

# SUNDAY REFLECTIONS

Sunday 12 July 2020 | The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

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## TODAY'S READINGS

Isaiah 55.10-13 | Psalm 65.1-13 | Romans 8.1-11 | Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23

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*'Sower at Sunset'*  
(1888)  
by Vincent Van Gogh

‡ In the name of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the most recognisable aspects of Jesus' ministry was his vocation as a teacher and preacher. We are told time and time again in the gospels that people longed to hear what he had to say, how they clamoured for his instruction and actively sought out the wisdom that he had to impart. So often when we hear Jesus speaking, its to crowds that assembled around him, those who were interested, intrigued and perhaps a little confused by what he had to say. Yes, he speaks intimately to his friends, his companions, those close to him, but more often that not, Jesus talks openly and publicly, speaking of God in a way that was compelling and made those around him want to know more.

We discover this in today's gospel reading where the evangelist Matthew reminds his readers that so extensive were the crowds that came to hear Jesus that he not only had to go outside of the house where he was staying, but in the end had to get into a boat in order to address his hearers gathered on the shoreline. Its a scene that paints a vivid picture, the assembling of a noisy, excitable group of people who are expecting great things from the one that they've come to hear. They are aware, we can presume, that Jesus is someone worth paying attention to, who will reveal deep truths and speak to them openly and clearly in a way that will somehow help they make sense of their lives and its meaning.

What follows is not a secret message to a select group of followers, rather its a deliberately universal announcement. The word of the Lord cannot be contained and so reaches out to all people - cajoling them, encouraging them, calling them to open their ears and take notice. All are given the opportunity to receive the message that Jesus brings, to hear for themselves the good news of the Kingdom, and so to share in its treasures revealed in lives open to the workings and promptings of God's Spirit.

The stories that Jesus shared were all about encouraging those who heard them to discern God's presence close at hand, and so to respond accordingly. Yet, as we know, these stories were also intended to challenge and disturb, speaking in parables, was Jesus's way of deliberately seeking to unsettle the comfortable prejudices of his hearers; recognising that they would need to be changed by the message they were given. As one biblical commentator remarks, *'true illumination comes from a parable only after something has changed within us, and we have come to accept the divine viewpoint it reveals... the parables are not a test of human intelligence, rather they are verbal strategies of grace that test the willingness of the human heart to surrender to and be enfolded by the the surprising generosity of God'*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leiva-Merikarkis, E., 'Fire of Mercy, Heart of the World' (Volume II), p 192.

It is therefore fitting that the first parable that Jesus shares is one that asks his hearers to consider their response to an awareness of God's unstinting abundance, revealed in the story of a seemingly rather reckless sower who goes out to sow and who doesn't seem to care where the seed ends up. This precious resource doesn't just end up in the good soil of the earth, but is found scattered along the path, in the rocky ground and in the middle of thorns which ultimately means that it is wasted.

Only the seed that falls in ground where it can be nurtured, cultivated and given the means to grow and ultimately bring forth grain, all the other seed is lost: eaten by the birds, withered by the sun, or unable to grow due to its lack of roots. In speaking as he does, Jesus indicates his knowledge of the farming practices of his day, where the sowing of the seed preceded the preparing of the land, meaning much of the seed would have been wasted in places that would never be ploughed. Yet, despite this the sower is not restrained - risking the loss of some of the seed in the hope that enough of it falls onto the good ground where it will have the chance to grow.

At the heart of the parable then is an inherent profligacy, an overflowing open-handedness which is required if the sower's efforts are to result in a bountiful harvest. The parable of the sower reminds us that divine generosity is the ultimate bedrock of the Kingdom that Jesus has come to reveal, that God's love and grace is given even when his word is rejected, ignored and unnoticed. Even in the face of our weakness, brokenness, faithlessness the sower will keep on scattering the seed, and Christ will, we can be assured, continue to seek out ways to make his home within us, so that we can learn more about what it means to not just to live but to thrive in his company.

