

Today's Gospel reading is one of my favourite parables. The parable of the sower. The Sower, goes out and scatters seed which falls not just on the ploughed field but all over the place, and some grows and some is lost. Later the disciples come to Jesus with questions about the parable and so he takes time to explain it to them – which he doesn't do with all the parables, so we are given more insight into Jesus thinking.

The image of God's abundance in the face of creation seems also most wasteful in the story of the sower. The sower seems not to care where the seed is thrown, otherwise it would only fall onto the prepared soil – put that does not seem to be the point of this story. Rather the image of the sower is one of generosity, abundance and hope!

Interesting, the parable is told to a community who understood the importance of seeds, and how valuable they were, so in many ways this is irresponsible. But the gift of a parable is that it is a story, it is trying to help us understand something else! In the explanation which is given to the disciples, Jesus tells them they need to listen – they need to be open to hearing and seeing things in new ways if they want to understand God's purpose.

We come to understand that the seed and soil represent those who hear and understand the word. When the seed and the soil are good, their hearts, the center of their very being, embrace the good news. They fight off evil. They endure difficulties and persecutions. They are not defined by worldly cares and wealth. They join the community formed by and committed to God's kingdom and marked by doing God's will (12:46).

But the seed is not always good, and we are not always good soil – so often we choose not to listen or not to hear what God is saying. We struggle or are jealous of the lot of others, and are distracted by things which seem more important or powerful than God. Hard questions with complex answers.

The focus of Jesus teaching in this parable focuses predominately on the soil. Drawing an analogy between the different qualities of soil and different kinds of believers<sup>1</sup>. The implication seems relatively clear: we should pray and strive, our role as disciples is to be 'good soil'.

So what does being 'good soil' mean for us?

A gardener will tell you that good soil takes years to cultivate. It must be fed, nurtured by the remains of plants that have come and gone. It must be worked and reworked so that it becomes supple, but not worked so hard that its structure is broken down. And it must be replenished, as seeds grow and draw on its nutrients<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/07/pentecost-6-a-enough/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4510](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4510)

This is true for us too – we do not just become good soil – it takes a life time of work – like soil needs care, so does our faith. This of course come from prayer and study of the bible, but also in our worship together, worship over many years in this place – which is why returning this week to church means so much to so many, it is part of what shapes our soil – that is our faith! But we do need to take care – not to take the gardener analogy too far, we need to ensure we do not become too root bound! In some ways, the last 4 months have also been a gift, in that they have helped us learn how to nurture our faith when we need to step outside the familiar. It may not have been comfortable or even our preference, but we have had to learn how to keep learning and growing.

I think there are a number of things which we can take from this parable. Firstly God's love is abundant like seed that can be scattered. God has more to offer that we can imagine and we must never fear that God does not have enough love for us. With all that we face in these times we should be reassured of God's love for us.

Secondly, if we embrace God's love as we have, if we strive to be part of God's kingdom, we need to allow ourselves to be nurtured and held. We need to be open to learning and growing, we need to allow ourselves to mature in faith overtime. We need to be open to the fact that like good soil we will develop and change over time.

Finally, we need to be willing to flourish. The good seed on good soil grew 100 fold – it is a great abundance, but it can also be scary to grow that much, to develop that much. We need to be open to allowing God to flourish in us.

God wants us to flourish – may we have the courage to allow God to use us!  
Amen