



THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY
TRINITY 5
12 JULY 2020

A sower went out to sow

Isaiah 55:10-13, Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In our garden we have one small bed at the front of the house which gets a lot of sun in the afternoon and evening. I have found that begonias do quite well there and I usually buy some each year to plant it up, and then dig out the remains when the frost finishes them off. This last year, when there was virtually no frost, and certainly not in that sheltered bed, the begonias survived, so I left them in place and five of the plants are thriving pretty well. In one spot, however, a tree root near the surface does not give the plants much room for roots and that small area looked a bit barren, so I put in three new plants a couple of weeks ago, and kept them watered in the hope they would thrive. They did not, and yesterday I could find no trace of them at all!

You can see which way my thoughts are tending. In the famous parable of the sower in today's gospel reading, Jesus uses a horticultural example (though I don't suppose he had begonias in mind) to illustrate how his message might be received by various types of listener. Because the parable is so familiar, it is difficult for us to say whether we need the explanation given in the second set of verses set in the reading for today, or whether we would recognise what Jesus meant without the explanation. As the verses (10-17) 'missing' from today's reading make clear, the disciples clearly thought that not everyone could understand the meaning of Jesus' parables, and we might surmise that they themselves were a bit baffled. When we read scripture, even with as open a heart as possible, we have always to have in mind the original context in which the text was written and then, as we try to discern what the words may be saying to us in our time, we need to bring all that we know and have learnt, formally and by experience, into play.

It is in this process that Jesus' parables come into their own; these stories, drawn from situations often quite different from 21st century Britain, seem to speak directly to us in a way that more formal biblical theology does not. Can any one of us not identify periods in our own lives when we have felt resistant to the promptings of God, or when we have been keen for a while, then somehow forgotten about it, or, perhaps more often, really felt we wanted to attend to those things, but thought we really needed to attend to other, pressing matters first, only to find that the 'other matters' were all that we had got round to? But recognising Jesus' perceptiveness is not really the point, what matters is being influenced for the good by what we draw from the parable.

Not wishing to be smug about this, I inadvertently did the right thing this morning. I wanted to write these notes, and could make a good case for doing so (let us be the judge of that, I hear you say!), but I also felt it was about time that I dropped a line to a couple of folk in residential homes who, in other times, I would have gone to visit long before now. I knew that if I began with these 'sermon' notes, I would not get round to writing the lines to my friends, probably not at all today, so I wrote those first before turning to this job. (And, to my surprise, the other thing I had thought of doing today – mowing the lawns, I have just found that Gareth has already done!)

Paul's message to the Romans in today's epistle contains a similar message to Jesus' parable, dressed up in theological language, but the parable wins by a long way in terms of memorability and comprehensibility.

Isaiah, in today's reading from the Old Testament uses the same image of the sower, but sets it in the context of God's input to the germination and flourishing of the seed, both actual seed, and the word of God. He points out that the product of the flourishing of that seed is not just providing food for sustenance, but leads to the wild rejoicing of the whole of creation, which is a joyous expansion of the image.

Those of us who have the parables of Jesus in our minds, can treat them as interesting elements of our faith, or we can use them to help us shape our lives. The latter is much to be preferred and it can lead to hugely transformative results.

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