

Reflection on Matthew 13.1-9,18-23: 12th July 2020.

Have any of you noticed that sometimes the same thing can be both simple and complicated? Actually, life's quite a lot like that, isn't it? It's both simple and complicated. And this equally applies to us trying to understand the Kingdom of God!

A really good example of "simple yet complicated" is the parable of the sower, the story that Jesus tells in today's Gospel reading.

The story line is simple enough. A sower goes out to sow, and casts seed so that it lands in four kinds of places, with four different results. The seed that lands on the hard path is eaten up by birds. The seed that lands in rocky soil grows up only to wither. The seed that lands among thorns grows up but is choked by the thorns. But some seed ends up in good soil and grows healthily and abundantly.

The story is simple, but the disciples of Jesus find it complicated, and ask for an explanation... And we also do well to pay attention to this story, despite its familiarity to many of us. After all, this parable about the sower appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels so it's clearly a prominent part of the teaching of Jesus.

So, the parables in general, and this one in particular, are concerned with describing the kingdom of God. They attempt to address the question, "What is the kingdom like?" by helping us see, time and again, that the kingdom is *entirely different* from our expectations.

And fortunately for the disciples, and for us, Jesus explains what he means:

To our understanding, it would have been far simpler if God had sown his seed of his love for us straight onto the good soil, wouldn't it? But no. Jesus tell us that God's seed is thrown with outrageous generosity, absolutely everywhere! And to absolutely everyone! So this story is about *everybody*. And that everybody has at least a chance to experience the kingdom of God.

And through this parable, Jesus also teaches us that God doesn't appear to us in an obvious and unmistakable way. God doesn't come along like a comic book superhero, punishing 'bad people' and rewarding or saving 'good people'.

God is a different sort of superhero! God sows the seed...but then it seems to disappear. It ends up in the ground where nobody can see it, and to all appearances is dead and buried... But then it sprouts and grows and becomes what its original size and shape would never suggest.

And God the sower doesn't just think about sowing the seed, or imagine it, or worry about it, or anything else. God just sows the seed! Through the whole world the sower goes, casting seed in every direction.

And whatever happens to a particular seed, it's still good seed. Its potential for growth and its power remains the same. So if there's a problem, it's not with the seed. The power of life is present there all along. Just like Jesus remains 'Jesus' through his life, death, and resurrection. The seed never becomes less than itself.

It is the Word alone, and not the resistance to it, that finally matters. The harvest is sure to happen! Our own spot of soil in our hearts may be barren on occasion, but there's so much promise for wonderful growth to happen! The only question is this: Will we obstruct growth on our own spot of soil, or will we stop blocking our life, and let the harvest happen to us? We do ourselves a favour by letting the harvest happen. It is the kingdom of God! It is not something we do, yet it grows in the soil we are.

The wondrous growth – thirty, sixty, even a hundred times the 'return on investment' – happens not just inside the church or among Christian people. It happens here and there, in countless places through the world which God loves. It happens wherever anyone acts from a sense of mercy, justice, compassion, love. This wondrous growth happens whenever relationships are mended, wounds healed, hope restored. For the seed is scattered in all corners of the world. And whether they have heard his name or not, Jesus enlightens everyone born into this world.

So let's be thankful for these abundant miracles. Let's be thankful for the harvest born from scattered seed. And let us live out our gratitude by using the gifts God has given us and add to the wonder in this world.

This is our task as children of the kingdom! And may we recognize it as a yoke easy to bear, and a burden that is light.

Amen.