

PENTECOST 6A 12-07-2020 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Genesis 25:19-34; Ps 119:105-112; Romans 8:1-11; *Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23*

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.'

I am the first to admit that I'm not much of a gardener. I don't have green fingers: when garden I get red, itchy, rashy fingers, and arms and legs and anywhere else the plants brush my skin. I end up sneezing and coughing, and think I need to wear a hazmat suit with a respirator and total protection from those vicious little green things.

Fortunately, God is not- as far as we know- allergic to anything. When we listen to the parable of the sower, we understand that the sower represents God: and God the Gardener scatters the seed all over the place with gay abandon and a complete disregard for good farming practice.

The seed is the Word, and as is made very clear in John's gospel Jesus is the Word. Remember: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.'

So how is it that God can be sowing Jesus all over the place? How does that work?

Traditionally, this parable is interpreted in this way: God sows the good news to us, and we respond in various ways. If we are like the path, then the good news is quickly snatched away and never takes root in us.

If we are like rocky ground, we don't have any depth and our faith doesn't last. If we are like thorny ground, we are distracted by worldly things and end up drifting away. But if we are like the good soil- whoopee! We will be fruitful, productive Christians. So we must all do our utmost to be good soil.

One problem with this interpretation is that it's all about us. It puts the responsibility for faith squarely on our shoulders: and it doesn't leave room for grace.

Jesus called this the parable of the sower for a reason: because it is about the sower, not the soil. It's about the way God works- not about how we may or may not respond.

The four kinds of soil described in the parable represent all kinds of conditions of life. God sends Jesus, the Word, to all of them, without discrimination: just as the rain falls on good and bad people.

This would have shocked many of those who heard Jesus tell this parable. They were brought up to believe that the Jews were the chosen people, who alone knew the one true God. But Jesus was saying that God does not discriminate, and sent Jesus for all people, not only those who were Jewish.

This message is still shocking today, for those who believe that only they have the truth. There are Christians who believe only their particular church or denomination holds the truth; Christians who believe you have to say exactly the right words and do precisely the right things or you are not 'saved'; Christians who believe that all other religions are evil, and anyone who does not subscribe to their particular brand will burn in hell.

And, of course, there are those of other faiths who are similarly deluded, believing that they are the only ones blessed by God and everyone else is doomed.

It is not up to us to judge who is and who isn't good soil, rocky soil or any other sort of soil. God sows the seed, and God is prepared for it to fall on everyone.

Some of the people in the Bible who God used to bring people to faith do not look anything like 'good soil'. Isaac and Rebekah, who we heard about this morning, seem like pretty indifferent parents: they played favourites, which we all know parents should never do. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. They were twin boys, but they were not alike: Jacob was manipulative and Esau liked his food too much.

Jacob went on to get himself into all sorts of pickles, but still managed to father twelve sons, who became the Twelve Tribes of Israel. (I guess you could say he was at least fertile soil!)

St Paul once went around getting Christians locked up, and worse, because he believed their faith in Jesus was wrong and they should be punished. And he became the great evangelist, the apostle to the Gentiles, preaching that the good news of Jesus was for the whole world.

The point is that God can and does use human beings who are flawed, who are far from perfect and who make a right mess of things at times- people like us, in fact.

God did not control them, like puppets: they would have behaved better if that was the case. They had free will to behave badly, and they did- just as we do. But because God does not break promises, and because God loves us, they were blessed and were a blessing to others. It is the same for us.

There are many people in Australia who are nervous about those of other religions- particularly Muslims. And it is true that there are fundamentalist Muslims who preach hatred and who are responsible for atrocities and acts of terrorism.

There are many, many more Muslims in the world who believe in a God of love, who are equally appalled by the behaviour of the fanatics.

Sadly, there are fundamentalist, fanatical Christians around who also preach hatred: some are white supremacists, some have killed doctors and blown up abortion clinics, some believe they are doing God's work by keeping people of other religions out of OUR country.

But there are many, many more Christians in the world who believe in a God of love, and who believe that Jesus taught us to love ALL people because he loves all people.

God loves all people. Not only the ones who go to church, who say they believe in Jesus; not only good, law-abiding citizens who pay their taxes and keep to the speed limit; not only people who are like good soil and receive the word with gladness. God loves the whole rich variety of humanity: brown, pink, dark, fair; straight, gay, trans, undecided; religious, agnostic, atheist, unsure; everyone.

God loves all of US, for goodness sake! God loves us even when we don't love ourselves, when we are hateful and spiteful and prejudiced, because God wants us to become the people we were meant to be; and God's Spirit helps us, from the inside.

So this week, as we listen to the radio news or read the papers, watch TV or check out the internet, let's try to remember what Jesus told us in the parable of the sower: that God showers every single person with love, so who are we to judge?

The Lord be with you.