

Trinity 6A 16/07/2023 Parable of the Sower

Recently Professor Craig Hassed from Monash University began his presentation to parents at my school about adolescent brain development, by asking them who had the longest attention span, a goldfish or a human? Professor Hassed said that science tells us it's a goldfish... by one second.

As an 11 year old, I see, hear, and am unavoidably exposed to, all sorts of information that my parents were never aware of at the same age. My brain is one of the countless adolescent brains Professor Hassed sees being impacted by the digital era. It is a world increasingly difficult to understand what is real and what is not.

But, if we have the ears to listen, and eyes to see, we already have the ultimate way to connect! If we turn off our screens and from our distractions, instead give God our undivided attention. He is our steadfast connection to the one true reality and to each other! God's word is the key to our seeking, finding, seeing, listening, understanding, trusting, and holding onto, what is truly important and worthwhile - His unending faithful love for us, and how we can, in turn, connect with each other through that compassionate divine love across the seasons of our shared lives.

Our readings today from Isaiah, Romans and Matthew teach us principles of spiritual life and death. Father Robert reminded me, *Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit* (Jeremiah 17:7-8). Scripture frequently uses the imagery of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the message of spiritual life and death, but what of the seeds and the sower? In Isaiah 55: 6-11 we are reminded that the Lord's thoughts and ways are greater than our earthly ones, that he sends the snow and rain so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater. I think it's a call for us to draw near to God, to listen to Him, and trust that He will always provide us what we need, if only we put our trust in Him as the Master sower. We are the seeds that produce different types of fruit according to God's plan. Verse 11 of Isaiah – "So is the word that goes from my mouth: It will not

return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

St Paul in Romans 8: 8-23 shows us the difference between the sinfully minded and spiritually minded, understanding that to be spiritually minded is to have the Lord help, assist and guide you; not focus on yourself but keep your eyes upward on the Lord. This is the path of trusting Him, just as a good sower puts the needs of the seed first— they focus on good growth, location and protecting the seed in difficult times so that it can grow and flourish.

Jesus’s parable of the sower and seed in today’s Gospel is aimed at those who hear his word. Jesus explains in Matthew 13: 1-9, that the farmer scatters the seed, where it falls on different types of ground - some seeds fall on the path, some rocky places, others amongst thorns, or good soil. So too we can understand that there are also different ways of accepting God's word, and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many other priorities, interests, or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it.

Jesus told his disciples that not everyone would understand his parables. Did Jesus mean to say that he was deliberately confusing or hiding the meaning of his stories from his listeners? Very likely not. Jesus was speaking from experience. He was aware that some who heard his parables refused to understand them. It was not that they could not intellectually understand them, but rather, their hearts were closed to what Jesus was saying. They had already made up their minds to not believe. God can only reveal the secrets of his kingdom - that which is hidden to the spiritually blind - to those who hunger for God and humbly submit to his truth.

What can make us ineffective or unresponsive to God's word? Preoccupation with other things can distract and draw us from what is truly important and worthwhile. And letting our hearts and minds be consumed with material things can easily weigh us down and draw us away from the heavenly treasure that lasts for eternity. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart which is at rest and ready to hear what God has to say.

A few weeks ago, I stayed on a small sheep farm in Heathcote with my parents. Without internet, television, home comforts, I was at first confronted by the stark reality of the small farm. In walking across the land though, I began to hear and see the livestock and wildlife, feel the cold seasonal wind across the grasses in the paddocks and on my face, listen to the busyness of Wild Duck creek constantly gurgling alongside wild thorny blackberry bushes, I could look up to high winds in the tall trees, closely observe lichen covered stones with doomed grasses growing in their crevices, watch winds pick up the dam's dusty barren soil into the air, follow clouds chasing each other across the moody days, gaze at stars barely visible through the evening cloud cover, and hear farm dogs barking in the distance. In squelching my wellies through the sodden soil, I realised that all the soil types in Jesus's parable – the bare ground, the rock, the thorns, the good soil, are ever-present in the world. I saw them all on the farm at Heathcote, but we also all see them in the world around us across the lives of people we are acquainted with and love.

What happens to the plants that sprout and that grow from the different soils reflect on what happens to us when we take different paths in life. Jesus preaches the parable to test whether the crowd will listen, absorb, and live what he is saying, or whether his words will go in one ear and out the other.

When the seeds got scattered onto the path, they were eaten by birds. Those on rocky ground sprouted quickly but withered almost as quickly because the plants were exposed to too much sunlight with little tree cover. When the seeds got scattered among thorns the thorns eventually choked the plants. All of these relate to us making short term choices in life that are not carefully thought through, and we can sometimes feel crushed by the never-ending pressure of life to give up. Simply put, choosing what is easy and short-term is not the long-term gain.

Finally, some seeds were scattered among good soil. This is the doing of a sower who cares about the welfare of his seeds like they are his offspring and reaps the reward from it as we should carefully consider our decisions in life with the Lord's help. The seeds produced a crop vastly greater than what was sown. We will too if we make the right decision in life and trust in Him for all our needs. To run the good race, fight the good fight, and get to the end goal of Heavenly treasure, you must put down solid roots in good soil and be ready to face different types of challenges which make us stronger, more ready. So don't get caught up in your overwhelming situation! Draw on the Lord and he will tell you where to go and advise you about how to get past obstacles in life, bearing the fruit you were meant to according to God's divine plan.

Let's finish with a prayer:

Dear Lord, when the cacophony of this world is trying to deafen us from recognising your voice, we pray that we always hear your calling. We trust that we always seek your one true eternal light and majestic splendour even when the hypnotic digital light of this world is trying to blind us. We give you thanks for our successes and failures in life. We pray that even though we are often tempted to take the easy route in life, we will through your grace and with your guidance choose to take the right path, navigate our way to solid and good soil so your plan can bear fruit, and that we remain humble, open in hearts and minds to always listen to what you have to say and be ready to follow you.

Amen