word.

Open our eyes and ears to the presence of Your Holy Spirit.  
May the seeds of Your Word scattered among us this morning  
fall on fertile soil.

May they take root in our hearts and lives,  
and produce an abundant harvest  
of good words and deeds.

Make us extravagant sowers,  
and give us the courage and opportunity to  
share the same Good News with all we meet.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,  
our teacher and our Lord.

Amen.