

MUC JULY 12, 2020

SERMON

When I read the Gospel lesson set for today my mind went back to the 60's and 70's when we lived in Papua New Guinea. Rabaul, on the Gazelle Peninsula, geologically is very young. The soil is volcanic and produces lush fruit and vegetables. I could go to the Market any time on a Saturday morning and buy a delicious pineapple for 10 cents, a pawpaw for 10 cents, a basket of tomatoes for 10 cents, a basket of kaukau (sweet potato) for 10 cents, a hand of bananas for 10 cents etc.

When we moved to Kavieng on New Ireland, the soil is very poor – a thin layer of soil on top of Karanas (coral). On a Saturday I had to be at the Market about 6.00am to purchase any fruit and vegetables that might be their eg. 1 or 2 small tomatoes for 10 cents, a small pineapple, a few bananas for 10 or 20 cents.

In SA, after the drought and the bushfires, this year's good rains have most farmers looking forward to a good, even a very good harvest. But, of course as the farmers keep reminding us, "It is not ours until it is in the silos".

The Parable of the Sower is well known to us. After telling the parable Jesus said to the crowd, "Let anyone with ears, listen!".

Listen to what?

- That Jesus is indeed God's Chosen One
- That in Jesus, God has acted in a most decisive way.
- Jesus came to inaugurate God's kingdom here on earth
- How do we respond to this message?

Are we like the husband in various cartoons who sits at the breakfast table reading the morning paper (or these days, with his mobile phone or iPad) who, when addressed by his wife, merely grunts, not giving any attention to her?

Are we sometimes so preoccupied that we don't hear God speaking to us?

Matthew tells us that Jesus used parables to tell many things to the crowd who gathered around him.

As Jesus was telling this Parable of the Sower it is quite possible that he could see a Sower broadcasting the seed.

If there was a wind blowing, some of the seed would fall on the path and the birds would have a feast.

Some seed would fall where the soil was very shallow on top of rock and would not survive when the sun was hot.

Some seed would fall on ground where the roots of weeds were waiting to spring to life again, and the weeds would choke the grain. (look at some gardens here after the rains of the past few weeks).

And some seed fell in the good, clean soil, in the good ground, and it produced an abundant harvest.

The same seed produces no crop, some crops or much crop, according to the soil in which it falls.

Since the seed is likened to the “word of the kingdom”, then we are to understand that everyone hears it – both the crowds and the disciples.

In the verses of Chapter 13 which we skipped over the disciples question Jesus “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?” Jesus says he speaks to everyone with varying results.

The challenge comes to us to ask ourselves: What kind of soil are we?

There are those whose heart are hardened and who lose what little they have. They do not participate in the kingdom. For them, the parable is a threat.

There are those whose minds are like the shallow or stony ground. There are the people who fail to think things through – they are the people who follow every new craze, and just as quickly, drop it. Sadly, some people have enthusiastically responded to the Gospel in an emotional reaction. But the Christian faith is much more than an emotional reaction. Christianity has its demands, and these must be faced before it can be accepted.

There are other hearers of the Word who have so many interests in life that certain things, and often the most important things, get crowded out. Committee meetings, good works, visiting relative and friends – all have their place, but only after we have spent time with God and his Word.

Then there are those whose lives are like the good soil. These people have minds which are open, they are prepared to hear to understand, and translate the hearing into action.

This is also a parable to encourage the preachers of the Word. Sure, some seed is lost, but the lesson is clear in the climax of the parable – the harvest does come, the harvest is sure. Some produced 100 grains, others 60, others 30.

H L Gee tells the story that in the Church where he worshipped there was a lonely old man, Thomas. Thomas had outlived all his friends, and hardly anyone knew him. Thomas died. H L Gee had the feeling that there would be no one to go to the funeral, so he decided to go. There was no-one else, and it was a wild, wet day.

The funeral reached the cemetery, it was during the War. At the gate a soldier was waiting. He was an Officer, but there weren't any rank badges on his raincoat. The soldier came to the graveside for the ceremony. When it was over, the soldier stepped forward and gave a salute that might have been given to a king. H L Gee walked away with the soldier, and as they walked, the wind blew open the soldier's raincoat. Gee saw that he was a Brigadier. The soldier said to Gee, "You are probably wondering what I'm doing here. Years ago, Thomas was my Sunday School teacher. I was a wild lad, and a severe trial to him, he never knew what he did for me, but I owe everything I am, or will be, to old Thomas, and today I had to come to salute him at the end."

The seed is being sown
The harvest is being gathered.
We are part of the sowing and harvesting.

1 Corinthians 3: 6. Paul "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth".
Verse 9: "We are God's servants working together."

This is, indeed, a word of encouragement to the whole congregation.
May God bless each one in our sowing, and harvesting.

Amen.