

LUKE 8: 4-15 FARNINGHAM 16 FEB 2020

The story in our reading this morning is, on the surface, very easy to understand:

A sower went out to sow his seed

This seed fell onto different types of ground:

The path

Rocky ground

Thorny ground

Good fertile soil

The seed prospered depending on the different soil it fell upon

People walked on it or birds ate it on the path

Initial upward growth but with no moisture the plants quickly withered on the rocky ground

Some growth occurred but due to the competition of the weeds, life for these seedlings was soon choked off in the thorny ground

Good growth, maturity and fruit was the end result of seed falling on good soil

This was a simple straightforward description of what would have been very familiar indeed to Jesus' hearers. They lived in an agricultural society and understood what sowing and harvesting was all about. Some of them may well have been sowers themselves. If Jesus intended to teach them some new agricultural techniques he would have had to say a whole lot more than this!

But Jesus wasn't thinking about agriculture at all he was simply using a story that would be readily understood by his hearers in order to lead some of them on to some serious thinking in a completely different way altogether.

Jesus explained many things by way of parables, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus was the Master Storyteller using just a few words to teach profound spiritual truth.

And this is why he repeatedly called out to his hearers to use their ears and really listen to what he was really saying.

A parable compels listeners to discover the truth for themselves, and it conceals the truth from those too lazy or unwilling to try to understand what

Jesus was actually saying to them. Most parables have just one point, and one meaning.

In this parable we, I'm sure will all want the last option. We all want to be like the seed that fell on the fertile soil. We want our lives to be healthy and productive, with good growth and maturity..

His disciples had shown spiritual perception and spiritual appetite – they knew his parable meant something significant and they wanted to know what that was.

Are we like them in any way? Do we have any personal spiritual hunger?

Having explained why he used parables Jesus then moved on to explain what this simple story really meant and this is what he said.

The seed that the sower sowed was not wheat or barley or anything like that. This sower was about the spiritual work of spreading the word of God. (In context it is Jesus who has been doing this work of a sower but today it can be applied to any person preaching or sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it can be anyone of us.) But we here and now are also told to go and share the Good News with others.

There is nothing the matter with the seed either – if not every seed sown grows it is not the seed that is at fault but the ground that it falls upon. The same seed that produces no fruit on the first three types of ground is yet capable of producing a great harvest when it falls on good soil.

The different types of ground/soil represent the heart condition of four different types of people. True faith is always a matter of the heart. The heart of a man/woman is what makes them what they truly are and true faith must always deal with this reality:

Perhaps we should underline the purpose that the sower has in sowing his seed. That purpose is not for the sake of emptying his seed sack, of filling a few hours of his time, no his purpose is in seeing a harvest! And here we mean a spiritual harvest.

If the different soil types represent different heart conditions let's take a closer look at just what those conditions are:

The path – the unresponsive heart. This provides an inhospitable welcome for the seed. The seed simply can't penetrate and has absolutely no chance of growing. A part of the seed is crushed as others walk on it and another part is eaten away by the birds.

Two people listen to a sermon and when it is over one turns to the other and rubbishes everything the preacher has said. The second paying attention to this critical voice finds that the seed has been crushed for him too and he also goes away unchanged.

Or as soon as the sermon is over no effort is made to keep a hold on what has been said and so quickly the message is pushed into the background, forgotten and lost. Instead of giving heed to the word any other subject of conversation will do and Satan's little birds take the seed away. There'll be no growth here.

The rocky soil – the impulsive heart. What is in view here is not a piece of land with lots of stones in it but a piece of land with solid rock strata just under the surface covered with a very thin layer of soil. Seed falling here can only go one way and being unable to put down roots it springs upwards. Initial appearance might well seem promising but without moisture the plant will wither just as speedily as it sprung up.

Faith here - if it be called faith at all - is merely temporary faith and as soon as difficulties come along that's it. Fair-weather believers but because there is no root the plant dies when the heat increases.

The thorny soil – the preoccupied heart. This time the message seems to have been well received but the ground is cluttered. The weeds have not been removed and the weeding isn't done now either. And so the weeds grow and grow and the young seedling has its life choked out of it. The weeds, the thorns, are of various kinds – they can be cares, worries or anxieties or they can be wealth and prosperity that so take over the heart that no room is left for anything else; they can be the pleasures of this life – and these pleasures become all-consuming.

It is the heart of someone who for a time doesn't want to completely reject the gospel message but who doesn't want to respond seriously either and so goes on for a time trying to serve both God and mammon – but in that contest there is just one winner because God withdraws – where he cannot be Lord of all he

will not be lord at all. Perhaps it is the heart of someone who says simply "not yet" and who finds out to their eternal loss that the other things in their life have caused them to delay too long.

The fertile soil – the responsive/prepared heart. Here the seed is properly welcomed and received. The word is not treated lightly or flippantly but held fast and held fast in the heart too. The growth might not be particularly rapid to the onlooker but real genuine growth quietly takes place; The seed germinates in the heart and roots are put down then the seedling emerges and withstands the various onslaughts that come its way and in due season a rich harvest is born.

This is the only soil that actually sees the seed producing its fruit and this is the only decent soil there is.

Finally, What soil are you? Are you the fertile soil that allows the a spiritual harvest to grow in you!