

Sermon - (6<sup>th</sup> after Trinity - Consecration Day) - Isaiah 55. 10-13, Matthew 13. 1-9, 18-23. 'The Farmer's Example'

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sometimes it is nice to go back to where you started. Sometimes we need to - to re-focus on where we are going, or to be reminded of what really matters to us.

The gospel of Matthew today tells us something of a story that would have been very familiar to them. It is equally likely to be familiar to us, and what is more, it would seem to be just as relevant now as then. In theological college, the parable of the sower is wheeled out time and time again in church growth and mission classes - redeeming the dubious expression 'sowing seeds' with a more virtuous emphasis. Because of its familiarity, it is easy (for me at least) to become bored or cynical when you hear it again, and again, and again.

It was lucky then that I was taken back to the start this week. As you know, moving house is the perfect time for a clear out. Imagine my surprise, while (finally) sorting out my bookshelves, I discovered my notes to the first bible study that I ever led. It was for an Elim Pentecostal youth group I attended as a teenager. As a good Anglican though, I'd structured it with 'Scripture, Tradition and Reason'.

Guess what the passage was? Jesus' timely quote from Isaiah - about heart's growing dull and not understanding deep within them was the reminder I needed to hammer the message home!

Sometimes we need to be taken back to the start and have our perspective deepened in new ways.

Jesus knew this which is why he told parables, to make us think about our perspective. Namely, he tells them a parable - literally a story with more than one meanings. Gaining his disciples attention with a loud 'Listen!', he talks to them about the things that they are familiar with.

And in the parable - which is on the bulletin (Matthew 13. 1-9, 18-23), we are not the seed, or the sower. We are the apprentices - seeing the farmer at his work. We are provided with a rough explanation of the parable in rough terms after the story ends (Matthew 13. 18-23) - but are left to ponder the methods for ourselves.

So, the field may have looked different to the listener's around Jesus, but we're in a different climate - and a better micro-climate of Formby. So the ground looks black with good rain, and the air smells thickly of loam - clay and solid earthiness, and the notionally good smell of from the stables near Kenton Close. At least it's good for the field!

It's a bright morning (if we're lucky) - the sun is pleasant, the dew dissipating from the leaves and branches of the boundary fences running next to a road on the left hand side.

It may look different to you, but hold on to the image if anything springs to mind.

A farmer, rubber-wellied, and a little unusual, perhaps a bit old-school (he's going to cast the seeds by hand) heads up the road as you watch. He stops and surveys the field - thinking about where he'll start and how he'll sow the whole area.

As you follow his gaze, you notice that this is really getting towards the final stages of one process - there has been a lot of work done already in examining and choosing land, perhaps purchasing it, then working the prepare it ready for this precise moment.

He starts by the road. This makes sense, you might think (or might not). If he is right handed, he might start from the left, so as to cast the seeds over a wider area as the day goes on.

Imagine you are observing a farmer sowing the seeds on a field near a road. As you watch him, some birds do eat up

the seeds on the path. It's unfortunate for this specific field, but it might be fortunate for another. It also nourishes the bird, its wings and sinews, to continue its own journey and pre-occupations - although to the detriment of that particular farmer.

The edges of the field, freshly cultivated, have less good soil from being cleared - there are stones and old potsherds in them - there are also brambles and weeds.

The seeds from the sower sometimes fall on stony edges of the field. The farmer says in his explanation that a seed that falls on stony soil has no roots. The small roots can be a problem for a person when problems come along, because they haven't got the depth.

I am encouraged by Jesus' warning here though. Small roots may be a problem initially for a plant, but if someone's keeping an eye on it, the root will grow strong enough to carve its own course. It is one of the things some of us are thinking of at the minute for the next few years - how we resource and inspire people in faith.

But on this consecration Sunday when we celebrate the faith that brought this church building to fruition, let's look to the fields where we work. Not as to how many seeds we sow, or how fruitful it eventually will be - but to

how to we encourage good growth where and when it is needed?

As we for St. Peter's on consecration Sunday - what we can offer you in a moment is another tip from the farmer that someone put into practice a long time ago. That of the farmer's table - full of good wine, wholesome bread and fellow labourers.

Come and be fed, so that you can nurture others wherever you are. Come and talk together as we follow the example of the farmer - so the harvest might be good. And don't let the weeds and birds be all that you see.

Amen.

