

Trinity V, 2017 (July 16th)

8am @ St. Lawrence and 11am @ Bedmond

### The Parable of the Sower

As for what was sown on the 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.

I wonder how much fruit you think you're yielding? How big and powerful is God's harvest in your life? One hundredfold? Sixty? Thirty?

Well, we are never the best judges of our own cases. But before asking the question it is probably worth reminding ourselves of precisely what it is that God is trying to grow. What is the seed that has been planted in us?

St. Paul gives a brilliant, twofold answer.

First, God wants a certain kind of human life here and now, one that shows what he calls the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22).

Fruits of the Spirit ... not, note, fruits of your great effort and discipline. Not things you were able to produce for yourself. Things, rather, that grow naturally inside you, that rise up from within. You might need to prepare the way for them a bit, or get other things out of the way – more of that later. But fundamentally, these things are of God, not you.

So that is the first harvest that God wants: lives filled here and now with his fruits, lives of love and joy and peace.

And the second, says St. Paul, comes at the end of all things, in the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15 he looks at our lives now, at everything we have become, and he says: look – we are just seeds. We are just the very beginning of what God plans for us. What we will be has not yet been revealed. We don't even have the words to describe it yet. Imagine an acorn trying to imagine a towering oak tree, and you have some idea of us trying to imagine the resurrection – and yet, like the acorn, it is our own destiny we contemplate. We don't even have the words or the ideas to describe it yet. But we do know it will be stupendously, overwhelmingly, infinitely glorious and beautiful.

So that the second harvest that God wants, that He sows inside us by his Word: the great, shining resurrection life.

Now the practical question for us is: given that that's what God wants, how do we go about helping it to happen? How do we make sure our lives are the best possible kind of soil for that seed to take root in? How do we let the seed in, and allow God to do his amazing work?

Well, the first thing perhaps is simply to remember that this is what your life is about. This is the point of you. It is incredibly easy to forget that. Jesus says in today's Gospel, so much of the time the seed goes to waste because people are running around distracted by all sorts of other things – 'the cares of the world and the lure of wealth', as he puts it. Or, maybe, the need to impress. The need to be valued, the need to be busy. Perhaps the most important thing

you can do, every day, is remind yourself what your life is actually about, what your destiny really is. And with that reminder clear in your head and heart, your priorities will then re-organise themselves.

So what does the life which remembers what it's about look like? What are the habits that make for a life which Jesus would call good soil, which God can do his wonders with?

I have five very quick suggestions, and uncharacteristically for my sermons, they do all actually begin with the same letter: the letter S.

Number one: Scripture. The person who is serious about letting God's Word go deep down inside them and bear fruit is going to spend a lot of time and energy simply absorbing that Word in perhaps its most obvious form: the bible. They're probably going to be reading it, studying it, praying over it, at least a bit every day. And they'll come together to be taught from it regularly too, like we are this morning.

Number two: Sacraments. If you want God to reach down into the roots of your life and work there, that is going to involve regularly doing what Jesus said: do this in memory of me. Eating his body, and drinking his blood – could there be a more powerful image of taking Him inside yourself, making Him the deepest part of you? That's one more reason, incidentally, why that thing you so often hear people say – 'of course you can be a Christian without going to church' – is only a little bit true, if it is at all. Because this is where Jesus promises to be at work. If you're serious about growing in him, you'll be here – or in some other church - every Sunday. (*and at Bedmond*: it's the reason I changed to having the Eucharist here every time, and the reason why I still believe we need to think about having a service every week. Coming to church, receiving the eucharist, should not be a 2 weeks out of 5 activity...)

Number three: service. If you read the whole sweep of the Old and New Testaments, you'll see that there simply is no understanding of growth in the spiritual life there which doesn't involve service, service especially to the poorest and weakest in society. It might be something very, very low-key: writing a letter for Amnesty International. It might be something very intense: visiting in a prison or a hospice. But it will be something. There is no spiritual life, no spiritual growth, which does not have this kind of practical, loving service to the poor and the weak as part of it.

Number four: Sacrifice. If life is about growing into the astounding destiny God has planned for us, if that is the over-riding, shaping purpose of our lives .... then it follows that other things aren't. And some space will need to be cleared in our lives for God's purpose to push through. The Gospel is fairly clear where the issues is most likely to be: money, and the comforts it brings. The cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, as Jesus said. But our issue could also be about status, or reputation, or power: it is worth taking time to figure out what it is that actually drives you, as opposed to what should drive you, or what you'd like to think drives you. And when you have figured it out – discipline it. Take action against it. Give some up of what you chase the most. And Jesus thought that for most of us, that is almost certainly going to involve money. That's why Christians don't just give to balance the church books or meet the parish share. Christians give, to the church and other causes, to teach ourselves that our lives are not about money. To make space in our hearts for God to do his work. Otherwise, the seed gets choked.

Scripture, Sacraments, Service, Sacrifice – and lastly Silence. All the Scripture, all the sacraments, all service and all the sacrifice in the world will not do very much for you if in the end you don't remember what they are about. They are about God's action. They're about His life planted deep within you, and rising up through your life. It is not about you rushing about and doing lots of things, accomplishing, controlling, achieving. God's work is being done in you, not by you. And perhaps the most helpful thing you can do along the way is simply to recognise that: to sit down, shut up, and say to God 'please be at work within me. Change me at my roots, fill me with you.' And then simply give Him the time to do it. Hold yourself still and open before Him, and say to Him 'Have your way'. That is one of the most important kinds of prayer there is, and that's why I'm thrilled that some of us have begun doing it together every Wednesday at 11. This is not stuff for the super-spiritual advanced: like scripture, like sacraments, like service and sacrifice it is Christianity 101: the basic business of being Christian. If you haven't tried it, come and do.

Scripture, sacraments, sacrifice, service silence. The recipe for good soil. Soil well prepared. Soil ready for the seed of God, human beings made ready for glory. This week, take the time to ask yourself: am I taking scripture, sacraments, service and sacrifice and silence seriously? Do they have their proper place in my life? And if not, how will I change so they do?

