

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. Romans 8:1-11

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I love this part of Matthew's gospel, where he writes this whole section about Jesus' teaching in parables, that would have been more easily relatable to the crowd.

If we read the whole section, our minds can very easily wander to imagining ourselves in places of beautiful nature. We are fortunate around here to have an abundance of stunning scenery to recall, most of which is easily accessible to most of us.

When I read it, I recall the stunning farmland as you travel across the North Yorkshire Moors towards the East coast. I especially love looking at the huge fields of the bright yellow of the rapeseed.

The huge sowing and harvesting machinery that farmers have, the tractors, the lorries. The huge fields with their perfect rows of freshly turned healthy soil. The machinery that places just the right amount of seed, at just the right depth, at just the right space apart. It is quite satisfying seeing vast fields that are so neat and tidy and well prepared. It makes you automatically think that it guarantees a successful harvest. Surely every seed could grow well in there.

It can be difficult then trying to imagine an unfamiliar and difficult to understand place, out of our comfort zones. To imagine where people suffer greatly, are persecuted, hungry and poor. One we do not really want to hear about, or especially to be asked to help to do something about.

It would be easier to reach for the remote control to switch over to avoid such news or images, or on social media to scroll on by, unfriend or even block people for sharing the difficult imagery or opinion we would rather avoid. We are all guilty of reacting in this way about some thing or other,

and so we must not as Christians become despondent when people react this way at the mere mention of God.

Jesus is teaching that the different types of soil is like us, as people are still very different in how we receive and respond to the word of God, how differently we receive these truths of God's kingdom, the gospel, the good news. Jesus is inviting us to listen so that we can take away the message with us in the hope that we will make the connections later in our everyday lives.

The success of that depends on where our hearts are towards God. Matthew speaks of what is happening with the heart fourteen times. In Dt. 6:5 we are told to 'love Yahweh your God with all your heart'. What is in our hearts reflects how we live out our Christian faith.

Jesus likens our human hearts to being like four different types of soil. Even if many of us have been Christians for a long time, we are wise to revisit the parable of the sower, even if we have heard it countless times, because our hearts are not guaranteed to be 'good soil'. We all need a continual spiritual check-up.

In our reading, we are to imagine a smaller plot of land than we are used to seeing here, one in a hot 1st century Palestine. One that people could walk right through the middle of, on a public pathway. An open to all land, with no prominent borders. People could also divert away from the main pathway to get to where they were going much quicker. The land has areas where there would be rocks just under the soil, large patches where thorns had established, as well as the areas of good deep soil. A much rougher, disorganised piece of land.

The sower of the seeds would have usually scattered them from a satchel, as he walked. Inevitably a lot of the seeds would not land on the deep soil that was the most likely to grow into an abundant harvest. The listening crowds will have thought that the sower was setting himself up for huge failure here, wasting so many seeds by scattering them so liberally and

carelessly on the path where the birds ate them instantly, or where they would have grown far too quickly with no strong roots to sustain them from the challenges of the hot sun, or where they would eventually be choked by the established thorns that overtook them.

Surely the seeds should be more selectively scattered to only the good deep soil. Why would anyone be so wasteful and careless with such precious seeds?

Jesus surprises them by telling them that the scattering of all the seeds everywhere, not only on the good soil is the important part. The seeds that landed on the good soil produced a fruitful harvest and it is to be celebrated, but also the seeds that we deem as humans to be a waste of time, money and effort, are deemed just as valuable to Jesus.

God through Jesus, as our sower is purposely scattering the seeds so generously in all the places anyway. Even the lost causes.

God recognises all four types of soil in all our hearts, the hard, shallow, distracted, and the good. yet Jesus continues to throw the seeds of grace and forgiveness at us continually anyway with absolute confidence that he scatters God's truth far and wide.

He continues to sow extravagantly. Jesus does not differentiate between the worthy and unworthy soil like we continue to do between each other. Judging by the example of the company Jesus kept, he was not worried about the risk of his efforts being wasted.

God scatters the seeds of grace and hope so liberally everywhere anyway, even knowing that only some of it takes root, only some of it falls on hearts willing to self-reflect, and self-confess enough to even begin a journey on a pathway to an honest spiritual transformation.

Even though only some of it is to grow into a deep rooted established faith that continues to steer our hearts back to God time and again, because the

reality hits hard that following God's call to mission and ministry, trying to be Jesus people by example, to reach a fruitful harvest, is not only challenging, it continues to be so throughout our Christian lives.

For every weed or thorn of distraction, and even destruction we encounter that tries to steal our hearts backwards away from God, every time we manage to pull out that one misplaced thorn of priority, there are always many more coming to take its place. No wonder the faith of many of us falls by the wayside or gets swallowed up in preference to the many other distractions and temptations in life.

As Christians we are called to scatter this heart changing good news of God's saving grace and hope far and wide, with absolute confidence and faith that people will connect, will persistently grow and thrive in a deep-rooted faith.

To be able to do that we must regularly revisit the parable of the sower ourselves. The more we can affirm our faith with deep rooted and heart-felt honesty and recognise God's abundant harvest of forgiveness and grace that he continually sows in us, the stronger and more confident we can share this with others.

Those of us who can look back long enough on our long Christian journeys walking alongside Christ, listening for long enough with new ears to his word, as well as to the shared experiences of each other, we can relate to how it wasn't a straightforward path.

Yet far more prominent than any losses, like we hear about in this parable, it is the times of being uplifted, blessed, listened to, loved and cared for all the way by God, and by other Christians, that still continues to produce the most beautiful growth in trust and faith in our hearts.

It is in this attitude that we learn how to cope better with whatever thorns come our way.

As isolation began and things closed including our churches, I read that someone on social media had written “is it just me or is there loads of people on here sharing tons of God stuff lately?”

Rather than getting despondent and counting any losses of those who answered the question with a derogatory, sometimes even very harsh comment, we are to be unashamedly encouraged as Christians to take a parable of the sower attitude and realise that our job as sowers of the kingdom of God, has been heard more than usual, whether people are ready to hear it or take it to heart or not!

We will share it because we know it to be good. Many of us have lived it and can compare life without it. We will pray for you. It is what we are called to do.

To do that we rely on our strong faith, lots of prayer, a daily remembrance of God’s grace and forgiveness that he has scattered upon us, then through Christ’s example, and drawing on the lead of his Holy Spirit, we continue to be the disciples, the sowers to others.

Amen