

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The parable of the sower must be one of the best known of all Jesus' stories, it is surely the favourite of Sunday school teachers throughout the ages who use cress seed with its rapid growth as a great visual aid which illustrates the allegory of the story perfectly; everything mentioned in the story represents something else, and the point of it is to impact on those LISTENING to the word of God.

**A man went to sow grain.**

The man represents God and the seed is his message.

**Some seeds fell on the path and the birds ate it.**

The birds represent the devil, the seed on the path represent the people who hear the message, but quickly forget it.

**Some seeds fell on rocky ground where there was little soil.**

The seed sprouted, but the sun burnt the tender plants.

The seed on rocky ground represent people who respond with enthusiasm, but the word of God doesn't really sink in. The sun represents hard times, which make people give up too quickly.

**Some seed fell among thorns.**

Thorn bushes represent all that is a distraction in life, pursuit of wealth, status, fame etc. which can prevent us from drawing us close to God, so our efforts fade and die.

**Some seeds fell on good soil:**

Good soil represents all those who hear, really hear God's word, in doing so they give their commitment and their focus to Him, not letting distractions or apathy get in the way of forming a relationship with God.

I'm sure I'm preaching to the converted and you all know this perfectly well.

However, this parable has a second aim, which was aimed at the disciples, and those who PREACH the word of God, and that, dear friends, includes us.

The disciples must have gone through times when they felt discouraged; they knew Jesus as the most kind, wise and selfless man, they witnessed his amazing feats of healing, they trusted and followed him, making sacrifices along the way. But they could see that Jesus wasn't having the impact they expected. He brought no great army to overthrow the Romans, he preached love and peace, not war, Religious leaders, suspicious of his intentions, were hostile to him and turned others against him.

Sure, people still came to see Jesus in great numbers, but for some, it was to receive his healing power, then move on.

They wanted to support Jesus, but they hadn't got the confidence for such a mammoth task. It's not surprising they felt lost and disappointed. That's why the second part of this parable, the whole climax of the story, is so important. Its sole aim is to encourage the discouraged.

Nothing in life is certain, the farmer, or sower, knows that not every seed scattered will "take" or mature, he knows some will be blown away by the wind or fail to germinate, but that doesn't stop him sowing, nor does it make him give up hope of reaping a harvest. He knows that though some seeds may be wasted, most will grow and the harvest will come.

There may be times when we feel discouraged in our faith, or discouraged by our church leaders, or the task ahead, but we must carry on. We are today's disciples, we have been chosen by God to spread His word to those who have no other way of hearing the Gospel. The harvest is out there, it's up to us to nurture it and gather it in, but be under no illusions, it's a weighty responsibility and easy to feel discouraged. The positive thing is that God knows who we are and of what we are made and he stands alongside us in all we do.

People are longing for a new dimension in their lives, especially at the moment, now is the time to talk about our faith as an encouragement to them, to use our words as seeds. We never know what effect our words will have, and we never know how long the seeds we set will take to germinate, but that shouldn't prevent us from sowing in abundance. I have heard stories of people coming to faith through words spoken to them in ordinary conversations many years previously, words that have stayed with them and fashioned their thinking. I preach my sermons never knowing if or how my words will affect people, if I'm lucky, they may have an immediate response, or they may lie dormant for years until one day the seed explodes into life and changes the course of someone's thinking.

So I encourage you to be like the sower and cast your seeds with abandon. Speak of your love of God in ordinary conversations, tell what it means to live with God in your heart, and tell people of his goodness and his love for them. You may never know the affect your words have, but sow the seeds with confidence and in patience: Then leave the rest to God. Amen