It is such an understanding that is revealed as Jesus begins to explain the meaning of the story he's just told, where the seed that is scattered so abundantly is in fact the 'word of the Kingdom', which his hearers are invited to receive with gladness and thanksgiving so as to give it the opportunity to take root and flourish. Nevertheless, as we've discovered this does not mean that the good news is offered only to a certain group who believe themselves to be more worthy, deserving, qualified or capable, rather it is given freely for the blessing of all.

What matters most Jesus says is how we make ourselves ready to receive it, and how then in turn we cultivate the soil of our lives to ensure that, in time, we will be able to bring forth the fruit of the Kingdom. This demands of us a patience and humility, a habit of heart and mind which cannot be rushed or ignored if we are to take seriously Christ's invitation to conversion of life, reframing our priorities and choices in a way that will enable us to love others in his name more joyfully and dutifully.

Its perhaps then for this reason that before all the other parables in Matthew's gospel, we hear the parable of the sower first. It doesn't teach us about what we are to do, what we are to think, how we are to behave; rather it reminds us of what first we need to receive, not simply the word of the Kingdom, but the living Word - Jesus Christ. If our lives are not focused around Christ and we are not prepared to allow him to be at work within us, then we will not be able to bear fruit, however hard we try and whatever we might do to justify ourselves before others. We will allow ourselves to be overcome by the pressures of the world, by the temptations around us and by the voices that lead us to doubt and disbelief, failing to open our ears to what the Lord might be saying to us.

That's why, ultimately, our growth in faith is not dependent upon our own resources; Jesus' words an important reminder that only those who recognise in themselves a need for God's grace will be given the means, the freedom and the opportunity to grow and develop into the people he has called them to be, just like the seed that fell on the good soil that in the end yielded the harvest. This doesn't happen by accident, chance or design, but comes only from our willingness to become more readily rooted and grounded in Christ, the one who is generous in all things, who alone can make our lives faithful and fruitful for the sake of his Kingdom and the service of others.

‡ In the name of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **The Sower**

*by Malcolm Guite*

*from 'Parable and Paradox' (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016), p 48.*

I love your simple story of the sower,  
With all its close attention to the soil,  
Its movement from the knowledge to the knower,  
Its take on the tenacity of toil.

I feel the fall of seed a sower scatters,  
So equally available to all,  
Your story takes me straight to all that matters,  
Yet understands the reasons why I fall.

Oh deepen me where I am thin and shallow,  
Uproot in me the thistle and the thorn,  
Keep far from me that swiftly snatching shadow,  
That seizes on your seed to mock and scorn.

O break me open, Jesus, set me free,  
Then find and keep your own good ground in me.

## **The Collect for The Fifth Sunday after Trinity**

**Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church  
is governed and sanctified:  
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,  
that in their vocation and ministry  
they may serve you in holiness and truth  
to the glory of your name;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

## First Reading

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

*Isaiah 55.10-13*

## Gospel Reading

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and

immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

*Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23*

## **Prayers of Intercession**

- ▶ for the whole Church - that together as the body of Christ we might be united in faith, love and in service of the gospel;
- ▶ for all parishes tentatively resuming public worship, that God might guide us into the future;
- ▶ for peace and unity in a world beset by divisions, challenges and fear;
- ▶ for those who are isolated, alone or afraid that they may not know the presence of the Lord;
- ▶ for those struggling to find hope, that they may know the comfort of Christ;
- ▶ for all those called to make decisions on behalf of others, for our Government and all those who make decisions locally;
- ▶ for our communities, that they may be places of trust and solidarity, where all are valued and welcomed;
- ▶ for those who feel undervalued and disregarded in any way, that God might bless and encourage them;
- ▶ for all who are sick or suffering, that they may know Christ's healing and wholeness in body, mind and spirit;
- ▶ for the departed, and all who mourn and grieve the loss of loved ones, may we find hope together in the victory of Christ over death;
- ▶ for fresh glimpses of God's grace in our lives in the coming week.

*This comes with every good wish and prayer for you all, may you, and those you love, know God's richest blessing.*

*Yours in Christ,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font with a horizontal line at the end.