**Isa. 55: 10-13; Rom. 8: 1-11; Matt. 13: 1-9, 18-23**

Seed of God’s crop, sown in good soil, watered by his rain and warmed by his sunlight, produces a good crop of spiritual fruit.

The Gospel reading today comes to us in two distinct sections: first, Jesus tells the parable of the sower to the crowds gathered, and secondly he explains its meaning to his disciples.

As with a sower scattering seeds, the laborious task of spreading the Good News will sometimes be difficult and disappointing. But, with perseverance and attentiveness, there may also be success. This story would resonate with most of the people listening, who would have known all about the haphazard methods of crop cultivation in first-century Palestine.

The challenge is whether the hearers really listen and understand it in their hearts. We are told of the four types of ground onto which the sower scatters the seed/message. A staggering three quarters of it fails to take root successfully. A pessimist would tell you that this means that three-quarters of the seed is wasted, the message rejected by a large proportion of the population. Indeed this was the reality. The reading is sandwiched in between two accounts of Jesus being ignored and rejected (Matt. 12:22-37 and 13:54-58). It is true that much of God’s message will fall onto unpromising ground. Yet if the sower perseveres, some seed will always land in the right place, and at the right time and under the right conditions will successfully put down deep roots in somebody’s heart. The effort is worth it.

Jesus’ teaching is a challenge for today. Preaching on a Sunday to those who have come to church should always be a way of embedding the word and nourishing fruitful souls. But it must have a greater potential. Those people are called to be not only bearers of the crop of faith, but also to be faithful sowers of the word in their day-to-day lives. And, as sowers we and they must never give up on the ground that we consider stony. This is precisely why you will see missioners spreading the word in places that at first sight would be considered bad ground for spiritual growth: rough inner cities, prisons, even the battlefields of the world, and not just in the secure and familiar walls of our places of worship. Equally, each one of us, in our daily living, is called to be a sower of the seed, by our words and deeds. Fertile soil may be found anywhere, even the most unlikely of places. “This is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit”.

The important fact of this Gospel is that the sower never gives up. The reality is that some, if not most, of his seed will fall on bad ground, but he keeps sowing. Failure, rejection, even persecution, must not deter us and will not be in vain when it finally does take root in the good soil and new disciples of God emerge, grow strong and begin to spread the seed themselves. The Good News is a message for anyone who chooses to hear it, whatever soil it looks like they are in.

I suspect we often walked the hard packed path of prejudice, a path where not much grows, where life and opportunities are too quickly snatched away. I’ll bet some of us know what it was like to live between a rock and hard place. On the rocky ground life withers because you can’t put down roots. There’s no security or stability and the sun scorches. We might have seen on the television the thorns of violence, fear, anger, and poverty in society. Those thorns wrapped themselves around some families, choking away dignity, security, trust. I hope the best soil that they walked through was the soil that they ploughed. I hope they stood in that dark rich soil that nourished life, love, and hope.

Seeds here. Seeds there. Seeds everywhere. That just seems like poor planning. Given today’s economy that’s just wasteful. By today’s farming practices it is inefficient. With the cost of seeds and the time spent sowing it may not even be profitable. These are not, however, the sower’s concerns. They are our concerns. Thankfully this parable is about God’s faithfulness and not about farming, soil quality, or how things work in this world. In the sower’s world wastefulness gives way to hope, inefficiency to love, and profitability to generosity. Every part of our life has been sown with the seeds of God and we know what happens to seeds.

Given the right conditions apple seeds become apples. Peach seeds become peaches. God seeds become…. God.

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Today is Sea Sunday so we pray for the Apostleship of the Sea who carry out their work on our behalf: may they continue to reveal, especially through their hospitality, the love of Christ.