

SERMON/REFLECTION FOR TRINITY 5 WEEK 15 YEAR A 12 JULY 2020.

I believe that some Junior Church members are joining in this service at their homes. They have received gifts that would normally have been given out at the Sung Mass in church. Many thanks to the deliverers!

Young or not so young, we've probably all heard the parable Jesus tells in this morning's gospel: the parable of the sower. We have the advantage that Jesus explains the parable: how the four different types of ground on which the seed falls correspond with the different reactions of people to hearing 'the word of the kingdom'.

You might say therefore that we don't need another sermon – Jesus has already given one. Well, hard luck. We still need to think how this parable fits in with other parts of the gospel, and how it applies to us.

Jesus did a great deal of preaching, teaching and proclaiming. Sometimes it was about how people should live; sometimes it was about himself; often it was about the kingdom of God. He told the twelve disciples to do the same: to give others the message. For nearly 2,000 years Christians have followed the example of Jesus and the disciples in spreading the word: making disciples, as Jesus commanded. This fits the overall content of the parable: a seed grows into a plant, and the plant produces more seeds.

It seems most unfair that 'the evil one' snatches away what has been sown in some people's hearts. No matter how brilliant a presentation of the Christian message we give, we're up against a power over which we have no control. But there is another way of looking at it. Jesus says that this first group of hearers are those who do not understand 'the word of the kingdom'. There have been examples of such people in the chapters of Matthew's gospel just before today's parable. We've read parts of those chapters in recent weeks. Last week for example, Jesus said,

To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." (Mt 11.16,17)

He explained this as people, 'this generation', rejecting both his message and John the Baptist's message. Moreover, on two occasions, Jesus' opponents associated him with Beelzebul, the prince of demons (Mt 9.34; 12.24): their reason for refusing to accept his teaching. So 'the evil one snatching away the word' is another way of describing a deliberate refusal to understand.

Such an attitude isn't confined to a religious message. The coronavirus pandemic has produced many examples of people just not listening – from ordinary people to political leaders. “Let anyone with ears listen!” could be said by the World Health Organisation.

We need to ask ourselves which group of hearers we belong to, rather than smugly assuming we are represented by the good soil producing healthy plants bearing plenty of fruit. The two types of hearer I haven't said anything about yet are those who give up when they face difficulties because they put the word into practice, and those who are more concerned with other things, including wealth, than with following Jesus' teaching. Jesus often taught about wealth, money, mammon. We often feel embarrassed talking about it.

All of us, in Junior Church or 'Adult Church', have many opportunities to hear Jesus' message – how are we responding? I hope we don't refuse to engage with it. But do we give up when things get tough? One of the most testing places to be a faithful Christian is school. Do we give our anxieties and desires more importance than our faith? Or are we growing like the healthy plants in good soil? As life goes on, are we bearing fruit, producing seeds of the gospel that can grow in other people?

Finally, there is another way of thinking about this parable, to hold alongside what I've said so far. It is natural to understand 'the word of the kingdom' as teaching. Many people would define a Christian as someone who follows the teaching of Jesus. But as I said earlier, part of his teaching is about himself. He is both the sower and the seed. He is the teacher and the message. In S. John's gospel he is introduced as the Word made flesh, to be received by people. S. Matthew would agree. In last week's gospel, Jesus said that the Son reveals the Father, and gave the invitation

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
(Mt 11.27,28)

Our growth into Christ, and his growth in us, is the best proclamation of the Christian message there is.