



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

The Sower Sows...

Matthew 13:1-11, 18-23; Isaiah 55:10-13

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Sowing

I want to start today with Jethro Tull. What, you might say, has a Progressive Rock band to do with it? Well it's all in the name. The Band started out as *The Blades* and reformed several times until playing in London they kept changing their name to get repeat bookings. Jethro Tull was a name chosen by their agent's clerk which stuck because when using that name that they got their first deliberate repeat booking.

And where did the name come from? That clerk was a history buff who chose the quirky name of an agricultural engineer pretty much at random.

Now, in 1701 Jethro Tull invented the Seed Drill. It was a major revolution in sowing. Previously, seeds were sown by scattering by hand (called broadcasting). But Tull invented the idea of placing the seeds in the ground in rows and covering them over again. This solved the disadvantages of the broadcast method. It placed the seeds in good soil, protected them and allowed easy weeding between the rows.

Listen to the encyclopaedia's description of the disadvantages of hand-sowing: "Some of the broadcast seeds were cast on unprepared ground where they never germinated, germinated prematurely only to be killed by frost or died from lack of access to water and nutrients."

Doesn't that sound remarkably like the issues Jesus described?

Parallel to sowing

He described:

- Some seed never germinates;
- Some sprouts but soon dies under harsh conditions;
- Some sprouts but is crowded out;
- Some grows well and produces a great crop.

Often we think this parable is about salvation – hearing God's Word, believing it, receiving the new life he gives and bearing fruit as a follower of Jesus. But actually, he is using the story to illustrate the fact that some people hear him and it has not impact on them whereas others are profoundly affected by his words.

And that applies to each one of here today – to me and to you!

Visitors with us today, you have heard something of that same message from God – what will you do with it?

Regulars here! Do you need to allow that message to penetrate your heart? It seems that we humans are quite capable of hearing something a hundred times and still not grasping it.

What about those of you who already love Jesus and know his forgiveness, what new thing has he said to you, today, this week, this year?

I'm sure that He is always wanting to communicate with us – what sort of soil will you be for his word? Stay with me and we will see how we can be good soil.

The Types of Soil

He describes four types of soil and three problems.

1. The Pathway

The land would have had tracks across it which many feet would have beaten into a hard surface. Seed landing there would not have a chance to germinate. Lying on the surface it would soon be eaten by hungry birds. Have you ever sown grass seed and watched in dismay as the birds promptly ate most of it up?

We are like that hardened soil when we don't register God speaking to us or just don't care. We ignore it or let it pass us by. There may be a flicker of recognition but we can't really be bothered to pay attention.

What can we do about it? The problem is that we probably don't care enough to want to act when we are in that state. But if we do, I think we can only ask God to give us the interest and help us to become open and protect us from being robbed. For we should note that he says, the evil one snatches the word away.

2. Rocky Ground

On Rocky Ground, the seeds sprout but are soon burnt up by the hot sun. This Jesus says is like life's troubles coming upon us. With little root we just wither and give up.

John Lennon

The former Beatle John Lennon was perhaps a good example of this kind of soil. During the 1970s John Lennon was living in virtual seclusion. During that time he became an avid viewer of Billy Graham on TV, and at some point he had an experience that he thought was a conversion to Christianity. During those few months people say, he peppered this conversation with phrases like "Praise the Lord," and "Thank you Jesus." But his wife Yoko was upset by this fearing that John would challenge some of her occultic ideas. But John's experience was only that: an experience. When the enthusiasm wore off and he experienced his wife's displeasure, he dropped his interest in Christ. In fact, sadly, it was at that stage that he wrote his song "Imagine," which asks us to "image that there's no heaven." It seems his heart was shallow soil, so his response was temporary.

What can we do about this condition? Again, I think we need to ask God to help us. He does want to. He talks elsewhere in the Bible about taking away our hard heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh. This ground needs breaking up to let the roots go down. Will we trust him as he does that? It may not be comfortable but it might be essential!

3. Choked by thorns

The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word.

This is a massive problem for us in our well-off culture. We are so comfortable that we don't know our real need of God and we long for more and more comfort and material things which fight against the things of God in us. We have a divided heart.

We are like the girl who said to her young man, "I love you with all my heart." With sudden hope, he responded, "Darling, I love you more than anything one in the world. I want you to marry me. Oh, I'm not rich; I don't have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Brown, but I love you with all my heart."

She replied, "I love you quite a lot - but tell me more about Johnny Brown."

With a divided heart we want everything but we end up with nothing.

This may be the easiest condition to recognise and do something about. We have to be firm with ourselves but we often know that we have heard God and we know we are lusting after material things. There are times when we have to be radical about that. God will call us to give away or to resist and we have to decide which way to go. Jesus said you cannot serve God and wealth.

4. The Productive Soil

Remember the problem is not in the seed. It is the same, good seed in each case. The problem is in what the soil offers the seed. It is in how we receive and treat the words Gods speaks to us.

When the seed lands on good soil, it is able to grow properly and bring forth an enormous crop. In those conditions a tenfold increase would be exceptional, with ploughed land and seed drills they might have got 15-times increase of grain. But Jesus is talking of wonderful abundance: 100, 50 or 30 times what was sown! God's word in a receptive heart can do wonderful things.

Isaiah 55

Isaiah 55 is full of promises about the Messiah – we see that in the earlier verses of the chapter. It starts with, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" Jesus refers to it in his call to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, in his invitation for the thirsty to come and drink from the springs of living water, and in his naming himself as the true bread which satisfies the hungry¹.

The passage continues with the everlasting covenant God would make with his people and the Messiah being a leader of the peoples who will summon other nations. This is a passage upon which Jesus would have meditated deeply. Surely, it was in his mind when he spoke of the Word being sent forth like broadcast seed.

Isaiah's prophecy compares the Word of God going forth to the rain watering the earth so it yields seed – enough for food and for more planting. One of Jesus' titles is the Word of God.

Jesus comes to the earth and accomplishes what he was sent to do. With the water of life he causes there to be seed to sow and for bread. Where that seed is welcomed, where the words of the one who is **The Word** find a welcome there come good fruit – joy and peace, singing and dancing. There grow useful plants grow instead of the harmful weeds of thorn and brier.

I don't know about you, but I want to receive his word, allow it to take deep root in my life. I want to clean the land of my life of weeds and allow much fruit instead. But I think we need to be deliberate about this – to make choices to listen and to obey what he has said.

Conclusion

Listen! Can you hear the radio? {Silence} Your favourite radio station is broadcasting right now. To hear it you must tune in and listen. So too, the Lord is speaking to us all in daily life but we need to tune into his voice and pay attention otherwise the words just go by unnoticed.

What does the sower want? The crop.

Where does it come from? The good soil.

What is the seed? God's words.

Where will it bring a good response? In lives open and responsive to him.

What does Jesus say? You who have ears – **Pay Attention!**

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¹ Mt 5:6, Jn 7:37, Jn 6:35